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**INTRODUCTION**

CHAPTER 1

**Sending, bringing, consuming and researching food parcels**

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**Introduction**

In 2008, on my first fieldwork visit to Andean Ecuador, I (Diana) encountered, hanging in the window of a carrier agency in the city of Cuenca, a picture of a roasted guinea pig stuffed with hominy and ready to be sent to the US. The sending of food parcels from this region--locally known as Austro--to the US has long been common practice for local families with members abroad. In particular, guinea pig--locally known as *cuy*-- is a culturally-loaded foodstuff throughout the Andes (Archetti 1997),widely consumed in festive and ceremonial events in Andean Ecuador, and which reportedly ‘travels well’ (Abbots 2008).

<FIGURE 1.1. ABOUT HERE>

Figure 1.1 Carrier agency in Cuenca, Ecuador, July 2008

During my fieldwork (2009–2010) in Guinea-Bissau, a small country in the West African coast, I (Maria) helped to harvest, pack, transport, sell, buy, pack again and then send fresh vegetables and fruit in cardboard boxes to Portugal every week, mostly through “informal” carriers found at the airport. “*Odja i badjiki pa Europa!*” (Look, here are *roselle leaves* to send to Europe) was the slogan often heard in the local food market in Bissau, announcing the freshness of the vegetables and their guaranteed safe arrival in Europe. In this announcement, the involvement of a complex, trust-based network of farmers, traders, carriers and a variety of other intermediaries in this common transnational practice was also implicit.

<FIGURE 1.2. ABOUT HERE>

Figure 1.2 Packing Guinean foodstuffs to send to Portugal, Bissau, December 2009

The ostensibly anecdotal nature of the two images above and their initial apparent expression of locality and exoticism soon vanish when confronted with the prevalence and importance of small-scale food-sending practices worldwide. For those Ecuadorians in the US who receive food parcels, the meaningless of food eaten daily --predominantly by irregular male migrants from the Austro--in order to just feed working bodies is complemented by the specialness of the contents of the food parcels which are routinely sent from Ecuador (Mata-Codesal 2010). Food parcels are essential in the relationship between migrants and their relatives back in Ecuador, just as they are for Guineans at home and abroad and for many others elsewhere, as the chapters in this book demonstrate. In Bissau, as the vignette (Figure 1.2) shows, market food sellers are familiar with the final destination of the products they sell. They maintain a close relationship with all those involved in the food chain--from production in the urban smallholdings of Bissau’s periphery or further rural settings, to packing and sending the food parcels and final consumption in Portugal--revealing notably close networks and connections across borders. In the summer of 2014, the importance of food parcels in creating, developing and maintaining intimate connections in the context of international migration became even clearer when a group of scholars gathered in the city of Tallinn to share and discuss ethnographic analyses of food parcels being sent, received, brought, consumed and shared by different people, in different locations and under different circumstances.1 Numerous ethnographic accounts provided ample evidence that food is the most regular type of reverse in-kind remittance being sent. Food and other nourishing substances travel in the shape of small-scale food packages (such as those analysed in this book by Maja Povrzanović Frykman, Raquel Ajates Gonzalez, Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska, Tiago Silveiro de Oliveira and Amber Gemmeke), and canned goods in cardboard boxes (as the balikbayan boxes explored by Clement C. Camposano and Karina Hof), as well as through larger-scale food distribution mechanisms (as presented by Xavier F. Medina and José A. Vázquez-Medina in the case of Mexican food supply mechanisms in the US). The chapters in this book provide clear proof that the circulation of food and other cooking paraphernalia (in the form of parcels, cardboard boxes or shipping containers) is often present in the most transited of migration corridors worldwide.

This volume provides eight ethnographic analyses of food-sending and -receiving practices in different migratory contexts. The food parcels that circulate between contiguous countries and within countries--even spanning continents--encapsulate issues of identity and belonging, kinship maintenance and broader socio-cultural reconfigurations. The ethnographic look at food parcels allows us to inquire about migrants’ multiple embeddedness and sense of belonging and their re-contextualized practices of family life at a distance, as well as to look at the various ways in which food links different geographical locations, social networks and even time periods, while helping to render migrants’ worlds meaningful. Food and its related practices are important vehicles through which to examine the reconciliation of people’s localised intimate experiences with globalising forces. The case studies offered in this book contribute to a better understanding of how migration and transnationalism are perceived and experienced at the local level by migrants and their families.

