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Homemaking as Homesickness. Romanian Migrants' Strategies of Coping with Cultural Di erence

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Abstract. Homemaking achieved materially and emotionally within a diasporic environment represents an important step in the long process of settling in a foreign country. This paper is devoted to explaining the Romanian concept of "home" as it is perceived by Romanian migrants who lived for long periods of time in western European countries. Interviews with Romanian migrants and Moldovan returned migrants, and participant observation during fieldwork revealed different levels of the psychological state of missing the home they departed from, the emotional underpinnings on having to manage life in two places, the concrete and spiritual significance of homemaking in a foreign country, the psychological undertones of "home" and "host" societies, questions on "identity" and "belonging", ethnic homeland attachments. The reality of pluri-local and/or trans-local identity, and of multi-located homes and specific transnational lifestyles is compared with Romanian collective memory and imaginary of "home" and the strong territorial attachments that are considered by autochthonous ethnopsychologies as part of the Romanian cultural intimacy. The paper analyses both residence (as the material cultures of home, such as design and commodities, the material world of objects that shape a home environment) and dwelling (meanings, values and beliefs, emotional significance of domesticity). For migrants, the various strategies of homemaking are connected in various ways with homesickness as not only longing for a specific residence, but a feeling of loss of a specific past that is even more accentuated for people in a diasporic condition.

Keywords: homemaking, homeland, ethnic diversity, transnational cultural heritage, Romanian migrants, nostalgia.

Anthropologists pointed out the complex network of privacy and outside realities, material and affective dimensions that all together influence our household. Home is "the mix of steady routines and stable traditions with constant improvisations and experiments" (Löfgren 2015: 95). In a thorough anthropological study of the concept, this dynamics of opposite

meanings and rationales of home are made evident:

> The home is a nodal point in a whole series of polarities: journey-arrival, rest-motion, sanctuary-outside, family-community, space-place, inside-outside, private-public, domestic-social, sparetime-worktime, feminine-masculine, heart-mind, Being-Becoming. These are not stable categories; they are both solidified and undermined as they play out their meaning and practice in and through the home (Short 1999: 9).

The research on the concept of household needs therefore to embrace the diversity of the researched realities:

> Moving beyond the separation of public and private spheres, current research on the home is often concerned with mobile geographies of dwelling, the political significance of domesticity, intimacy and privacy, and the ways in which ideas of home invoke a sense of place, belonging or alienation that is intimately tied to a sense of self (Blunt and Varley 2004: 3).

It is worth mentioning for the purpose of this paper that Romanian migrants could not be connected intimately with a myth of the homeland that is characteristic for other types of diasporic communities, such as the ones created especially by political and religious refugees. On the contrary, as statistics show, most Romanians involved in the recent waves of migration have good opportunities to return at least once a year in their country of origin; this geographical connection is allowing the popularity of seasonal migration among them. Therefore, the feeling of being distanced and emotionally lost does not necessarily indicate a geographical gap or a political seclusion, which means that the reasons underneath homesickness need to be searched in a more complex web of emotional and ethnic attachments, analyzed within the psychological background of homemaking, as emphasized by Brah:

> On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality (1996: 188).

Additionally, the topic addressed in this paper means also putting aside the home as a physical structure, the housing material conditions and interior decoration or the domestic architecture, and applying the discourse on the metaphorical resonances of home, given the fact making home requires especially investing time and feelings in a particular place. In today's world, the need to settle down is also strengthened by the tendency to avoid the undesirable feeling of homelessness, perceived as one of the greatest risks of migration in the migrant's psychology when she/he is migrating on the basis of "weak ties" (Granovetter 1976). Due to a long tradition of their spatial peasant imaginary well documented by ethnologists (Bernea 1985), Romanians put a great value on having roots and had built a strong positive opinion on settling in a "house on soil", which is a constant feature of old European societies' imaginaries:

> The traditional notion of home as the site where one is rooted in place derives its metaphorical power from nature: one is like a plant and thus one has native soil. With the growth of cities, that sense of home as agrarian and rural became more a figure of speech than a literal truth (Howe 2004: 4).

