

## The Collective Turkish Home in Vienna: Aesthetic Narratives of Migration and Belonging

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**THE COLLECTIVE  
TURKISH HOME IN  
VIENNA: AESTHETIC  
NARRATIVES OF  
MIGRATION AND  
BELONGING**

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AESTHETIC AND MATERIAL  
PRACTICE OF BELONGING."  
HER KEY RESEARCH  
INTERESTS INCLUDE  
MATERIAL AND VISUAL  
CULTURE.

**ABSTRACT** This article explores how Turkish people in Vienna create a collective sense of belonging and position themselves in a complex web of diasporic relations, through the materiality and aesthetics of their homes. It aims to show how the efforts of displaced people to construct a belonging to the new place of dwelling are intertwined with the aesthetic and material practices of making homes. Based on ethnographic research, it will be argued that a particular "Turkish home" is collectively created through shared aesthetic practices and discourses and serves as a material and social medium both for imagining and building collectivities and for constructing

**and expressing ambiguities, conflicts, multiplicities and contests, played out in the aesthetics of the everyday. Challenging the common view that homes in diasporic or migratory resettlements reflect past lives and locations or a mixture of two cultures and two sets of different objects associated with them, it will be argued that Turkish homes in Vienna are made through a new and particular aesthetic, which serves to produce and reproduce a communal Turkish narrative of migration to and dwelling in Vienna.**

KEYWORDS: Turkish migration, home, diaspora, aesthetics of the everyday, Vienna

## INTRODUCTION



The concept of home, in terms of belonging, has been widely discussed with regard to migration and diasporas. In a world increasingly characterized by travel, mobility, and displacement, the notion of the rooted home is usefully destabilized and the home is argued to be found within the movement itself (Chambers 1994; Clifford 1997; Morley 2000; Rapport and Dawson 1998). On the other hand, it is also argued that an overemphasis on movement risks celebrating homelessness universally and ahistorically for all forms of displacements, including migration and diasporas (Kaplan 1996). The inevitability of the desire for a home (Martin and Mohanty 1986; Pratt 1984), or “inexorability of home-making” (Rapport and Dawson 1998), lies at the heart of diasporic politics and strategies of belonging. As Clifford (1994: 317) puts it, diaspora is not only about travel and movement but more powerfully implies “dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home.”

Interestingly, however, with few exceptions (Çağlar 2002; Joy *et al.* 1985; Beverly McCloud 1996; Miller 2008; Salih 2002; Tolia-Kelly 2004a, b; Walsh 2006), the materialities of homes that displaced people establish in new places of dwelling have not attracted the same amount of scholarly attention. In diasporic or migratory resettlements, material and aesthetic practices and symbolic articulations of “making home” are closely linked to each other. In the case of the Turkish migration to and resettlement in Vienna, efforts to construct a collective belonging to the new place of dwelling intertwine with the aesthetic and material practices of making homes that are actually lived in.<sup>1</sup> This article explores how Turkish people in Vienna form a collective sense of belonging and position themselves in a complex web of diasporic relations through the materiality and aesthetics of their homes.

Although the Turkish population in Vienna is diverse and far from homogenous, a particular community is formed by focusing on harmonies that are produced and reproduced through the creation of a “Turkish home.”<sup>2</sup> Such a role of homes in achieving a collectivity has largely been addressed in ethnographic works on Norwegian society. Gullestad (1984, 1992, 2002) argues that in Norwegian society, where equality is perceived to be “sameness,” individuals attempt to create a uniform life through accentuating similarities and masking differences. As home is central to socialization in Norwegian culture, a normative home aesthetic evolves and serves as a social reference by which similarities are foregrounded (Garvey 2003; Gullestad 1992: 61–92). The “Turkish home” in Vienna has many parallels with the Norwegian home. A particular Turkish collectivity is constructed and expressed through a shared material home culture, which emphasizes uniformity and solidarity in the everyday. For home-centeredness of Turkish socialization in Vienna, a coherent and consistent life is imagined and materialized in a normative aesthetic order and discourse on home decoration. Yet the aesthetics of the “Turkish home” serves not only to imagine and build a collectivity, but also to construct, maintain, and express ambiguities, conflicts, multiplicities, and contests that are played out in the aesthetics of the everyday. Home decoration serves as a powerful aesthetic and social medium by which Turkishness is performed, debated, and positioned in a complex web of diasporic relations.

Domestic material cultures in diasporic and migratory resettlements have largely been addressed in relation to their role in remembering and keeping ties with past lives and places. For instance, Walsh (2006) shows how objects carried by British expatriates to Dubai serve as materialized belongings that simultaneously recall the past homes and constitute the current homes. Tolia-Kelly (2004a, b) discusses how the visual and material cultures of South-Asian homes in Britain serve as connections to pre-migratory places and precipitate memories in the ways they are narrated in individual and communal histories.

Material cultures in migrants’ homes are also argued to be a mixture of two different sets of material objects; one is associated with the country of residence and the other with the country of origin. For example, Salih (2002) argues that Moroccan homes in Italy are decorated with a mixture of Italian and Moroccan objects, revealing double belongings and plural identities. Such a practice of blending distinct cultural and material forms is indeed stressed by many scholarly studies that address material culture, fashion, and consumption in migratory and diasporic contexts (see, for example, Beverly McCloud 1996; Bridgwood 1999; Ger and Østergaard 1998; Koskenurmi-Sivonen *et al.* 2004; Mehta and Belk 1991; Oswald 1999). My main criticism of these studies is that they easily and comfortably assign material objects to definite geographical and cultural settings in which they

acquire fixed and stable meanings. This article aims to show how displaced people dislocate and relocate material objects and their meanings within the experience of the inhabited space and time. Most of the significant objects of Turkish homes in Vienna have neither prior connections with pre-migratory lives nor some “ethnic” associations. They have rather been registered as *a repertoire of Turkish objects* within the experience of dwelling in Vienna. “Turkish” objects are appropriated and enunciated as such because they objectify and embody Turkish experiences of Vienna.