The volume covers a wide spectrum of sending and receiving practices undertaken by international migrants in different migration corridors. The authors ground their analysis in different geographic locations and migration routes in Europe, Africa, America and Asia. The chapters explore food parcels travelling from Eastern Europe to Sweden, from West Africa to the Netherlands, from Spain to the UK, from Macedonia to Italy, from the US, Hong Kong and the Netherlands to the Philippines, from Cabo Verde to Portugal and other European locations, and from Mexico to the US. They also deal with different types of migrant, including international students, asylum-seekers, professional transnationals, low-skilled labour migrants, irregular migrants and reunited relatives. The food parcels addressed in the chapters also include a variety of substances and materials: from raw products, cooked meals, kitchen utensils and jars of preserves, to plants and seeds. Finally, specific exchange and consumption practices are also examined, including face-to-face or technology-mediated commensality, holidays and other special occasions. More importantly, all authors contribute to reveal the diversity of meanings attached to travelling food, the relationships it generates, the variety of sending and receiving practices, the cultural transformations they undergo on their journeys, and the social transformations they produce at local and transnational levels.

Each chapter in this book takes food parcels as a material through which to think about belonging, relationships, intimacy, care, consumption, exchange and other fundamental anthropological concerns, examining them in relation to wider transnational spaces. They offer an in-depth, grounded approach to social change by examining migrants’ and their families’ experiences of global connectedness through familiar objects and narratives. By bringing in ethnographic insights from such different social and economic contexts, we hope to widen our understanding of the lived experiences of mobility and to go beyond the divide between origin and destination countries, therefore contributing to new ways of thinking about migration and transnationalism that take into consideration the way in which global connections are grounded and experienced at the local level.

Food and migration: intertwining theoretical approaches

Food is a key research theme in a variety of disciplines and areas of study and intervention, and its growing popularity is associated precisely with academics’ and practitioners’ entwined concerns. In the context of a global food crisis--given food's centrality for our survival and in our social practices--understanding food systems and how they have changed historically and politically is essential. Within anthropology, the complexity of systems, meanings and practices involving food (from production to exchange and consumption), and the variety of angles from which to examine them, have resulted in a range of approaches that reflect different broader concerns: development, power, cultural practices, health and nutrition are just a few examples of thematic interests in the expanding field of the anthropology of food.2

Similarly, research on migration benefits from a range of disciplinary approaches, theories and methods. Economists, political scientists, geographers, sociologists, anthropologists and others have been increasingly concerned with the movement of people, some amongst them with the ‘things’ people take with them in those movements (cf. Basu and Coleman 2008). Looking at the materiality of migration allows us to better understand not just the meanings people attribute to things, but also how those meanings are transformed with migration, and how these changes impact upon the lives of migrants and their kin, whether home-based or in the diaspora. Food is one of the most significant materials that accompany migrants on their journeys, particularly for what it represents: a sense of security, belonging and nostalgia--commonly researched topics in this regard. However, as we wish to highlight in this volume, food is also of interest for the negotiations spurred around it and the, sometimes conflicting, practices that migrants engage with through the use of their food.

The relationship between food and migration, though not extensively researched, is an increasing area of interest among anthropologists and other social scientists.3 While most specialise in issues related to memory and identity, some researchers have analysed memory from an embodiment perspective, and focused on a sensorial approach to the role of food in home-making practices (cf. Ben-Ze’ev 2004; Hage 1997; Law 2001; Petridou 2001; Sutton 2001). They explore the intimate and corporeal importance of food in the context of migration, highlighting how memories can be constructed through touching, smelling, preparing, tasting and sharing homeland food. Amongst anthropologists, Dudley (2010, 56), for example, describes this importance for the Karenni refugees in North-West Thailand in relation to myths and rituals, to traditional approaches to health and illness, and to general conversation. Warin and Dennis (2005), who also take an embodied approach to food and migration, focus on the senses in order to analyse the memory and home-making practices through food of Persian women in Australia. As Weiss (1996) puts it,

Concrete objects, namely cooked foods, are considered as embodiments of social practices, whose specific form and properties (e.g., their gendered dimensions, their temporal unfolding, their centrality or periphery) can be recognized and interpreted through the experience of these foods (1996, 125).

