Chapter 11
Transnational Circulation of Home Through Objects: A Multisited Ethnography in Peruvian 'Homes'

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11.1 Introduction

What is the added value of visiting migrants' current and previous houses when investigating the transnational circulation of home? This chapter addresses this question, drawing on ethnographic research in houses inhabited by Peruvian migrants in England and Spain and by their relatives living back in Peru. I argue that an ethnographic engagement with people's domestic space is not only desirable. It is actually irreplaceable to capture the transnational circulation of home, both conceptually and empirically.

The notion of 'transnational circulation of home' involves a large set of practices adopted by families to keep themselves sentimentally connected despite the geographical distance between the places they inhabit, including the circulation of 'care' (Baldassar, 2007; Brandhorst et al., 2020), 'housing design' (Van der Horst, 2010; Boccagni & Pérez Murcia, 2020), and particular objects (Povrzanovic Frykman & Humbracht, 2013). For the remit of this chapter, my analysis is focused on the latter aspect. It is my contention that by looking at participant's domestic spaces and their everyday social and cultural practices we can better understand how migration shapes transnational families' experiences of home. More specifically, based on previous research on the role of objects in transnational home-making (Buffel, 2015; Vullnetari, 2016; Walsh, 2016), I argue that through the analysis of how the domestic space is organised and how individuals interact with their everyday materialities we can better understand the transnational circulation of home. Some objects can help those living at both ends of a migration system to feel emotionally and symbolically connected.

Methodologically speaking, by gaining access to the participants' 'home', as a 'sphere of practice and experience in its own right' (Ferguson, 2018: 65), we can

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better understand the intimacy that individuals create and nurture with objects and other people. As Miller (2001, 2010) suggests, by observing the ways in which people nurture relationships with their objects we can gain insights of how people relate to other people. Both interactions, as I illustrate in the empirical section of the chapter, are vital for comprehending how home is lived and experienced all across a migration corridor.

The idea of gaining access to people's 'home' deserves a special note. We can visit a person's house or domestic space but cannot take for granted that these spaces constitute a home for him or her. Home is made through everyday social and cultural practices (Hammond, 2004), and as discussed below, mundane materialities can play a significant role in transforming people's houses and domestic spaces into meaningful homes. Based on this consideration, the term 'home visit' is reserved, in this chapter, for those participants who attach ideas, emotions or senses of home to the houses and domestic spaces they inhabit. In other cases, the terms 'housing visits' or 'domestic visits' are preferred.

Following this introduction, Sect. 11.2 briefly discusses the notions of home and everyday materialities and Sect. 11.3 provides details about the methodology, research context and ethics of my study. I then advance the critical argument of this chapter in Sect. 11.4 with empirical examples from England, Spain and Peru. The chapter ends by discussing the added value of engaging with people's domestic space to advance the debate on the circulation of home from the specific angle of the circulation of objects. It also highlights the significance of doing fieldwork in both migrants' current domestic spaces and in the places they used to call, or still call, home. At the end, as this chapter stresses, understanding transnational families' experiences of home entails an ethnographic engagement with more than one 'home'.

11.2 Linking Home, Migration and Everyday Materialities

Although the theoretical debate on the nexus between home, migration and objects is beyond the scope of this chapter, the following paragraphs briefly discuss the use of these concepts in this research. The notion of 'home' denotes a material and symbolic space (Blunt & Dowling, 2006) where individuals attach ideas of safety, familiarity and comfort (Hage, 1997; Papastergiadis, 1998; Boccagni, 2017), 'ontological security' (Handel, 2019), personal and group identity (Lucas & Purkayastha, 2007), and establish and nurture meaningful social relationships. As discussed later in the chapter with the narrative of Dala, home is not necessarily a place of 'love and belonging' (cf. Papastergiadis, 1998). It can also be a place of estrangement where individuals experience loneliness and isolation.