This study is part of a larger ethnographic research entitled “Taste Diaspora: The Aesthetic and Material Practice of Belonging.”<sup>3</sup> Based on a three-year ethnographic study, roughly between 2005 and 2008, carried out in homes, shops, political and religious organizations, various leisure sites, and “Turkish” places in Vienna, it addresses how Turkish people construct a specific diasporic sphere and forge, perform, and enunciate collective belonging through a particular and unique taste formed within a specific context of displacement and relocation of both people and material objects. In this study, I am interested in understanding how Turkishness, diasporicity, and foreignness or localness are constituted, lived out, and transformed in the aesthetic choices of the everyday. Foregrounding everyday practices and discourses, taste in mundane objects reveals particularities and contingencies of living out “grand” narratives (Auslander 1996). Furthermore, as argued by ethnographically informed analyses of material cultures, objects are constitutive of cultural structures and social relations (see, for example, Buchli 2002; Miller 1987, 1998, 2005; Tilley *et al.* 2006). As Tilley (2006: 60) puts it, “ideas, values and social relations do not exist prior to culture forms which then become merely passive reflections of them, but are themselves created through the process in which these forms themselves come into being.” Thus, rather than a pre-defined and self-evident community, culture or identity, this ethnography was founded on the repertoire of Turkish objects in Vienna and the everyday practices and discourses around them.

The material discussed in this article was derived from my visits to thirty-two homes, as well as shops, various leisure sites, and “Turkish” places. Through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and “chit-chatting,” I focused on domestic material cultures as well as various narratives on migration and Turkish life in Vienna. I observed that certain objects and aesthetic choices are significant for constituting, performing, and debating Turkish collectivity in Vienna. I traced biographies of these significant objects (Kopytoff 1988), as they too have social lives (Appadurai 1988). My aim of investigating the spatial and temporal paths of their appropriation into the repertoire of Turkish objects in Vienna led this research to a variety of sites other than homes, such as Turkish shops and various consumption spaces in Vienna. Simultaneously, I listened to the stories people told of their

homes and participated in practices of home decoration and shopping activities when possible. In short, throughout this research, I aimed to grasp the intertwined biographies of people and material objects.

In this article, I will first explain how Turkish homes in Vienna are powerfully involved in the diasporic project of making collective spaces. Later, I will explore the collectively created and defended “Turkish home” and its role in constituting a particular Turkish community in Vienna. I will also address how differentiation from that particular community is achieved through avoidance of the aesthetics of the “Turkish home.” Finally, it will be argued that the “Turkish home” does not merely produce representations that define group boundaries and make sameness or difference visible, but more importantly serves as an aesthetic and social medium for the narration of Turkish experiences of migration to and resettlement in Vienna.

### THE COLLECTIVE HOME

The materiality of home is critical to investigating the “hybridity between social and material relations” (Miller 2001a: 13). *Home Possessions*, edited by Daniel Miller (2001b), explores many cases where domestic relations and the materiality of home are embedded into each other, such as associating caring with the wooden furniture in Romania (Drazin 2001) or the connection between building a marriage and building a home in the Paiwan society of Taiwan (Tan 2001). In this article, I will instead focus on the creation and performance of collectivities and communal relations through the materiality of homes. In Norwegian culture, famously home-centered, home serves to construct social groups, as it brings together “the idea of a place and the idea of social togetherness associated with this place” (Gullestad 1992: 64). Likewise, Turkish homes in Vienna provide a social setting not only for the family, but also for the community. “We are a family in Vienna” is a common phrase of those informants who feel a fervent identification to a particular Turkish group whose communal narrative is materialized in normative home decoration. In this sense, the “privacy” and “intimacy” of Turkish homes can be ascribed to a wider “Turkish family.” In other words, Turkish homes in Vienna are *selectively* “public.”

Home in a diasporic resettlement lends itself to the contested politics of identity and belonging (Blunt 2005), moving beyond the separation of public and private spheres. Considerations of the home as a private sphere, disconnected from the public sphere, have been challenged in various contexts. Communication technologies such as television and the Internet, for example, make a rigid boundary between the two spheres impossible (Morley 2000). The depoliticization of the home through emphasis on privacy and intimacy has been criticized within feminist theory for masking the power relations embedded in it (see, for example, Duncan and Lambert 2003; Martin and Mohanty 1986). The political and ideological significance of homes

has been further shown in relation to various contexts that situate them in power relations and political agendas (among others, Cox and Narula 2003; Legg 2003).

The most obvious material interventions between the private and the public are perhaps windows, windowsills, doors, and their decoration that takes place at the “boundary,” referring to the inside and outside of the home simultaneously (Garvey 2005; Dohmen 2004). Beyond publicly visible material culture, Clarke (2001) explores how an unseen materiality of the “internal” sphere also builds relationships with the outside. In her study of working-class households in London, she finds that despite the absence of actual visitors, the practice of home decoration appears to be a site for building and mediating relationships with the outside through the interiorized other. Households utilize homes “to project themselves beyond their immediate surroundings” (Clarke 2001: 32) and as benchmarks by which they evaluate, judge, and position themselves in the social world. As such, she argues, home becomes an “other,” implying “a relationship that was never simply between an internal private sphere and an external public sphere, but a more complex process of projection and interiorization that continues to evolve” (Clarke 2001: 42–3).

This interiority of the outside can be observed in Turkish homes in Vienna, which are made and positioned with references to the “gaze” of both actual and imagined observers. The idea of a Turkish home is built and its corresponding aesthetics is practiced with the support of actual visitors, who are perceived as part of the larger Turkish community. At the same time, the Turkish home and the community it implies are constructed and constantly positioned in relation, and often contrast, to the imagined and interiorized “gaze” of significant others, in particular Austrians, one’s counterparts in Turkey and other Turkish people in Vienna perceived as different.

What lends these homes to the discussion of collectivities is mainly the home-centeredness of Turkish socialization in Vienna. Until the recent boom of Turkish shops and the creation of “Turkish places” around them, homes were the only social spaces for women who did not have paid jobs. Homes are still central to socialization, especially that of women, but they are not limited to them. Women continue to arrange *güns*, that is: successive gathering in each other’s homes on a weekly basis. Apart from these arranged meetings, relatives, neighbors, and close friends can drop by any time without phoning ahead. Friends who are less close are expected to call before visiting, because it is necessary to make *hazırlık* (preparations) for them, such as cleaning and cooking. *Akşam oturması* (evening meetings) and dinner invitations are central to socialization for families, including men.

