

## **Introduction: Women Migrants, Objects, Emotions and Cultural Production**

The interrelationship between people and things, as well as the affective meanings those objects may have on lives is a subject that permeates generations, genders, groups. Even more compelling a subject is the significance of particular objects in migrant lives, especially as layers of deep emotionality and threads of cultural constructions of homelands, memories and mobilities are intertwined with such tangible things. Some of 'these cultures situated in the homespace offer a sense of inclusion, which has aesthetic, sensual, and psycho-sociological dimensions' (Tolia-Kelly, 2004: 685).

The cultural and emotional meanings triggered by the presence, absence or circulation of objects in migrant lives, vary from familial to personal contexts, and, are extensively subjective. Exploring such shifting dynamics of material culture, cultural and social mediation, as well as, emotional production has become a stimulating platform for lively interdisciplinary debates (cf. Svašek, 2012). Such discussions, grounded in ethnographically rich and theoretically driven debates, focus on varying and multidimensional aspects of the complex and changing relationships between migrants and objects, often saturated in deeply emotional, sensorial and socio-aesthetically constituted processes. They reflect the "stickier" parts of contemporary mobilities' (Walsh, 2006: 124).

The renewed interest in the socio-historical ground of cultural production has been exemplified in different ways through various schools of thought from hermeneutics, new historicism, literary criticism and cultural studies, to new criticism, structuralism and deconstruction, with Bourdieu being a central theoretical voice in providing

empirically grounded critical studies of cultural practices (e.g. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 1993). Bourdieu's analytical precision offers both a fruitful alternative and a robust theoretical framework in dissecting the relationship between social/structural processes and aesthetic/cultural practices. The insight into the layers of material and symbolic power, that social institutions exhibit, in how the role of culture in the reproduction of unequal power relations is embedded in the simplicity and ordinariness of everyday life, is sociologically relevant and important.

For most, the term 'material' usually conveys, semiologically at least, images of things, objects, artefacts, stuff. However, Miller (2005: 4) explains that 'this definition soon breaks down as we move on to consider the large compass of materiality, the ephemeral, the imaginary, the biological, and the theoretical; all that which would have been external to the simple definition of an artifact'. Instead, Miller (2005) presents an encompassing theorisation which situates materiality with a wider conceptualisation of culture.

At the same time, aspects of identification processes involving issues of homing and belonging (Brah, 1996; Christou, 2011) also include materialities of domesticity by focusing on what Miller (1987) suggests is a 'process of objectification' whereupon the social subject interacting with a particular object can enter a process of self-creation. The significance of material possessions is exemplified in the way people carve out particular meanings of their domestic environments and the feelings associated with common household objects (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Additionally, Basu and Coleman (2008) remind us that migration is grounded in objects, practices and relationships that mediate and create contexts of movement. With the ease of technology, migrants' means of performing trips home became faster, more affordable and more frequent (cf. Burrell, 2011). At the same time, the material culture of gift-giving in transnational mobilities gives impetus to both multigenerational perspectives and the cultural significance of ritualistic customs when women perform important empowering roles as 'gift agents' in the host and home countries, thus extending the concept of 'mobility practices' (e.g. Ali and Suleman, 2017).

While academic work (Miller, 1987; 2001) has been devoted to studies of material culture, objects, consumption and shopping, less attention has been given to the relationship between material culture and international migration. According to Ahmed (2010), objects trigger various emotions, symbolise feelings and things but also provide a means of making us happy. An object can become a 'happy object' if given by a loved one – the object itself can acquire affective value (Ahmed, 2010: 33). In their ethnographic study, Povrzanovic Frykman and Humbracht (2013) examine familiar objects owned by migrants in Sweden and point to their power of establishing palpable connections between people and places. Through objects, migrants attempt to achieve the sense of continuity and an ability to recreate 'home'. Hence objects in migrants' lives tell us about identity, memory, belonging, but also point to the extent of migrants' adaptation in their new destination.

Researchers note that migrant lives are furnished with products and objects which are carried on their return trips; objects that embody longing of people and places (Baldassar, 2008; Burrell, 2008; Dudley, 2011). Transnational relationships are embodied in the objects shuttled over the borders. Having different purposes, they can

be symbolic or nostalgic, holding memories of earlier experiences; gifts, home-made food, photos, letters, cards and memorabilia. By stocking up on their favourite ethnic food products, both home-made and commercially produced, migrants can feel 'homely' in the new destination (Rabikowska, 2010; Brown and Paszkiewicz, 2017).