The critical question examined in this chapter is how the positive and negative experiences of home are shaped by migration and what role objects have in mediating this relationship. Previous research by Tolia-Kelly (2004, 2006), and more recently by Walsh (2018) and Pérez Murcia and Boccagni (2022) show that objects play a critical role in migrants' attempts to remake and reproduce home on the

move. As Povrzanovic Frykman and Humbracht (2013: 50) suggest, mundane objects such as an espresso moka can help migrants to reproduce 'home' and give them a sense of 'normalcy and continuity'. In fact, objects can play a wide range of different but interrelated functions: they may bring memories of previous homes (Ratnam, 2018; Trabert, 2020); connect migrant's current physical dwellings with the places and people left behind (Marschall, 2019); and even keep alive the memories of those who passed away but were vital in making migrants feel at home (Tiaynen-Qadir, 2016). More broadly, 'objects allow migrants to integrate themselves into new social networks while still maintaining connections to their previous communities' (Trabert, 2020: 98).

None of these accounts explicitly reflects on the conceptual value of entering migrant's 'homes' for unveiling the role of objects in the transnational circulation of home. As stressed in the introduction, ethnography in people's domestic space constitutes a unique opportunity to understand their everyday social and cultural practices and the extent to which those living within transnational arrangements keep or circulate objects to mediate the physical absence of their relatives and feel at home. Moreover, none of these accounts engage with the migrants' distant kin's domestic spaces when looking at how home is shaped by transnational migration.[1] The opportunity to observe the domestic space migrants are currently inhabiting and those they left behind, instead, helps us to appreciate the disposition of everyday materialities and the multiple ways in which individuals interact and even nurture an affective relationship with them. As discussed in the subsequent empirical sections, some of these objects help geographically distant family members to retain their everyday routines of home. A simple glass or kitchen cabinet, for instance, can help a mother to feel the co-presence of her physically absent daughter. Before going into details of how my empirical findings contribute to fill these conceptual gaps, a discussion on methods, context and ethics is in order.

11.3 Methods, Context and Ethics

This chapter draws on over three years of ethnographic research with Peruvian migrants in England and Spain, and with some of their relatives back in Peru. The data is part of a broader research project exploring the interplay between home and migration. For the purpose of this analysis I selected a set of 21 interviews and life stories that I collected in the migrants and their relatives' domestic space in Manchester, Madrid, Lima (including the districts of *El Callao* and *Ventanilla*) and Pisco. Most data were gathered between April 2018 and March 2019. After that, I conducted online follow up interviews with key informants in 2020 and early 2021. Interviews and life stories were gathered in Spanish, which is the mother tongue of

[1] Povrzanovic Frykman and Humbracht (2013) drew on ethnographic research with migrants and their kin in countries of origin but their article did only include the migrants' objects and narratives.

both research participants and the researcher. Only selected quotes have been translated into English for this chapter.

Entering the research participant's domestic space was by no means a straightforward process. Rapport and even a sense of friendship (Huisman, 2008; Hall, 2009) were needed before my participants would spontaneously invite me into their domestic space. I initially recruited participants in Manchester and Madrid. This facilitated my connection with their relatives and friends back in Peru. As I had initially asked all participants to choose the location for the interview, some of them selected precisely their domiciles. After building rapport with them, which was generally a matter of weeks or months, 21 out of 34 spontaneously invited me to visit their houses.

In all visits to participants' domestic space I asked formal permission to look at their objects and engaged in conversations about the history of those they mentioned when talking about home. I also enquired about the history of the mundane materialities that captured my attention for the ways in which they were displayed in the domestic space; for instance, religious icons next to the photos of family members living abroad. When participants became more aware of my interest in their material cultures, many of them were keen to bring objects from their private spaces or call my attention to items I would not have noticed otherwise. A glass and kitchen cabinet, for example.

With eight out of the 21 participants, I also filmed the housing visit with a mobile phone. I recorded short videos, between 30 s and 3 min of length, asking people to show me significant places of their houses and/or talk about their objects and the ways they bring memories of their families. As I had the opportunity to travel back to England and Spain, participants interviewed in Peru recorded those videos as a present to their families. Following Evans and Jones's (2011) reflections about the walking interviews in people's domestic spaces, I asked participants to feel free to keep private areas away from the camera. Similar approaches have been adopted by Pink (2004, 2009) when encouraging researchers to use visual methods in the home space and more recently by Ratnam and Drozdzewski (2020). Those accounts have shown the significance of visual material for engaging with people's domestic spaces and to understand the ways they relate to specific places and material cultures. The videos were then shared with research participants in Europe and their emotional responses were included in the data. I dedicated special attention to their reactions when they were looking at their previous domestic space and the objects their relatives and friends were talking about.