The centrality of the home to Turkish socialization in Vienna arises not only from the cultural articulation of hospitality, which implies that invitations to one’s home are key to building friendships, but also

from the experience of real or perceived exclusion from the society in which they live. In a place felt as unfriendly, migrants' "defense of locale," the politics of controlling space and claiming it as their own, are "fundamental to a sense of belonging and to the creation and sustenance of diasporic identities" (Westwood 1995: 200; see also D'Alisera 2001; Ehrkamp 2005; Fortier 2000; Mandel 1996). Some neighborhoods in Vienna, the 10th, 16th, and, partly, the 20th district, are claimed as and known to be Turkish places. Turkish visual and material cultures of the everyday are central to the process whereby these spaces are "resignified and reshaped according to the forms of belonging that are performed and permitted there" (Bell 1999: 10). Shops with Turkish nameplates, Turkish goods for sale, Turkish words written on the windows, posters announcing Turkish concerts on the walls, and Turkish women doing their shopping (characterized and stereotyped mainly by headscarves) reconstruct and mark those spaces as Turkish.

Domestic spaces, too, define an area of control and a refuge in an environment felt as hostile (Beverly McCloud 1996). Turkish homes are often referred to as *sığınak* (refuge) and felt to be *rahat* (comfortable, easy, undisturbed)—that is, "free from the gaze and rules of Austrians." However, neither the Turkish home nor its comfort can be achieved merely by the Turkish origins of the householder. The basis of this comfortable collectivity is a shared materiality and aesthetics, which imply uniformity and solidarity. My informants often told me that in the similarly decorated homes of each other they feel comfortable and, more importantly, they feel like they have spaces of their own in a foreign country. In her discussion of Italian migrants in Britain, Fortier (2000) explores how some physical spaces serve as belongings, referring both to "possessions" and to terrains of a collective sense of belonging (Fortier 2000: 2). In tandem with Fortier, I regard the collectively created and defended "Turkish home" and the repertoire of objects associated with it as belongings of Turkish people through which they feel at home in Vienna.

### THE "TURKISH HOME" AND ITS SHARED AESTHETIC

Strikingly, many of the Turkish homes I visited during this research were decorated in an almost identical way. Much of the material discussed here derived from my visits to the homes of Yeliz and her network, including her sister-in-law Kerime, Kerime's close friend Ayla, Yeliz's son Ömer and daughter-in-law Melek, and Kerime's neighbor Selma. However, the conclusion that Turkish homes share a common aesthetic was not derived only from those in-depth group interviews. Indeed, my request to see the homes of my informants' friends elicited a common response: "Okay, but you will not see anything different. Their homes are almost the same as mine."

Yeliz and her network identify three types of Turkish homes in Vienna: "typically Turkish," "not so Turkish," and "definitely not



**Figure 1**  
Yeliz's living room as an example of the "typically Turkish home."



Turkish." The "typically Turkish home" consists of similar sets of objects arranged in the same way (Figure 1). Living rooms are usually furnished with a corner sofa around a coffee table, which is also used for meal times. The coffee table is often topped with ceramic and is one of the significant pieces in the repertoire of Turkish objects in Vienna. The corner sofa is referred to as "typically Austrian furniture" and usually bought from Möbelix, a cheaper and lower-quality subsidiary of Lutz, a middle-class Austrian furniture retailer. At the opposite side of the room there is usually a cabinet that holds a television set and which is generally only half full and decorated with lace doilies, a few books, some ornaments, glasses, porcelain objects, and plastic flowers. This furniture and its arrangement give the impression of a simple and utilitarian home. Curtains, carpets, and bedding, on the other hand, are ornate and colorful, bought either in Turkey or from Turkish shops in Vienna (Figure 2). Key decorative objects in homes include souvenirs brought back from Turkey and copper or bronze plates adorned with calligraphic Koranic verses.

Kerime, who has been living in Vienna for thirty years, has a clear definition of what a Turkish home is and carefully avoids straying beyond this definition. Her identification with a particular Turkish group in Vienna is maintained by the similarity of her home to that of her friends. As a group, they create a "truly Turkish home" and conform to it by going shopping together or buying things they see in each other's homes. Hesitations about buying something that has not yet been registered as an object of the "Turkish home" are resolved by the support of close people. Kerime's doubts about buying an unconventional decorative object exemplify her strong need for the support and appreciation of friends who are perceived to be the same:

I liked this very much because it is extraordinary. However, it was so extraordinary; I could not decide whether it suited my home.



**Figure 2**  
Kerime's bedclothes and curtains bought from a Turkish shop in Vienna.

I saw it in a Turkish *kermes* [bazaar], which was only open for two days. I did not have time to think. Then I met a friend of mine and she also liked it. I decided to buy it... Previously, I had placed it somewhere else at home, but since everybody liked it I put it here in the hallway.

This "so extraordinary" object is Kerime's individual success at discovering an item that has not already been registered as a conventional object in Turkish homes (Figure 3). Indeed, her friends who liked it asked her where she bought it, with the intention to buy one for themselves, but the bazaar had already closed. One of them even phoned the organizers of the bazaar, described that particular object and asked them to bring it again for the next year's bazaar. This object has been a powerful candidate for admission to the repertoire of Turkish objects in Vienna.

The tendency of Turkish women to buy the same things is also noted by Turkish shops. In one of the shops I occasionally visited, a female customer asked for a particular teapot—one that her friend had bought from that shop—only to be told that they had sold out. Although the shopkeeper showed her similar teapots, the customer asked her

**Figure 3**  
Kerime's "so extraordinary"  
object.



to make a new order for that particular teapot and left the shop. The angry and bored shopkeeper explained to me how frequently this happens:

They all look for something they see in each other's homes. This teapot, that curtain... Buy something different! I swear next time I will order only one model for each item. If I sell it to only one customer, then I can sell the whole batch for sure.

The "typically Turkish home" serves as an aesthetic and social medium through which a coherent collectivity is imagined and performed. This shared domestic material culture does not only define a particular community and allow identifications with it, but also serves as a yardstick to appraise Turkishness. Aesthetic conformity to the "typically Turkish home" is an everyday constitution, expression, and performance of Turkishness in Vienna. Kerime perceives different decorative orders in other Turkish homes as an expression of assimilation into Austrian culture or as a denigration of the "real Turkish culture." For example, she dislikes one of her Turkish neighbors and perceives and justifies her difference and incompatibility in terms of dissimilarity of their homes:

*Kerime:* When I visited her home, I could not think that Turks are living there. She has nothing Turkish at home. Her home is just like Austrians'.