Food helps us to understand how meanings and sensorial practices are closely related. Within anthropological studies of food and foodways, Mintz’s (1985) influential socio-historical study of sugar also demonstrates the relationship between practice and meanings of authenticity through foodways. Entangled in social relations rather than being abstractedly fixed, meanings of food are constantly subject to change. As Mintz has put it,

... the anthropology of just such homely, everyday substances may help us to clarify both how the world changes from what it was to what it may become, and how it manages at the same time to stay in certain regards very much the same (1985, xxvii).

Changes in the meanings of food are particularly noteworthy in the migration context, with the ability to affect migrants’ home-making experiences, as well as the experiences of their home-based kin, as we explore in the next section.

In spite of such growing interest in the field, solid analytical frames through which to look at the relationship between food and migration are still lacking, and most academic production on this theme corresponds to scattered studies that, although offering important insights and reflections, would strengthen their contribution to an emerging field of studies if more emphasis could be put on the theoretical intersection of food studies and the study of human migration. This is obviously a complex task, and the ways in which to examine this intersection are also countless. In this book, we focus on one such way: an ethnographic approach grounded on the actual food parcels that circulate in and through migratory landscapes, and on what these may reveal—not just in terms of their contents but also of related networks, relationships and experiences of migrants and their relatives across borders. We believe that looking at food parcels sent and received by migrants and their relatives offers a theoretical possibility that we hope can contribute to filling this gap and to help us to better understand the ways in which people reconcile their local lives and embodied experiences with their belonging to broader networks and participation in an outside world. Although not always absent from tensions, conflicts and contradictions, these “local” and “global” relationships are part of the way that people “make” themselves (to use the anthropological classic theme of personhood) and their lives, and are not necessarily opposed.

Most researchers and practitioners in the field of migration look at issues of choice and constraint, with a focus on space. Spaces of memory, emotions and performances, state, borders and transnationalism, are some of the ways in which space is addressed. The choices available to migrants and the constraints which they face in what is often referred to in the literature as “global space” are as much a product of unequal relationships of power as they are of the everyday practical and emotional attachments which people make both to and in place. Space-making is therefore another common concern of most authors in this book--from spaces of continuity in transnational lives (Maja Povrzanović Frykman), to changing spaces of consumer identity (Raquel Ajates Gonzalez), spaces of intimacy and power (Clement C. Camposano), of commensality (Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska) and of hospitality (Karina Hof), “invisible” spaces (Amber Gemmeke), spaces of food exchange (Tiago Silveiro de Oliveira) and of food provision (F. Xavier Medina and José A. Vázquez-Medina), all with the particularity of looking at both ends of the migratory experience--origin and destination.

Rather than seeing the subjective and objective aspects of reality as divided by clear boundaries, our approach to understanding space-making through food parcels invites examination of the intersubjective articulation of subjective/objective reality. It draws on the “anthropology of experience,” which has been increasingly followed since the mid-1980s, when an undue focus on meaning, discourse, structural relations and political economy started to be seen as oblivious to the everyday experiences, contingencies and dilemmas that weigh on people’s lives (Desjarlais and Throop 2011). This is a particularly useful theoretical lens through which to explore the influence of materials like food and plants, whose importance in migrants’ lives seems to derive as much from their apparently “symbolic” form (meanings) as from their bodily and organic qualities (smells, textures and healing properties, for example). In order to explore both forms, the authors in this volume draw on insights that understand reality and meaning as one and the same thing, in the sense that people make reality by attributing meanings to things.

**Food, identity and belonging: the materiality of transnational relations**

Food is a key dimension of building and communicating identity, as well as a sign of group membership. As Fischler (1988, 275) stated in his seminal work, “Food is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps it assert its [...] oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently.” This fact explains the continuity of eating practices between migrant communities all over the world (e.g. Keller Brown and Mussell 1984; Diner 2001; Gabaccia 1998; Valentine 1999). Unsurprisingly, food parcels act as strong markers of belonging and continuity in the geographical and social fragmentation introduced by international migration.

