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Transnational Consumption Practices for Social Mobility: A Study of Turkish Immigrants in Denmark

Mine Üçok
Department of Marketing
University of Southern Denmark, Odense

Introduction

The aim of this research is to provide a better understanding of the consumption practices of a new type of immigrants called “transmigrants” (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994) through a “multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus 1995). It explores how the multiple identities of today’s migrants are shaped by and constructed through their consumption practices in multiple localities. The argument is put forth that in order to have a better understanding of the migrants’ lives today, we need to go beyond the limitations imposed by the concept of nation-state and look beyond its borders into the spaces created across the nations. This discussion draws from the field of migration studies such concepts as *transnationalism*, *transmigrants* and *transnational social spaces* to convey the transitional nature of the migration phenomenon. Emphasis is placed on the consumption practices of transmigrants, which give important clues to their self-identities and act as a marker of social status as exemplified through the case of Turkish¹ immigrants in Denmark.

New approaches to migration: transmigrants and transnational social spaces

Migration implies a movement between the social, economic, cultural, and political spheres of the globe. It has been studied mainly as a movement between places, from one significant environment to another, and from one set of social relationships to another (Rouse 2002). What is different about the migrants of today is that they do not cut their ties with their home countries but instead, maintain a connection that expands over nations. They form a

¹ The informants of this study consist of immigrants from Turkey with Turkish and Kurdish ethnic origins. The label of “Turkish immigrants” in this paper will be used to denote all immigrants from Turkey, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.

community that stretches across boundaries (Xavier Inda and Rosaldo 2001, p. 20) which could be referred to as a “transnational migrant circuit” (Rouse 2002, p. 162).

Stuart Hall captures the complex nature of the new migrants and describes it as:

[..] people who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically), inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home; who have learned to negotiate and translate *between* cultures, and who, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, have learned to live with, and indeed to speak from *difference*. They speak from the “in-between” of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another, and thus finding ways of being both *the same* as and at the same time *different from* the others amongst whom they live (as quoted in Xavier Inda and Rosaldo 2001, p. 19, [Hall 1995, p. 206]; emphasis in the original).

A new anthropology of transnational migration is emerging which labels such international migrants as “transmigrants” (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). According to the advocates of this argument “transnational migration is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (ibid.).

Rapid developments in transportation and communication technologies are connecting people all over the world faster and more efficiently than ever before. In the presence of the internet and satellite broadcasting, national borders are losing their significance. Complex global systems connect the fate of communities in one locale to the fate of communities in distant regions of the world. Worldwide interconnectedness is experienced in every aspect of contemporary life. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argue that both in ethnological and national discourses, the association between people and places has been regarded as solid, commonsensical, and agreed upon, when they are in fact in flux, uncertain, and contested. In support of this argument, Ludger Pries (2001) claims that the ties between the social and geographical spaces are weakening as “transnational social spaces” emerge. In an age in which the status of the nation-state is contested, focusing on geographically bounded spaces in order to understand migration has insufficient power to explain the transnational aspects of this phenomenon. In order to make sense of people’s lives, with their constant border crossings, one needs to look across transnational social spaces. Pries (2001) suggests an approach of transnational social spaces, where:

A focus on transnational social spaces is based on the conviction that we must look systematically for multi-sited social realities composed of material artefacts, social practices and everyday life, as well as systems of symbolic representation that are structured by and, at the same time, structure human life, and span more

than one nation-state not only in a transitory manner but in a stable manner over time. (p. 28).

Based on this approach, studying consumption practices that take place in these transnational social spaces seems to be an appropriate way to provide a better understanding of these spaces. Consumption is about material artefacts, is a social practice of every day life and is full of symbolic representations (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, McCracken 1988, Belk 1988). When moving in-between places, immigrants carry their material possessions (Mehta and Belk 1991), engage in consumption practices of several kinds on a daily basis and use consumption symbolically as part of their identity construction and social communication.