*Me:* What does it look like?

*Kerime:* She has some expensive furniture. There are lots of photos and weird paintings on the wall. I have not seen, for example, any copper plate or another religious object. By the way, she is so arrogant and does not like us. She is probably embarrassed for being Turkish. Maybe she thinks that if she does

not live like the Turkish, then Austrians will accept her as a friend. I must say that this would never happen.

The neighbor, Lale, decorated her home with some IKEA furniture that is indeed cheaper than much of the furniture sold in Turkish shops. She moved to Vienna several years ago, marrying a Turkish man who has been settled in Vienna for a long time. They both are educated and from an urban background in Turkey, unlike the majority of Turkish people in Vienna. Kerime perceives and objectifies these differences that set up boundaries between her and her neighbor through dissimilar home interiors. Although she has never visited an Austrian home, confronted with a shockingly different Turkish home, she translates those differences into non-Turkishness, expressed through a seemingly Austrian home.

Kerime further disapproves of the different tastes of some of the younger Turkish people, regarding them as proof of assimilation. In contrast, some women are proud of their children's different tastes in home interiors, thinking that they have a better, a "modern," taste and are thus better prepared to live in Austrian society. Yeliz, for example, took me to the home of her son, Ömer, and her daughter-in-law, Melek, which she considers to be decorated in a modern style, associated with a better and easier life in Vienna.

Ömer and Melek were married five years ago and decorated their home together (Figure 4). Ömer was born and grew up in Vienna; Melek migrated only five years ago, after getting married. Having considered Turkish furniture shops for a long time and visited them all, they decided to buy their furniture from Lutz because "Turkish furniture sold in Vienna is too *cafcacılı* [colorful and ornate] and *köylü* [village-y, provincial]." They decided on a plain sofa in gray, an accompanying carpet, and a "modern cabinet." Ömer tells that he never liked those "typically Turkish homes," even Turkish carpets, whose superiority is agreed upon by all. The major difference between his taste and that of his parents', he says, is that he likes "more modern things." Basing his aesthetic choices on distaste towards his parents' home, he greatly trusts Melek's taste because "in Turkey, people are much more modern."



Figure 4  
Ömer and Melek's living room.

To sum up, a shared aesthetic order, which makes homes “Turkish,” lends itself to the performance and evaluation of Turkishness and serves for determining inclusions to and exclusions from a particular Turkish community that is perceived and defended as a coherent whole. A Turkish collectivity is imagined and practiced in Vienna by means of the “typically Turkish home.” Through conformity to the aesthetics of the “Turkish home,” individuals project their homes towards the creation of a Turkish collectivity. Failing to conform to the “Turkish home” is often regarded as disruption of the Turkish solidarity. However, as I will discuss later, disagreements over the deviations from the shared home aesthetics arise not simply because the Turkish home stands for Turkishness by means of certain objects associated with it, but rather, more importantly, because it is an objectification of a communal narrative of the Turkish experience of migration to and dwelling in Vienna.

### **SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION THROUGH CONTRASTING HOMES**

As well as expressing sameness and unity, “the object may lend itself equally to the expression of difference, indicating the separate domains to which people or aspects of people belong” (Miller 1987: 130). The “typically Turkish home” and the repertoire of objects associated with it powerfully serve as aesthetic and social references not only for building collectivities but also for achieving and expressing differentiations. Home decoration is a highly contested practice that reveals multiplicities, ambiguities, and conflicts within the Turkish community in Vienna.

The contrasting homes of Remzi and Seda exemplify how those who attempt to prove their non-association with “typically Turkish people in Vienna” can project this distinction through their homes. Both Remzi and Seda migrated to Vienna as teenagers about thirty-five years ago, with their guest worker parents. They met in the factory where both were working and were married twenty-seven years ago. They think that they have nothing in common with the majority of Turkish people in Vienna and told me that they are actually ashamed of that dominant lifestyle presented as Turkish. Indeed, they share common backgrounds with many of the Turkish guest worker migrants. Remzi was born and raised in a village in central Anatolia and his parents used to be farmers. Seda was born in Afyon (a town in central Anatolia) and when she was a child her parents migrated to İzmir (in western Anatolia, the third largest city of Turkey), where they used to live in a *gecekondu* neighborhood (slum). Both Remzi and Seda aspired to higher education, but did not have the opportunity. They had to leave school at the time of migration and their parents did not send them to a school in Vienna in order to prevent their assimilation into Austrian culture. However, as they told me, they tried very hard to advance intellectually, by reading books, learning German

perfectly, and attaining a good Turkish pronunciation with no traces of their parents' accents. They describe themselves as "modern, secular and democratic." They are proud of their daughter, who graduated from university, and of their son, who is currently studying medicine. Having become who they are today despite their disadvantageous backgrounds, Remzi and Seda express their dislike of a particular Turkish group in Vienna, believing that "being that much *cahil* [ignorant] and *taşralı* [provincial] is not a destiny; it is their choice."

In his ground-breaking book, *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) attributes differences in tastes to the different experiences of social classes in modern society. Internalized as a class *habitus*, taste, he argues, predisposes individuals to certain aesthetic choices of the everyday and reproduces class structure and social distinction. The major critique of *Distinction*, emerging from material culture studies, is its neglect of the transformation of social divisions through the choice of objects (Miller 1987). Remzi and Seda's aesthetic choices exemplify how objects can be utilized to mark changing social positions. Despite occupying social positions similar to the inhabitants of "typically Turkish homes," they consciously formed a different taste in home objects, which, they believe, distinguishes them from "typical Turkish people in Vienna" and instead associates them with "modern people in Turkey." Remzi and Seda draw clear conclusions from their experiences in Vienna, motivating their consumption choices in the pursuit of social differentiation through consciously developed taste preferences.

Pointing out another aspect of the relationship between consumption, identity, tastes, and preferences, Wilk (1997) focuses on the role of dislikes and distastes in forming group inclusions and exclusions, arguing that choices of what *not* to consume can be even more significant for the formation of identities. Aiming to differentiate themselves from the "typical Turkish taste," the aesthetic choices of Remzi and Seda are governed by distaste and rejection, leading to decisions of what not to consume.