Some migrants--particularly those less wealthy, less skilled or perceived as coming from the Global South--face sudden changes in status due to migration. Migration may entail going from being a native to being a foreigner, from being language knowledgeable to having limited language skills, from having physical family relations to being forced to perform kinwork at a distance. In such a process migrants are stripped of many identification traits which are relevant to them. Food, as a highly significant marker of personal, family and group identification, becomes of paramount importance in migrants’ attempts to rework, contest or accept such changes in status, as well as in building new identifications. Food choices signal the desire to maintain or create specific group membership--of a family, a social class, a national origin or a rural background (Fischler 1988). However, such identifications do not necessarily restrict themselves to well-establishedcollective identities. In fact, as Raquel Ajates González’s chapter in this volume, for example, shows, food parcels can incarnatethe conflicting nature of belongings.

With growing surveillance of migrants’ alliances, food as a visible marker of belonging appears as a rather innocuous performance of ascription—a colourful and exotic representation of group identity that is tolerated in the tamed spectacle of the food stalls at the so-called multicultural fairs. However, as Maja Povrzanović Frykman’s chapter shows, the contents of food parcels can differ from the public image of valuable ethnic foods. The process of iconising particular dishes as condensing national cuisines (for two interesting discussions on the idea of “national cuisines” see Appadurai 1988; Cusak 2000) entails a simultaneous process of rendering invisible many other dishes and ingredients commonly used in the same culinary tradition. This creates a mismatch between what is habitually consumed in an area--and most likely to be sent to migrants in the form of food parcels--and what are depicted as proper ethnically representative dishes in migrants’ societies of residence. The processes of ascribing meaning and worthiness to foodstuffs differ in that case among migrants and host societies. The contents of food parcels are so intimate that the inability of other people to appreciate their preciousness can lead to the parcels being maintained in the close intimate domain, with migrants not wanting to share them. As both Maja Povrzanović Frykman’s and Raquel Ajates Gonzalez’s chapters show, food parcels’ worthiness for migrants derives not so much from the final product itself as from the work devoted by relatives to cooking, selecting, wrapping and sending it, and from the symbols and memories attached to it. This is equally true when it is migrants sending food parcels in the opposite direction. Karina Hof’s chapter examines the ritual for Filipino migrants around the “slow” practice of choosing, buying and packing the items to be sent to their relatives in the Philippines. Those practicalities become a way to express care and love.

### The specific materiality of the items included in the parcels is of particular relevance when migrants’ needs to rework their identifications concur with situations of material precariousness. As with the more-studied case of financial remittances (cf. Datta *et al*. 2007), there may be tensions arising from the decision to send or not send parcels. In some cases, although the cost of the items themselves may not be relevant, the cost of the sending can be important and compete with other pressing needs for money.

### Maintaining regular contacts across national borders enacts or relies on a materiality that is often overlooked. This way, the materiality of the food parcels speaks of the much broader issue of the materiality of transnational relations. The inter-relatedness of the movements of people and things has been a later concern for migration scholars. Works mapping some of the intersections between migration and material culture (see, for instance, the collections edited by Basu and Coleman 2008 or Svašek 2012) ground transnational practices while opening up spaces in which to analyse people’s meaning-making processes as embodied and fleshed up in their daily actions. The increasing attention paid to the material culture of movement means a growing interest in food. However, as Maja Povrzanović Frykman argues in this volume, more needs to be known about how specific material culture, and particularly food, creates social transnational spaces. Food allows our analysis to redress discarnate and ungrounded accounts of migrancy by incorporating the sensorial materiality of migration and transnationalism. Food is an important and specific kind of material culture. It is literally embodied and present on an everyday basis. Familiar food can play an important role in the migratory context, both at a public visible level, and in the intimate domain of the domestic sphere and the mundane everyday. As migration involves discontinuity with the known social, cultural and material environment, food practices and preferences can be used as a strategy by migrants to, in a sensorial way, compensate for the sense of fragmentation triggered by migration. The use of food in the context of migration is not straightforward. Simultaneously the performance of “home food” can also be used politically to distract from real social inequalities and discriminatory regimes, as with the earlier-mentioned multicultural fairs.