Besides the material settlement, home also means for most people material symbols of home; these are not only actual assets of a house, such as favorite places, well known surroundings, friends and relatives, but also the larger environment created by essential elements of culture and sociability: language, traditions, symbols, history, ideology, arts, etc. The study of homemaking based on migrants' perception may enlighten the values attached to this process by mostly sedentary people:

> Apart from the physical place of dwelling and shelter, 'home' has commonly been linked to 'family', 'community' or 'homeland/nation'. Yet all of these traditional meanings of home have been subject to social, cultural, economic and political changes and have been radically redefined (Bammer 1992: viii).

On the opposite, when national discourse is appropriating the concept of home, orienting it towards the meaning of "home nation", researchers pointed out that we deal with a lasting effect of the political instrumentalization of homemaking (Duyvendack 2011).

The approach of this paper is not a systematical one but mainly supported by the results of a series of semi-structured interviews with Romanian migrants and Moldovan returned migrants, and a comprehensive interpretation of the data determined by the fact the author shares the ethnic identity with the informants. The topic selected for this paper was part of a set of questions and the assessing of more extensive personal stories of migration that were used as part of an ethnographic research undertaken within the project "Migration and identity within the Romanian cultural milieu. An interdisciplinary approach" (2018-2021). The interview was designed to investigate various aspects of the migration experience as perceived by Romanians living in Western Europe; the interviewees were asked to evaluate the social, cultural, and psychological effects that living abroad had on their lives, explain the cultural differences they acknowledge between Romanian and foreign cultural traits, and to compare lifestyles in the country of origin and the country of residence. The answers that were the main source of data for this paper came to the question inquiring over the personal perspective of migrants on where they feel the most "at home". The intention of the question was to inquire on home-related opinions both in a psychological or emotional point of view, as well as to reveal the material side of homemaking. The answers provided views on both dimensions and explained even the complex perspective on the importance of homemaking generally, with the addition that for migrants, the home concept becomes more relevant in their set of values when compared with sedentary people, and the feelings towards homemaking seem to be generally more explicit and present in their discourse.

Besides taking into consideration the answers directly given by interviewees, the author conducted in-depth conversations about the most constant objects that they carry along with them from the birth country to the host country and that have a special value in homemaking. Recent research on the „migrant objects" undertaken by ethnographers of migration contributes to a deeper level of assessing the migration experience revealing meanings that migrants themselves do not often verbalize; this specific analysis means "investigating how transportable objects evoke feelings and distinct socio-geographical milieux (...) and how individuals and groups of migrants produce and interact emotionally with specific artifacts" (Svašek 2012: 1-2). While being for a limited time in the home country for their yearly vacation, migrants use to bring back specific objects from food to décor elements that essentialize for them the homeland and that help build a "transnational extended self" (Belk 1988). Though not reducing homemaking to its material setting, it is helpful to consider these objects' contribution to a 'mobile' conception of home (Rapport and Dawson 1998) in a highly globalized world where place attachments seem rather antiquated.

Before trying to grasp the associated private, very individualized conceptualizations of home, it is worth studying the system of national, cultural and social belongings, because, as Al-Ali and Koser mention, „often a great sense of belonging to a specific place is accompanied by the wish to reproduce and/or reinvent 'traditions' and 'cultures' associated with 'home'" (Al-Ali and Koser 2002: 7). Generally speaking, migration could be emotionally described as a loss of home, and consequently as a loss of identity, a movemenet that implies getting far away from a place of shared memory and commonalities. The connection of migrants with their ethnic homeland could be essentially placed between what Benedict Anderson called "long-distance nationalism", which is a strong and constant connection with the country of origin and its cultural representations (Anderson 1998: 62), and the vision of "post-ethnicity" proposed by David Hollinger. The post-ethnicity model would favor voluntary affiliations against the involuntary ones, and would promote solidarities based not on hereditary criteria, but on criteria that do not imply ethnicity, race etc. (Hollinger 1995: 3). As for the ethnic belonging understood within the migration phenomenon, some scholars criticized the unilinear theory of assimilation that dominated the field since the half of the last century; advocates of the assimilation theory highlighted the migrants' destination culture. On the other hand, theorists of transnationalism evaluted as irelevant and excessive the "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002) that pointed out the unaffected relationship of the migrant with her/his country of origin (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927). On the opposite, transnationalism accentuated the migrants' orientation

towards the place of origin, and on the multiple connections that they entertain with the root culture witin the migration environment (Glick-Schiller *et alii* 1995: 48).