Research by Baldassar (2008) on emotions of missing kin and longing for co-presence in transnational relationships indicates that migrants yearn to see, hear and touch their loved ones, but also crave the special foods, smells and tastes associated with family and places. Food contains highly emotional, narrative and mnemonic significance in family relationships (Abarca and Colby, 2016) and allows a migrant to feel continued belonging with the culture they left behind while transmitting that 'homely feeling' miles away from the ancestral homeland (Rabikowska, 2010). Being an irreplaceable part of migrants' life, ethnic food consumption is a coping mechanism and helps to create nostalgic memories of the homeland. Brown and Paszkiewicz (2017: 62) in their recent study of British Poles call the act of carrying food from the homeland during trips back 'bringing back a little bit of paradise'— food brought from home is a powerful symbol of comfort, heritage and health.

Despite the known importance of researching ethnic food and its evocation of cultural landscapes and homeland memories (Baldassar, 2008; Christou and King, 2010), the role of food carried from the countries of origin back to the new destination has been far less researched. This paper aims to contribute by focusing on empirical data regarding products of the soil, such as food produced in migrant homelands and transported back to the host society, but also encompasses soil related affective and culturally symbolic materialities such as plants and gardens, as well as other decorative objects transported from homelands. All these things, objects and cultural

materialities are understood along with social practice and family relations through an interpretive framework. They are situated in a theoretical framing of 'affective habitus' (Illouz, 2007; Reay, 2015) in stretching Bourdieu to a more holistic sociological account of affectively shaped gendered mobilities and cultural materialities. In terms of our definition of the term, we employ 'affective habitus' as an interpretive framework applied in the analysis of the meanings of objects as a *performative repertoire of practices imbued with affective connotations and shaped by the personal magnitude of things in the narratives of migrant lives*. We understand such processes as *acts of material consciousness which are embodied, emotional, performative and narrated accounts central to the notion of practice in everyday migrant lives*.

However, as with most conceptual framings, along with opportunities come limitations, and while 'affective habitus' offers utility in bridging things-feelings-people-place, (in the relationship of materiality with the emotional), we are also cautious of the scope for a more critical analysis of the complexities and ruptures of such with a range of power entanglements. That is, a more multi-dynamic and symbolic signification needs to incorporate a holistic analytic paradigm that also stresses the integral connection between the continuously changing practices, evolving, discovering, recreating, reinventing and infusing with the vitality of the personal lifestyle choices that (in this case middle class and highly skilled women) migrants make and the possible power resistances that the local constructions or limitations to cultural citizenship involve. The latter extends some of the practical re-memory leisure activities of migrants to actual re-membering work of being/becoming/belonging in the new host society. Here, we also remain attentive of Wacquant's (2016) recent 'concise genealogy and anatomy of habitus' where he underscores habitus as dynamic, multiscalar, multi-layered, displaying tension but not a self-sufficient mechanism for the generation of action.

Therefore, while affect and emotions continue to be salient concepts in psychosocial research, we find particular utility in the sociological context of applying 'affective habitus' as the conceptual framing. We apply this to examine how mediations of memory and women's actions related to homecoming visits can extend understandings of how migrants create agentic ways to settle in new social settings while making cultural accommodations. We further theorise below these conceptual terrains through a phenomenological approach to gendered migrancy and cultural materiality in everyday life.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Considerations: Exploring Im/mobilities, Materialities and Cultural Dynamics**

Women migrants are often called upon to make conscious strategic choices, to demonstrate resilience (Christou and Michail, 2015; Michail and Christou, 2016) and often construct their subjectivities in negotiating regulating practices and knowledges, transgressing and resisting fixed/ethnicised/gendered norms (Erel, 2009). Empirical insights (cf. Christou, 2006; Erel, 2009) have demonstrated that when migrant women as social agents become aware of the importance of transforming their lives (through migration, education, professionalisation, etc.) they can re-invent new identities based on new circumstances, changing social positions and relations.

Nevertheless, still in 2015, Espin and Dottolo proclaim that 'most published work on immigration does not focus on women *as women* or on the gendered processes that underlie the experience of migration. With very few exceptions, even when data about women and girls are presented, a gender analysis of the implications of these data tends to be absent' (italics in the original, p.1). This paper aims to make a modest contribution to a gendered analysis on migrant women *as women*, along with the

emotional and gendered processes of cultural production in materially affective contexts of making a home 'away from home'.

We explore women migrants who perform visits home and carry objects that have value to them. Specifically, we examine which objects women carry from their homeland with them in understanding the significance of those objects in shaping a sense of homing and belonging in the new destination. We further analyse the meaning attached to these objects and emotions they trigger within the context of 'affective habitus' as we have defined earlier.