Shaped by distaste towards a particular Turkish group in Vienna and aspirations to certain lifestyles in Turkey, Remzi and Seda's home simultaneously alludes to those two reference points (Figure 5). They think of their home as resembling "modern homes in Turkey." Their list of objects to be avoided includes almost all conventional objects associated with "typically Turkish homes" in Vienna: ceramic-topped coffee tables, *cafaflı* (very ornate and colorful) curtains, copper plates adorned with calligraphic Koranic verses, and calendars with mosque images distributed by Turkish shops. Indeed, more significantly than the way their home is arranged, their reflections on the objects they have reveal just such a struggle for distinct positioning in Vienna. They constantly compare their tastes, shopping manners, and home objects to those of "typical Turkish people in Vienna," as exemplified below:

Figure 5  
Remzi and Seda's living room.



*Remzi:* We bought much of our furniture from Lutz about fifteen years ago. Back then, Turkish people did not shop at Lutz because they thought it was expensive. They are richer than we are, but they do not spend their money. They do not realize that money is for living.

*Seda:* I do not like the Turkish shops in Vienna. They sell *taş rali* [rural, provincial] furniture for Turkish people living here. But there is a newly opened shop that is really good. It sells high-quality and modern furniture with prestigious brands from Turkey.

*Remzi:* Do you want to see our collection of DVDs? We have many recent Turkish films. You cannot see them in other Turkish homes in Vienna.

However, Remzi and Seda have several objects that are associated with the “typically Turkish home,” such as plastic flowers and religious display objects, which they consider as inappropriate to their self-image and representation (Figure 6). Although I was prepared to ask

Figure 6  
Seda's plastic flowers and religious display objects



how and why those objects were acquired in order to find out more of their biography and origins (Appadurai 1988), they felt they had to make a disclaimer before I asked any questions. Regarding me as one of those “modern people in Turkey” whose gaze is significant for them, they avoided giving a wrong impression of themselves. They clarified that these objects do not fit with their tastes but were acquired for other reasons:

*Seda:* I know that plastic flowers are tacky, but I love flowers. I had many flowers before; they were so beautiful. But when I was sick, I could not take care of them and they all died. I do not have the courage to buy flowers again. So, I settled for plastic flowers.

The two religious objects Seda displays in their cabinet are the source of a big controversy between her and Remzi, who is not comfortable with them:

*Remzi:* Why are you insisting on keeping those things?

*Seda:* If we were living in Turkey I would never, ever have them at home. But I told you; in Vienna, I want my children to learn something about Islam. They cannot see them elsewhere in Vienna.

*Remzi:* Okay, but our children are grown up now. One of them is even not living with us anymore.

*Seda:* But now I am used to seeing them there in the cabinet. I cannot simply throw them away. [To me] He is obsessed with those two little things. [To Remzi] Leave my ornaments alone!

Surprisingly, Remzi and Seda’s decorative choices at home have many allusions to Turkey, which is very rare in “typically Turkish homes.” For example, Seda decorated the bathroom in a way to recall İzmir, which is her favorite place in the world (Figure 7). She put up a bathroom curtain with an image of the sea and covered the washing machine



**Figure 7**  
Seda’s shower curtain.



with a cloth adorned with dolphin pictures. She calls the bathroom the “İzmir spot of the home.” The numerous holiday photos on the walls and in albums are Seda’s most valued objects, which remind her of their lifetime and assure her that it was not wasted in Vienna:

Our life in Vienna is very monotonous. During all those years, we woke up very early, worked the whole day and went to bed after dinner. We had fun only during holidays in Turkey. These photos remind me that our life was not too unpleasant.

These objects reconstitute the parts of Remzi’s and Seda’s lives spent in Turkey at their home in Vienna. The value they attribute to them exemplifies how they keep ties with Turkey more strongly than “typical Turkish people in Vienna.” Although they seem “more integrated” in terms of their lifestyles, they do not feel as much at home in Vienna as the majority of their counterparts. Indeed, they say that they would prefer to live in Turkey if they could achieve the same social and economic standards there that they have attained in Vienna. Despite orienting their lives towards Turkey, however, they complain about feeling excluded when there. Detaching themselves from the majority of Turkish people in Vienna, having no access to other Turkish networks, and believing that Austrians will never consider them as friends, Remzi and Seda feel lonely, unlike those who “carried their whole village to Vienna.”

As Çağlar (1997, 2002) has pointed out, many Turkish people who migrated to Germany struggled to achieve higher social positions in Turkey. Yet, she argues, despite seeing themselves as equivalent to the middle classes in Turkey, the symbolic and cultural capital they hold is not sufficient for their acceptance into these groups. Thus, they develop various strategies to overcome the lack of symbolic capital that prevents them from upward social mobility in Turkey. For example, due to the popularity of having pets among the new bourgeoisie and new petite bourgeoisie in Turkey, German Turks get lap dogs and take them to Turkey during summer returns (Çağlar 1997). Or they attempt to decorate their houses in Turkey in a way to achieve a higher social position (Çağlar 2002). Similarly, Turkish people who migrated to Vienna have long since developed various strategies to achieve upward social mobility in Turkey. For example, in the past, they attempted to gain social prestige by traveling to Turkey with Mercedes cars that were filled with gifts “made-in-Europe.” Today, they aim to attain higher social positions by spending part of their summer returns in Turkish holiday resorts.

By contrast, Remzi and Seda transfer the “gaze” of those social groups in Turkey they want to be part of onto their home in Vienna. For example, they, too, have a pet dog, Şeker, through which they can aim to realize their social aspirations, although they have never carried her to Turkey. Remzi tells of an incident with Şeker as follows:

One day when I was walking with Şeker, I saw two veiled Turkish women looking at me and Şeker and talking about how dirty Austrians are because they live with dogs. They believe that if there is a dog in the house, angels do not come in. Can you believe this? Then I called Şeker in Turkish and they realized that I was Turkish. They were shocked. Are they crazy? There are many people in Turkey who have dogs at home.