**Transnational kinwork: intimate connections in international migration**

Worldwide food plays a role in the conception, maintenance and ritual celebration of kin ties (Di Leonardo 1987). As migration entails spatial discontinuity (Jackson 1995), food parcels act as key connective devices in families who experience transnational migration, being central to the work of kin in the context of migration. By building material transnational circuits, food-sending practices play a significant role in the development and maintenance of the affective and emotional geographies spurred by international migration. For migrants and their families kept apart by migration, food circuits are a powerful material and symbolic source of connections. Food parcels sent and received by migrants worldwide maintain, reinforce and, in some cases, even create, new transnational interconnections, which produce food-related changes in both migrants’ societies of residence and their areas of origin. The progressive and changing nature of migrants’ food choices, as Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska’s chapter shows in relation to a group of Macedonians in Northern Italy, modifies migrants’ foodways as well as those of their relatives back in their sites of origin. Through migrants’ active engagement in new foodways, food knowledge, choices and behaviour are also transformed in their places of origin, as are, for example, ideas about nutrition and health.

Sharing, cooking or eating food from home are intimate acts which acquire extra connotations in situations of physical separation. While living divided daily lives, migrants and their families forge lasting and meaningful transnational bonds through food and food-related practices. Preparing, sending, consuming, selling, sharing or giving away food are important transnational connections, reminders of mutual obligations, as well as tokens of love. Intimacy is crucial for nurturing and sustaining bonds over time. In the context of continuing social belonging but physical separation, intimacy needs to be reworked. Authors like Karina Hof, in this book, reveal how the maintenance of family relations across borders requires intensive kinwork in which the materiality of food parcels plays a central role. As much of the literature on transnational families has now shown, productive and care arrangements are modified by transnational migration (cf. Baldassar and Merla 2014). Since care is a highly gendered activity, and food provision in its final material form is constructed as a basic caring activity, food parcels also have a clear gendered reading, as the chapters by Clement C. Camposano and Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska show.

The ability of food parcels to foster intimate connections--across both time and space--is not uncontested. Negotiations around the content of the parcels themselves are often present. Chapter 3 by Raquel Ajates Gonzalez, builds on the tensions derived from the mismatching of meanings attached by senders and receivers to the specific foodstuffs sent in the parcels. In particular, tensions and negotiations around practices of selection, appropriation and meaning-attachment to food are commonplace. Food packages become sites of struggle around representational power: who has the ability to attach which meaning and in which form? As the chapters by Clement C. Camposano and Karina Hof on the sending of balikbayan boxes to the Philippines unveil, food parcels are Janus-faced. Camposano's chapter, for instance, speaks of the ambiguity of the power relations around food, while Hof explores the hidden burdens derived from the notion of hospitality underlying the sending of balikbayan boxes. As is the case for the sending of financial remittances (Datta *et al*. 2007), food parcels as in-kind remittances perform parallel roles which are sometimes difficult to balance. While sending food can be a clear token of love, it can also place a heavy burden on migrants in precarious economic situations, who are sometimes subjected to pressure by their non-migrant relatives, unaware of their socio-economic positioning.

The tensions mentioned above, as well as other changes in cross-border relationships that the sending and receiving of food parcels generates, produce inevitable effects upon the lives of migrants and of their home-based kin. In fact, complementing what more-recent anthropological research has shown, the chapters in this book reveal the importance of maintaining mutually beneficial social ties on all sides of the migratory landscape. In spite of existing tensions, the expectation of future forms of compensation or reciprocity is often associated with gifts sent in both directions, and these have undeniable effects upon the lives of local communities on both sides of the migration pathway (Abranches 2014).

**The circulation of nourishment: meanings and experiences of the migration–development nexus**

The third section of this book is concerned with the circulation of nourishment. This focus responds to a conscious effort to locate food within a broader understanding of the concept. The symbolic attributes of the food parcels, central for senders and receivers alike, enable us to extend the notion of ‘food from home’ to other substances, such as plants, herbs and roots used for medicinal purposes, and other substances which may not be fully edible, like amulets, potions and animal products used in healing practices--the “plants and prayers” explored by Amber Gemmeke in her chapter on West African marabouts in the Netherlands. Whether to be drunk as teas or potions, or for the body to be washed with, plants are, as much as food, associated with the land of origin, and are equally important sources of nourishment--not just physical but also spiritual--in an unfamiliar territory. Just like food, they also open up possibilities for cross-border exchange practices, as the marabouts’ work of brokers perfectly exemplifies.