As my experience also shows, ethics is central in gaining space to participant's domestic spaces. The observation of participants in their everyday settings does not require only the building of a sense of friendship and intimacy between ethnographers and participants. It also demands their willingness to mutually share emotions and respect each other's intimacy. As Hall (2014: 2176) stresses, 'it is through emotions that relationships with participants are made'. In the same vein, I contend that ethnography in participants' domestic space creates opportunities for emotions to be disclosed and intimacy to be unsettled. This is not only because by being welcomed in participant's domestic space, especially after several visits, ethnographers

may be involved in family life (see Iverson, 2009; Gabb, 2010). It is also because participants may perceive the intimacy of the domestic space as a secure environment to share their emotions. As Hall (2009: 2177) rightly asserts, "by welcoming the researcher into their homes and lives, families may expose themselves and their relationships in ways they have never done before. It is in this environment that participants feel increasingly comfortable and are likely to reveal personal information about themselves and other family members". What is observed in people's domestic space and what is shared with others, for example in conferences and publications, therefore, deserve close consideration. For ethnographers to be invited to participants' domestic space does not mean that they are allowed to share all what they observe and hear. Although the boundaries between what can be shared are often complicated to trace, the basic rule of respecting people's intimacy must be privileged in all circumstances.

In my case study, all participants gave written consent for being interviewed and their life stories being collected. All participants were asked to choose a pseudonym. Although most participants asked me to use their real names, only pseudonyms were used to safeguard confidentiality. They also gave consent for video recording and photos of their houses and objects being taken. In terms of positionality, I am a Colombian male who is familiar with many of the social and cultural practices of Peruvians. To avoid gender imbalances during interviews, I allowed both men and women to elaborate their narratives and asked questions around whether and how they experience migration and home differently. Although the level of education between research participants and the researcher is not the same, most participants not having a bachelor's degree, I asked questions in plain language so as to facilitate participants to elaborate and share their ideas. In order to prevent any potential problem related to interviewing people in their houses, particularly with young adults and the elderly, I conducted domestic visits only when research participants were not alone. When needed, I formulated follow-up questions to double-check my full understanding of participants' expressions.

When doing fieldwork with couples, in particular it was common that they would ask me about my marital status and would extend the invitation to visit their house to my partner. In those cases, the distinction between doing ethnographic research in people's domestic spaces and visiting friends were notably blurred. Although doing fieldwork with family members can both open opportunities for close engagement with participants or disturb the research environment (Korpela et al., 2016), in this particular case doing fieldwork with my partner facilitated the emergence of spontaneous conversations about home and home-making. By sharing our ideas, interests, food and more generally our everyday practices to make ourselves at home, I learnt things I would not have been able to know if I had not visited the place, or probably if I had visited it on my own. The sense of friendship between couples opened the door to talk about intimate aspects and their significance for understanding home.

11.4 Understanding the Role of Objects in the Transnational Circulation of Home

Ethnographic research in people's domestic spaces has the potential to advance knowledge on the transnational circulation of home in multiple directions. Although, as already said, the transnational circulation of home encompasses a large set of aspects such as the circulation of care and housing design, I focus my analysis on the role of domestic visits to advance conceptual debates on transnational home-making through everyday materialities. By entering the domestic spaces of migrants and of their left-behind relatives, ethnographers access to a privileged point of reference to understand the personal connection between individuals and objects. As the narratives of those who took part in this research show, the connections between individuals and objects help families living in different houses to feel part of the same home, regardless of geographical distance.

I deliberately present only few cases in the empirical discussion with a view to provide the reader with the necessary details about how I engaged with the participant's domestic space. This will enable me to better illustrate the value of domestic visits to advance research on transnational home-making trough objects.

