The trajectory of food as a symbolic resource for international migrants

Sara Greco Morasso

School of Psychology, University of Surrey, Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences

GU2 7XH Guildford, UK

Tania Zittoun

Institut de psychologie et éducation, University of Neuchâtel, FLSH - Louis-Agassiz 1

2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Abstract

This paper explores the trajectories of food and how culinary practices evolve over time in relation to a migrant's experience. Our focus is on international mothers adjusting to life in London. We identify a connection between eating practices and evolving identities. In line with a stream of research in cultural psychology, we consider food as a symbolic resource mobilized by migrants to provide some material support to their processes of adaptation to a new country. In this respect, we introduce the notion of malleable symbolic resource in order to highlight the ductility of food in relation to an individual's evolving personal culture. On this basis, we propose to describe ductile trajectories of food in relation to three important steps: where food and eating practices come from; with whom food is consumed and for what goal it is chosen.

Introduction

To be apprehended in their complexity and dynamics, contemporary migrations demand renouncing to linear models assuming that clear-cut cultural groups simply get integrated one in the other. Rather, approaches that focus on people's multiple belonging and complex positioning invite us to consider migrants' agency and creativity. Here, we

propose a sociocultural approach that examines what available cultural elements are actually identified and used as resource by people, and what is done with them (Gillespie and Zittoun 2010).

We propose here to concentrate on one type of activities: those related to food. In general, negotiation around food and eating have been shown to participate to the socialisation of children to the culture, tastes, but also, roles and linguistic skills required by their environment (Arcidiacono and Pontecorvo 2007; Pontecorvo and Fasulo 1999). When speaking about the role that food and eating practices have for migrants, it is generally acknowledged that food is at the centre of processes of *negotiation* of meanings, memories and identities (Gvion 2009; Chang 2010). "Nostalgic food" (Locher et al. 2005) is often linked to memories and used to maintain ethnic identity. With the time, however, food may take on shifting meanings as people's identities change in the process of migration and adaptation to new lifestyles (Sutton 2001; Laurens and Masson 2006). Within these studies, it is clear that food might play a crucial role to negotiate and construct migrants' identities.

Following this line of reasoning, we propose here to examine the trajectory of food in the life of migrants. Our working hypothesis is that how people handle food, what cultural resources they use to produce food, how they conceive food, and with whom or for whom they share food, reveals a lot of the dynamic processes of adjustment to a new place. More, we also explore if, and in what sense, food itself might be considered as a resource used for migration processes.

Studying food practices to learn about migration

Migration and the integration debate

The challenges that modern migration poses today to national states and communities have made processes of migrant *integration* into the host societies increasingly important (Castles and Miller 2009; Barrett, Flood and Eade 2011). On the one hand, the nexus integration-citizenship has been studied (Castles and Davidson 2000; Castles and Miller 2009). On the other hand, there are a number of studies on *cultural integration* and, more in general, how mobility affects social life and identity (Easthope 2009).

One of the first approaches to migrants' cultural integration is Berry's (1990) study on migrant acculturation. The main problem with this approach is that it presupposes clear-cut "cultures". Recent discussions have shown how problematic the term was, which can designate national boundaries, linguistic communities, religious systems, socio-educative background, or any combinations of these (Knott and McLoughlin 2010; Barrett, Flood and Eade 2011). Also, contrarily to what Berry suggests, migration rarely entails *one* so-called culture of origin and *one* culture of the host country. Rather, each individual is normally part of different cultural communities, and cultural identities include discontinuities and development (Hale and De Abreu 2010); thus there are virtually infinite possibilities of personal combination of cultural belongings in cases of migration and acculturation.

In addition, the situation of multiple belongings and identities is to some extent common to each and every person (Byram et al. 2009: 13). This has brought to challenge the idea that migrants belong to one single and monolithic culture and that they only encounter one

culture in their destination country. Even more radically, the concepts of identity and culture have been discussed, highlighting the *porousness* of cultural boundaries (Duruz 2005), the *hybridity* of cultures and identities (Hall 1996; Easthope 2009; Ali and Sonn 2010) and the meaning of belonging and attachment to places in a mobile and globalized world (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005). These suggestions have been emphasized in studies on *transnationalism* (Vertovec 1999; DeWind, Levitt and Vertovec 2003; Brettell 2006) and diaspora (Brah 1996; Cohen 2008; Knott and MCLoughlin 2010), which show how migrants experience multiple and changing belongings. All this makes justice to a complex process of adaptation and negotiation of meaning, which is made even more complex for children born in the country to which parents have been migrating (Aveling and Gillespie 2008; Ali and Sonn 2010) or mixed heritage individuals (Garbin 2009), or as the social and political conditions of the host country change (Bhatia 2007).

From cultural belongings to using cultural elements

For these various reasons, rather than a-priori deciding what a specific "cultural belonging" entails, and, admitting typical strategies or being more or less integrated beforehand, we prefer to go back to actual practices and specific personal migrant trajectories. Our approach finds a double theoretical grounding. First, rather than approaching "cultures" as stable groups with their boundaries, we consider "culture" in general as participating to the making of people, in which people are situated, and that they can transform. It might be also useful to distinguish "collective culture" (the potentially shared totality of human cultural-historical productions) from a specific individual's "personal culture" (Valsiner 2000), which designates which part of the reservoir of shared values, meaning and objects, a specific person's internalizes and appropriates through her unique story. In that first sense, even in the "same" social and cultural environment, two persons construct their own, different "personal cultures". Migration becomes a variation of a general principle: a recently arrived migrant might simply have a more "different" personal culture in that situation than his two local neighbours. Second, following a more dynamic and pragmatic turn in social sciences (James 1904), we prefer to consider cultural elements when they actually become relevant for the person, in specific situations. Hence, it is not useful considering that a person "knows" folkloric tales, while it is relevant to examine how and when she mobilizes it, remembers it, or mentions it; and this is always in specific situations, with intent, to achieve certain goals.