Home feelings ensure ontological security, and the constant homemaking practices are often performed far from home by migrants as shown by relevant research projects (Povrzanovic Frykman 2019). On the other hand, homesickness is aggravated for most migrants I interviewed not only due to the estrangement from country people, but also by the incapacity to create new social and cultural ties with people in the migration country, that in some cases express hostile feelings towards newcomers, either in face-to-face encounters, or more implicitly through the national migration policy, mass-media, etc. From the point of view of the ways homesickness evolved and developed in relation with homemaking practices, migrants interviewed within my research fell into two main categories: the ones for which household making and the adaptation to social and cultural conditions of the migration society seriously diminished homesickness, and home was more a tangible location and less an emotional one; and a second category for which, on the contrary, no matter how much they started to feel at home in a foreign country, they never got entirely used to give up on the ideal "home" left in the country of origin. For this second category, home was and still continues to be moreover an emotional reality; for them, homesickness never ends, and homemaking involves a constant appropriation of the ideal home left behind rather in time, than in space. This category also displays the features explored by Susannah Eckersley in a research of the Polish-German Silesian place-making:

> The intangible senses of belonging or feeling 'at home', including memory (of people, place, objects, experiences, sounds, smells, tastes etc.) may be more significant when the individual is no longer fixed emotionally or geographically to a single place, and/or because their 'home'-place is no longer reachable by them. (Eckersley 2017: 12)

The cultural and social life of these migrants is therefore impregnated by homemaking strategies and oriented towards recreating their personal and ethnic roots in a foreign environment.

THE HOME EFFECT FOR ROMANIAN MIGRANTS

During the semi-structured interviews, most relevant constant question that started the conversation about homemaking and homesickness was: "What specifically do you consider your home: a place in Romania or a place in the country of migration?". Not surprisingly the obtained answers were remarkably diverse. For some migrants, home was a specific community (family, neighbors, relatives, friends, former school colleagues), only one specific individual (a parent left in the country of origin, for example), a place of cherished memories, a distinctive taste, a type of music, a folk dance, and even the heavily criticized defaults of the Romanian society and the dusty and imperfect roads in the countryside, as explained by Tamara (living in Spain for 25 years, 64 years old). For some well-integrated migrants, returning home for a short time determines a clash between the dream homeland and its constant disappointing reality, because, as G. Fouron and N. Glick-Schiller point out, migrants "often dream of a homeland non-existent in real memories" (Fouron and Glick-Schiller 2002: 168).

During the interviews abroad, given the fact the I am also a Romanian citizen, from a methodological point of view I had to face the risk of indirectly encouraging migrants to sentimentalize over the topic of our home country. Against my specific intention of respecting the norm of objectivity and be considered by the interviewee as an outsider, the fact I was coming from the homeland and had just experienced the travel between home and abroad, did not help me achieve the much-desired etic perspective. On the other hand, the topic of homesickness and the diverse elements of ethnic culture that they were missing were much easier approached by my interviewees in front of an insider as I was and to whom they could easily identify with. As such, the anthropological fieldwork I have conducted should be integrated in-between multi-sited anthropology and anthropology at home; more appropriately I would call it a mobile anthropology of home people.