11.4.1 A Baby Jesus Sculpture

Liisa is a Peruvian migrant living in Spain for thirteen years. I visited her house in South Madrid in 2018. I had interviewed Pilar, one of her work colleagues and friends in Madrid, and Pilar had encouraged her to take part in my research. This certainly facilitated the process of building rapport. When asked about the venue for the interview, she kindly invited me to her flat.

What first called my attention is that symbols of Peru were displayed all across the living room. Most notably, the country's national flag and traditional Peruvian handcrafts. Liisa recounted that upon leaving Peru she had put the flag into the suitcase as a way to bring her country and identity to Spain. The remaining objects had been gathered in different holidays she had enjoyed in Peru. Beyond these rather paradigmatic representations of her country, Liisa said that all the stuff she has in her house is somehow related to her feelings towards home. When talking about home, however, she was not talking about Peru but primarily about the flat she has been living in for many years in Spain. As she put it, '*The bed I rest daily, the table I share food with my family, the TV and radio I hear news. All these objects make me feel somehow at home*'. But what does Liisa find in these objects, beyond the comfort they bring? Leaving aside their material value, Liisa has nurtured a symbolic relationship with them (Appadurai, 1986). They are a reminder of the different moments she has gone through in Spain. She arrived with a suitcase and step by step, relying on her work as caregiver, has been able to equip the house with the facilities she needs to feel at home. While the 'ethnic' objects, notably the flag, help

her to keep a connection with her home-land (see Povrzanovic Frykman & Humbracht, 2013), the mundane materialities she was talking about help her to feel at home in her host-land.

No other specific object was mentioned by Liisa when I asked her about the role of objects in her sense and experiences of home in Madrid. When visiting her relatives in Lima, however, I realised that I had forgot to ask a simple but important question to further understand the connections between objects, migration, and home - *Is there any object you left in Peru that says something about your sense of home*?

While entering the room in which Liisa dwells when visiting her relatives back in Peru, I noticed that the room was not so empty as one may expect for a room a migrant only visits once every four years or so. Consistent with the research findings of Pistrick (2013) on the rooms left by Albanian migrants, and with my own findings on other Ecuadorian and Peruvian migrants (Pérez Murcia, 2022), Liisa's room was fully decorated. Everything was tidy and fresh as if she was dwelling there. What most captured my attention was however the presence of a baby Jesus sculpture on the bed. When enquired about its meaning, Liisa's cousin, Cecil, said: '*This is the most important connection Liisa has in Peru. She has a house she inherited from her mother but she does not care much about it. She cares about him* [the baby Jesus]'. Then, she added:

> Liisa went to Spain and left him with us. She knows we look well after him and he looks after us. He [*the baby Jesus*] spends his time between Liisa's room and our living room. Like us, he is always waiting for Liisa's visit. She knows this house is her home in Lima. (Fig. 11.1)

Judging from the way in which Cecil talks about the sculpture, one would expect that she is talking about a person rather than an object. By being there, in the family domestic space, I could see how individuals personify objects as a way to keep present their relatives living abroad in their everyday life. To some extent therefore objects are meant to embody people.

The baby Jesus statue keeps Liisa present and at the same time absent in the house and in the home. As I shared time and coffee with the family, they proudly showed me the altar they have made in the living room for the baby Jesus and the different outfits they have made for him. By looking after Liisa's '*most important connection in Peru'*, Cecil and her mother were also somehow looking after Liisa in Spain. By taking care of particular objects, as a way to (indirectly) take care about people, they were enacting a form of transnational care (Brandhorst et al., 2020).

Before leaving Cecil's house, I asked her to send a message to Liisa and permission to record it. Cecil and her mother sat on the sofa and put the baby Jesus statue in the middle of them. Part of the message said: '*Liisa, your family is here and this will always be your home. Baby Jesus is always looking after your room'*.