The question is thus not anymore what "culture" a person "has" or "is", but adopting a more pragmatic stance, to examine when, why and what for is a person using a specific cultural element. Such idea has been developed both in social anthropology, to show that individuals and groups use "cultural stuff" (Barth 1969) to reinforce their sense of belonging or boundaries (Dahinden 2011), and in cultural psychology, in which people have been shown to use specific cultural elements to adjust to new situations (Gillespie and Zittoun 2010; Zittoun 2006a, 2006b). Altogether, we thus propose to consider how a given person might use cultural elements from her personal culture or her environment, in order to achieve specific goals.

Using food as a malleable resource

In this section, we will introduce our interpretation of food as a particular type of symbolic resource which may be used by migrants in processes of transition. We first introduce the idea that food can become part of the set of symbolic resources used by migrants (3.1), but that, in contrast with other resources, foods offer malleability (3.2), thus entering in complex trajectories (3.3). We then introduce the data on the basis that ground our proposition and that will be presented below (3.4).

Uses of symbolic resources in migration

Studies of transitions in people's trajectories have shown the importance of various symbolic resources used by people to support and facilitate their own change and continuity. Symbolic resources are specific cultural elements used by people, with some specific intentions (Gillespie and Zittoun 2010; Zittoun et al. 2003; Zittoun 2006a). Cultural elements include semiotic as well as material productions, which are discrete, have some stability, and have various socially admitted functions, such as books, religious systems, or recipes. These can also acquire additional meaning and functions when they become part of a person's intentional activity: a paperback novel is a material cultural element firstly meant to carry a meaning encapsulated in the semiotic codes of written language and organised through the convention of story-telling; yet for a person it might above all be, as an object, the reminder of the relative who offered the book; or, as narrative, a mean to reflect upon one's own relational situation; or, for the landscape it evokes poetically, a mean to feed-in imagination of a country in which he will eventually travel.

Uses of symbolic resources have been shown to facilitate people's adjustment to new places or support major life changes. For instance, young people who recently moved out from their hometown use objects on their walls (e.g., pictures, flags) to maintain a sense of self continuity beyond the changes. Some of these objects also enable them to support their feeling of belonging to certain groups or communities (such as a flag) or to be acknowledged, by others, as such members (e.g., by wearing certain colours). The fact that many cultural elements contain meaning also support people's sense making of certain situation (e.g., lyrics of songs are felt to say what one could not articulate otherwise). In some cases, people also use these resources to learn how to develop new ways of doing or guide actions, as when young mothers guide their child-rearing practices through their uses of novels (Zittoun 2004, 2007). Because uses of symbolic resource can be used to support sense-making, the development of skills and knowledge, as well as identity dynamics, their study is a good entry to examine change processes related to migration (Hale and de Abreu 2010; Mahmoud 2009; Kadianaki 2009, 2010).

Food as a malleable resource

If books and food are both cultural elements, there is however a main difference between these: a book keeps its text constant; yet a receipt or a dish is always re-created. We therefore introduce the category of *malleable* or *ductile* symbolic resource. This allows distinguishing malleable and non-malleable symbolic resources, the difference being the degree of a person's possible *agency* on the symbolic resource (see Table 1). Often it is not the material support which is ductile or not but the type of fruition which a person can

make of the resource. For example, *writing* poetry is a malleable use of poetry, while referring *to existing* poetry once read or heard is using a non-malleable symbolic resource.

Table 1: Examples of malleable and non-malleable symbolic resources

Non-malleable symbolic resources	Malleable symbolic resources
Referring to read poetry, novels…	Writing poetry, novels…
Watching movies and referring to these	Taking photographs
Visiting museums and referring to these	Painting
Referring to existing recipes	Cooking food, commensality, conviviality

Cooking and practices of commensality and conviviality are malleable uses of symbolic resources because a person may make use of these resources on the basis of his or her experience and identity and to construct his or her personal culture (Valsiner 2000). Food is malleable, because ingredients may be changed or adapted depending on the migrants' preferences and on food availability (cf. Laurens and Masson 2006); practices of commensality and conviviality may be adapted according to migration practices and transnational geographies.

Trajectories of food practices

Because of its malleability, "food" can be seen as part of a series of practices: that of buying ingredients, identifying recipes, assembling components, actually cooking, dressing, sharing a meal, and the discussions all these practices entails. Food is a complex construct, moving through several social spheres, acted out and created by diverse actors, demanding organization, taking a variety of symbolic and material forms, having diverse consequences for various people; it can this be said to be part of *trajectory work*, as for example could be said about illness (Strauss et al.1982). Like illness, the trajectory of food demands management at different scales, and has some more or less predictable outcomes, has endings – when a meal is eaten – and has various relationships with biographies.

On the data and methodology

The data we will be considering have been collected in the framework of a research project[1] undertaken by the first author. Twenty-nine migrating mothers of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds have been interviewed about their experience of international migration. At the time of the study, the interviewees had all been living in the greater London area for a period of one to twenty-two years.

The interviews lasted from 32 to 90 minutes; they were all recorded and transcribed. The interviewees have been selected through different channels. Some of them answered to online posts; the large part of this group of respondents replied to an online post on a forum or social network. Other respondents were recruited at the toddlers' reading group

---

of a local library in a London borough characterized by a high level of diversity. Further interviewees were recruited via direct or indirect personal contacts.

The project focused on the migrants' reported inner dialogue; in particular, it was focused on how they coped with the *rupture* of leaving their country and moving abroad and the following processes of *transition*, including adaptation to a new life, sense-making and learning (Zittoun 2006). In this case, the rupture of international migration is combined with the experience of *motherhood* (Greco Morasso 2013).

