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The domestic work of consumption: materiality, migration and home-making

O consumo enquanto trabalho doméstico: materialidades, migrações e processos de construção de uma nova casa

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The domestic work of consumption: materiality, migration and home-making¹

Marta Vilar Rosales

This article aims to discuss the potentials of an integrated approach to two significant fields of practice: materiality and migration. Based on the results of a preliminary approach to the Portuguese migrant community in Toronto and three previous ethnographies with Portuguese and Indi-Portuguese migrants conducted in Lisbon, Maputo and four Brazilian cities, it intends in particular to explore the various ways in which the home and home-making as a social and cultural process can work as a significant field to explore that relation. It will be argued that domestic materiality constitutes a particularly productive field to look at the relationships between macro-contexts and micro-practices, social formations and cultural institutions that affect and shape the life experiences of those who migrate. In order to discuss its participation in the evaluations, reconfigurations and processes of rebuilding/reconstructions that necessarily take part in all migratory movements, the work of domestic consumption will be addressed as an expression of those processes but also as a constitutive activity, i.e., the (re)production of identity and belonging.

KEYWORDS: material culture, migration, home, belonging, appropriation, work.

OUR DAILY LIFE EXPERIENCED A GREAT CHANGE. WE HAD TO GET used to a new way of life. We bought new furniture because the old one was too big for these rooms. Some appliances helped us with the new domestic tasks we had to do. It was difficult, very difficult. I could not buy things

1 This article is the first outcome of a research project concerning the domestic material culture of Portuguese migrants in Toronto, Canada. The first phase of the project was funded by a Canadian Studies Faculty Research Award attributed by the International Council for Canadian Studies to which I am particularly grateful. The project is part of my program of research as a senior researcher at FCSH-UNL for the overarching initiative “Ciência 2007” which was financed by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT, Foundation for Science and Technology, Portugal).

here. I would go to the market and ask – what is this for? How do you cook it? [Paula]

The first time Paula and I met and I explained to her that I was researching the Portuguese migrations that resulted from the Mozambican process of decolonization in the 1970s she was puzzled by my interest in discussing “everyday domestic routines and consumption practices”. However, when describing the difficulties arising from adapting to a new context, Paula spontaneously started to describe them using examples of daily episodes such as the ones stated. Eventually, talking about new types of food, decorative options and new domestic routines and tasks made perfect sense to Paula as a means to describe the migration of her family to Mozambique, the long period they lived in the colony, as well as the exodus and settlement in Portugal. During the next two years Paula and I revisited her “lost home in Africa”, its scents, colours and textures, its garden and its neighbourhood. We discussed the criteria used to choose what to take along and what to leave behind when the independence process began and the family decided to move out of Mozambique; the disassembling of large pieces of furniture in order to be shipped to Portugal; the difficulty of finding wood boxes and large cases at that time. We also talked about and observed extensively her family home in Lisbon. Paula showed me her “objects from the past”, explained how and why they are used differently at the present days and why it was difficult, though creative, to adjust and fit some “Mozambican pieces in Portuguese rooms”.

This brief account of Paula’s home integrates a broader ethnographic research project² concerning the life experiences of a group of elite families of colonial Mozambique who, after residing in Africa for three generations, were abruptly forced to move to Portugal due to the independence process of the former colony. Even though it was my first approach to the subject of Portuguese colonial migrations, the intersections between materiality and migration proved to be a productive field of analysis. In this, as in the other

2 This research corresponds to my PhD thesis. The research was carried out in Lisbon and Maputo during four years (from 2002 to 2006). It integrated a limited number of families of European and Goan Catholic Brahmin descent who belonged to the Mozambican colonial elite before the independence of the country, in 1975. The ethnography included direct observation, extensive non-structured interviews with all family members and a significant number of informants (especially in Mozambique) and content analysis of multiple written and visual documents from the colonial period. The research’s main objective was to depict and discuss, via domestic material culture and consumption practices, the everyday colonial experiences of these families by means of a triple mediation: the present context of integration (Portugal), the shared past context (colonial Mozambique) and the past context of origin (Portugal and Goa). This option allowed the setting up of a comparative approach that aimed to contribute to highlight both the existent distinctiveness and the semblances between these two groups of families’ “African memories”, their strategies to produce and assert a “shared past” and the part played by the “African culture”, as cultural resource, on their contemporary identities.

cases included in the research, the interrelationships between life stories, biographies and material goods were widely noted (Burrell 2008) and it became apparent that objects and consumption practices formed both a powerful resource to address the subject's narratives regarding their migration experiences and, more importantly, a constituent of those same experiences. Moreover, the results also tended to indicate that if objects are able to assist people achieving their goals, they can also work against them, holding people back, often in oppressive circumstances. These features seem to be particularly accurate with regard to domestic materiality, since all migrant families were using things at home to order and relate to the inside and the outside worlds. During this and the two research projects that followed, I learned that a tea set could be used to testify one's commitment to not let go past memories, that a hidden case filled with heirlooms expressed identity negotiations going on between different generations, and that the use of an electric blender to prepare traditional meals had been kept in secret for twenty years for the sake of marital peace, therefore enhancing the discussion of how migration differently affects people within the family.