Such opportunities show us that sending and receiving food parcels is not only about family obligations and solidarity; it is also about creating spaces of resistance, continuity and economic strategies. Moreover, these parcels help us to better understand the place of small-scale food circulation in the global food system. In fact, focusing on the different stages of the food chain--from production to exchange and consumption--the eight ethnographic studies in this volume bring out important insights on how these may all be intimately interconnected, even if operating within the context of a global market economy, usually characterised by alienation between production and consumption. This is particularly addressed by F. Xavier Medina and José A. Vázquez-Medina in their analysis of the dynamics of supply in family-owned Mexican restaurants in the United States, which follows on the interesting work done by, for example, Cook and Harrison (2007). In this work, the complex relationship between producers, consumers and intermediaries across borders was studied through an exceptional attempt to trace the connection between the lives of one family in North London and a group of farmers in rural Jamaica, by focusing on the consumption and production of one specific foodstuff--hot peppers. Another important contribution to the understanding of the different stages and geographies of a transnational food system was put forward by Long and Villarreal (1998) who, like F. Xavier Medina and José A. Vázquez-Medina, looked at Mexico and the US. They explored how products used in Mexican cuisine can be seen as part of Mexican identity, tradition and ancestral heritage by consumers abroad, whereas, at the production site, the same products are actually perceived as transmitters of modernity--given their growing importance in the global market and cross-border export, which are seen as signs of modern industry. Similar concerns with uncovering the false dichotomy of tradition and modernity through food are explored further in this book. Karina Hof, for instance, speaks of the perceived otherness and foreign appeal of the items sent as the source of their worthiness for receivers in the Philippines.

Thanks particularly to the transnational approach, migration is decreasingly considered as a lineal origin–destination process. Many migrants’ trajectories speak of a constellation of destinations; and transnational spaces (cf. Jackson *et al*. 2004) and connections (cf. Hannerz 1996) have been conceptualised as resulting from the multiplicity of migrants’ transnational experiences and relations. In a similar vein, Tiago Silveiro de Oliveira’s chapter in this volume shows that the journeys of food parcels within the Cabo Verdean diaspora also go beyond the idea of the one single destination. The Cabo Verdean diasporic space--with Lisbon as a central node--is composed of many different locations all over Europe. Food parcels--or *inkumenda di téra* as they are known in Cabo Verdean Creole--travel among such locations. The use of methodological individualism by Maja Povrzanović Frykman in her chapter also aims to overcome the origin–destination linearity. Such a methodological approach helps to avoid limiting research on migration to the predictable routes of connections between “old” and “new” homes.

Food and migration are two key areas of interest in the field of international development; however, they are often studied separately. The concept of food security, which has been at the centre of debates on food and development--usually associated with concerns over malnutrition--has evolved over time to include not only dietary needs but also food preferences. An increasing number of ethnographic studies have been helping us to understand such preferences, but what happens when the distance between people and their familiar foods increases with migration, or when they encounter new foods in a new place? The chapters in this book offer invaluable insights into these questions from a variety of geographic locations and trajectories. For example, how are foreign foods conciliated with feelings of home in the balikbayan boxes explored by Karina Hof? What is the importance of West African amulets’ and plants’ healing properties, not only for the continuity of migrants’ spiritual and bodily well-being in an unfamiliar environment, but also for the creation of transnational livelihood strategies and intermediary occupations in these cross-border spaces, as examined by Amber Gemmeke in the Netherlands? Or, asTiago Silveiro de Oliveira investigates in Chapter 8, how does the involvement of Cabo Verdeans in the transnational informal trade of homeland food impact upon a gendered economic space for these communities in Portugal, as well as on their ties with home?