From the methodological point of view, the study of migrants' processes of transition is in general supported by in-depth reconstructive interviews. Via this method, individuals reconstruct how they lived a moment of rupture and the following transition a posteriori (Zittoun 2009: 415ff). In this paper, we are going to retrace the trajectory of food as a symbolic resource by identifying its main steps. In order to do so, from the methodological point of view, we have selected a *paradigmatic* case (in the sense of Flyvbjerg 2001) in which it is possible to retrace the whole trajectory of a migrant's use of food. We will select extracts from the interview relative to our central paradigmatic case and contrast them with those of other migrants who result different in some important respect. In fact, the malleability of food as a symbolic resource appears more clearly if a paradigm of different possible uses of food is outlined, in order to show how ductile food may be in relation to a migrant's personal culture.

The trajectory of food as a malleable symbolic resource

Our central paradigmatic case is Mary, a South-African mother of two who has been living in a London suburban area for about five years at the time of the interview. Mary is a physiotherapist who has moved to the UK with her husband and son, looking for a better life. In South Africa, she was working long hours and she found it very hard to balance her work life with family commitments. Migrating to the UK has meant being able to realize what she dreamt: starting her own practice as a physiotherapist, working part-time and devoting more time to her family, as well as having a second child (Greco Morasso 2013). Nevertheless, she shows her attachment to her home country in several ways, food and culinary practices being a primary resource to her.

The analysis is organized around the main steps of the trajectory of food as a malleable symbolic resource. Section 4.1 is devoted to the *origin* of culinary practices, that is, where migrants take their ingredients and recipes. Section 4.2 concerns *with whom* Mary and other respondents eat and explores the possible variability of eating practices according to different contexts of interaction. Finally, section 4.3 explores the ultimate *goals* why they are cooking and eating in a certain way, including *whom* they are cooking *for*.

Codes and experience: where culinary practices come from

In section 2,1, we have described our pragmatic approach to culture and cultural elements. Now, in order to understand the origin of cultural elements as they have emerged from our data, it is useful to distinguish two main components of culture following the Tartu school of semiotics (Lotman and Uspenskij 1987). On the one hand, culture is a grammar, i.e. a system of categories and rules which are necessary for human beings to approach reality. On the other hand, culture may be seen as a hypertext. The term text is intended here in the broad semiotic sense of relationship to reality, i.e. experience (Rigotti 2005). These two components – grammar and hypertext – apply to languages (grammar vs. texts), art

(codes vs. artworks), music (musical notation and forms vs. musical compositions) and many other aspects. One such aspect is cuisine. Cuisine includes, on the one hand, a grammar or system of rules about what to eat and how to eat it. On the other hand, one lives a hypertext of experiences of eating together with one's family or a broader cultural group.

By defining culture as a system (grammar) and a hypertext of experiences, in view of the Tartu school of semiotics' proposal, it is possible to retrace the *origins* of culinary practices. In fact, cooking food in a given way is often a combination of what a migrant has *experienced* and of her acquisition via various forms of *codes*. Mary prevailingly speaks of her attachment to traditional South African food. She elaborates on the reasons why she still cooks South African dishes in relation to what she is used to and what has been important to her (Extract i).

Extract (i)

Q   Yes (.) and: I mean for example how are you cooking in terms of (.) your
     (.) for example of your cooking practice
A   We (.) ah do all the South African things ( ) the South African calls a barbecue (.) a
     braai (.) and our neighbours would be thinking we're mad because (.) my husband loves
     (.) cooking and braaing and (.) you know even yesterday he lighted a fire (.) and it was
     raining
Q   Yes in fact I was thinking ((*both laughing*))
A   And: yesterday we did the barbecue (.) but he did what's called then the potjie so a black
     African pot that you put over (.) on the fire and you cook in that like (.) almost like a
     stew or a casserole kind of dish so we still do (.) cook South African dishes (.) or
     traditional stuff (.) 'cause we like 'cause we've grown up with that so:

Differently from the accounts of other migration stories, in which finding ingredients or adapting recipes to what is available in the host society may be an issue (cf. for example Laurens and Masson 2006), this aspect seems not to bother Mary; nor does she miss South African food in the UK, because, as she puts it, she finds continuity between the two countries in terms of culture in general and food in particular (extract ii). Mary sketches an account of the South African colonial history, pointing at the double direction of UK-South Africa international trade concerning food items. Some typical South African food items, such as rooibos (red bush) tea, are now easily available from common British retailers, while some of the food which is eaten in South Africa comes from the UK or it has "British heritage". In this sense, due to the colonial history of her home country, the South African collective culture (section 2.2) at Mary's disposal is already enmeshed with British elements. Only a few items, such as biltong (dried meat) mark the belonging to South Africa. They are described as "very South African" and "something that British people don't know" (extract ii).

Extract (ii)

Q   So your children when they go to school they eat English things I suppose
A   Well (.) their school I mean doesn't have a cooked meal so: they get packed lunch but:
     they've grown up with that even to the extent that (.) ehm they like everything (.) they
     eat everything we eat (.) including good example as well that British people don't know
     at all well something called biltong which is dried meat (.) and doesn't get cooked it's

dried and put special spices ( ) and when when it's hard (.) you cut that into slices or whatever and (.) there's a fight in the house as for who's getting and how many pieces 'cause they love that and that's very South African ah: so: yes no they're fond and also an another good example is ah: they're both fond of (.) drunk rooibos tea which is a natural (.) ah ehm tea with with (.) no caffeine (.) no caffeine so okay it's something ya in the UK at Sainsbury's[2] they sell it it's called (.) they called it the red bush tea (.) but that's a South African tea so yes all the- all our (.) things like that (.) we still do all of them (.) but eh a lot of the South African produce is (.) available in the UK is ehm (.) in shops (.) and the ( ) is quite close in (name of the place) so: (laughing) everything we want we can buy=

Q   =ya so it's not (.) it's a foreign country but it's a special one for you did I understand correctly↑ so it's (.) it's a foreign country but it's not like going to:
A   Yes
Q   Italy or France
A   I think perhaps the main thing WHY it is ( ) is the language
Q   Yes
A   And I think also because (.) of the history of South Africa ehm the settlers […] I think you know because of that (.) even some of the stuff that's eaten in South Africa is (.) with British heritage (.) or comes from Britain (.) so because of all of that it's very it's very easy (.) I would say (.) from that aspect (.) you know food as all dietarywise and (.) the language is easy (.) for South Africans (.) to come to the UK

In this excerpt of the interview, the origin of food for Mary is more in her experience than in what she has learnt as a code or grammar. In fact, even the description of colonial history is part of a hypertext of connections in which she is a part insofar as she is South African. In that sense, Mary seems to experience no rupture in what regards finding ingredients to prepare South African meals, which are simply "available"; her routine seems to be smoothly adapted to the new, English environment.