Drawing on results from this particular ethnography in Lisbon and Mozambique and from a second one in Brazil (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Fortaleza and Belo Horizonte)³ also with Portuguese migrants from Mozambique, this article aims to put forward an integrated approach to two important fields of practice: materiality and migration. In particular, it aims to explore the various ways in which the home and home-making as a social and cultural process can work as a significant site within which to explore its relation at the level of everyday practices, therefore contributing to clarify the diversity of expectations, investments and adjustments that all migration experiences entail.

Anthropology has, since the beginning, devoted attention to materiality as a significant field of practice that was central, particularly, to the understanding of non-industrialized cultural contexts. However, in industrialized capitalist societies, social sciences dominant debate shifted from the analysis of the material constituents of culture to a concern with theoretical, ideological questions regarding the visibility and "authenticity" of consumption practices

3 This second research project resulted directly from the PhD thesis. It was carried in 2007 and 2008 in four Brazilian cities (Fortaleza, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte) with a group of families that belonged to the Mozambican colonial elite as in the case of the first research. However, and although at first they all have migrated from Africa to Portugal, this group opted to settle permanently in Brazil since the early 1980s. Using a methodology identical to that used in the first study, the main objective of this project was to describe, via the analysis of domestic material culture and consumption practices, the social and cultural paths travelled by these families, especially with reference to the families who chose to settle in Portugal. The project was carried out by Filomena Silvano and me and funded by FCT (POCTI/ANT/61058/2004).

(Woodward 2001). Objects as visible parts of culture (Douglas and Isherwood 1979) and their uses only recently regained centrality in the discussion of contemporary material culture by the hand of a set of theoretical productions (Bourdieu 1979; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987). Not devaluing the importance of the discussion of the global impacts of capitalist production, the mentioned works claimed the urgency of rethinking the position of things and their relations with people in contemporary industrialized societies.

The importance of contemporary objects and consumption practices in generating cultural meanings is now established and their ability to do “social and cultural work through processes of differentiation, objectification and integration” (Woodward 2001: 118) gains visibility, based on premises that emphasize: the relevance of things as objectification devices that actively participate in social processes of evaluation, positioning and mobility (Bourdieu 1979; Miller 1987); the appreciation of consumption as an expressive set of practices of acquisition, use and reuse of things whose meanings are adjusted according to the subjects they meet and the contexts they enter (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Miller 1987; Warde 1996); and the assertion that things, far from being neutral entities, actively participate and are responsible for the co-production of reality (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987).

Contemporary migrations are also subjected to intense debate. In fact, migrations have been scrutinized in the last years in terms of its causes, impacts, modalities, trajectories and intensities by all social sciences. Such considerations have contributed to highlight two of migrations’ major contemporary characteristics: their sharp visibility and intrinsic diversity. In this context, the works of Appadurai (2003 [1990]), Gupta and Ferguson (1992), Hannerz (1998 [1996]), Rapport and Dawson (1998), Portes (1999), Vertovec (2007a, 2007b) or Schiller (2008) are central references since they point towards the necessity of thinking the multiple consequences of movement in terms of its impacts in cultural diversity, social reproduction and communal life. The idea of the journey as a unique movement from a fixed origin to a pre-defined destination was substituted by a concept of “migration as a continual process” (Gardner 2002) of movements between locations, contributing to its visibility but also to its instability and fluidity. The “transnational turn” (Vertovec 2007b: 968) also introduced a significant change in the anthropology of migration, by way of shifting the focus of analysis from groups in specific locations to groups and their activities as they engage in cross-border, multi-local processes and practices. Yet, this new meaningful revision needs to be balanced by a renewed and necessary emphasis on community, kinship, residence and all other more or less stable forms of affiliation and belonging (Fortier 2000; Gardner 2002). Moreover, migrations are based on detail and specificity, not

only regarding who travels, when, how and in which circumstances, but also in terms of the historical, economical, political and cultural conditions that mark contexts and trajectories and of its impacts on personal biographies and networks of belonging.