The empirical evidence we discuss in responding to the above research objectives draws on twenty in-depth interviews with migrant women employed in various highly-skilled professions (managers, architects, medical doctors) and were conducted in the Swiss city of Basel, home to an estimated 36 per cent of foreign-born population (Basel Statistical Office, 2017). Their jobs reflected prevalent sectors in which foreign highly-skilled professionals in the city of Basel are employed. At the time of the interviews, the participants were in age, between 23 and 46 years, and, eight of them were mothers. They all were of European nationality, originating from France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland and Spain. Although one of the researchers used personal connections to access some of the interviewees, others were approached using various social networking sites for newcomers in Basel as well as German language classes for architects (this is because many of the highly-skilled professionals employed in Switzerland work in English-speaking only environments and begin learning German after arrival). Before the interview took place, participants were informed about the purpose of the interview and ensured that pseudonyms would be used in order to maintain confidentiality. Interviews were conducted between April 2015 and September 2016, mostly in English, the language

used daily by all the respondents. They were held in a variety of locations, such as coffee shops, bars or by the river and also at participants' homes. All interviews, lasting on average an hour, were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. A semi-structured interview format covered migrants' visits to and from the homeland, objects transported, the means of transport and overall maintenance of transnational relations.

With a focus on emotions and material culture, the recollection of traditional home country items, brought either by the migrants or their visitors from the homeland (personally or by post), featured strongly in all the interviews. Home possessions, such as libraries, lamps, coffee machines, plants and various ethnic food items were also shown to the researcher during those interviews which took place at participants' homes. Some of these items were displayed in central places, reflecting homing practices; notably, the large piece of jamón in Mariana's kitchen (Image 1), which, inevitably, became an important subject of the interview. It is interesting to note that a large food item took a central place in her kitchen; a comforting rather than an aesthetically pleasing object, in the home of two architects. This provided a depth and richness of phenomenological importance in capturing the lived experience of 'homing' in the 'affective habitus'; this time the kitchen reconfirmed a serenity of intimacy with the oversized piece of cured meat as a reminder of coziness and homing. The centrality of the location and display of the object in the kitchen is in line with our definition of 'affective habitus' with its performative repertoire of the practice and personal magnitude of the object which is infused with the affective meanings of consumption of the product reminiscent of feelings of homing, comfort and caring.



At times, reflecting on food items and familiar objects triggered strong emotions, resulting in moments of great sadness. For example, for a woman who migrated from Ireland, reminiscing about long evenings spent with her parents and siblings in their childhood garden caused visible emotional pain during the interview conducted on a summer evening by the river Rhine. Recollecting the typical ethnic food items and home-made dishes from the homeland was associated with migrants' home country landscapes, roots and soil. Within the processes involved in international migration, beyond the physical act of crossing borders and states, there are additional multiple layers of mobilities inclusive of those of the impact of homeland visiting trips and the significance of bringing back objects. Airplanes, cars, coaches and trains were important ways in transporting the meaningful objects from the homeland.

As will be shown in Mariana's extract that follows further on, limited baggage allowance impacted on her traditional Spanish food consumption, while travelling through northern Greece, carrying a suitcase with Greek tomatoes grown by Georgia's parents, triggered embarrassment when questioned of this practice during the interview. Discussing meaningful objects from the homeland evoked sadness, nostalgia and longing for parents, siblings and close friends as well as places. These narrations effectively construct an 'affective habitus' in the interviewees' new destinations through the very act of telling material culture stories. We understand these stories as saturated by 'affective habitus'; emplaced within and enacted through the processes of acts of narrations of material consciousness. Such narrative accounts are also permeated by layers of embodied, emotional and culturally performative notions of the significance of objects in the women's lives. At the same time, we find gendered implications in such narrations, given that women are often associated with

creating domesticity and homing through belonging, associated with familiar foods, objects and ethnic practices.

While material objects and the interconnected impact of materialities and emotionalities on the transnational lives of women migrants were central to the project in exploring notions of homing and belonging, nevertheless, we did not impose the methodological fixity of place in terms of where participants felt comfortable in holding the interviews. That is, while we acknowledge a possible limitation of not conducting all interviews in participant homes where we could allow for a rigidly focused discussion on objects brought from the homeland, and, in their physical emplacement in the destination residence, it is the latter, the rigidity of spatio-temporal interaction with the participants that we did not want to privilege.

Rather, we wanted mnemonic and storied accounts of the meanings of material culture to become a vehicle for the participants to narrate cultural production in the very experience of narration. It is what Becker and Quasthoff (2004: 1) refer to when indicating that 'narrating is not only to be seen as verbalizing a past event by making use of the structural possibilities of language. Rather this process of verbalization is intricately interwoven with the interactive interdependencies of storytelling within the local context. Telling a story demands a certain kind of context and in itself establishes a particular interactive reality'. It is those interactive subjectivities as an outcome of *object-subject-affective* encounter that we sought to analyse and present through a discussion of our findings.

Finally, as discussed earlier, a conceptualisation of the 'affective habitus' (cf. Illouz, 2007; Reay, 2015) was pivotal in both the research design and the analytical phase of the data collected. In the definition we have offered earlier, we found much inspiration

in 'Bourdieu with feelings' (Reay, 2015) to extend habitus to the psychosocial realm. It was theoretically refreshing to follow this conceptual journey into the affective aspects of living in discovering a richer understanding of how externalities of social structures are experientially mediated through internalities of emotional spheres. In our research, we find that the dispositions of affectivity unfold in a context of habitus underpinned by a tapestry of memory, kinship and materiality, all stimulated by a process of adaptation to the new destination.