We found fairly different attitudes in several others of the respondents as regard the origin of those cultural elements that they have been using. Migrants who are interested in knowing about the English culinary traditions tend to learn by acquiring cultural *codes* rather than by experience. For example, Davita from Argentina (extract iii) reports cooking English food on the basis of the celebrity cook Jamie Oliver's recipes (www.jamieoliver.com). Hilaria from The Philippines (extract iv), who is married to an Englishman, has learnt cooking English food by reading cookbooks and via a yearly subscription to Good Food, a monthly food magazine published by the BBC (www.goodfood.com).

   Extract (iii)

   A   Normally it's funny because the one who cooks the most is Joe[3] I clean he cooks
            ((*laughing*)) but when I cook well I cook as well but the (.) it's funny because in a
            way in terms of traditions with the girls (.) they tend to eat earlier and we tend to eat
            very late so:: the girls and the girls are very fussy (.) so I normally give very simple
            food (.) I don't know like rice with chicken I don't know but with us (.) I follow:
            English recipes (.) I follow: Jamie Oliver for example so: it's more pasta yeah you

---

2 Founded in 1869, Sainsbury's is one of the UK biggest grocery chains.
[3] Joe is Davita's husband.

know the thing is that Argentine food is very general you know I mean I don't know it's very international in a way [...]

Extract (iv)

Q   And sorry what about your household you cook=
A   =Filipino food↑
Q   Always yeah okay
A   Ahm English food when I came here there permanently so ninety two there wasn't a lot of (.) Filipino South East Asian ingredients in the groceries like in Sainsbury's (.) but now you can get more so it's easier (.) so I thought how will I survive without all these things there is a Filipino: there are Filipino shops in Earl's Court[4] (.) and we used to live in (name of the place) so it was easy so Henry would get rice from there and hh but now you could even get Jasmine or (.) the sort of rice WE cook in the groceries whereas before you had to go to China town or to the special shops (.) so I've made (.) when I came it's funny because I had ideal meals cookbook (.) and I went through it and I got recipes from there and that's how I learnt to cook English food (.) and then there was a year I subscribed to Good Food magazine so: to increase my etcetera but now it's ( ) because it's easy to get these ingredients so I could cook Filipino and I could cook (.) hh [English

In these examples, books and magazines become symbolic resources that these women use in order to learn cooking "English", and thus, in order to facilitate the transformation of their cooking experience. As a result, it is food itself which, as a malleable resource, is being transformed, from foreign to more local, following the interviewees' processes of settling down.

In the examples we have discussed, there seems to be a difference between the modalities by which a migrant learns culinary traditions from her home country – i.e. mainly from experience – and how she may get to know recipes from the receiving country – i.e. via symbolic resources such books, video and other forms of grammars or codes. Food, as a malleable symbolic resource, is fed with other symbolic resources and experience, and evolving together with the individual migrant's preferences and experiences. From such perspective, then, migration demands a transformation of one's relationship to the shared culture, by using personal and local cultural resources, in a unique "bricolage" (after Levi-Strauss 1966; see also Zittoun 2006a)[5]. In relation to what we have been arguing in this section, it is interesting to plunge into a different case, which is *extreme* (Flyvbjerg 2001) from the point of view of how Petra, a migrant from Poland, uses food as a mean to represent her willingness to adapt to the multicultural community she has encountered in London. Petra reports about meeting many friends from other countries and learning from them to cook dishes from other countries. She is therefore learning by experience, food and culinary practices being a result of her intercultural relationships:

---

[4] Earl's Court (London borough of Kensington and Chelsea) is known for Filipino restaurants and shops.
[5] Of course, this dynamic might be more or less accepted and recognized by social others – immediate neighbours, local authorities, the administration, and in some configurations people might more easily feel at home or alienated.

Extract (v)

A   Ah↓ This is a because because I've got so many friends from around the world I cook everything Chinese my ( ) my Japanese friend (.) she taught me how to cook even Japanese you know something some dishes (.) eh I'm sorry meals then (.) and Indian food we like spicy stuff (.) Mexican (.) Polish (.) we love pasta so Italian ((*laughing*)) so easy and quick

Petra represents a sort of "Esperanto experiment", in which Polish food – her own tradition – is mentioned in a longer list including various international traditions (Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Italian). Her way of learning, anyhow, is following experience, as she learns to cook when she has a friend who teaches her and who thus becomes a social resource.

In addition, the very fact of finding food related resources participates to the exploration of the geographical and social spaces: one needs to explore London, its areas such as China town (iv), its shops (ii), its food-TV shows and magazines. In some way, identifying and gathering the components enabling to maintain or transform one's practices might thus also participate to the domestication of one's new environment.

With whom

Our take on culture is focused on the *use* of cultural elements (see section 2.2). From this viewpoint, it is to be noted that food as a cultural element is often mobilized by our participants *while interacting with someone else* – family or a broader community network. These uses in interaction are part and parcel of the trajectory of food.