While much scholarly work exists on migration, there is however little literature concerning its intersections with material culture and consumption practices (Basu and Coleman 2008). Still, all migrations are embedded in materiality since they necessarily involve processes of expropriation and appropriation, desire and expectation regarding objects. As some recent studies demonstrate (Burrell 2008; Frykman 2009; Rosales 2009), ethnographic insights into migrants' relationships and participations in transnational networks achieved through objects constitute productive conceptual lenses in migration studies. As Basu and Coleman (2008) summarise, it is urgent to explore, not only the material culture involved in the processes of migration, but also and more significantly the material implications of migration and the existent interdependences of the movements of people and things. In fact, the centrality of objects in peoples' biographies should not be surprising since the interrelationship between life-stories and materiality has been widely noted. Many times, people are unable to talk separately about their life stories and their possessions. However, when considering migration, the spatial and temporal disruption associated with movement work "to entwine human and material biographies still further" (Burrell 2008: 65). The impacts of migration on material experiences reach further than attachment to objects from home. Materiality can change peoples' perceptions of themselves, restructure their patterns of social interaction and alter the balance of relationships sustained with those left behind as well as with those who migrated to other localities. As Frykman recalls through a series of questions, material culture and consumption constitute a significant field of practice to address and discuss contemporary migration:

What do they do, send or carry in order to stay connected – to be accepted, remembered, needed or appreciated? Which objects do they consider crucial to the maintenance of their private everyday normality in different locations of attachment? To what extent is involvement in personal relations and social networks achieved or proved through objects, and to what degree does this require physical presence and personal travel? (Frykman 2009: 109)

By addressing the traffic of people and things through the observation of its routes, temporalities and patterns (Basu and Coleman 2008), this article seeks to focus on the movements and appropriations of objects and discuss how and to what extent they can work as translation tools of contemporary

migration experiences. In particular, it hopes to contribute to the discussion of how migrants make use of objects to manage their relationships and social networks, how they perceive and handle materiality, and which logics preside and structure the intersecting movements of people and things.

Though material culture and consumption practices can be addressed and observed in all social spheres and domains, this article elected the home and domesticity as its main focus of analysis. In the following section it will be argued and exemplified that the home, its domesticity and materiality, constitute a significant and particularly expressive locus to observe and discuss the complexities, investments and struggles that all processes of migration entail. As Ahmed *et al.* suggest, “Homing entails processes of home-building whether at home or in migration. Making home is about (re)creation [...] of soils of significance” (2003 [1990]: 9). And these processes cannot be divorced from concrete materiality such as the one of rooms, objects, furniture, food habits or decorative options.

HOMES

Home has been progressively elected as a key site for the study of contemporary material culture and consumption processes. Though many research projects tend mostly to emphasise the centrality of home as a location where significant consumption practices occur, some also stress the role played by objects and practices in its own making and in the (re)production of identity by its inhabitants. As Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1994: 15) suggest, if it is possible to state that all approaches to the study of the relationships between people and things have to take into consideration the contexts in which these occur, the opposite is also true. Objects and consumption practices actively participate in the structuring and appropriation of domestic spaces, as well as in the production, consolidation and negotiation of the interactions occurring in the home. Drawing on this perspective, home becomes then a key site to the depiction both of contemporary materiality and of its effects in cultural identities, i.e. a significant arena to observe and discuss the mutual and complex relationships between people and things. Miller also shares this position. According to the author, the fact that “increasingly, people’s lives take place behind the closed doors of private houses” (Miller 2008: 1) justifies its relevance as a research site, especially in great metropolis where people from very different origins and social backgrounds live next to each other challenging pre-existing notions of what one might expect to find in “typical” homes. Significant to understand diversity through the prism of “real people” (Miller 2008), homes seem to be especially vital when those people happen to be migrants. Actually, in many migration situations it often is the main location for managing and expressing loss or/and nostalgia of the past and, simultaneously, to deal with

new resources and belongings. As Ahmed *et al.* argue, “making a home is about creating both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present” (2003 [1990]: 9), which, in the case of migrants, necessarily implies skills, as well as other resources, to reclaim, adjust and (re)contextualize habits, routines and things that have been uprooted from one location and were regrounded in a different scenario. Moreover, the fact that homes are usually less exposed to public scrutiny makes them an important site for acknowledging, evaluate and adjust to a different milieu and to a new set of material and symbolic resources.