In one of the first waves of the Romanian migration, to North America, homesickness was strongly experienced, especially before the migrants managed to be acculturated within the American society of the beginning of

the 20th century, which was a society that was very different than the one they had left behind. In a research devoted to the assimilation of Romanians in the U.S. undertaken in 1927, Christine A. Gallitzi describes the important ties Romanians entertained with their "modes of thought and action, of belief and customs prevailing in the old country" (Gallitzi 1929: 87). She remarks a strong group cohesion and the tendency of Romanians to meet up with their keen out in the foreign world:

> As relatives, friends or old acquaintances from the native village and districts joined the first Romanian immigrants in the United States they were drawn together by ties of kinship, of common traditions, of a spirit of neighborliness, of village or district allegiance. (Gallitzi 1929: 88)

These early migrants clustered in ethnic communities, spent their entire spare time in the effort to recreate their home atmosphere:

> The group life of these early Romanian colonists found expression only in the casual gatherings around the saloons or the boarding houses. There the Romanians exchanged their personal experiences and their news from home; sung their doinas (pastoral songs); expressed their longings for a return home; confessed their successes or their failures and their hardships in their adaptation to the new environment. (Gallitzi 1929: 89)

The coping and adapting strategies put in place by Romanian migrants back in early 20th century in the U.S. could still be retrieved in the following waves of Romanian migration.

After 1989, the research of Romanian economic migration grew in close connection with the new migration waves of Romanian workers to western Europe, and part of this research involved the study of the lifestyle, community, and household design of Romanians abroad. Dumitru Sandu for example studied "the social worlds of Romanian migration abroad" from a sociological perspective (Sandu 2010). Carmen Bănța analyzed "the cultural landmarks of Romanian migrants in Bruxelles". The dynamics of preserving and transferring the Romanian homeland culture abroad was also studied by Daniela Petronela Feraru based on extensive research of a Romanian community in Italy that determined her to notice the emergence of a "double identity" of these Romanian citizens (2011). Adrian Otovescu studied the level of preservation of the Romanian identity among Romanian migrants in Italy and discovered that homesickness is one of the strongest difficulties that these migrants experience, that was considered more difficult to cope with than the financial or linguistic troubles or the event of facing discrimination (Otovescu 2013: 174). This type of research shows that it is particularly the recreation of the sense of community and the ethnic-kinship structures that connect migrants from the same country that is helping them to make a home abroad. By using a questionnaire dedicated to measure the level of identity preservation in a Romanian community in Italy, A. Grigoriu reveals that 86,9% experience homesickness almost all the time, and this feeling is a trigger for maintaining the social and cultural ties with the home country (Grigoriu 2014: 168).

As the extensive research on the topic shows, the majority of Romanian migrants in the latest migration wave had as a main goal the intention to gain enough money in order to build up a house back in Romania:

> Most migrants begin as target earners, seeking to earn money for specific goals that will improve their status or well-being at home – building a house, paying for school, buying land, acquiring consumer: 'I left [Romania] because it was impossible to have a house of my own there. If I had a place to live there, a point to start, I wouldn't have gone. My wife and I had been working for more than 5 years in the best factories in town. Our situation was way beyond average. But still we had no access to a place of our own. We used to live in a rented room belonging to the factory (man, age 31)'. (Bleahu 2004: 23)

For others, accumulating remittances is the main reason behind migrating; as D. Sandu notices for Romanian migrants to Italy, migration is typically a "life strategy", meaning that they need to financially support the household left behind in Romania (Sandu 2000; Sandu 2010). This home orientation lasts until the migrant's life plan of securing enough financial capital to securely return to the country of origin, and then tends to change and the actual return is postponed for long periods of time; in these cases, home country or home place becomes somewhat a mythical and forever untouchable reality.

As Roxana Bratu argues based on extensive interviews with children of Romanian migrants, belonging to the "1.5 Generation", "the different types of attachment identified in the interviewees' discourses are mediated by the subjective assessment of the integration experience into the host country" (Bratu 2015: 3). When well received, migrants integrate easily, as opposed to the situation when they find work with difficulty and face discrimination and marginalization – a situation that emphasizes homesickness and preserves the attachment to homeland for a longer time, also intensifying ethnic self-awareness.