Remzi's and Seda's relationship with Şeker is very intimate, different from the commodified relationship of German Turks with their lap dogs (Cağlar 1997). Yet owning a dog creates a strong contrast to those Turkish people they wish to dissociate themselves from, placing Şeker in a discursive field of group identifications and boundaries. Şeker detaches them from "typical Turkish people in Vienna" while aligning them with "modern people in Turkey."

Likewise, despite not currently living in Turkey and being invisible to people they feel compatible to, Remzi and Seda arrange their home with references to the "gaze" of those groups in Turkey they aspire to belong to. It is through the "interiorized image of the other," rather than as actual observers, that they work on their homes (Clarke 2001: 42). Arranging their home in relation to two significant groups, that is, "typical Turkish people in Vienna" and "modern people in Turkey," they simultaneously experience these two social worlds at home. Their home is a projection beyond Vienna towards Turkey. Similar to "typically Turkish homes" that are intended for achieving a Turkish collectivity in Vienna, those homes that differ are also powerfully embedded in diasporic strategies of belonging.

### **THE TURKISH EXPERIENCE OF VIENNA AND "INDIFFERENCE TO AESTHETICS"**

Returning to the "typically Turkish home," it is vital to ask how its shared aesthetics evolved. Unlike homes in diasporic or migratory resettlements that are arranged in a way to maintain ties with past lives and locations, the "typically Turkish home" in Vienna has no prior associations with pre-migratory lives. This raises the question of how it actually attains its Turkishness: for example, how is furniture that is referred to as "typically Austrian" appropriated as integral to "typically Turkish homes?"

The collective project of making a home Turkish is achieved not so much by means of "ethnic" objects, as it is often assumed, but rather through an underlying aesthetic ideal that registers certain objects as belonging to the "typically Turkish home." In her study of homes in the Norwegian town of Skien, Garvey (2003) argues that "practicality" in home decoration is a normative aesthetic and social reference, which serves to avoid emulation and competition, instead achieving equality and sameness. Transgressing this normative canon through social ambitions, apparent in the choices of objects, is regarded as a failure

to achieve equality (Gullestad 1984). Likewise, an aesthetic ideal that guides Turkish home-making practices in Vienna serves to build and defend a coherent community, imagined to be devoid of diversities and contests.

The aesthetic ideal that makes a home Turkish can be defined, paradoxically, as “indifference to aesthetics.”<sup>75</sup> As I observed in the arrangements of homes and as identified by households, conformity to the “typically Turkish home” is achieved by supposedly inattentive and careless decoration. For most of my informants, it is useless to spend a great deal of effort and money to beautify the home. The color of the sofa or the styles of the ornaments on the walls are regarded as unimportant. Such an indifference to aesthetics is perhaps best exemplified by the half empty cabinets that are significantly different from those of their counterparts in Turkey. For example, items in Ayla’s cabinet include lace doilies, several glasses, a Turkish flag, a candle bought from a cheap shop, and remote controls, all seemingly placed in a casual manner (Figure 8). She does not consider whether her cabinet looks beautiful or not, because an attractively decorated home is unnecessary in Vienna and, more importantly, conspicuousness fails to achieve the desired collectivity:

If I was in Turkey, I would be crazy for decorating the cabinet like everybody else, in order to show that I am not poor. You know, lots of glasses, porcelain, and the best lace doilies. But here, we know each other very well and we know that we are the same. We know that we suffered a lot. *Gösteriş* [showing off, conspicuousness] by what you possess is very shameful among us. Besides, I do not have such beautiful stuff to display. I do not know what to buy.

Ayla’s comments mirror fundamental aspects of the communal narrative of the Turkish experience of Vienna, realized through the material culture of the home: social similarity, common suffering from



Figure 8  
Ayla’s half empty cabinet.

poverty, and the ideal of getting together rather than competing. The “Turkish home” relates to the “external” social world, not through emulation and competition as it is often assumed, but rather through the lack or repression of desire to compete in order to forge collective belonging. Situated against “conspicuous consumption,” which is driven by envy and competition (Veblen 1957), the collective Turkish home is achieved by consumption practices that are conformist, safe, and inconspicuous. Although it may conflict with the tendency to search for higher social positions in Turkey by means of European objects, the opposition to conspicuousness is one of the strongest references by which Turkish people in Vienna differentiate themselves from their counterparts in Turkey, whom they criticize for superfluous consumption.

Inhabitants of the “typically Turkish home” share similar material histories of migration and resettlement. They occupy similar social positions in Vienna. Either they or their parents migrated as guest workers from rural origins in Turkey. Women either quit their paid jobs or have never worked outside the home. They mostly share religious lifestyles and some express their commitment to political Islam. Yet similarities in social and economic positions are not only expressed in, but also constituted by the aesthetic order and discourse that govern the collectively created Turkish home. “Indifference to aesthetics” operates as a social reference by which coherence is visually constructed and materialized, and inevitable differences are masked in favor of a Turkish collectivity (Garvey 2003). Thus, indifference to aesthetics as an aesthetic norm by no means implies a lack of effort on home decoration. Indeed, as a normative decorative order and discourse serving to define and represent a collective Turkish life in Vienna, it requires a great deal of effort in conformity.

The emergence of an “indifference to aesthetics” as a social reference is the result of two interrelated Turkish guest worker experiences in Vienna. The first is the “myth of return,” held by the majority of Turkish people in Vienna until around the early 1990s, which implies the desire to return to the home country and considering life in the new setting as temporary (Anwar 1979). The motivation to migrate was to work for several years and save enough money to buy land, a house or at least a tractor and to return to the hometowns in Turkey. Therefore, for a long time migrants made do with the bare necessities and tried to save their earnings for a future life “back home.” An orientation of life towards Turkey rather than Vienna can perhaps be best observed in different attitudes to homes in the two places. With the money saved so far, many families built a home in Turkey and decorated them enthusiastically during this period, while regarding their homes in Vienna as temporary and secondary. The “indifference to aesthetics” is the perfect aesthetic approach to those insignificant and temporary homes that are suspended between return and settlement and powerfully serves for their constitution as such.