As seen in section 4.1, the reproduction of South African food for Mary is tightly bound to the sense of continuity to her tradition within her family environment. She enjoys South African food *together* with her husband (what *we* have grown up with) and children (*they* love / *they* are fond of). Moreover, when Mary describes her husband "cooking and braaing" under a falling rain to the amusement of their neighbours (extract i), she decidedly aligns with him: "*our neighbours* would be thinking *we*'re mad". She thus distinguishes her home, a micro-South African community, from neighbours, which are presumably foreign (British or other). She attributes to neighbours a sort of extraneousness from the love for South African-like barbecue; by so doing, she draws the boundaries of her home with complicity and affection, alluding to love for traditional cuisine as a shared value which binds her and her husband.

With food being a malleable resource, different uses of food and different eating practices allow for maintaining different spheres of experience, thereby integrating different aspects of one's identity. For Lucy from St. Lucia (extract vi), the creole tradition is distinguished from everyday life in terms of time (it is only for special celebrations), people involved, as well as other material aspects (food, clothes, and the language spoken). In Lucy's case, meeting with a migrant network from her home country, even if it only happens once a year, shows how food is used to give a material support to one's part of identity. The presence of others is necessary to perpetuate a tradition in this case, while adapting it to the new environment.

Extract (vi)

A   […] so we have (.) link a French Creole tradition as well I think this is more what we:
        (.) we're more attached to (.) so: (2) is that something that I follow daily↑ No but then
        there are: activities during the year like:: Junen Kweyol like a Creole day (.) that you
        make an effort to cook Creole food: wear Creole clo:thes speak Creole and staff like
        that you know
Q   And you can do that↑
A   Yeah
Q   You can speak too
A   Yeah (.) And normally what we do is we gather by somebody (.) a cousin or friend or
        something (.) and yeah

For what goal (and for whom)

Finally, central to define the trajectory of food and how it contributes to a migrant's
negotiation of cultural identities, is the reason why a migrant ultimately decides to cook
according to her original tradition or following new recipes (or both). Cooking food
originally from South Africa, for Mary, implies some form of adaptation and effort. In
extract 1, she remarks that her husband was lighting a fire for braai while it was raining,
thus alluding to the difference in weather conditions between the UK and South Africa, a
theme which is recurrent in Mary's interview. Such effort is justified by the migrants'
goal. There are a variety of goals possible; these often include the wish to transmit a
cultural experience to somebody else. In Mary, for example, the relation with children and
their being South African is central to her use of food. Notice for example that, in extract
(ii), Mary's concern for her children and their attitude towards South African food is
central ("They love it" / "They're both fond of [it]"). Her choice of eating South African
food, then, originates from her experience – what she has grown up with – but is oriented
towards keeping of this orientation for the next generation.

Yet the most qualifying aspect of Mary's goal in relation to food is her willingness to
present South African food as a *gift* to her new acquaintances in the UK. Introducing
South African recipes and culinary experiences is part of her personal contribution to her
host country, which she gives in exchange for having gained a better life in the UK (see
extract vii).

Extract (vii)

A   =And also you know you had a lot of sort of (.) it's CULTURALLY (.) you know
        sitting around the fire and cooking in a black pot all of that you know that's so (.) we
        still manage to do that even though (.) to something else and to something (.) British
        barbecue is just a way to cooking food whereas to South Africans (.) that's what
        South Africans do with their family at the weekends it's far more: you know you you
        you light a fire and it mustn't be gas *((laughing))* we have to light a fire and that
        social I mean and you (.) socialize together you know with (.) friends and whatever
        and: that's the whole sort of days it's not just the cooking food
        […]
Q   Do you recall any episode of meeting people through this sort of particular
A   Not really MEETING them because we invite people that we already know to our
        house ehm (.) well some of them literally (.) you know they they're always (.) there's
        always interest in things (laughing) and I'll always (.) you know if we are doing that
        then I'll always think well I'm gonna make something South African (.) as a side dish

you know let also people so EXPERIENCE (.) you know and then eh (.) they always said (.) quite positive comments I don't know if they've just been polite (both laughing) but yes we make all type of (.) you know not just cooking the meat for example for this example and having (.) cold stuff and potatoes that you can buy at Sainsbury's but we can do (.) different things you know in a (.) South African way

Anthropological evidence suggests that uninterested gift generates a system of social obligations: 1) the obligation to give; 2) for the receiver, the obligation to accept; 3) the obligation to reciprocate the gift (Mauss 2001). Gift appears as a very pervasive and basic social phenomena, even a binding force between individual and groups (Bourdieu 1994, Magnani 2007). The dynamic of gift might thus be active in situations related to food, and as such, might have a function in creating relationship which might have a fundamental function of integrating migrants in new networks. This seems to be at work with Mary who, as said, feels grateful to the UK for having received the opportunity to live a better life in the UK. In Extract (v), she describes inviting people to her home-made South African braai and cooking real South African side-dishes (as opposed to "cold stuff and potatoes that you can buy at Sainsbury's") as the possibility to make them *experience* her culture of origin. The dimension of gift also emerges in relation to other aspects of Mary's life beyond food, as she describes having been invited to her children's school to talk about their home country and having been proud to do that as a means for the school to "educate the other children" about different places and cultures.

For Latife from Turkey, the goal of using food is to give a concrete support for her hybrid identity of a long-term migrant now living with the prospect of staying in the UK forever. Latife arrived in the UK as a girl with her family, who followed her father, a labour migrant who left Turkey for London in the 1980s. She got married in 2000; at the time of the interview, she is the mother of twin boys, who are about four years old. In extract (viii), Latife shows how food is a material support for her continuous negotiation of a complex identity, including family commitments and engagements as a working mother.

Extract (viii)
Q   […] (.) I mean how you cook what you celebrate etcetera=
A   =ah okay ah (.) we celebrate both Eid[6](.) and New Year we just eh it's basically family get together eh (.) we go to my parents' house
Q   Mmh
A   All my brothers and my uncles come as well (.) h (.) ah and we eat obviously my mum cooks Turkish food (.) ah (.) and we have space and (.) sing along then
Q   Yes (.) and on a daily basis you are more/
A   On a daily basis I'm (.) I cook (.) but my cooking is much more cosmopolitan ((*laughing*)) than Turkish I picked up (.) bits and pieces (.) from books and from TV programs
Q   Yes
A   So: and there is and there are certain foods (.) that I can't cook (.) because of time restrictions and because hh I don't know how to do it

---

[6] Eid is a three-day celebration marking the end of Ramadan and a public holiday in Turkey.