Transmigrants are constantly on the move, in-between geographies, cultures and ways of living. As Jeffrey Jurgens (2001) puts it “[m]igration represents not only movement through space, but also movement through and across different social class/status structures in different national labour markets” (p. 104). These social class and status differences manifest themselves in consumption practices.

Symbolic meaning of consumption

Exploring consumption practices gives us clues about the culture of a particular group, as they are loaded with signs and meanings that add up to something as profound as one’s identity. As Russell Belk (1988) argues “our possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities” (p. 139). In the arguably postmodern times of today, the symbolic meanings of goods have become more important than their utility values (Bourdieu 1984; McCracken 1988). All acts of consumption, conscious or unconscious, carry symbolic meanings. Possessions play an irreplaceable role in creating a sense of identity that not only distinguishes one from the rest of the crowd but also helps to achieve a sense of belongingness to the group of others with similar possessions.

Social embeddedness of consumption

In *World of Goods: towards an anthropology of consumption* (1996, 1979), Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, an anthropologist and an economist, approach consumption from a socio-cultural perspective criticizing the neoclassical economic theory in terms of having little explanatory power when it comes to people’s consumption practices as it disregards the role of society and culture. The neoclassical economic theory assumes that consumers are rational individuals that make decisions in isolation, have insatiable wants and needs, and seek utility maximization in a world of scarce goods. In the real world, people often make irrational decisions which are hardly ever made in isolation and many times based on socio-psychological reasons. Douglas and Isherwood’s (1996) main argument is that “the theory of consumption has to be

a theory of culture and a theory of social life” (pp. xxii-xxiii). They state that “[i]t is standard ethnographic practice to assume that all material possessions carry social meanings and to concentrate a main part of cultural analysis upon their use as communicators” (ibid., p. 38). They investigate the reasons why people want what they want and why they save. In their analysis they situate the individual within a social group explaining the individual’s actions as part of a group membership. Therefore, they oppose the neoclassical economic theory’s assumption that consumption decisions are made in isolation and state that “consumption standards are socially determined” (ibid., p. 26).

James Duesenberry was the first economist to criticize the traditional utility theory that ignored the fact that decisions were made in a social environment (Douglas and Isherwood 1996). He introduced a sociological outlook to economic behaviour and argued for the importance of interdependence of preferences by emphasizing the role of societal influences on the individual’s decision making process, stating that “a real understanding of the problem of consumer behaviour must begin with a full recognition of the social character of consumption patterns” (Duesenberry 1949, p. 19).

Duesenberry attached great importance to the social character of consumption and proposed that social status was a key factor influencing the process of choice and the purchase of goods (Mason 2002, p. 92). According to his argument, people consume conspicuously in order to maintain or improve their social status among those who they perceive to be their social equals, at the same time distancing themselves from those whom they regard as their social inferiors (ibid., p. 93). Therefore, much expenditure is determined by social, rather than by economic motives (ibid.).

In a similar manner, Bourdieu (1984) discusses how taste, as manifested in one’s consumption patterns, is a source of classification for the person in a social hierarchy. He claims that “taste classifies and classifies the classifier” (ibid., p. 5) and “is a marker of class” (ibid., p. 2). According to Bourdieu, consumers are situated in a social hierarchy, and their needs are the product of their upbringing and education. In addition to the economic capital, which is central to Marxist theory, Bourdieu integrates two more types of capital, the cultural and the social one (which he also calls symbolic), into his analysis. The economic capital is one’s financial assets, and social capital is one’s social network and group membership. The cultural capital is mainly related to the general knowledge associated with acquired arts and style of living, usually through the family one is born into, and education obtained through formal institutions and family. He argues that the cultural and social capitals are often ignored as their transmissions are more disguised than the economic one. To Bourdieu (2001), capital signifies power and forms of capital can be transformed into one another under certain circumstances. He continues to argue that the upper classes constantly change their tastes for particular things

in an attempt to distinguish themselves from the lower classes. Once the lower classes emulate the lifestyle of the upper classes, the taste of the upper classes alters in order to maintain a gap.