When I delivered the present to Liisa, her emotional reaction was significant. She was looking at the three characters in the video as if they were all real persons. I asked: 'What does the baby Jesus in Cecil's house mean to you'? '*He is very important',* Liisa replied:

Fig. 11.1 Baby Jesus looking after Liisa's room in Lima. (Author's picture)

> My brother asked me to look after the baby Jesus before he died. I wanted to bring him [*the statue*] to Spain but could not. It is so big. It was a hard decision to make because he meant a lot for my brother and, since he died, for me. He is like a bond between us [*brother and sister*].

Then, I asked: Does the baby Jesus say something about your idea of home?

> Yes, I think about the baby Jesus very often. When I go to my local church in Madrid, I ask him [*the baby Jesus*] to protect my brother and my mother [*the mother also passed away*]. While praying in the church I feel that we are all together, here in Madrid, as a family.

The memory of the dead brother and mother and the left-behind baby Jesus seem to help Liisa to feel at home in Madrid, notably in the church. Liisa and Cecil's reflections about the significance of the baby Jesus statue in their experiences of home would have probably never been captured without visiting their houses and looking at their everyday materialities. By being 'there', in their domestic spaces, I was able to build the necessary intimacy to talk about objects that have assume very personal spiritual connections. I learnt that the baby Jesus is much more than an object. "He" has rather become a personified/humanized object. The family talks about him like a person and this 'person' seems to transnationally connect their domestic spaces and senses of home. He, the baby Jesus, seems even to connect Liisa with her passed away mother and sibling.

11.4.2 Looking at My Daughter Through a Kitchen Cabinet

Dala, interviewed in Lima, is the mother of Lili, a Peruvian migrant living in Manchester since 2007. When interviewing Dala in her house, the fact that her daughter was present in every corner of the house captured my attention. Photos of her at different stages of her life were displayed in the living room and in the room in which her daughter used to dwell. Beyond those photos, one object was particularly remarkable – the first clothing of her granddaughter. She had left the country when she was only two months old and Dala wanted to keep her clothing. In fact, the clothing is displayed next to some of the toys Lili had a special bond with in her childhood (Fig. 11.2).

Dala mentioned that "home" for her, means "family". The first granddaughter's clothing and the photo and toys of her daughter alleviate the pain of living away from her family. These objects represent Dala's memories of home but remind at the same time that the people who make her feel at home no longer live with her. Indeed, since her son died and her daughter migrated, Dala struggles to experience her house as home. '*For many years I did not feel at home in this house. I did not want to come here* [the house] *after work. I did not want to be alone'*. Then, Dala went on to say that by looking after those objects she felt somehow accompanied by her family. As Pistrick (2013: 67) stresses: "it is through their absence that persons, souvenirs and memories develop a powerful presence in the lives of those who have remained in the [*places left behind*]".

Besides illuminating the value of these everyday objects in Dala's sense of home, the visit to her domestic space was significant for unveiling how Lili is present in her mother's everyday life through ordinary materialities. When Dala was asked about a particular object that recalls her daughter in the house, she said:

> Every object in this house reminds me of my daughter. She is in every corner of the house. You see this cabinet [*the one in the kitchen*]. When I look at the cabinet, I see my daughter

Fig. 11.2 Dala's granddaughter's first clothing. (Author's picture)

> opening it and grabbing a glass to bring me water. That is why it is difficult to live in this house without her.

It was not necessary for Dala to stand up, open the cabinet and grab the glass, for me to see the underlying point –how those everyday family interactions she has missed for over fourteen years often make her feel homeless. By being there, on her sofa, looking attentively at how she pointed out with her finger to that particular domestic corner, I could myself imagine seeing Lili serving water for her mother. The cabinet, as many other objects in the house, tells something about the sentimental connection between a mother and her daughter. By observing how Dala looks after these everyday materialities and touches them, something I would have missed if not for entering her domestic space, I learned that these objects create an ambivalent experience of home (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). They bring about happy memories of a daughter serving water to her mother and sad memories at the same time, as they are a constant reminder that Lili no longer lives with her and there is little hope for her to return. The relationship Dala has nurtured with these objects shows us that they play a role in Dala's mixed feelings towards home. They can help her to feel at home at one time and homeless at another. The latter feeling seemed to be alleviated by the love and affection that these two women express for each other. They cannot be present in each other's everyday life and therefore cannot mutually provide hands-in-care. They, however, use technology to keep regularly connected and care for each other, despite the geographical distance between the places in which they live (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