We follow the recognition of emotion beyond a psychological one, to a cultural and social entity, in its capacity to enact definitions of personhood through concrete socio-culturally defined relationships (cf. Illouz, 2007) in everyday life interactions. According to Eva Illouz (2007: 3), the cultural meanings of emotions through social relations are in a context of compact compression because they 'are deeply internalized and unreflexive aspects of action'. The latter, however, is precisely due to emotions being saturated by culture and society, thus, by extension linked to fundamental socio-cultural entities such as objects, things, stuff that are integral to our ordinary lives. As one of the 'least reflexive aspects of habitus' and the most 'embodied forms of cultural capital', emotional habitus is cultural in its style, tonality, attitudes and social in that it is made and transformed through social interaction (Illouz, 2007: 66).

In the next section we delve into the empirical findings that extend sociologies of migration and sociologies of everyday life by bringing the concept of 'affective habitus' to bear on the field of the phenomenology of material culture. We unpack how emotions triggered by objects shape settling practices in host societies. The analysis centres on pathways of cultural production as they unfold through memories, objects and experiential return visits. We find sociological depth in applying 'affective habitus' as the conceptual framing to examine how mediations of memory and emotions can

extend understandings of how women migrants create agentic ways to settle in new host societies while making cultural accommodations. We theorise the conceptual terrain of 'affective habitus' through a phenomenological approach to gendered migrancy and cultural materiality in everyday life.

### **Affective Habitus in Products of the Soil: Meaning Making in Mobilities of Cultural Materialities**

Homeland nature, gardens, landscapes and food strongly featured in all the interviews conducted with migrant women. Often, products of the homeland soil carry an emphatic phenomenology of being regarded as 'authentic' and 'genuine' of ethnic roots, in a literal manifestation from the earth to ethnicity. As such, they are carried across borders by migrants as symbolic groundings in new 'diasporic routes' (cf. Christou and King, 2010). For women migrants, in their roles as mothers, the symbolism extends to their responsibility as 'biological producers of the nation' (cf. Yuval Davis, 1997), and, in their caring roles creating a homing context for offspring.

The affectivity of such a habitus is integral to the socialisation of the next generation, and, the significance of homeland 'stuff' becomes a major component of the process. Indeed, in the case of our participants, large amounts of traditional and familiar foodstuff, termed simply as '*different*' than in Switzerland, were carried transnationally by various means of transport: uncomfortable journey by bus, relaxing train, car, *Mittfarengalagen* (a German practice of car sharing) and quick trips by air. Each of these journeys provided different opportunities and barriers for transporting goods from the homeland; goods that conveyed a sense of safety, love, health and parents' personal efforts. Memories of people and places related to familiar landscapes from the homeland were repeatedly brought up during interviews. The garden was

significant for women recalling their visits home or planning next trips. A teacher who migrated from France was imagining her next holiday in her parents' French house with her own young family and other family members. Not a house but a garden featured strongly as a busy centre of family events; long meals, conversations, playing, learning and relaxation:

*The garden is quite important and there will be other children, the cousins. In the garden we eat. (...) And now there is a veranda, so I don't know whether this is going to change. If it is very hot, the children will play with the water a bit. My father wanted to build a little house for the children to play, in the garden. Last year he built an insect's hotel with his grandson. (...) So they had a project together. My sister lives in Paris and they don't have a garden so for the little boy, he is 3, it is nice to be outside in the garden. They don't need much to play. Also, there is a hammock, we stay there and talk. (Audrey, French, Teacher, 40 years old, mother of 6 month old boy, living with British partner)*

Recalling the garden – a space of happy family life, both past and imagined, but also tranquillity and reflection, at times provoked troubled thoughts and nostalgia. The memory of her parents' garden was a reoccurring theme, discussed intensively by another participant, Shannon. The interview setting, an outdoor place by the river Rhine on a summer evening, triggered nostalgic emotions in Shannon: sadness and longing for her parents. For the woman who was born and raised in Ireland, visits home were associated with leisure time in the childhood garden with her parents and siblings in Dublin. Recalling those happy moments triggered thoughts on returning home:

*I was kind of homesick, around three weeks ago. I missed like this summer atmosphere at home. You know, all my memories of summer, just being in the garden, and being outside and doing different things with my family. So I just spontaneously booked the flight. (...) My parents have a lovely garden, so beautiful and in the summer you can sit out, and evenings are much longer in Ireland, because it is further north, even if it is colder, I still sit with my coat on, and we sit outside, and my parents have a dog and I miss that also. I think I just miss home. It is probably all related to family experiences. It is just the essence of childhood, the essence of growing up, what was familiar to you then, what makes you feel safe and comfortable. It is all there. I am thinking of moving home. (Shannon, Irish, Pharmaceutical Company, 31 years old, living with Italian partner)*