The second Turkish guest worker experience in Vienna is the widespread poverty, real or ritualistic, which is closely related to the myth of return and the resulting unwillingness to spend money. Although the factual poverty of the pre- and post-migratory years has largely vanished today, its effects continue to exist in the form of a custom of poverty. While young people who grew up in Vienna think that money is for spending to achieve a better life, their parents, the first-generation migrants, often state that they are unable to spend money even if they wish to, voicing feelings similar to the following: “Whenever I like something in a shop, when it comes to paying for it, it seems pointless to buy it. I am not used to spending money.” Both the real and the ritualistic poverty resulted in long-time avoidance of consumption in Vienna and shaped particular Turkish shopping customs: not knowing what to buy and searching for the cheapest items, irrespective of the amount of money one has.

Ayla is one of those Turkish customers whose sole criterion for choosing among a range of objects is the price. She has been living in Vienna for thirty-one years and moved into her current three-room apartment fifteen years ago with her husband and two sons. For her, neither style nor quality of the furniture is an important question for decorating home. She bought her furniture from Möbelix, “only because it is the cheapest store.” When things break or become worn out, she buys new ones because “they are cheap anyway.” If she finds something exceptionally cheap, she buys it regardless of whether she needs it or likes it. Although they do not have any economic problems at present (her husband owns a butchery shop in Vienna and the family owns a building with three apartments in Yozgat, Turkey), they maintain shopping habits that grew out of their past poverty. Ayla regards spending more money on items that fulfill the same functions as meaningless, not because of her frugality but because she does not have any criteria for differentiating between objects other than price:

I came to Vienna at the age of twelve. We, the whole family, were living in a one-room apartment... For a very long time, we did not buy any new furniture. We lived with furniture that Austrians had thrown away. So, I do not know about the value of goods. I do not know what to buy. We buy anything cheap and then discard it when it breaks.

When joining the womens' home meetings, an important topic of conversation was about where to get the cheapest goods. As a group, they searched for the lowest prices in Turkish and also other shops known to be inexpensive, such as Chinese stores and street markets, especially Brunnenmarkt.<sup>4</sup> They went to sales promoted in advertisements and catalogs left in the mailboxes to get things for the best price. They inform each other about sales and when they discover a good sale or

a cheap shop, they go there together. Shopping is a collective social activity devoted to finding the cheapest goods. This effort cannot be simply explained by frugality or a wish to satisfy needs by paying less. It is a more complex activity: “liking the cheap” that brings rewards such as fun, satisfaction, conformity rather than competition, and achievement of a communal narrative on a ritualistic poverty (Figure 9).

Another factor that shapes “indifference to aesthetics” as the ideal of home decoration is the material features of the apartments in Vienna. As Miller (2002: 115) states, “the word ‘accommodating’ may imply our changing of a home to suit ourselves, but it can also imply the need to change ourselves in order to suit our accommodation.” The smallness of apartments in Vienna in comparison to those in Turkey plays a decisive role in decoration practices as it limits choices of furniture. For example, although the recently growing interest in furniture imported from Turkey has started to replace the emphasis on cheap and inconspicuous furniture, it is difficult to redecorate homes with this furniture due to space limitations. Designed for larger spaces, furniture such as armchair sets are seen to be “for apartments in Turkey, for proper homes.”<sup>5</sup>

Recently, many Turkish households holding Austrian citizenship moved into or registered for *Gemeindebauwohnungen* (state housing), which are “more proper apartments,” more spacious. Combined with the decision to permanently stay in Vienna and the boom of Turkish shops, moving into better apartments has opened a new era in aesthetic practices and discourses on homes. The furniture that stands for aesthetic indifference has started to be replaced with the “attractive and beautiful Turkish furniture” sold by Turkish shops. Selma, for example, moved into a *Gemeindebauwohnung* two years ago and considered buying new furniture from a newly opened Turkish shop. Although she was worried about going against the shared aesthetics of the “typically Turkish home,” her friends who also value the new Turkish shops encouraged her to buy new furniture. Selma bought a sofa and armchair set in red, which is her favorite color, painted the walls orange to give the apartment a warm atmosphere and placed “precious things” in the cabinet, such as porcelain with *çini* decoration (a traditional motif) she bought in Kütahya, Turkey (Figure 10). Her new home differs from the “typically Turkish home” not so much in terms of furniture arrangements but rather in terms of attention paid to objects, styles, and colors; in short, to the aesthetics of the home. Selma’s home exemplifies the recent transformation from the “typically Turkish home” governed by “indifference to aesthetics” to the “beautiful Turkish home” decorated with furniture from Turkey.

The new furniture sold by Turkish shops is central to the widely discussed transformation in Turkish life in Vienna, from saving money for a future life in Turkey to making permanent homes in Vienna. Turkish people have started to replace their “aesthetically indifferent” furniture, which marked their homes in Vienna as temporary and



**Figure 9**  
Bargain hunting in  
Brunnenmarkt.



**Figure 10**  
Selma’s living room and  
porcelain decorative objects.

insignificant, with the “beautiful Turkish furniture” at the moment they decided to stay in Vienna or realized that this decision had already, perhaps inadvertently, been made. Indeed, Turkish furniture shops have started to open in quick succession, spotting a newly emerging consumer potential among Turkish people who realized that they are *kalıcı* (permanently staying) in Vienna.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the marketing strategy of Hane Mobilya—the first Turkish furniture shop in Vienna—explicitly recognizes that for many people, a return to Turkey is simply unrealistic. Its website states:

Hane Mobilya is a Turkish firm which was founded in Vienna in 1999 and has represented furniture from Turkey in Vienna for five years. Turkish people in Europe have invested in Turkey for years and tried to decorate their homes in Turkey in the best way, believing that they will have a better and more comfortable life in those homes after returning to Turkey. Today, our people who live here answer to the question of “whether to stay in Europe or to return” with “it is difficult to return.” Millions of people have stayed here. Let’s decorate our homes where we spend our lives with the comfortable and beautiful furniture from Turkey, along with our hearts. We live only once. Our time is precious. As you are *kalıcı* here, so are we.

Turkish furniture retailers in Vienna offer an engagement with taste worlds in Turkey, but in culturally, socially, and economically unique (and limited) ways. The style connections with Turkey via furniture are uneasy and have specificities that shape a local particularity of Turkish taste cultures in Vienna. Through articulating specific definitions of Turkish taste in Vienna and eliminating different tastes in accordance with their marketing strategies, furniture retailers decide the range of available Turkish furniture in Vienna. The “beautiful Turkish home” is a new and particular aesthetic and cultural form that emerges from specific paths of displacement and relocation of Turkish furniture, determined by sources and strategies of diaspora economies.