Therefore, and even if still not benefiting from the same visibility as the public sphere in contemporary social sciences, the significance and the analytical potential of the home is being increasingly acknowledged. According to Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga (1999), Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1996), Cieraad (1999), Jackson and Moores (1995), Mackay (1997) or Miller (2001), whose works actively contributed to its promotion, the apparent lack of interest for the Western modern home is particularly surprising since there has been always a strong anthropological tradition in the study of the “tribal house” or the “exotic house” (Cieraad 1999: 2). According to this tradition, the internal structure of the house is interpreted as a symbolic entity that reflects the collective order it integrates, thus contributing to its cosmological depiction. The alternative to the dominant understanding of home as “just a scenario” in Western modern societies would then entail the confirmation of its centrality as a social entity, that is, as a key site to the understanding of most of contemporary everyday life.

The rehabilitation of the domestic space is, according to the authors mentioned before, currently grounded in two major assumptions: first, the valorisation of private practices and routines by attributing them an equivalent status to the public ones in terms of complexity and diversity, and, second, the conceptualization of home as a specific form of social organization that interferes and frames the naturalized procedures and ritual practices that happen behind its doors.⁴ As Short summarises, the contemporary home is

A key site in the social organization of space. It is where space becomes place, and where family relations and gendered and class identities are negotiated, contested and transformed. The home is an active moment in both time and space in the creation of identity, social relations and collective meaning. (Short 1999: x)

4 Most of the authors mentioned finding inspiration in the foundational works of Lévi-Strauss (1979 [1975]), *La voie des masques*, and Bourdieu (1977 [1972]), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. The article “Home: a kind of space” by Mary Douglas (1991) also constitutes a relevant reference for many of them. Though a discussion of these significant contributions transcends the main objectives of this article, its relevance is entirely acknowledged.

Inspired by this rather generalist formulation, how should one address and characterize the practices occurring “at home” according to, not only their specificities and complementarities, but also their contrasts with the ones occurring in public domains? Also, how should one tackle them in contexts of displacement and movement?

The first, and probably most significant, common denominator found in the discourses of the families about their past and present homes is their portrait as complex social and cultural sites. In fact, all testimonies are wide-ranging and multifaceted, making reference to locations, people, relationships, feelings, scales, memories and, specially, to positioning strategies and policies of belonging:

I’ve a very vivid image of one of our houses. I was quite young but I remember many details. It was one of those colonial houses, with a large balcony in front. At the end of the day, my father used to seat in the balcony with two or three friends drinking whiskey the old colonial way. I loved that house. It was very isolated, with a large garden, a spectacular view of the bush. There were not many white people around just those friends of my father’s – the judge, the doctor and the teacher of the small village nearby. [Ana]

This is a picture of my family’s house in Goa. It is a splendid house. The first time I went to Goa and visited the house I was a grown woman but I felt like I had lived there all my life. Everybody knew who I was and I felt right at home immediately. It was my first time there but I felt I belonged. Of course my parents talked about that house, all its rooms and furniture, and of our aunts, uncles and cousins all the time in Mozambique. [Maria]

Though both referring to past situations, Ana’s and Maria’s stories are quite different. When enquired about the many houses she inhabited in Africa, Ana chose her childhood home, a large and isolated building in the bush where, according to her words, she was truly happy and felt save. Maria’s family house is, on the contrary, a place where she never dwelled. The ancestral building was, nevertheless, present in her home in Mozambique, both in a small picture that now stands in Maria’s living room in Lisbon, and in the stories that her parents told repeatedly as a means of maintaining their connection with Goa. The first home is lost forever, the second one, on the contrary, recently gained a different status as Maria visits it every year ever since that first trip. Despite the differences, it is however possible to recognise in these discourses the meanings of “home” as both a concrete physical space and a personal space of identification (Olwig 1998). “Home” emerged many times during fieldwork, mostly as a topic of conversation. When informants were reporting their life experiences, it took a pivotal position, appearing to have the ability

to assemble, materialise and express most of the complex issues that resulted from migration. That is to say, like the families, homes too moved from one original location to several others, had to adjust to different social, economical, political and spatial structures, lost some of its inhabitants and gained others, were visited by old and new friends, testified the maintenance of ancient habits and routines and the introduction of new ones and gained new things while keeping and losing others. As one of the interviewees mentioned when describing the difficulties she had when she and her family arrived in Lisbon after the independence of Mozambique, the new family home started to take shape at the same time as their lives settled down:

It is very difficult to explain to people that still live in the same homes where they were born, in the same villages, with all their friends and relatives around them, people that kept the same job all their lives, what it means and how it feels to get out of your home to a totally different country, to a totally different, strange and empty house, with all our friends dispersed... You have to start everything from the beginning: home, work, reorganize your group of friends and social contacts. [Joana]

When addressing the topic of home as “a nodal point in social relations” (Olwig 1998: 236), classical perspectives tended to emphasise its role as a site for the social reproduction of structural dimensions, a context of “regular doings” (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 6), social orientations and organic solidarities. Yet, during the 1980s and 1990s a considerable number of studies introduced an innovative angle in the debate by calling attention to the self-expressive activities that were going on in contemporary homes. Drawing on the “do-it-yourself” ideology, the depiction of home was less subjected to external constraints and impositions, especially when compared to the public sphere, and started to be increasingly complemented by a second viewpoint that stressed the necessity for a “far more mobile conception of home” (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 7), that is, a concept that could integrate movements of various kinds and lengths.