In both Audrey's and Shannon's recollections the garden seemed to feature not only as a magnet of joy for the children but also triggered happy moments of their childhood

experiences in that very same garden which embraced familiarity, safety, warmth and comfort. Often such visits express a strong desire to reconnect with the places that comprised the landscape of people's childhood (cf. Burger, 2011). The motivation lies behind the need to make affective links between the past and the present, between values and principles taught as children and current new norms during adult migrant lives, and, to create new emotional bonds between former homes and new homes. We understand these processes as steps into the pathway of the *affective habitus* where objects become channels of emotion and material culture a conduit to adaptation in the host society. While the time spent in the garden was often recalled and longed for, the garden featured in the narratives also in relation to working with the soil. Connected to parents' care and mundane labour in which their own fruits and vegetables are grown, the fruits of the garden symbolised evidence of love and care. Encouraged by parents, fruits and vegetables were carried transnationally to Basel, as one of such typical quotes below emphasises. In Julia's account below, the mother-daughter relationship is further accentuated by food:

*I bring the food from my mother. Yeah, that is very important. And often, at the end, I have some complaints from my mother: 'take this, take that'. (...) Because my parents have a garden and they are very proud of it. I go home with luggage that is half empty and it is full when I go (back to my) home. My parents grew up in Poland, so kopytka (potato dumpling) (laughter) and fricadell (pork meat meal). I really like them. My mother can only do them; I can't make them. Some cake. And then my mother will cook some schnitzel; she knows I like that. And fresh food from the garden. (Julia, German, Medical Doctor, 35 years old, single mother of 4 year old Tomas)*

Products from the garden and home-made dishes, prepared often via slow-cooking, are given by parents. While the products from the gardens were frequently transported by train between neighbouring countries, from Germany and France to Switzerland, distance seemed to make no difference. Georgia, a dentist who migrated from Greece, appeared rather embarrassed during the interview when listing all the items brought

all the way from Greece by her parents visiting her in Basel, including home grown tomatoes:

*Earlier on they also wanted to bring some vegetables because they grow their own, but I mean, it is not necessary any more. It is very nice but you can get it here. Oil and olives are quite special to me but other things are not necessary to carry. Of course the tomatoes taste completely different but bringing tomatoes from Greece to Switzerland is.... (Georgia, Greek, Dentist, 33 years old, single)*

Travelling between her Greek village in Northern Greece and Basel is a long and tiresome journey, involving a short flight and a long journey by coach through mainland Greece. Despite that huge effort put in travelling, Georgia carries familiar food items personally made by her family members. This time, the gendered (traditional) food production involves generations, as in addition to the mother above, the grandmother below also figures in the affective link between memory/migration and food/family.

*Actually I bring oil because my family makes their own, they have olive trees and some thako - it is a special bread, they have it in Crete and you eat it with oil and it becomes soft. And you don't find it here. Some years ago I was also bringing feta with me because my grandmother was making it herself but now she is too old and she doesn't make it. Most of the things you can find them here but it is not the same.*

In other studies (Christou and King, 2010) addressing issues related to migrant transnational visits, the volume of products of the soil were transported in cars crossing borders, Georgia however, carries the foodstuff herself, despite the long uneasy journey by plane and coach across the country. Possibly, the complex experience of making the long journey gives even more weight to the symbolic meaning of the home foodstuff and its appreciation of consuming it when in Basel. Kristina, an architect who migrated from Hungary, mentioned the special effort that is needed to safely transport goods with short expiry dates between countries. *'Specialties, like meat, salami, milk products like turo-rudi'* (type of cottage cheese which can be sweet or savoury) needed ice cubes and special wrapping paper. Any effort involved in purchasing and packaging the foodstuff was clearly worthwhile.

In the narrative of Sofia, another participant from Greece, 'products of the soil' were regularly transported to-and-fro. Again, the mother in this case makes most of the sweets but there are other foods brought as well:

*What I always bring is olive oil and olives. And then I can bring some sweets my mother does, like jams. I can have some kind of beans that they make in Greece. I can bring some, even that I don't always cook, I may throw it away after a while (laughs). I don't bring so much. I know of other people who will bring so many things, like moving them from a supermarket. Because the olive comes from my cousin in the South of Greece, and then my parents buy 30 kg of it, I think it is a different taste, this olive oil. My mother would make cookies, and comfiture or these fruits – sweets we eat with yoghurt. There was a time at the beginning when my parents were bringing meat, but not anymore. Sometime maybe I can bring sausages, as they come from this particular area. (Sofia, Greek, 36 years old, Pharmaceutical company, single)*

It is interesting to note that Sofia emphasises how little she or her parents bring from Greece to Switzerland, despite the long list of items described in her narrative, from meat, beans, olives to home-made sweets. Checking the availability of the familiar items in the proximity of her new home or even making full use of the products brought seem to be unnecessary. Perhaps it is the sole act of transporting the food items and stocking up the favourite products that is significant, a practice that contributes to the sense of homing. In that context, it is indeed the *significance of things* that matters because materiality becomes the salient transmitter of cultural belonging.