Conspicuous consumption

As early as in 1899, Thorstein Veblen drew attention to the possession of goods as social status signifiers and how they act to distinguish the classes from one another. In his book, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, he investigates the “conspicuous consumption” of the “vicarious leisure class” that consume wastefully in order to differentiate themselves from the working class. According to Veblen (2000) “[c]onspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure” (p. 191). His main theory revolves around the argument that consumption of “more excellent goods” (ibid., p. 190) is a mark of social status. The failure to consume certain goods “becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit” (ibid.). But, simply consuming such goods is not sufficient to earn merit, as it is also necessary to consume them in an appropriate manner. Veblen regarded both conspicuous leisure and consumption as “methods of demonstrating the possession of wealth” (ibid.).

According to Anne Mayhew (2002, p. 54) “All consumption is conspicuous in that it serves to reaffirm the consumer’s role as part of a group or to mark the outsider.” Mayhew (ibid.) summarizes the social embeddedness of consumption by stating that:

All consumption is visible and made visible to mark the consumers as members of their group, to mark the status of each, and to inform outsiders that each is a member, not an outsider. Thus is all consumption conspicuous. Of course, people enjoy many traits inherent in the goods and services that they consume: the taste, sound, smell, and use of goods are important. But non-functional and functional demands are all functional in establishing group identity; all demand is intersubjective.

This model of consumption, contrary to that proposed by neoclassical economists, is particularly applicable in the case of immigrants. Once relocated in the host country, immigrants often live in close clusters of people from their native countries, marked by strong social ties. The norms, values and beliefs of their societies and cultures have powerful influences on their lifestyles, decision-making processes and consumption practices. What may seem like individual decisions are often the result of a communication within close social networks and sometimes even societal pressures. Mehta and Belk (1991) find that possessions play an important role in the reconstruction of an immigrant identity. They compare two Indian groups, one living in India and the other in the United States, in terms of their favorite possessions and claim that “[w]hen possessions are seen as a part of the individual or family identity, they may also

allow immigrants to ‘transport’ part of their former identities to a new place” (Mehta and Belk 1991, p. 399) and that “[d]uring geographic movement away from the people, places, and things of previous home, cities, and nations, an increased burden is placed on individual possessions for anchoring identity” (ibid., p. 400). They also find that the Indian immigrants value Indian traditions and customs more than they did when they were in India.

Consumption in transnational social spaces

As discussed above, possessions play important roles in communicating one’s identity, social status and class. In the case of transmigrants whose lives stretch across several national borders, cultures and communities, they tend to acquire several identities as their social status and class vary, depending on the social and national contexts. Many transmigrants, who constantly travel back and forth between their countries of origin and settlement, carry their possessions with them, often as status symbols. Transmigrants’ possessions also acquire different meanings in different contexts as documented in the following examples.

Ruba Salih (2002) provides an account of the Moroccan women’s transnational practices between Italy and Morocco in which she focuses on their consumption practices as a domain of objectification and expression of social status (p. 53). “Consumption of commodities and the flow of goods between Morocco and Italy represent significant arenas through which social meanings and migrant women’s creation and recreation of self and ‘home’ can be analysed” (ibid.). Generational differences exist among these immigrants, as the first generation divert their savings to investments in land and property in Morocco while the children push their parents to conform to an Italian lifestyle through consumption of certain types of commodities as they yearn for social recognition in Italy. Salih (2002) draws attention not only to the flow of goods, ideas and cultural meanings, but also to the ways “in which things are given new social and cultural meanings, and what kind of relations they produce, modify or redefine in the social field in which they are received and consumed” (p. 56). She studies the conceptualization of home in particular. Salih (2002) claims that women signify the social identity of the family by displaying material objects; for example as in the case of the unused espresso machine in a Moroccan women’s kitchen on display or similarly, a blender that was given as a gift to a relative back in Morocco but never has been used.