However, and even if this innovative position seems useful to the study of domestic materiality in migration frameworks, especially with regard to the relationships with the public sphere, its potentialities and limitations need to be further scrutinized.

Home Possessions by Daniel Miller (2001) productively summarizes a number of arguments significant to this extensive debate. According to Miller, who uses the expression “behind closed doors”, the interrelationships between the public and private domains are far more complex than the dichotomy private/public tends to express, especially due to the porosity and flexibility of the borders dividing the two. First, it is imperative to establish a clear distinction

between “personal” and “private”, therefore avoiding conceptualizing private spaces as contexts freed from social rules and structuring principles. Far from being “unbound contexts”, domestic spaces entail a multiplicity of relationships that directly and indirectly interfere with most personal practices. These relationships involve the other co-residents at home, but also entail the domestic unit/family as a collective entity, as well as the home itself, since its physical and symbolic dimensions have the aptitude to impose limits to human agency. At this point it is necessary to clarify that Miller’s remarks do not intend to question the potentialities of the home to accommodate creative and expressive practices. On the contrary, what should be highlighted is precisely the resourcefulness of the domestic unit to strategically manage its relations with structural entities in ways that simultaneously allow its sustaining and affirming of identity and autonomy as an economic, social and cultural unit. Then, what is fundamentally at stake in the relationship between the private and the public spheres is the ability of the domestic unit to prove to itself and to others, through the objectification of practice, its competences and status as an element of collective life. The projects and processes of home-building and of its maintenance thus result from the intersection of formal social and cultural dimensions with the domestic units’ aptitudes to incorporate and transform, in the home and through everyday regular practices, the cultural materials available in the public context. This theoretical position is particularly in evidence in the works of Silverstone and Hirsch (1994) and Jackson and Moores (1995), both stressing the need to unwrap and clarify the enduring and mutual constitutive interactions going on between domestic units and more wide socio-economical structures:

In the continuous work of reproduction [...] – and via the mesh of class, position, ethnicity, geography and the rest – the household engages in a process of value creation in its various daily practices [...] that are firmly grounded in, but also constitutive of, its position in space and time and which provide the bases for achievement [...] of a sense of trust in the world as it appears to be. (Silverstone and Hirsch 1994: 16)

Besides permanent interaction with formal social structures, homes also entail permanent processes of internal negotiation. In fact, the supposed homogeneity of the domestic unit, as well as its representation as a “peaceful” and “ideal” self-expressive domain, needs to be questioned (Olwig 1998; Miller 2001) if we want to depict its internal logics. In view of that, the domestic unit is better defined as a collective entity resulting from progressive negotiations between all its members. In fact, the existence of different and, in many cases, divergent positions in the same home has been vastly acknowledged. Often the home emerges as a site of contestation, where the interests of different

individuals clash and they struggle when trying to find their own particular position within its boundaries. As Fog Olwig states (1998: 226), “within the physical bounds of a given home site, there may thus be space for many homes, between which a given person may migrate in a process of developing and maintaining personal identities”. This perspective does not however question the validity of the concept of domestic unit. On the contrary, it corresponds to the assertion and rehabilitation of the home as the expression of a collective significant project that results from a permanent process of negotiation and compromise and involves all its members.

How, and to what extent, do the physical dimensions of the home participate and are involved in the structuring of the domestic practices?

The discussion of this central question should perhaps start with the idea that not just houses but in fact all objects are formally able to actively participate in domestic life. According to Alfred Gell (1998), all things potentially have the skill to gather, divide, restructure, reorganize and, therefore, to objectify the existing relationships taking place within the home. This aptitude allows the house to potentially affect and shape the daily life routines of those who inhabit it, as much as to being appropriated and modified by them. Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga also support this idea, confirming that

... the production and use of houses [...] are not just exercises in the practical generation of cultural forms; they entail the reciprocal influence of the domestic environment on actors who find their daily activities both enabled and constrained by the physical character of the house and its contents. (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999: 9)

The multiple meanings of the word “accommodating” (Miller 2002) can productively assist the discussion regarding homes. According to Miller, to accommodate speaks first of the need to find accommodation, in the sense of a place to live. Secondly, it may imply the reciprocal process of appropriation of the home by its inhabitants and vice versa, i.e. “it may imply our changing of a home to suit ourselves, but also imply the need to change ourselves in order to suit our accommodation” (Miller 2010: 96). Thirdly, it also expresses a sense of agreement to compromise on behalf of the other.

