

Introduction

*Things of the House*¹ is the result of an extensive ethnography carried out between 2002 and 2006 with two groups of families of the former Portuguese colonial elites who were forced to migrate from Africa after the Carnation Revolution, in 1974. The publication² of its results fifteen years after its completion is exciting since this passage of time has allowed for the discovery of novel aspects, previously unnoticed, which have enriched this version of the manuscript with a more nuanced discussion of Portuguese colonial and post-colonial circulations.

The book explores a still relatively discrete domain in Portuguese anthropology, that of contemporary material culture. It does so in a particular context – the house – and in a field of study that receives considerable attention from the social sciences and the humanities – human migrations. More specifically, *Things of the House* investigates the materiality and domestic consumption practices of families with a common life experience: a long stay in Mozambique during the colonial period, followed by a period of forced migration to Portugal, shortly after the April Revolution of 1974.

My research has always privileged the material culture and domestic consumption practices of migrant populations. This was, however, my only inquiry in the field of Portuguese colonial and post-colonial studies. While preparing my dissertation, I was invited to take part in broader research aimed at exploring the processes of identity construction and negotiation of diverse groups that had circulated between Mozambique and Portugal during the colonial and post-colonial periods. This broad frame determined the selection of the Portuguese and the Catholic Brahmin Goan, the two best positioned groups in colonial society, as research units, as well as the adoption of a comparative approach that decisively structured the research outcomes. These decisions ended up having a profound impact on my future research. The relative lack of comparative studies focusing on the Portuguese

elites justified, at the time, the focus on these two social groups. And it was this first ethnography that paved the way for later explorations of other contemporary migration movements – with a focus on the circulations of those least welcome and whose voices were less powerful – as a way of promoting a broader discussion of the diversity and complexity that contemporary migrations and migrant populations entail.

An analogous argument justifies the preference given to the daily life routines and consumption practices and to the mundane, and often invisible, domestic materiality in contexts of migration. Drawing on Miller's (2008) material culture perspective, when an object goes unnoticed in the eyes of its subject at work, that object can be understood as all the more effective. In that same vein, priority has been given to everyday things and routinized consumptions, as well as to the families' everyday household practices (Longhurst and Savage 1996; Mackay 1997a). As the term itself suggests, an approach centred on mundane routines promotes a focus on the ways in which subjects interact and appropriate things and how these appropriations contribute to stabilizing their daily lives (Mackay 1997a), are means to expressing their aspirations and idealizations (Clarke 2001) and for the materialization of their relationships and memories (Garvey 2001; Marcoux 2010).

The integration of material culture studies in the field of contemporary migrations illuminated the intersections between the movement of people and the movement of their things (Basu and Coleman 2008), as well as how they mutually established and supported each other (Burrell 2009; Rosales 2010a). Furthermore, it also supported the discussion of the families' positioning strategies (Bourdieu 1979), identity reconfiguration and belonging (Rosales 2010b), both in colonial Mozambique and in Portugal.

The framework of this research began with the premise that material culture and consumer practices provide significant resources for the development of cultural and social activities (Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Baudrillard 2002 [1968]; Bourdieu 1979; Appadurai 2003a; Miller 1987) and in this sense constitute a setting (Miller 2010), that is, an effective context for everyday life. Within this frame, people and things are thought to coproduce the contexts they inhabit, objects establish lines of continuity between present and past, and the impacts of movement on materiality are not restricted to mobile objects or things. Moreover, the contradictions between the gains and losses of displacement are evident in the experiences and encounters with the objects through which they are expressed (Parrot 2012; Rosales

2017, 2018). Domestic materiality is a particularly effective setting for exploring these experiences, encounters and expressions. Although contemporary material culture clearly transcends the domestic sphere, its significance, as a context for tackling the relationships between people, and between people and things (Silverstone and Hirsch 1994; Gullestad 1995; Mackay 1997a; Warde 1996; Miller 1997, 2001c; Clarke 2001), has been widely acknowledged. Likewise, the home is a vital material setting in all migration experiences. Unlike other more public spaces, homes are somewhat less subjected to the constraints imposed by social structures (Rapport and Dawson 1998), and therefore particularly significant for addressing the evaluation, reorganization and repositioning processes resulting from migration. Homes provide room for integrating objects transported from other contexts (Harbottle 1996; Morley 2000; Petridou 2001), for the expression of loss (Rosales 2010a,b, 2014), for articulating and managing memories, and for maintaining relationships with the past (Marcoux 2001).

This book is organized into six chapters. The first chapter summarizes the theoretical framework, object of study and the methodology. The second chapter provides a brief historical, political and demographic contextualization that seeks to explain some of the fundamental features of Mozambique's colonial history, namely its migration and colonization policies, transition to independence and decolonization. Given the origin of the families, special attention is paid to the characterization of migratory flows originating in Portugal and Goa and their return migration to Portugal, after independence. The third chapter addresses the families' life experiences in colonial Mozambique. The fourth chapter provides an analysis of the families' domestic material culture and consumption practices. More narrowly, this chapter focuses on the homes of the past in colonial Mozambique. The fifth chapter discusses the exit of the families and their things from Mozambique towards Portugal. The sixth and final chapter is devoted to an analysis and discussion of the families' post-colonial life in Portugal. Following an identical structure to chapter four, this final chapter addresses the settling in processes of the families in their new domestic spaces and the way in which material culture and consumption practices contributed to forging their new sense of belonging and materializing, in general, memories of their past colonial experience and, in particular, of their lost African homes.

Notes

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2. A previous version (in Portuguese) of *Things of the House* was published with Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, Lisbon, in 2015.