Such ethnic foodstuff, traditional and home-made, is called 'the basics' by Manuela who migrated from Spain, justifying the need to be carried between countries. In a repetitively gendered way, Manuela's mother prepares such 'basics' which remarkably consist of about half a dozen 'things' transported after each homecoming visit. Although the list is indicative of a methodical collection of flavours and food categories, this is perceived in sheer simplicity as 'basic' for the return.

*I bring chorizo (...) and maybe some jamón and some cheese. Only basics, these kinds of stuff you cannot find here, the cheese is manchego, so the Spanish cheese, very tasty one, and maybe olive oil, so really like the basics, the other things I can find*



*here. (Manuela, Spanish, Head of Construction site, 33 years old, living with Spanish partner)*

All participants spoke about carrying food from the homeland – a reminder of being at home, of the happy years of childhood (Brown and Paszkiewicz, 2017). Food of special smell and flavour that ‘*tastes different*’ or ‘*completely different*’ – words echoed by all women, was the reason for moving it across national borders. More importantly, fruits of the parents’ labour – vegetables, cheese and alcohol were the meaningful items that travelled in between places. Home-made or regional foods such as olive oil from Greece and Spain, bread, meat, sausages, cheese, honey, wild tea from a nearby forest, alcohol and home-made dishes by parents and other close family members were key food items. Mariana’s quote below demonstrates the sheer scale of the food carried transnationally:

*Half of my luggage usually (is food). Dry sausages, dry ham. (...) I mean my luggage usually has ten kilos of jamón and chorizo! It does not take me long to buy, I just go to a shop and find it. Now, when I think about it, yes, it is true! Yes I bring a lot... Last time we went home, in the summer, so we only had hand luggage. Half of the suitcase occupied clothes for me and Anna and half was food. (...). They stop me at the border sometimes. They say: ‘can you open that?’ I say: ‘is there a problem?’ (making funny voice) ‘But where are you going? You don’t have all these things there?’ And I say: ‘No I am going to Switzerland, and they don’t have these things, and if they do, it is ten times more expensive.’ I travel with Easyjet. Yes, I do squeeze all these things!*

Flying with Easyjet, a low-cost carrier with restrictive baggage allowance did not stop Mariana from purchasing large amounts of foods from Spain, prioritising food over other domestic goods. During the interview, we sat in Mariana’s kitchen, while the mentioned jamón brought from the homeland, was placed in a central location of the kitchen. Food, in this case its sensory impact, seeing and smelling the meat, evoked the familiar emotions associated with home, warmth and safety. Despite some humour in the above extract, Mariana expressed a great sadness while recalling experiences of carrying food from her homeland. Speaking of familiar food triggered memories associated with people and places (Baldassar, 2008).

Produced by soil were also other items carried between places. Silke's narrative focused on what she termed: '*sentimental plants*' (Image 2). Green plants were the typical items she would transport between Dresden, her university town in Germany, and Basel. For Silke, plants symbolised friendships as they evoked memories of time spent together, and, often, they are bought while spending intimate time with loved ones and friends:

*What I bring from Dresden is plants. Because I really like plants and my friend likes them (...) It is more like a sentimental thing. It is really like that. I have a lot of sentimental plants, for example, the one with big leaves. I bought it when I was studying, I bought it with my mum. This one I brought from my friend. And I had one that grew in this shared office, where I used to work in this atelier when I was studying but it has just died. (...) I really love having this stuff around me, because it reminds me of my friend. Then I had another one and it died. And this is sad, because I bought it together with my friend; we bought them in the same shop on the same day. (Silke, German, Architect, 32 years old, single)*

Purchasing things together, which were later brought to Switzerland, carried a symbolic meaning for Silke. Tangible objects evoked memories of people; moments shared with significant others, affection, love or friendship. While processes of friendship-making in contexts of mobility are important insights into stories of new places, new friendships, obstacles, interests and social networks (cf. Ryan, 2015), the understanding of sociality in mobility remains quite a complex web of past, present and future instances, experiences, relationships. One of those sociality features we have identified here is integral to sustaining affective friendships through the very potential that 'affective habitus' has in the symbolic and visceral impact of cultural materialities.