In another study, Ayse Caglar (2002) examines how the symbolic meaning of a particular object, a coffee table, changes in the contexts of the home and host countries. She demonstrates “how the same group of people use and manipulate the same object to construct their identity and social relations differently” (Caglar 2002). She studies the Turkish immigrants in Germany and brings to the attention how the decoration and organization of their homes in Turkey and

Germany differ strikingly. She describes the furnishing of the homes in Germany as lacking homogeneity, full of objects that show relationships with Turkey and not decorated fashionably. In Caglar's (2002) words, these homes are "not conceived as places appropriate to the display of conspicuous wealth" (p. 298). On the other hand the same people's homes in Turkey show distinct differences. The furniture is much more homogeneous as opposed to the second-hand furniture in homes in Germany and there is an apparent concern with fashion and displaying wealth. In accordance with this, the coffee table in these different living rooms has different functions and meanings. Caglar connects the significance of this particular consumption object to the German Turks' quest for recognition. The important question is recognition by whom and where. Her analyses are based on Bourdieu's notion of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. Caglar (2002) claims that even though in terms of economic capital there are no severe differences between Turkish immigrants and German workers, they have a clear deficit in their cultural and symbolic capitals which are relatively harder to achieve. Being stigmatized as a foreign group, a non-European one, they suffer from a lack of social recognition in Germany. Therefore, Turkey becomes the "most convenient site to anchor their envisioned social mobility, by converting economic capital into social and symbolic capital" (p. 303), and this can be observed in the differences between their displays of material culture in multiple national contexts where they have various types of social recognition. Working class German Turks find themselves economically closer to the middle classes in Turkey. However, on this side they also find resistance from the middle classes that do not find German Turks' symbolic capital sufficient enough to allow them to be members of this class. Caglar (2002) draws attention to the importance of context when she writes that "[t]ransnational collectivities not only have multiple and fluid identities, but also have multiple syntaxes of space which shift according to context" (p. 304).

Similar to the coffee table of Caglar's German Turk families, in Laura Oswald's study (1999), cornmeal becomes both sacred and profane for the Haitian immigrant family in the USA depending on the national context. In Oswald's account, while the informer describes her use of cornmeal in Haiti and the United States, she

[...] moves in and out of roles, moves between several different cultural frames, and moves between first-person narrative discourse and the dramatic representation of the speech of others. She consistently doubles references for indexical pronouns including, 'I,' 'we,' 'here,' and 'there,' shifting imperceptibly between the present in America and her past in Haiti (Oswald 1999, pp. 311-312).

According to Oswald (1999), these immigrants do not think of themselves as having left one place and assimilated to another. Their stories do not run on a linear narrative, making it difficult to segment ethnic markets into

homogeneous groups, “since at any given moment the ethnic consumer may be using goods to identify with either ‘here’ or ‘there’” (p. 312).

A multi-sited ethnographic study of Turkish immigrants in Denmark

Research background

The rapid growth of industrialization in Western Europe in the second half of the twentieth century had borne a deficiency in the available labour force which was compensated for by importing guest workers from countries where there was unemployment and people were seeking better life standards and job opportunities. Along with Germany, France, Belgium and Sweden, Denmark opened up its borders to welcome thousands of guest workers during the late 1960s and the early 1970s. These countries anticipated using such guest workers as unskilled labourers who would work in the host country for a limited period of time and then return to their countries of origin upon completion of work. What might have been feasible in theory at the time, however, did not prove to be so in practice, as millions of migrants settled down in their new “homes”, causing social, economic, cultural and political consequences that are perceptible to this very day.

According to the Danish Statistics of 2004, there is about a quarter of a million immigrants in Denmark which has a total population of 5.4 million. The biggest ethnic minority group included in this figure is the Turks, with their number reaching over 30,000. With the inclusion of the naturalized people who have been granted Danish citizenship, this number rises to 54,000 (ibid.). The first Turkish immigrants arrived in Denmark in the late 1960s, either as guest workers or tourists looking for jobs. Despite the tightening laws and the migration freeze that was passed in 1973, the number of Turkish immigrants in Denmark continues to rise due to family reunifications and new marriages. Literally hundreds of marriages are contracted every year between the migrant’s children and girls and boys from Turkey, especially during the summer vacation months.