Q   Certain foods/
A   Certain foods from Turkey
Q   Ah↓ [yes
A   [that my mum can cook but I can't
Q   Okay
A   A:h and again it's due to (.) time (.) time and practicing (.) and I don't have that (.) I
     don't I don't have that I need something ah I would just go and put pasta on or go and
     make ah rice and some chicken (.) you know easy food that you can cook (.) quickly (.)
     quickly

Latife bases her integration on different temporalities. Turkish recipes are cooked for special celebrations, while on a daily basis she is "more cosmopolitan than Turkish"; she "picked up bits and pieces" of international cuisines reading books and watching TV programs. Her cosmopolitanism is characterized by foods and recipes which are simpler and quicker than the Turkish ones. International food provides Latife a material support to live her identity of a working mum, a role-model which her mother cannot offer her.

In other parts of her interview, Latife explains about her first reaction to the British culture when she was a young girl. She was always going out with Turkish friends and even almost refusing to speak English. Her father at the time did not allow her to go out and meet British people like her male siblings would do. After she got married, however, was allowed by her husband to meet up with her colleagues. Thus she progressively became "more open"; her career improved as she studied and became a teacher leaving her previous job as a teaching assistant. When she had children, she found herself being a mum and the main breadwinner in her family. Consequently, her idea of a family, including father's and mother's roles, became extremely different from what she learnt at her parents' home, in which her mother was a housewife and her father the income producer. Latife's combination of international food and Turkish food provides her a material support to live her complex and still-in-the-process-of-changing identity.

If we now go back to Petra's case (extract v), what we have called an "Esperanto experiment" depends on Petra's goals in terms of her evolving identity. In this case, food – not a specific food but the possibility to adopt varied and multicultural eating habits – is used as a symbolic resource in order to crystallize her enthusiastic assimilation to super-diverse London. Petra, in fact, reports feeling at home in London and overtly speaks of herself as a Polish Londoner (Extract x).

Extract (x)

A   The fact is because you know I don't have a citizenship we didn't we never applied
     (.) that's why I DON'T feel more British I feel more Londoner/
Q   Yes
A   I still feel like a: mix of people who live here (.) that's maybe
Q   Yeah so you: are not concerned with=
A   =I'm not connected actually to British people because this is actually for me the:
     different I'm from Poland and I'm Polish they're British (.) I'm more Londoner
     because I was saying there's people from all over the world here and then (.) I just
     live with them

She adopts a hyphenated identity as a Polish Londoner while she cannot see herself as a Polish British. It is London's characteristic super-diversity (Vertovec 2007) and the plethora of opportunities for learning and moving on (Greco Morasso 2012) which makes Petra feel a Londoner. As Zittoun (2010) suggests, there is a connection between *sense-making*, *learning* and *identity* processes for people who are experiencing phases of transition. In Petra's case, her multiple experiences about learning new international recipes follow her change at the identity level.

Notably, from the vantage point of identity, Petra constructs a dichotomy British versus Polish, while she declares she feels a Londoner[7]. This hints to the fact that even the widely established opposition between sending country (home country) and receiving country (or host society, as it is sometimes labelled) is not to be taken rigidly. *Countries* are not necessarily relevant to a migrant's experience. In Petra's case, London as a multicultural *city* plays the dominant role in her decision not to go back to Poland. To her, the city of London is more relevant than the country she is living in, which also motivates why she has not asked for a British passport despite being entitled to do this.

The case of Mary is illuminating from this perspective as well. When talking about food, in fact, Mary stresses the blurred boundaries between South Africa and the UK – sending and receiving country respectively – in terms of dishes and ingredients, due to colonial history. Mary describes her culinary customs as closer to those of the UK than to cuisines of other potential receiving countries, thus drawing a qualitative distinction between the UK and other potential endpoints of South African migration. This aspect problematizes the home *country- receiving country continuum*, as a migrant's individual experience is to be considered in a broader temporal framework, including the legacy of past generations which are part of the experience component of every culture (see section 4.1). In this sense, South Africa and the UK might be felt as "closer" than other sending-receiving countries couples.

Conclusion

With this paper, we wished to contribute to the understanding of how international migration participates to the evolution of personal identities in the framework of family relationships as well as in a migrant's constant reference to past and future generations. In order to do so, we have proposed a triple move from traditional and recent studies on migration. First, we did not consider pre-existing, essential nation- or ethnic belongings, but how people use diverse cultural elements available in their history and environment, as resources in their unique cultural bricolage. Second, we proposed to consider food as revealing cultural dynamics; we considered it as a malleable symbolic resource, an actively re-created cultural element that people can use for various functions. Finally, we examined how food enters in trajectories of uses, demanding series of activities and socialities, which can be used for different purposes. Altogether, we proposed a study of the trajectories of uses of food seen as *malleable resources* revealing the dynamics of migrating.

---

[7] Such questioning of the British-Londoner identity could be read as in line with the problematisation of the notion of Britishness which has been the object of numerous studies in cultural psychology (Condor 2000, 2011, Andreouli and Dashtipour 2013) and which is present in British nationals' discourse as well.

Studying food in these terms was made possible by concentrating on its *trajectory*, considering where recipes and traditions come from, as well as why (for which goal) and with whom they are applied or modified. In doing this, we have been concentrating on a paradigmatic case, that of Mary, by describing the trajectory of food in relation to her migration experience from South Africa to the UK. From the methodological point of view, it has been necessary to compare the case of Mary with other examples at various stages of the trajectory. This enabled us to test the malleability of food and its ability to adapt to a variety of life experiences, personal cultures, situations and identities.