Homesickness and the need of a sedentary home place come also as side effect of the migrants' feeling of being suspended in-between two realities – a negative and a positive one, as D. Feraru shows (2011: 103); they stay abroad because of the negative connotations associated with the prospects of finding a good job in Romania, and they also blame the general social landscape in their home country; on the other hand, the positive connotations are associated with the prospect of a good financial gain in Italy and the lifestyle provided by the Italian society living standards. The critical view on the realities back home is due to the comparison betweeen the two economic and social worlds. Dumitru Sandu's quantitative research points out that Romanian migrants have a very negative view on "institutional actors" in their home country (Sandu 2006: 36); while encountering abroad a better situation from this point of view, they realize the inappropriate living conditions they experienced in Romania (Sandu 2006: 39). Though the migrants interviewed by Feraru expressed negative opinions about the social and economic realities of the home country, they also had showed their appreciation for a few cultural elements that they deeply regret not having them in their destination home, i.e. Romanian culture, traditions, and cuisine (Feraru 2011: 105). As a solution to fill in the gap between the desired homeland and the actual realities of their daily lives, Romanian migrants enable the same strategies that were found and described in the case of other diasporic communities: "migrants re-created the life left behind as their first expression of their homesickness: markets, Saturday soup, Sunday chicken and rice, barber shops, cloths" (Bryan 2005: 45).

Homesickness is therefore a lasting ingredient of the diasporic experience, and its strength depends on the duration of the migration experience, as it is pointed out by the "saudade" feelings experienced by Portuguese migrants in Switzerland. Based on a quantitative research, Felix Neto realized that the length of residence abroad influenced the level of "saudade", and the longer the time spent abroad the less "saudade" was felt. Higher sociocultural adaptation problems and lower migration satisfaction also predicted higher "saudade" (Neto 2019: 667).

The Romanian migrants I have interviewed were asked to voice the concept of "home" in their personal opinion and experience, and to briefly comment on their strategies of recreating the sense of „home" through accommodation choices, specific objects that embody domesticity and ways of experiencing homeland culture, explain contradictory feelings about home and where they feel that home is. I also questioned them on the objects that they frequently use to carry from home with them, they bring later on, or they want to be sent by their family left in Romania. I tried to encourage them to choose using the concept of "home" in an abstract or a material meaning, from an actual place that one inhabits to a place where one belongs. The answers helped illuminating the different understandings of the concept given the fact both meanings of the "home" concept were used. Unavoidably, other topics from the other questions of the interviews contributed to creating the underlining individual explanations for homesickness, i.e. the ones that encouraged the interviewees to explain the reason of their general happy or unhappy settlements in the migration country, their attitudes towards both their country of origin and residency, the personal story of migration, and the motivations for identifying their residency country as their home.

I was also able to notice during the interviews the shifting meanings of "home" in one individual's experience, combined with feelings of displacement and deterritorialization. While studying lists of objects travelling from the origin country to the destination, it became apparent that the possibility to transfer these objects entertained the transnational home feelings and materialized the idea of a transnational community. The easiness of this process differs from the experiences of Romanian migrants belonging to previous migration waves, given the fact today migrants take advantage of easy connections with homeland; today's fast transportation and easily available electronic communication help transferring material and symbolic goods that also embody home connections. The sense of home brought about by specific objects, supporting house-building projects back home, developing and maintaining feelings of belonging in both the immigration country and the destination country, an existence based

on multiple localities, dissipating the mental boundaries between home and host countries are a few of the conclusions that the interviews revealed.

Food consumption attitudes of Romanian migrants also seem to be informed by a need to recreate a homeland spiritual connection; food or other cultural objects such as handicraft items sold across Romania in souvenir shops and that express essentialized ethnicity objectify for migrants homeland attachments; traditional ethnic food especially forges a sense of identity recreated and maintained as such. The objects that they bring with them and display in their diasporic houses help give "home" meaning to the spaces they inhabit. The majority of migrants I interviewed still identify with the culture of origin, and therefore with the locality where they were born and lived for a longer time before deciding to migrate.