Trying to find answers to these questions becomes even more relevant when we consider that, thus far, the migration–development nexus has mostly been addressed through the study of financial remittances, home associations and investment in housing, land or other assets in home countries, thereby focusing on the destination–origin direction (see, for example, de Haas 2005; Eversole and Johnson 2014). Without wishing to diminish the importance of this direction of research, it is also crucial to note that, even when examining movement in this direction, a more detailed look at the materiality of such fluxes may tell us more about community impact. For example, household gendered relations and the control over resources--another recurrent topic in development--has been addressed from the perspective of “Gendered Geographies of Power” (Mahler and Pessar 2001), whereby the way in which people move between geographical locations and social positions influences gendered power dynamics of decision-making and authority. While this conceptual model is extremely useful for understanding who sends and receives what, and who decides and manages the use of circulating materials, gendered power relations can also be better understood through a closer examination of the actual material--for example, by looking at the selection of items contained in the parcels sent by Filipino migrant women to their relatives at home, as Clement C. Camposano shows us in Chapter 4.

**Structure of the volume**

This book consists of eight ethnographic explorations of people's lived experiences with food in the context of international migration. In line with the emphasis of transnationalism on interconnections and continuities, each chapter renders food parcels as sites of personal and group continuation in situations of physical dislocation brought about by migration. The chapters explore the materiality of transnational migration, an aspect that, as explained above, remains under-researched to date. In addition, this introductory chapter has offered an overview of the topic and some reflections on what research has shown thus far about the relationship between food and migration, and on how this edited work contributes to a better understanding of that relationship by standing at the intersection between Anthropology, Migration Studies and Food Studies.

The chapters are grouped under three headings. Section 1 explores food in relation to identity and belonging. In the first two chapters, food parcels appear as a key dimension of building and communicating identity. In Section 2, food parcels are thought of as important connective devices in transnational families. Through this lens, food parcels allow anthropological explorations of meaning and practice, as well as the negotiations and struggles, which are central to kinwork. Finally, the chapters in Section 3 explore the circulation of nourishment and the deterritorialisation of food consumption, by focusing on the broader circuits through which food packages circulate.

In Chapter 2, Maja Povrzanović Frykman focuses on the materiality of food and food-related objects and practices in order to illustrate how they help to create normalcy and continuity in conditions of transnational migration. Her research is based on examples of individual experiences--by different categories of mobile people--concerning the transportation and consumption of food across borders in order to avoid the epistemological trap of the ethnic lens. The chapter argues that methodological individualism--i.e. focusing on the individual as the primary unit of analysis--allows for an approach to transnational migration that does not prioritise the analytical dyads of “old” and “new” homes as the only relevant routes inscribed by food parcels. Methodological individualism allows transnational practices motivated by individual habits and preferences to be treated as equally as important as the practices that may be typical for particular groups of migrants.

In Chapter 3, through the autoethnographic examination of three food parcels sent by relatives in Spain to the author in the UK, Raquel Ajates Gonzalez conceives of consumers as both identity-seekers and -makers and considers their relation with these invisible, non-sensorial attributes of food. The chapter argues that a new nutrition transition is taking place, led by consumers who aspire to become conscious consumer-citizens--defined by their more sustainable and ethical food choices, a new complex category difficult to reduce to quantitative terms and, therefore, difficult to measure. Using Bruno Latour’s distinction between “real enough” objects and “abstracted” objects, the chapter discusses how meanings associated with food parcels change and become more complex through a process of layering of abstractions and meanings. The food items received, their transformation while they travel, as well as the reconciled recipes and dishes prepared with them, all add another layer to the process of consumer identity negotiation beyond nationality. New assimilated and constantly changing yardsticks are used to judge these familiar food items, resulting in an ever-evolving perception of the food parcels’ contents that can either hinder or support the transition to become a consumer-citizen.

In Chapter 4, Clement C. Camposano explores the complex role of food in the struggle by Filipino migrant women to perform intimacy, but also to exercise new forms of domestic power and craft more fulfilling narratives of the self in migration. He examines how food items, as part of the transnational circulation of goods via the so-called balikbayan boxes, can give form and shape to the politics of self-making within what has been described as “global householding.” Camposano argues that focusing the analysis on the social life of food, as it is transferred across transnational space, illumines how macro-historical processes like the de-territorialisation of culture can find roots in the mundane practices and struggles of ordinary people.