My visit to Dala's house ended with a very significant ethnographic experience. She asked me to bring her daughter a present she cannot deliver by herself because of the distance between Peru and England and because of migration regulations. Dala's visa application to visit her daughter in England has been rejected twice and she has only been able to meet her daughter a couple of times in about 14 years when she visits Peru. The present was a hug and it was actually a real hug, sent with real physical contact. I found myself embraced by a woman I had never met before and receiving detailed instructions on how to deliver the present. It was an emotional moment that helped me capture further both the value of the tangible copresence and the symbolic meaning of transnational practices and experiences of home and home-making. Although, as Skrbiš (2008) argues, physical immediacy may not be a prerequisite or even sufficient to sustain a sense of family and I would add a sense of home, it stills an ambition for many of those living in transnational arrangements. The need for some form of bodily co-presence, at least intermittent, was explicitly expressed by Dala. Indeed, when I arrived at her house, she embraced me and mentioned that I was welcome to her house because I had visited Lili's house in Manchester and thus I was bringing part of her 'essence' there. By virtue of the possibility I had to enter both houses, the daughter's and the mother's, I was somehow embedded with the 'power' of bringing families together and transnationally carrying their expressions of affect. Unfortunately, the hug is still waiting to be delivered. I could not meet Lili before the covid-19 lockdowns in England and now online hugs have become the 'norm'. I hope to deliver the present in the near future because

I know firsthand that this is not what Dala means by a hug. In short, home visits – and research into them – have also a very bodily dimension that should not go unnoticed.

11.4.3 Creating a Corner for the Dead in the Domestic Space

Chela is a Peruvian migrant living in Madrid for over twenty years. I interviewed her nephew in Manchester and two of her cousins in Madrid. My interview with her was directly arranged by her cousin who kindly brought me to Chela's house. As soon as I arrived, she noticed that '*it is good to have a friend of my nephew at home*'. It was clearly the sense of friendship I had been building with her relatives that gave me access to her place, from our very first encounter.

Chela's apartment has a wall displaying photos of herself and her family back in Peru. When asked about any objects she would connect with ideas of home, she explicitly referred to the wall and its photos. These showed their parents and siblings and some of them were displayed next to Peruvian handcrafts. Moreover, a display cabinet placed in the corner of the living room caught my attention because it was decorated with traditional religious images that Chela had brought from Peru. A closer look at the cabinet revealed two mugs with votive candles being placed amongst the religious images. The mugs were stamped with the photos of two different elderly women, her mother and her mother-in-law. By looking at her material stuff and enquiring about its meaning, I learnt that the two women had passed away and that Chela had not been able to attend their funerals (Pérez Murcia, 2022). When asked about the meanings of those objects Chela became utterly emotional but decided to continue the conversation anyway. '*Those mugs are perhaps the most important belongings you can find in this place. My mother was the most important person in my life and with her I always felt loved and safe*'. The display cabinet was indeed an altar for the Peruvians virgins and saints, as well as for Chela's mother and mother-in-law (Fig. 11.3). Similar religious iconographies, equally revealing of migrants' transnational connections, were found by Tiaynen-Qadir (2016) amongst Russian grandmothers in Finland.

By looking at the corner of Chela's house and how she interacts with both the religious icons and the two mugs, I did learn what was confirmed later in the interview: that corner is the part of the domestic space in which Chela feels more at home. As she said, '*I feel at home everywhere in this house but this is a special corner. This is my place for praying and keeping a connection with my mother*'. This is the place where she regularly starts and ends her daily routines. She expressed a spiritual need to say good morning to her mother and pray for her and also the need to say 'good night mom' every night. By looking at this corner, I learnt how the impossibility to attend her mother and mother-in-law's funerals has shaped her sense of home in Spain and back in Peru. Only by visiting the domestic space was I able to learn about the death of her closest relatives and how such a loss and the impossibility to attend their funerals had shaped Chela's experience of home.