Catarina, when interviewed about her present home in Lisbon, describes her process of “accommodating” in a way that illustrates the complexity and reciprocity of the process:

I think that, because I had always lived in “grandness”, the fact that we moved to a small house had a great effect on me. I was always bumping against things. The objects, the furniture seemed not to fit in the rooms. I had to adjust, to compromise, and so did my things. I had to cut my tables in

half, get rid of chairs and cupboards and adjust the beds and the headboards. Now I think I'm adapted to it, but it was very hard work. [Catarina]

While calling attention to the existence of significant features that interfere and therefore constrain the apparent “freedom of action” at home, the authors stress the significance of its agency, an aspect that is essential to confirm the potential of its contribution to the study of contemporary migrations. Moreover, acknowledging the home as a non-atomized context, immune to the interferences of other social terrains, makes it a significant site for establishing relationships of inclusion and exclusion that reflect existent structures of power and forms of social categorization (such as ethnicity, gender or class) that clearly surpass the domain of self expression. Homes, therefore, should be addressed from a perspective that permanently articulates agency and structure, creativity and contingency, individuality and collectiveness.

MIGRANT HOMES, MATERIAL CULTURE

The participation of objects and consumption practices in the processes of transforming an anonymous house into a meaningful home is well documented in a vast number of classic and contemporary ethnographies. Their relevance is acknowledged by means of an array of examples ranging from food habits to the use of extraordinary decorative pieces, housekeeping practices or family task assignments. The plurality of existing empirical objects is matched by an equally vast number of theoretical approaches that range from analysis focused in specific features of domestic consumption or/and types of things to more general approaches to the home as a signifying unit, with the objective of illuminating the “overall logic” (Miller 2008: 5) of the relationships between people and things. Despite its differences in terms of scope, most of these contributions however embrace a common goal: to highlight the importance of materiality in the production and expression of cultural identities and in the reinforcement of kinship and other networks of belonging and support. These features are present in many excerpts collected during fieldwork, as in the case depicted by Ana when she was invited to tea by a friend that she had not seen for a long time:

Despite the fact that things here are completely different, our way of life did not disappear completely. Little by little, people started to get together again, though not quite so often as before. There is this one group of ladies friends of my mother-in-law that used to get together in the past to play *canasta*.⁵ Their homes now are very tiny. Sometimes, I'm also invited to

5 Card game resembling rummy, using two packs of cards.

go to their homes and play. In the living room there are two tables to play the *canasta*. Tea is served in the kitchen because there is no room left in the living room due to the two *canasta* tables. So, you go into the kitchen and... there are fabulous things in there! The kitchen table is covered with a beautiful tablecloth from the old days, one of those tablecloths that only ladies like them have; and tea is being served in Satsuma china. And on the table there are all these fabulous jams they make, the beautiful cakes, fruit pies, little triangular pate sandwiches, all very good and exquisite. Of course they do not make the same quantities they used to make in the old days because now they have to bake everything themselves. The first time I went to one of these tea parties, I started to cry. I used to go to their extraordinary parties in Mozambique and now there it was! Everything was there again, though at a different scale. Exactly the same! [Ana]

Central for the study of all domestic spaces, material culture and consumption practices acquire specific features in migration processes. All migrations necessarily introduce disruption, loss, deconstruction, change and instability that should be taken into consideration but also, as in the episode described by Ana, continuities and logics of reproduction. As Burrell (2008) summarises, displacements of people usually bring about replacements of objects since migrations necessarily entail, besides material continuities often linked with coping with an unfamiliar context, the task of having to deal with a new material world and face new material norms and values that will necessarily affect the lives of those who stayed behind. A fruitful way of integrating these features in the analysis is to promote a perspective of the “home as process”. The conceptualization of the home as a process resulted, at first, from the necessity of discussing the supposed “fixed” and “solid” nature of the house, as opposite to the intrinsic dynamic nature of the concept of domestic unit. Clarke (2001) promotes one of the most interesting contributions to its implementation. Her research in a London neighbourhood, while trying to access and clarify the factors that mediate the relationships between domestic units and the involving social milieu, confirmed the existence of intricate links between the specific biographies of the subjects, their representations of the social context and their domestic consumption practices. The concept of home as process attempts precisely to depict the intrinsic dynamism of this relationship. The concept of a static and stable home is questioned and replaced by an alternative conceptualization that re-equates the domestic space and its materiality as central to the promotion of social mobility and social reconfiguration processes, according to the specificities of the social framework: “It considers the ‘home’ as process [...], in which past and future trajectories (inseparable from external abstractions such as ‘class’) are negotiated through fantasy and action, projection and interiorization” (Clarke 2001: 25). Besides calling attention to the