During the participant observation I have conducted in Spain, at Romanian shops in Barcelona and Castellon de la Plana in 2018, I was able to notice firsthand that one of the most well bought item were vegetables imported from Romania, such as tomatoes and peppers. When asked to motivate this choice, buyers explained to me that they are pinning for the "authentic" Romanian vegetable taste that the vegetables grown in Spain do not ever ensure for them. The same type of observation could be found in other interviews with Romanian migrants, who engaged in comparing in small details the Spanish and Romanian vegetables:

> 'The peppers... again are not real peppers, with a proper pepper taste. And the green been, you know what a green been is... at home it is yellow, but here it is only green.' (M.C., woman, 50 years old). (Bojincă 2009: 80)

For other Romanian migrants, home is the place where everyting has a good, very particular taste (Otovescu 2013: 178). A similar effect of homeland vegetables in the homemaking strategies of migrants is analyzed by E. Krăsteva-Blagoeva using the description by Bulgarian migrants in Germany, who noticed that the local vegetables and fruits are:

> tasteless, artificial, plastic. This is especially true for tomatoes. All the respondents claim that they deeply miss tasty Bulgarian tomatoes. (Krăsteva-Blagoeva 2009: 254)

The interviews I have conducted with Romanian migrants in Spain revealed the existence of two different categories of migrants divided according to their personal relationship with the home country. The first category represents migrants that, even though they have lived for very long periods of time in the destination country are still experiencing homesickness and always plan to return. The economic and lifestyle advantages of living in Spain do not counteract the longing for their life back home. For example, Cătălin T. (man, 42 years old, interview from 2018) does not feel that he belongs in the small village in the province of Valencia where he lived in the last decade. He is well aware of the reasons why his family would enjoy a better life in Spain, but his plan is to return one day in Romania where he almost finished building his dream house. Cătălin feels closer to home through working the land in a neighbour's garden, but he abstains to plant there perennial plants because he would have to leave them in Spain when he eventually returns to Romania. The food, plants, national flags he brings back with him to Spain after every visit to his home country entertain this idealized connection with the homeland, though he also emphasized the many negative features of the Romanian society that make him to not return as yet.

Similar feelings about home and homeland were expressed by Ala V. (woman, 53 years old, interview from 2018), Romanian citizen originally from the Republic of Moldova. During her 20 years spent in Spain, Ala faced discrimination and feels unadapted in the Spanish society, and she constantly pines for the cultural environment she left in Moldova. Ala has a daughter that adapted very well to the Spanish society, but even her Spanish in-laws did not help Ala to find her place in Spain and to consider Spain her home. She still tries to recreate the Moldovan environment in her house and within her daily activities by using folk objects and wearing items of the traditional costumes at church and during religious holidays. The second category is well illustrated by Carmen C. (woman, 38 years old, interviewed in 2018), who told me:

> I could never go back to Romania. I adapted so well to their [Spanish] culture. I almost feel Spanish, but I am not the type of person that tends to forget her roots. I did not change my nationality. I could always change my passport. But I am proud to be Romanian, but still I could never go to live back home. I see things differently now. I was really well accepted here, I did not face discrimination. It depends on every person... I was always an open-minded person and I tried to understand them, to understand how they are, and to try to adapt. I never say that my actual country is specifically that, that I eat only that... So I always try to fit in...

As many other Romanian migrants, Carmen's main motivation behind migration was originally to save money for buying an apartment in her home city. After a few years of living in Spain, a small vacation to visit her parents was the moment when she realized she did not feel at home there anymore. She explains this change as a result of her higher social and cultural expectations that the Romanian society did not match anymore. The only thing in Romania that she still considered desirable was the traditional food, but purchasing often food items from the small Romanian shop in Barcelona and receiving packages sent from home was enough to fulfill her quest for the home taste. Carmen is one of the many migrants I have interviewed who considers that food is capable to transport the home feeling across distances, and to provide a cherished sense of home. For Carmen, going back to her hometown in Romania after spending a few years in Spain made her realize the profound gap between the imagined and idealized home and the reality of it. Some migrants describe this gap in temporal terms, considering that the society of migration develops much faster than the Romanian one, and every time they go back to the country of origin, they experience a strong clash between the two homes; this specific clash prevents them from feeling quite at home in Romania and encourages them to give up on the idealized imagined homeland that they preserve in their personal imagery. The lack of a juxtaposition between mental homes and experiential habitation is described as a struggle and a loss, but further on it becomes an acknowledged fact that is often verbalized in the interviews.