Via such comparison, we have shown a range of roles that food may have when it is used as a resource in migration experiences. In particular, we have suggested to focus on three moments. First, we examined the *origin*s of food and culinary practices, which could be retraced, depending on circumstances, in our participants' experience as well as in their learning of cultural codes. In both cases, our results hint to the presence of a *chain* of symbolic resources linked one to another. For example, one might have learnt a recipe from her mother who used to cook it at home because she learnt it from her grandmother. Also, one could learn to reproduce a recipe written in a cookbook and codified by a celebrity cook who is a migrant as well. Finally, one might need to explore the urban space to find the ingredients required by one's meal. In that sense, food has a function both connected to self-continuity and memory, and to prospective and explorative learning as well as change.

Second, we have considered those people with whom food is consumed. New relationships often characterize the process of migrant settling down in the host country and shape new possible uses of food. In this sense, food might be used either as a connection to one's home country, for example when a migrant meets with family or friends from her home country; or to give a material support to a new emerging identity, like in the case of Petra (section 4.3).

Finally, we proposed to consider a migrant's *goals* in cooking food. This is in line with our take on cultural elements, as we consider how a person uses the symbolic resources available to her. Now, using something is a form of action and, as such, is most importantly qualified by its goal: the goal of an action, in fact, defines the ultimate reason why a human being undertakes that action. Therefore, understanding the goals of using food[8] means understanding a migrant's personal and unique process of learning and adaptation, and the sense conferred on one's trajectory.

Globally, our theoretical contributions have touched upon several aspects. First, we have expanded the study of uses of resources in transitions by theorizing ductile or malleable resources, resources that are recreated and transformed as they are used. Second, we hope to have contributed to the study of migration by showing how personal and unique are the making of trajectories in new social settings. Finally, because food is so ductile, both social and highly personal, following the trajectories of food can be seen as revealing underlining dynamics of transformation. Its peculiar nature allows considering one person's changing identities in relation to family networks and other migrant networks in the home and receiving countries. In this relation, considering food as a symbolic resource

---

[8] Goals may certainly be modified over time. In this paper, we provide a viewpoint on processes of transition at a given moment in our participants' experience.

and studying its trajectories has revealed the importance of considering individual process of adaptation and change, which show a high level of variability and personalization.

References

Ali, L., and Sonn, C.C. (2010). Constructing identity as a second-generation Cypriot Turkish in Australia: The multi-hyphenated other. *Culture and Psychology*, *16* (3), 416–436.

Andreouli, E., and Dashtipour, P. (2013). British citizenship and the 'other': An analysis of the earned citizenship discourse. To appear in the *J. Community Appl. Soc. Psychol.*

Arcidiacono, F., and Pontecorvo, C. (2007). *Famiglie all'italiana. Parlare a tavola*. Roma: Cortina Raffaello.

Barrett, M., Flood, C., and Eade, J. (2011). *Nationalism, ethnicity, citizenship: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Barth, F. (1969). *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The social organisation of culture difference*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company.

Berry, J. (1990). Psychology of acculturation: Understanding individuals moving between cultures. In: R. W. Brislin, ed. *Applied cross-cultural psychology*. Newbury Park: Sage, 232-253.

Bhatia, S. (2007). *American karma: race, culture, and identity in the Indian diaspora*. New York: NYU Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1994). *L'économie des biens symboliques. Raisons pratiques: sur la théorie de l'action* (p. 177-213). Paris: Seuil.

Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities*. London: Routledge.

Brettell, C.B. (2006). Introduction: Global spaces/Local places: transnationalism, diaspora, and the meaning of home. *Identities*, 13 (3), 327-334.

Byram, M., et al. (2009). Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters: Context, Concepts and Theories. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe Publishing. Available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/Source/AIE_en/AIE_context_concepts_and_theories_en.pdf [Accessed 27 September 2012].

Castles, S. and Davidson, A. (2000). *Citizenship and migration. Globalization and the politics of belonging*. London: McMillan Press.

Castles, S. and Miller, M.J. (2009). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world.4th ed*. Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillans.

Chan, C.S. (2010). Food, memories, and identities in Hong Kong. *Identities*, *17* (2-3), 204-227.

Cohen, R. (2008). *Global diasporas: An introduction.2nd ed*. London: Routledge.

Condor, S (2000). Pride and Prejudice: identity management in English people's talk about 'this country'. *Discourse & Society 11* (2): 175-205.

Condor, S. (2011). Rebranding Britain? Ideological dilemmas in political appeals to 'British Multiculturalism'. In M. Barrett, C. Flood and J. Eade, eds. *Nationalism, Ethnicity, Citizenship*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 101–134.

Crang, Ph. (2010). Diasporas and material culture. In K. Knott and S. Mcloughlin, eds. *Diasporas: Concepts, intersections, identities*. London: Zed Books, 139-144.

Dahinden, J. (2011). Cities, Migrant Incorporation, and Ethnicity: A Network Perspective on Boundary Work. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Online First.

DeWind, J., Levitt, P. and Vertovec, S. (2003). Transnational migration: International perspectives, special issue of *International Migration Review*, 37 (3).

Duruz, J. (2005). Eating at the borders: Culinary journeys. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 23*, 51-69.

Easthope, H. (2009). Fixed identities in a mobile world? The relationship between mobility, place and identity. *Identities*, *16* (1), 61-82.

Garbin, D. (2009). Identities and 'new ethnicities' among British Bangladeshi and mixed-heritage youth in London. Working Paper of CRONEM. Available at: http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/2313/ [Accessed 27 September 2012].

Gillespie, A. and Zittoun, T. (2010). Using resources: Conceptualizing the mediation and reflective use of tools and signs. *Culture & Psychology*, *16* (1), 37-62.

Greco Morasso, S. (2012) . Learning as a precondition of migrants' interest and engagement. *Human Affairs*, *22* (3), 313–324.