Also focusing on the cardboard containers that Filipinos in the diaspora send and carry to the Philippines, Karina Hof provides a different analytical angle for the balikbayan box in Chapter 5. The contents of the balikbayan boxes are apparently intended to enhance life for loved ones in the Philippines. However, a closer look at the contents and processes surrounding the preparation of the balikbayan box reveals that both senders and receivers alike value these in-kind remittances expressly because they come from a place that is “Other.” The analysis also shows how the processes surrounding the box’s preparation, dispatch and reception serve as material and emotional stopgaps in a sender’s prospective return. Finally, the chapter examines how the reiteration of this particular transnational kinwork practice--by individuals and the Filipino state, which encourages and regulates it--produces an exported hospitality.

Chapter 6, by Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska, focuses on the changing foodways of Macedonian-speaking Muslims who migrated to Northern Italy, and their temporary visits back to their rural areas of origin in Macedonia. In such a transnational context, the author explores how food practices are used in the development and maintenance of the gender and ethnic identities of migrants. Migrants, especially women, actively engage in the new foodscape as they learn new skills and experiment with new tastes. The metaphor of “spaghetti with *ajvar*” best describes this phenomenon, as it reflects the immersion in the cultural and social context of both the place of origin--Western Macedonia--and the place of settlement--Northern Italy--while capturing the mutual influence of these contexts.

In Chapter 7, Amber Gemmeke explores how transnational connections between West Africa and Europe are created, emphasised and maintained through the transference of plants and other visible and invisible substances used in healing practices--such as animal products, prayers and spells. She focuses on the importance of marabouts, or Sufi Islamic experts, in providing these linkages between West Africans in the Netherlands and their country of origin. By taking esoteric practices as a starting point, this chapter explores transnationalism in the intimate, private sphere of personal well-being, protection and empowerment. In addressing specifically Muslim, francophone West African migrants in the Netherlands, this chapter also analyses the ways in which visible and invisible connections to the “homeland” matter to migrants who form a small minority in their residence country.

Chapter 8, by Tiago Silveiro de Oliveira, investigates the role played by Cabo Verdean migrants residing in Lisbon in the dissemination and preservation of Cabo Verdean food practices within the diaspora living in Portugal and other European countries, by cooking, sending and transporting food parcels (*inkumendas di téra).* The biographical narratives of several Cabo Verdean migrants in Lisbon map the informal circulation of food products between Portugal and Cabo Verde, and between Portugal and other places of the diaspora in Europe. The transit of these parcels appears to shorten distances between territories, connect families and friends who are geographically apart, and contribute to the maintenance of practices and associated memories.

Finally, Chapter 9, by F. Xavier Medina and José A. Vázquez-Medina, explores three models of supply and procurement of Mexican food in the United States. First, the chapter focuses on the transportation of foodstuffs by the migrants themselves or by people socially linked to them. The second model highlights the provision of prepared foods or artisanal products that are made and sold in the US to clients who are predominantly compatriots of the producers. Finally the authors present new strategies being adopted by the Mexican owners of family restaurants in the US, examining the practices that arise from supply between compatriots of the same migratory status. Their analysis illustrates how Mexican migrants set strategies to preserve their native food culture in order to also maintain their links with Mexico.

The analyses of food parcels in this book allow us to explore both intimate and familial experiences, as well as the structural aspects of sending, receiving, consuming and exchanging food, and the ways in which these influence local and transnational changes in social landscapes. Preparing and opening up carefully wrapped parcels of food being sent, brought, received, shared and consumed by migrants and their families in a variety of locations worldwide is an ethnographic experience that allows us to think about identity and belonging, family and kinship relations, as well as processes of nourishment circulation and food deterritorialisation, and to unveil migrants’ and their home-based kin’s local experiences of these processes from a transnational perspective.

**Notes**

1 The panel entitled “Food Parcels: Intimate Connections in Transnational Migration” was hosted by the biannual conference of the EASA--the European Association of Social Anthropologists. A revised version of some of the papers presented are included in this volume.

2 See Pottier (1999) for an overview of the anthropology of food from a food security perspective.

3 Interest in the field also resulted in a special issue of *Food, Culture & Society*, edited by Harry West in 2011. See also Kershen (2002) and Ray (2004).

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