To sum up, the aesthetically indifferent home is collectively consented to and defended, not because it is regarded as beautiful or tasteful, or because it has ethnic associations to Turkishness, but rather because it corresponds with the particular Turkish experience of migration and resettlement. Both as a governing aesthetic ideal of home decoration and as a social reference, “indifference to aesthetics” objectifies a communal narrative of the Turkish experience of Vienna. The recently emerging ideal home fitted with “beautiful Turkish furniture” derives its Turkishness from the fact that those interiors are imported from Turkey and sold in Turkish shops. Yet far from operating as a crude symbol for Turkishness, the “beautiful Turkish furniture” derives its value from the fact that it tells of and shapes the transformation of Turkish life in Vienna, from the myth of return to the decision

to permanently settle. As such, home is an aesthetic and material medium by which Turkish people can objectify their story of migration and resettlement, and achieve, realize, and transform their sense of belonging to the space and time they inhabit.

## CONCLUSION

This article addressed how Turkish homes in Vienna are powerfully embedded in diasporic strategies of belonging and local articulations of collective identities. It raises several arguments regarding homes in diasporic and migratory contexts: firstly, aesthetic and material practices of home-making intertwine with processes of constructing a collective sense of diasporic belonging. The aesthetic discourse which produces the “typically Turkish home,” that is “indifference to aesthetics,” serves as a social medium through which a coherent Turkish community is imagined and objectified. It also serves as an aesthetic reference for those who wish to differentiate themselves from the “typical Turkish people in Vienna” and reveals conflicts and contests that are played out in the materiality of the everyday. Yet this ideal aesthetic order does not operate merely as a sign by which Turkishness and group identifications are evaluated. It is a significant social and material medium, which produces and reproduces a communal narrative and memory of Turkish experiences of home-making in Vienna. The recent transformation in the experience of Vienna from a temporary to a permanent place of dwelling has been matched with changing aesthetic practices. The new homes that are carefully decorated with Turkish furniture signify and reconstitute Vienna as the major and permanent ground of belonging.

Secondly, focusing on aesthetic and material practices of making homes highlights the agency of women in shaping diasporic belongings and relations, differently from the studies that address “spheres in which migrant women’s agency is usually quite invisible” (Salih 2002: 52). The interviews on home decoration were generally conducted with women, unless occasionally men were present. With few exceptions, men in general are not concerned with home-related choices and shopping. They generally responded to my home-related questions with phrases such as “ask *hanım* [my wife]” or “*hanım* knows.” It has been well documented that as a site where women express and construct themselves and their relations, the home ascribes agency and power to them (see, for example, Attfield and Kirkham 1989; Putnam and Newton 1990). However, the control and power of women at home is also seen as limited to this narrow context and associated with powerlessness in wider social contexts (Gullestad 1992). On the other hand, making a Turkish home in Vienna is closely linked to building, performing, and debating a Turkish collectivity. While women create and re-create their homes and give meaning to this space, they also articulate collective identities and diasporic social relations.



Lastly, this article aims to point out the local particularity of Turkish home-making practices in Vienna. Both the “aesthetically indifferent home” and the “beautiful Turkish home” are *new* and *particular* cultural forms that have emerged out of specific biographies and experiences of migration and resettlement that yield specific ways of engagement with the world of material objects. Hence, the diasporic aesthetics of Turkish homes in Vienna moves beyond both essentialist views and hybridization accounts. It is not a self-evident cultural form, which exists prior to the experience of migration and is inherited from a past. Nor is it a simple blending or mixture of two distinct cultural forms that are supposed to form some sort of holistic culture of the country of origin and of the country of settlement. Turkish homes in Vienna are culturally, socially, and historically particular forms that are articulated within specific processes, following paths of displacement and dwelling of both people and material objects.

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### NOTES

1. The mass migration from Turkey to Austria started with the bilateral labor recruitment contract signed on May 15, 1964 between the two countries. Today, the number of immigrants from Turkey and their descendants residing in Austria, with either Turkish or Austrian citizenship, is around 200,000. Following Germany, France, and the Netherlands, Austria accommodates the fourth largest Turkish group in Western Europe. About 40 percent of its Turkish population has settled in Vienna due to the high concentration of industry and chain migration through ethnic networking.
2. There exist huge differences between people who migrated as guest workers and as students or ex pats, between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic identifications, and between Sunni and Alevi religious identifications. However, rejecting a pre-given and self-evident category of community, identity or culture, this study is not based on an attempt to define different focus groups and to reflect on or compare them. This ethnography rather follows a repertoire of Turkish objects in Vienna and certain individuals and groups, aiming to understand the active constitution of identities within the aesthetics of the everyday. It is also important to remark that the majority of my informants have Turkish and Sunni backgrounds. Either they or their parents migrated to Vienna as guest workers. Throughout this article, “Turkish” is used to refer to people who

migrated from Turkey and to their children who were born and grew up in Vienna. This is not a random choice for practical reasons but follows from the fact that all of my informants presented in this article referred to themselves as Turkish.

3. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Applied Arts Vienna, 2008.
4. Brunnenmarkt is a permanent street market located in the 16th district, Ottakring, and one of the significant places that hosts a collective Turkish presence. Food stands at Brunnenmarkt and the shops surrounding the area are dominated by Turkish vendors. The neighborhood, the Brunnenviertel, is populated mainly by Turkish households and called “little Istanbul” (“*Klein-Istanbul*” by Austrians and “*küçük İstanbul*” by Turkish people). In addition, it is also called “*küçük Yozgat*” by Turkish people who do not identify themselves with the “typical Turkish community” in Vienna. Yozgat is a small town in central Anatolia from where migration to Vienna has been widespread.
5. My informants consider small Viennese apartments as appropriate to Austrian lifestyles, but not proper for a Turkish home life. They believe that “Austrians use their homes like a hotel.”
6. *Kalıcı* is one of the significant words in Turkish vocabulary in Vienna. It is used to refer to people who decided to stay in a place. My informants use this word to describe permanent residence in Vienna, in phrases such as “*Biz Viyana’da kalıcıyız*” (“We are *kalıcı* in Vienna”), and “*Sen kalıcı mısın?*” (“Are you *kalıcı*?”).

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