Greco Morasso, S. (2013). *Multivoiced decisions*. A study of migrants' inner dialogue and its connection to social argumentation. *Pragmatics & Cognition* 21 (1), 55–80.

Gvion, L. (2009). Narrating modernity and tradition: The case of Palestinian food in Israel. *Identities*, *16* (4): 391-413.

Hale, H. and Abreu, G. de (2010). Drawing on the notion of symbolic resources in exploring the development of cultural identities in immigrant transitions. *Culture & Psychology*, *16* (3), 395-415.

Hall, S. (1996). Who needs "identity"?. In S. Hall and P. Du Gay, eds. *Questions of cultural identity*. London: Sage, 1–17.

James, W. (1904). What is Pragmatism. A new name for some old ways of thinking, Writings 1902-1920. The Library of Amercia. Available from: http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/james.htm [Accessed 27 September 2012].

Kadianaki, I. (2009). Dramatic life courses: Migrants in the making. In J. Valsiner, P. C. M. Molenaar, M. C. D. P. Lyra, and N. Chaudhary, eds. *Dynamic Process Methodology in the Social and Developmental Sciences*. NY: Springer, 477-492.

Kadianaki, I. (2010). Negotiating Immigration Through Symbolic Resources: The case of Immigrants Living in Greece. PhD Dissertation. University of Cambridge.

Knott, K., and McLoughlin, S. (2010). *Diasporas: Concepts, intersections, identities*. London/New York: Zed Books.

Laurens, S., and Masson, E. (2006). Aidealizaçao das origens entre os imigrados ou exilados: A duplafunçao de manutençao da identidade e de aculturaçao . *Arquivos Brasileiros de Psicologia*, 58 (1). Available at: http://www.psicologia.ufrj.br/abp/ [Accessed 17 October 2011].

Levi-Strauss, C. (1966). *The Savage Mind* (Original French publication: 1962). Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press/Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd.

Locher, J. L., et al. (2005). Comfort foods: An exploratory journey into the social and emotional significance of food. *Food and Foodways*, *13* (4), 273-297.

Magnani, E. (2007, ed.). *Don et sciences sociales : Théories et pratiques croisées*. Dijon: Editions de l'Université de Dijon.

Mahmoud, H. W. (2009). Disrupted Lives and Shattered Dreams: Culture, Identity, and Coping Pathways among Sudanese Refugees in Cairo. PhD Dissertation. University of Cambridge.

Mauss, M. (2001). *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. (W. Halls, Trans.). 2nd Revised ed. London: Routledge [Original French publication 1950].

Lotman, Ju. M., and Uspenskij, B. A. (1987[1973]). Sul meccanismo semiotico della cultura. In: *Tipologia della cultura*, Milano: Bompiani, 39-68.

Pontecorvo, C., and Fasulo, A. (1999). Planning a typical Italian meal: A family reflection on culture. *Culture & Psychology*, *5* (3), 313–335.

Rigotti, E. (2005). Plurilinguismo e unità culturale in Europa. In: B. Cambiaghi, C. Milani e P. Pontani, eds. *Europa plurilingue: Comunicazione e didattica*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 307-319.

Savage, M., Bagnall, G., and Longhurst, B. (2005). *Globalization and belonging*. London etc.: Sage.

Sutton, D. E. (2001). *Remembrance of repasts: An anthropology of food and memory*. Oxford/New York: Berg.

Strauss, A., et al. (1982). Sentimental work in the technologized hospital. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *4* (3), 254-278.

Vertovec, S. (1999). Conceiving and researching transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22 (2), 447-662.

Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *30* (6), 1024-1054.

Wiener, C., et al. (1979). Trajectories, biographies and the evolving medical technology scene: labor and delivery and the intensive care nursery. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *1* (3), 261-283.

Xavier Medina, F. (2001). Alimentation et identité chez les immigrants basques en Catalogne. *Anthropology of food* S1 / October 2001. Available at: http://aof.revues.org/index1541.html [Accessed 17 October 2011].

Zittoun, T. (2006a). *Transitions: Development through symbolic resources*. Greenwich: IAP.

Zittoun, T. (2006b). Difficult secularity: Talmud as symbolic resource. *Outlines. Critical social studies*, *8* (2), 59-75.

Zittoun, T. (2004). Symbolic competencies for developmental transitions: The case of the choice of first names. *Culture & Psychology*, *10* (2), 131-161.

Zittoun, T. (2007). The role of symbolic resources in human lives. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa, eds. *Cambridge Handbook of Socio-Cultural Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 343-361.

Zittoun, T. 2012. Life course: a sociocultural perspective. In: J. Valsiner, ed. The Oxford Handbook of culture and psychology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 513–535.

Zittoun, T., et al. 2003. The uses of symbolic resources in transitions. Culture & Psychology, *9* (4), 415-448.

Acknowledgement

About the authors

Sara Greco Morasso is currently lecturer and researcher at the Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland. She is the author of numerous publications on argumentation in the context of interpersonal and intra-personal conflict and its resolution. She has been working on this article while she was based at the University of Surrey (UK), School of Psychology. In her research on migration, she has applied methodologies drawn from linguistics and argumentation theory to the study of migrants' inner dialogue, thus opening a new perspective on trajectories of personal development.

Contact: School of Psychology, University of Surrey, Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences, GU2 7XH Guildford, UK

 Email: sara.grecomorasso@gmail.com

Tania Zittoun is professor at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. A sociocultural psychologist, she is interested in lifelong development, and processes by which people create their trajectories in complex social and cultural worlds. She has been interested in people's uses of various resources to facilitate the transitions they might engage in, and is

currently exploring the role of imagination. She is co-author of the forthcoming *Human development in the lifecourse. Melodies of living*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, with J. Valsiner, D. Vedeler, J. Salagado, M. Gonçalves and D. Ferring.

Contact: Institut de psychologie et éducation, Université de Neuchâtel, FLSH - Louis Agassiz 1, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Email: tania.zittoun@unine.ch