

Thinking on migration through domestic objects: experiences of older Italian migrants in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK.

Simona Palladino
Newcastle University

Abstract

Material culture studies investigate the manner in which people think to themselves or their life through the medium of different kind of things (Miller, 1987). Many scholars in this discipline have highlighted how individuals imbue material objects with values, significance, and meanings (Steiner, 2001). Some, stating that the house can influence the ways people mentally order and understand the world (Morton, 2007), have shown how people express the self through objects and artefacts in the domestic environment (Miller, 2008b).

Research on migration has often been contextualized in terms of engagement with material culture (Basu and Coleman, 2008; Miller, 2008b; Miller, 2008a; Vilar Rosales, 2009) referring to tangible aspect of the home, as well as home--making practices (Miller, 2008a).

In the literature about Migration and Material culture, lot of attention has been paid to items carried with the migrant on the journey that can be physically transported from the country of origin to the new dwelling: memorabilia (Datta, 2012), transitional objects (Parkin, 1999). However, given the huge variety and complexities of materiality related to this sphere, some scholars (Basu and Coleman, 2008), suggest to focus the attention to the material effects of migration, even many years later the process of migration.

This study addressed this knowledge gap by exploring how some objects, preserved and displayed in older migrant's homes, many years after the process of migration, convey meanings and significance for the individual sense of self. Ethnographic research was conducted, including participant observations, in--depth interviews and autobiographical accounts of older Italian migrants, living in Newcastle upon Tyne and surrounded areas. Participants were first, second or third generation Italian migrants, over 65 years old.

The study explored the meanings of domestic practices of displaying objects related to migration experience, emphasizing their potential of generate discourses, personal histories and multiple narratives about the self. The research focused on migrating objects that represented: family--bonds and migrant belongings; career achievements; loss and nostalgia.

Material possession were found to assert their presence in older Italian migrants homes and contribute to process of negotiation and re--construction of individual sense of identity and attachment to and through places. The authors also discuss how material culture, migrating objects, and their embodied practices of everyday life, that represent the link between the past and the present, participants enact both their social ties and their link with places.