Methodology

This research utilizes a “multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus 1995) that stretches across the two nation-states of Denmark and Turkey. Multi-sited ethnography suggests an approach that moves away from the conventional single-site location to “multiple sites of observation and participation those cross-cut dichotomies such as the ‘local’ and the ‘global’, the ‘lifeworld’ and the ‘system’” (Marcus 1995, p. 95). “Ethnoconsumerism” (Venkatesh 1995), described as the study of consumption from the point of view of the social group or cultural group that is the subject of study, is taken as the central

approach. Ethnoconsumerism is defined as a conceptual framework that uses the theoretical categories originating in a given culture (ibid.). An ethnoconsumerist point of view criticizes the general tendency to adopt and adapt general theoretical categories across different cultural settings and proposes that in order to understand the consumption practices of a given culture we need to examine behavior on the basis of the cultural realities of the subject of study. Therefore, in this research, etic and emic perspectives, with an emphasis on the emic one, were taken into consideration while collecting data on multiple sites.

Multiple data collection techniques, which included semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation and photography were used. Interviews and conversations were conducted with 12 Turkish immigrant families and several individuals in both Denmark and Turkey. The fieldwork stretched over a period of one year, which included preliminary data collection in Denmark, followed by more data collection in Turkey with the immigrant families and their communities in multiple sites. Observations were made during social events such as weddings, during daily activities such as shopping and while travelling between Denmark and Turkey. Photographs were taken of the immigrants' dwellings, neighbourhoods and artifacts – to give clues to their lifestyles. In addition, print and broadcast media were used as supplementary data.

The method of triangulation was used to gather information from different sources. Besides the accounts of the main informants being Turkish immigrants living in Denmark, interviews and observations were made with people from different contexts like the families of immigrants who are left behind and live in Turkey and the local people living in the towns of origin in Turkey. This triangulation of sources enriched the data and enhanced the trustworthiness of the research.

Changing consumption practices of Turkish immigrants in Denmark

At a first glance, the Turkish immigrant community in Denmark might seem to be a homogeneous group. Yet a deeper investigation reveals certain differences among its members. There are several factors, including age, education level, area of residence, and occupation that set the immigrants apart from each other, which have consequences for their consumption practices. As other studies reveal (Ger and Østergaard 1998; Jurgens 2001), you can hardly speak of one common Turkish immigrant identity.

The first generation of Turkish immigrants that arrived in Denmark and other parts of Europe had the main intention of saving money and going back to Turkey in a few years time. The common consumption practices of these people included purchase of property and land in Turkey, of gold coins and gold jewelry, and purchase of shares in Turkish companies. This trend seems to

be changing among those who have a stronger tendency to direct their investments towards their country of settlement, Denmark. In most cases the “myth of return” (Anwar 1979) of the first generation was not realized. Instead, they began to bring their families and settle down in their new homes, forming ever-enlarging communities. The majority of the descendants who came to Denmark as children, were born in Denmark or arrived as “imported” brides and grooms, differ from the first generation in terms of their mentality and consumption practices. Erdem², 40 years old, is technically a first-generation immigrant as he was born outside Denmark, but refers to himself as “second generation”³ because he came to Denmark at the age of 18 by means of family reunification. He puts forward this difference between the consumption patterns of generations by observing that:

there are still [Turkish immigrant] families living in Denmark who are still thinking of returning. They exist physically in Denmark but their souls are in Turkey. ... [he] builds three *gecekodu*⁴ next to one another, as if that’s not enough he buys some more land. Children, the new generations say “what shall I do with them? Why did you buy them? I wish you bought a Mercedes here so we can drive it”. ... Things have changed. The new generations, the second generation does not want to invest in Turkey anymore, they do not want to go and burry money in the mountains of Sivas and Çorum [towns in Turkey] (personal interview 2003).

A majority of the first-generation immigrants in Denmark have been saving up for a better life in Turkey in the future, but this trend has changed for their children who feel that life has to be lived in Denmark now. However, having said this, it must be noted that this is not valid for all immigrants. Not all immigrants conform to the assumed consumption patterns of their generation. While some first-generation immigrants have decided to settle in Denmark, some descendants still save up for their return.