more specific aspects of peoples' social trajectories, this definition introduces dynamism in the analysis of the present while establishing a productive dialogue with the past and the future times. In fact, homes include a set of multiple and very different materials, ranging from furniture and decorative objects to its physical structure that, when experienced as a unified and autonomous entity, correspond to something different from the sum of its parts. Since all these material elements are appropriated and invested with meanings, the home can constitute a material testimony that simultaneously accommodates memories from past experiences and expectancies regarding the present and the future. Hence the home corresponds to what Simmel had meaningfully defined as "unique synthesis", i.e., "an aspect of life and at the same time a special way of forming, reflecting and interrelating the totality of life" (Simmel 1984: 93-94).

As stated before, the importance of domestic material culture in contemporary migrations processes only recently started to gain visibility.⁶ Though not primarily concerned with materiality and consumption, some works confirmed the existence of expressive and extensive associations between the most critical moments in migration processes, the home and its objects. These associations were particularly explored in its first stages and often corresponded to the abandonment of meaningful things, including the building that housed them, and the retention of others that were elected to travel with the migrant.

Things that travelled, along with the remembrances of all things that stayed behind, constitute a valuable field of critical evaluation of the past but also of the present and of future expectations via the classificatory systems used to place and evaluate them in relation to all other constituent parts of the present home. So, to look at these objects primarily means to find out the principles responsible for making them matter. As Marcoux points out: "Possessions are not simply given as mattering from the start. They come to matter through the sorting out. Because in itself it classifies" (Marcoux 2001: 84). Recognizing the significance of these objects should not however be interpreted as if all other things somehow played a secondary part in or had less expressive value. All things, regardless of their origin, nature or biography (Kopytoff 1986), need to be placed in a broader framework, that of the home as a coherent unit. "Home-making" is an ongoing task, a complex and permanent process, continuously subjected to a series of constraints and negotiations resulting from the networks of relationships among its inhabitants and of them with the world outside, but also with the physical structure of the house and with all the material elements it contains. This task, described in terms of appropriation (Miller 1987; Silverstone and Hirsch 1994), agency (Gell 1998) or,

6 See, for example, the contributions of Howes (1996), Rapport and Dawson (1998), Fortier (2000), Morley (2000), Gardner (2002), Basu and Coleman (2008), Burrell (2008), Frykman (2009).

as previously discussed, accommodation (Miller 2002), requires creative knowledge and personal effort since things, houses included, are not immediately apprehensible, nor necessarily ready-to-use according to a pre-fixed universal set of instructions. In order to be used, things have to be sorted out, worked, domesticated, classified and integrated in diverse practices and activities. Though highly dependent on routines and naturalized practices, this discrete field of action is, in contemporary contexts, a main setting for the transformation of the resources acquired in the global market into what Miller describes as “expressive environments, daily routines and often cosmological ideals: that is, ideas about order, morality and family, and their relationships with the wider society” (1987: 8).

The conceptualization of home as a site of confluence of multiple factors and influences and as a unit of ongoing production of material culture clearly transcends the context of migration. Nevertheless, and since it formally establishes the conditions for a productive dialogue between the more large abstract structures of contemporary social life and the micro realm of ordinary domestic routines, it can be significant to accede the particular and original features that often mark migration. This relevance becomes particularly evident regarding the great variety of ways to objectify belonging and bridge the material gulf existing between “there” and “here”. Morley (2000) cites a series of ethnographies in the city of London where objects directly related with the migrants’ past are portrayed in diverse situations, ranging from the ostensive display of the door-key of the “lost home” to the existence of hidden cases full of mass produced things that never were, and most probably never will be, used. In his examples, the idea that all materiality holds the creative ability of transforming and/or adapting the meanings of things according to the subject’s interests and strategies is emphasised. That is to say that all objects, independently of their kind, purpose, use or presence, can participate in the (re)making, negotiating and acknowledging of one’s place in the world.