Other interviewees, on the contrary, avoid qualifying the homeland in pragmatic terms and assessing the social and economic disparities between the two societies. This type of Romanian migrants prefers to concentrate themselves on the unique features and experiences that the homeland provides to their lives, and therefore they preserve it in their personal imaginary as a symbolic space of ethnic and national belonging, essentializing their lost homeland and ethnic affiliation. That is why they are personally drawn towards recreating in their country of residence this symbolic space through tangible and intangible objects of heritage and belonging, such as folk music and traditional ceramics or carpets. My interviewees did not express strongly individualized meanings of home, but rather typical ones. A certain category of interviewees mentioned the transition in their individual concept of „home" from feeling homesick for the first years of migration experience in the country of residence to acquiring the "homely" feelings for the country where they lived for a longer time.

A little different experience from Carmen has Daniela C. (woman, 43 years old, interviewed in 2018). Though she definitely appreciates the friendly nature of the Spanish people with which she works, she knows that they will never allow her to fully consider this foreign society her own:

> The Spanish are very nice, they always smile to you, but they are nice in a superficial way, they are not open and friendly. (...) So I only have Romanian friends here.

Daniela acknowledged that she managed to create a homely surrounding for her in Spain due to her many Romanian friends who live around the same area. For Daniela as well as for Carmen, eating traditional Romanian food is the best and easiest strategy to feel at home in Spain. All four migrants described above, and also others are involved in receiving packages from relatives in Romania, a practice that preserves the feeling of in-betweenness and brings abroad material presences of the home community, because „the memory of taste and smell leads to the emotional effect and the sense of emotional/embodied plenitude" (Sutton 2001: 82). Ethnic food as homemaking strategy in a foreign environment is explained by some scholars through the fact "food enables insiders to distinguish between their own culture and that of others and, by extension, between the home and the world" (Ray 2004:162).

Many migrants interviewed describe their current life as a sort of living in an existential limbo, i.e. as being "neither here, nor there". A similar situation is described by Salih in the case of Moroccans in Italy:

> Transnational relations do not always seem to forge the sense of belonging simultaneously to two countries. On the contrary, they may paradoxically reinforce migrants' feelings of living in more than one country but belonging to 'neither' place". (Salih 2002: 52)

Al-Ali and Koser, on the contrary, identify two different categories of migrants from the point of view of homemaking feelings:

> While some of the transnational migrant subjects (...) do successfully negotiate a sense of pluri-national subjectivity, others express a persistent desire for ontological security or 'homing' that thus far has eluded them. (Al-Ali and Koser 2002: XIV)

The concept that explains this type of experience is the one proposed along with a visual metaphor by two human geographers from the University of Edinburgh, David Ralph and Lynn Staeheli (2007); they suggested a conceptualization of a migrant's home as "being accordion-like", in that it stretches to expand migrants outwards to distant and remote places, while also squeezing to embed them in their proximate and immediate locales. The accordion metaphor touches on therefore both the need of unavoidable extension, flexibility and movement, but also the migrant's need to be grounded and sedentary (Ralph and Staeheli 2007: 518). In our placeless world, full of „non-places", in Marc Auge's terms, people are always and yet never at home. That is why conceptualizations of home cannot be done within the classic ethnographic terms while researching sedentary communities. That is why migration – the context within which home becomes an even more flexible and ambiguous reality – sometimes entails the need to conceptualize an extended 'self' stretching from one location to the other, or from one culture to the other. As suggested by the Romanian migrants I have described above, home is a place where you use objects to create feelings of belonging, or, as suggested by Rapport and Dawson, "[h]ome is where one best knows oneself" (1998: 21).

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