### **Objects of Affective Friendship and their Habitus Potential**

Another food item, vodka, connected to the country's landscape (fields of rye, potatoes and wheat) featured in narratives of migrant women from Poland interviewed in this project: Kasia, Anita and Ania. While the way alcohol is produced relates to the

country's landscape and its extensive fields, it is also treated as an object, a decorative piece of home display. When asked about objects she brings from her native Poland, Ania admits that she brings bottles of vodka with a particular aim in mind:

*I do bring alcohol from Poland, I do. When I am in Poland, I buy Wisniowka (cherry flavour vodka), Orzechowka, (hazelnut flavour vodka) so that I can fill my alcohol cabinet, which is of course used to propagate Polish culture (laughter). Funny but true. (Ania, Polish, 32 years old, Architect, single)*

Ania, an architect, is actively promoting Polish culture among her Swiss and other friends living in Basel, including the experience of drinking her national drink – vodka – being a signifier of building social relationships and social rituals (Rabikowska, 2010). From time to time, Ania organises weekend trips to her native Poland, celebrating food, drinks, architecture and culture. Colourful bottles of vodka are on display in her kitchen, re-creating familiar Polish domestic spaces, but they also act as an excuse to invite friends to parties to celebrate, laugh and make connections, or as she emphasised multiple times: to 'promote Polish culture'.

Recent paradigms in migration studies focusing on relational patterns among ethnic groups in contributing to intercultural diversity have significantly added to the importance of conviviality as a lived and experienced platform toward interactions and relations among residents of different ethnic origins and backgrounds (cf. Padilla et al., 2015). While we do not directly theoretically engage here with the concept of 'conviviality' (see for instance, Wise and Noble, 2016), we find that elements of such emerge through the collective habitus consciously created by Ania. This functions as another homing construction enabled through the materialities of Polish culture.

For Anita, vodka, as well as other traditional items are important in making connections with others too. With laughter, she talked about buying bottles of flavoured vodka from 'the duty free' at Warsaw airport:

*What have I brought lately? 'Soplica' vodka, hazelnut flavour, from the duty free (laughs). I always buy things in order to give them to someone from here. (Anita, Polish, Biomedical engineer, 26 years old, single)*

Both Ania and Anita showed a sense of pride in their own national culture and its produce which is a reason to 'promote' it among others. While we acknowledge the positive paradigmatic potential that Padilla et al. (2015) advance in relation to the concept of 'conviviality' in migration contexts, we are also alert to the critique robustly argued by Linda Lapiņa (2015) in its analytic application. Lapiņa (2015) recognises the increasing use of the concept of 'conviviality' to denote unproblematic encounters with diversity, often extending to normatively crafted utopian dimensions of harmonious and universal application. While we agree with such a reflexive lens in the utility of the concept, we also draw attention to how an elaboration of the 'affective habitus' of such interactions can bridge inconsistencies, since such an approach does not restrict the re/production of affective power, inequalities and ambivalence that may also emerge. Rather, when situating a discussion of relational encounters in migrant contexts, the bridging of affectivity and habitus through the significance of ordinary things gives substance to both acts and emotions. Hence, sociality here becomes more demonstrable in understanding the particularities of local, everyday life encounters through the significance of objects. So for instance, here is how such ordinariness is articulated:

A single mother, Chiara, speaks of a mocha coffee maker, a typical product of Italy which will be brought by her parents and given as a gift to her son's teacher:

*For example, when they come next time I told them to bring a mocha machine, a little one. I want to make a gift to the teacher in the kindergarden. It is really famous from Italy, or from our region. (Chiara, Italian, 30 years old, Medical consultant, single mother of 2 year old Antonio)*

Gift giving in this instance creates a new 'affective habitus' in the direction of dual 'effort': networking and settling. The object becomes the conduit to intercultural

networking (cf. Ryan and Mulholland, 2013) in showing appreciation to the teacher through a culturally/regionally significant object/gift.

Marta, an architect active in the Basel arts scene, was particularly proud about bringing designer lamps from her native Poland. Perhaps in one sense a status symbol of decorative significance for a highly skilled architect, at the same time the elaborate narration of the ritualised purchase of the three different lamps underscores their significance as 'ethno-cultural' materialities/homeland purchases, now staged in the new migrant home.

*And now when we go to Poland, the reason is to discover something special, such as lamps that are Polish design. (...) There is this thing that when some people or some paths intrigue me, then we are able to dedicate time for it, despite all the other commitments during these trips. So what we did, we left the kids for 2 hours literally only and we went to the designer shop to see the lamps. And we met cool people. (...) So we entered this shop, and it turned out that some young people are making lamps. And there was also a lamp hanging on the closet, with these coloured cables (pointing to the lamp). And we had such great conversation with the guys, so I said: boys, although we need something completely different, we take the lamp, because we do not know whether we will be in Poland by car again. And we took the lamp. And then it turned out that we went to another store, and bought another lamp! Because (...) later on, after our return to Basel, we got an email from these young people, asking whether we want to buy that lamp we looked at because they are changing the entire display and selling lamps for half price. So yes, three lamps during one vacation! (Marta, Polish, Architect, 39 years old, living with Swiss partner and 2 children)*