To conclude it is necessary to draw attention to one last aspect. The main gain in studying “migrants’ homes” can only be acknowledged if one avoids assuming that home “has an essential meaning in advance of its making” (Ahmed *et al.* 2003: 8). This assumption does not intend to deny the existence of highly shared cultural representations of home, but fundamentally to call attention to the fact that homes are permanently subjected to processes of making and remaking according to the shifting conditions introduced by movement and migration, as well as other social forces and dynamics. Home-making is, then, about merging present and past while equating the future, a task that takes time and implies commitment and effort from all members of the domestic unit, a “homework” where objects and domestic consumption practices play a significant part expressing but also producing new belongings.

FINAL REMARKS: THE DOMESTIC WORK OF CONSUMPTION

It is fairly consensual to say that there is little anthropological work on the subject of migration and material culture, especially in what concerns domestic objects and everyday consumption routines going on in the private sphere of the home. Most academic approaches on the vast and complex subject of contemporary migrations tend to prioritise and be focused in the immaterial dimensions (norms, attitudes, values, strategies, positioning and visibility policies) manifested in the public space, or in core themes such as the modalities of contact and interaction with the context of origin and the hosting societies, the depiction and characterisation of the paths, fluxes and movements of different migrant groups, or the economic, political and demographic impacts of migration. Though essential, these approaches do not seem to pay as much attention to the private expressions and impacts of contemporary migrations as to their more public and visible features and effects, therefore placing the first in a position that does not contribute much to unfold the analytical potential of domestic material culture and consumption practices that take place in all (migrants') homes. These regular doings can however constitute a significant field to observe, depict and analyse what Vertovec termed the "super-diversity" of contemporary migrations: "the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of additional variables" (Vertovec 2007a: 1025) such as age profiles, gender, differential migration statuses, divergent labour experiences, patterns of spatial distribution or local area responses by service providers and residents that work together and beyond ethnicity in conditioning migrants daily lives.

The main aim of this article was precisely to question the lack of attention given to materiality and consumption practices and highlight their ability to contribute to the study of contemporary migration experiences and the cultural encounters they promote. This position results from an ongoing reflection based on the theoretical references cited but also from the findings of recent research work.

According to the examples presented, home, its material culture and domestic consumption can be addressed and discussed as significant fields of practice that are both expressive and constitutive of the tensions, anxieties and expectations that mark migration movements. Migration is, by definition, a disruptive and disturbing experience that usually implies a significant effort in order to restore the lost senses of familiarity and order. Though not entirely circumscribed to it, it was argued that the home, and the relationships it entails, play a major part in these vital processes. Home and its objects seem to assume a pivotal position due to their ability to assemble, materialize and express far-reaching topics and concerns directly resulting from movement and displacement. On the other hand, home-making was described by the interviewees

as a task of production and transformation of meaningful material and, of course, also immaterial resources. The appropriation of contemporary material culture can take many shapes and forms and contemporary things can be used in diverse ways, relate to subjects according to their specific interests and via different modalities. The material diversity resulting from these activities is not only expressive of the subjects' identities but also constitutive of them since "the product of labour is labour embodied and made material in an object" (Marx 2001: 37). Hopefully, domestic material culture and consumption practices will contribute to bring light to new angles of contemporary migrations, especially in what concerns the way they are perceived, evaluated and, more importantly, daily experienced by those who migrate.

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O consumo enquanto trabalho doméstico: materialidades, migrações e processos de construção de uma nova casa ♦ Marta Vilar Rosales ♦ CRIA/FCSH-UNL, Portugal ♦ m.rosales@fcsh.unl.pt

Este artigo procura discutir as potencialidades de uma abordagem que promova a integração de dois terrenos de estudo: o da cultura material e o das migrações contemporâneas. Mais especificamente, exploram-se os modos como a casa, enquanto contexto, e os processos culturais através dos quais esta é produzida poderão contribuir para discutir os cruzamentos destes dois campos, a partir dos resultados preliminares de uma investigação conduzida na comunidade portuguesa em Toronto e de três etnografias realizadas em Lisboa, Maputo e em quatro cidades brasileiras com famílias migrantes de origem portuguesa e indo-portuguesa. Argumenta-se que a cultura material do espaço doméstico constitui um campo particularmente produtivo de observação de relações entre os macrocontextos e as micropráticas, as formações sociais e as instituições culturais que dão forma e afectam as experiências de vida daqueles que migram. Por forma a discutir a sua participação nas avaliações, reconfigurações e reconstruções que ocorrem em todas as migrações, a cultura material e o consumo (enquanto trabalho doméstico) serão tratados, não só como uma expressão desses processos, mas igualmente como actividades constitutivas dos mesmos, isto é, de (re)produção de identidade e de pertença sociais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: cultura material, migrações, casa, pertença, apropriação, trabalho.