Fig. 11.3 Chela's altar. (Author's picture)

During the interview she expressed that she rarely shares her intimate affections with strangers and that that corner of her house is not only a personal but also a sacred space. I was already there, however, able and allowed to see the space and capture her emotional reactions. I was in a position to see how her mother and mother-in-law are present in her everyday life despite they had both passed away. The mugs and the religious icons displayed in the cabinet show that they are not only remembered by Chela. She talks with them every day and they are still their main companions in Madrid.

11.5 Discussion and Final Remarks: On the Added Value of Doing Ethnography in the Domestic Space

This chapter has illustrated the significance of ethnographic engagement with peoples' domestic spaces to advance the understanding of the role of mundane objects in migrants and their kin's experiences of home. Drawing on the narratives of Peruvians in England and Spain and their relatives back in Peru, I have showed how the domestic space provides a unique point of reference to unveil the symbiosis between the material and the symbolic for understanding home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

These empirical findings provide new insights to advance two distinct and yet interrelated lines of research. First, they show the multiple roles played by ordinary

materialities in keeping families connected across transnational spaces (Levitt, 2003; Horn, 2019). By entering into people's houses, researchers do not only engage with the very space participants spend a significant part of their lives in. The domestic space allows researchers to better understand how ideas and practices of home travel across borders and the role of mundane materialities in the making and reproduction of home (Pérez Murcia & Boccagni, 2022). As Povrzanovic Frykman and Humbracht (2013: 43) stress, 'by being used, or by merely being present, objects bestow continuity in migrants' practices and in places'.

Second, the findings reveal the significance of everyday materialities in keeping migrants connected not only to the family members who stayed put but also to those who passed away. Those who died in the places left behind, and who used to provide a sense of home to those who migrated, are often present through the objects migrants use to decorate their current dwellings and the practices they celebrate with them. This is notably the case of the altar Chela has created in Madrid to pray for her mother and mother-in-law who passed away in Lima (Tiaynen-Qadir, 2016). More generally, these findings show how the domestic space helps migration and home scholars to understand the intimate and even spiritual connections individuals establish with their material cultures, the baby Jesus sculpture being only one example, and how those materialities connect people's experiences of home across the transnational space.

We could then wonder what we are actually missing, if we conceptualize transnational home-making without engaging with people's domestic spaces. In short, we would be missing the opportunity to observe the emotional and even spiritual connections that people establish with those objects and with people that no longer dwell with them under the same roof. By visiting their domestic spaces, scholars can get a better understanding of how both those who stay and those who move use and even transform their houses and rooms to make those who are physically absent present in their everyday life. By entering the houses of migrants and of their left-behind relatives we can better appreciate how families living transnationally display their objects, look after them and communicate with them, thereby reproducing memories of previous homes in people's current places of settlement (Ratnam, 2018).

Furthermore, the opportunity to be *there*, at both ends of a migration corridor, enables researchers to nuance their understanding of how migrants and their relatives experience home. By looking at how people use and relate to their domestic spaces, we can unveil the multiple meanings people attach to their dwellings. This includes the role of unoccupied rooms in making the absent person 'visible and present' at the same time (Pistrick, 2013), and the significance of their material cultures on their ideas of home. The domestic space is therefore a privileged site to appreciate the intimate relationships individuals nurture with their objects; in essence, to understand the 'secret life' some individuals built with their objects. This is something they would only feel comfortable to recreate at 'home', as it protects them from being judged or misrepresented.

The significance of domestic visits for understanding the meaning of home is by no means a prerogative of migrant communities and of those affected by their mobility. However, domestic visits, especially when conducted at both sides of a

migration corridor, can provide us a better understanding of how people make sense of their places of dwelling when living away from their families and places of origin. At the end, as Ferguson (2018) stresses, a 'home visit' is an embodied practice that involves all the senses and emotions. Both senses and emotions, as contended in this chapter, are central to conceptualise further the role of objects in nurturing transnational family connections and their experiences of home.

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