Despite limited time in her homeland and a commitment to visit relatives in multiple locations in Poland, for her and her Swiss partner it was important to find time to see designer products and meet their creators, and eventually purchased them. Yet not all the objects from the native homeland were considered valuable. During the interview, Marta showed packages with gifts recently sent by post by her mother and grandmother. While little stationary gifts from Poland sent to her children conjured mixed feelings (interpreted by Marta as signs of overprotection and disillusion with little value), Polish designer lamps were the items of conversation proudly displayed in key places in the flat. Indicating the couple's passion for well-designed but personalised

objects, a reminder of a new friendship and support for a Polish brand, designer lamps were the valuable and worthwhile objects transnationally carried from Poland to Switzerland.

### **Conclusion: Sociologies of Mobile Everyday Lives in Conversation with a Phenomenology of Domesticity**

We have tapped into moments and spaces of dis/comfort and sociality in how highly skilled women migrants appropriate affectivity in domesticity but also mediate meaning in crafting liveable lives through ordinary materialities. We perceive this to be a contribution to widening sociologies of 'affective relationality', whereupon the conceptual link of 'affective habitus' can bridge the sociology of mobilities with the sociology of everyday life by recognising the importance of unfolding phenomenologies of material culture in shaping practices and social relations. While such dynamics also point to cultural productions of memories through materiality, they also construct new spaces for intercultural accommodations. This way we can revisit earlier sociological insights of how exactly 'home' becomes sensorial in combining spaces inhabited by familiarity, family, people, things and belongings (cf. Mallet, 2004), but all the time aware that 'making home is about *creating* both pasts and futures through inhabiting grounds of the present' (Ahmed et al., 2003: 9; italics in the original).

Such ordinary materiality as the thread of connectivity among past, present and future is of key significance for the migrant women. In our study focusing on emotions, memories and material culture, a range of objects were transnationally transported between European places by migrant women living in Basel, capturing the lived experience of 'homing' in the 'affective habitus'. Bringing familiar items to migrants' new homes from the homeland conveys homely feelings, safety, heritage, health and

happy memories. The products of soil, such as olives, vegetables and fruits, are of key importance – signifying parental love and care via their physical work in the garden. Despite their weight and difficulty in being transported, food objects are worth that extra effort in packaging and then physically carrying in heavy suitcases, even during lengthy and tiresome journeys.

Objects used as home décor, sometimes only temporary, that connect women to their homeland vary and these range from lamps, green plants, displayed bottles of alcohol, oversized piece of cured meat, to shelves full of ethnic produce. Some may seem trivial for an observer but they all symbolise the sense of homing; the material connections between homes, families and friends that provide the sense of continuity and an ability to re-create ‘home’ (Povrzanovic Frykman and Humbracht, 2013). Other times, they can symbolise old or new friendships, or a potential to form or strengthen new transnational ties emerging in both the old and new destination. These practices also correspond to sociological work advanced in respect to ‘the concept of place-making as a set of discursive practices ... for an analysis of the relationship between middle-class residents and place’, which incorporates an approach that recognises that not only imaginings but also practices and on-going processes shape neighbourhoods as generative of subjectivities and identities (Benson and Jackson, 2012: 794). In the case of the women migrants in this study, habitus extends from place-making to *place-accommodating* as new host settings are transformed into hubs of adaptation through everyday actions and material object interventions.

Mundane encounters in private and public spaces among newcomers and locals emerge and are discussed through accounts that either embrace the positivity in conviviality of ordinary interactions in migrant contexts (cf. Padilla et al., 2015) or cautiously critique its limitations (Lapiņa, 2015). At the same time, it is also imperative

to understand that 'there is undoubtedly much more that needs to be revealed in relation to gendered habitus and the psychosocial' (Reay, 2015:22). There seems to be a vibrant interrelationship in how personal narratives inform and shape social relations. In turn those social relations can improve when poignancy of objects and memories creates intimacy of intercultural trust and friendship. The sharing and caring work that takes place happens in pleasurable contexts and strips away the resistance of 'effort'. Nevertheless, 'developing understandings of habitus to include psychic responses and the emotional underworld of individuals both extends and enriches the concept' (ibid).

While our research makes a modest contribution to sociological literatures of migration and everyday life through our analysis of 'affective habitus' and the phenomenology of cultural materialities, we also make a partial contribution to the call to explore the sociological meaning of 'effort' in the energies and activities that highly skilled migrants make at networking in host societies (Ryan and Mulholland 2013). We see such 'efforts' at intercultural networking advanced through objects brought from home-coming visits and offered as gifts to members of the host society as both 'place-making' and 'friendship-enabling'. Both these outcomes are productive in advancing intercultural sociality and sociability through things that are (sociologically) significant.

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