The following quotation helps to depict the lifestyles of the first-generation immigrants especially during the initial years of their arrival.

We never thought we would settle down here, that our kids would grow up here. That’s why we were so frugal at the time. We wore old clothes, ate old things, and used old furniture. We didn’t send my youngest daughter to kindergarten in order

² The names of the informants have been changed in order to ensure anonymity.

³ An immigrant is a person born outside the host country and technically it is not correct to call someone a “second-generation immigrant” if s/he was born in the host country. However, in colloquial language the informants refer to themselves as “second-generation immigrants” whether they are born in or outside Denmark. Adopting an emic, ethnoconsumerist approach, I subscribe to the informants’ usage of the term.

⁴ *Gecekodu* literally means ‘built overnight’ and refers to the shanty town houses built in the outskirts of main cities in Turkey, on land that usually belonged to the state, by lower income people that have migrated from the rural parts of Turkey.

to save money. We brought our elder daughter from the village in Turkey to look after the baby. I regret that now because my elder daughter was never successful at school or later in life. We were ignorant and frugal. (Mustafa, 65 years old, pensioner, personal interview 2003).

Another anecdote again by Erdem reaffirms the mentality of the first-generation immigrants who led frugal lifestyles in Denmark while yearning for higher standards of living in Turkey:

Colour television sets were just out when I was a teenager. I begged my father to buy one but he was reluctant at first. Finally he gave in and bought a new colour television. We were so happy and we were dreaming that one day when we would move back to Turkey we would not take anything back 'cause everything we owned was second-hand, old stuff, except this colour television. Years followed years, so many other television sets we have bought and we are still here. (personal interview 2003).

These stories repeatedly reveal the changing lifestyles and consumption practices of the Turkish immigrants. In order to economize on rent, it was quite common for six adults to live in the same apartment with their kids. All adults would work, and the salaries would be given to the head of the household, the father, who would give them some pocket money. Eating out, buying new furniture, spending money for entertainment outside of the home were all regarded as luxuries that one could not afford. Second-hand shops were the main places to buy clothes and other needs of the members of the family. The number of families with cars was limited; people would often walk or use inexpensive public transportation to the market, where they would buy the cheapest goods on offer. In order to save money, women would bake bread and other Turkish delicacies at home for the entire family, as well as for neighbours, most commonly being members of the extended family.

Some immigrants, who are mainly descendants that have decided for a future in their country of settlement, show differences in their consumption patterns. Sevgi, 40 years old, who came to Denmark as Erdem's wife when she was 16, describes the gradual changes in their lifestyle as they moved out of the apartment they shared for four years with Erdem's parents, brother and sister-in-law. She says it was a conscious decision of theirs to move into a non-immigrant neighbourhood where their two daughters could go to school with Danish children rather than with other immigrant kids. She states:

We didn't have any social life. For example we never used to go out to the theatre, to the cinema, or to eat. We used to work only to save. Slowly, slowly our mentality started to change. We started to divert our attentions to other things. For example we started to buy newspapers, give importance to other things, read more books, go out more to dine. Then our kids grew up and we felt obliged to do other

social activities. ...our main aim was to save money and buy a house in Turkey. But we didn't have any preference about how to decorate our home, what style of clothes to wear. It was not important at the time, we used to wear whatever we found in the sales. We didn't care whether our furniture matched or not. But now, if I like something, I buy it whether it is expensive or not. Because now I am thinking since I live here I want to live according to my taste and wants. But I didn't used to think that way before (personal interview 2003).

Sevgi, who is a social worker, represents a group of immigrants that are mostly better educated, have white-collar jobs as opposed to working as factory workers or cleaners like their first-generation parents, consciously distinguishing themselves from the immigrants that lead more "traditional" lifestyles by not living in immigrant neighborhoods, nor by continuing to save up in Denmark in order to spend more in Turkey.

One of the main reasons for differences in consumption patterns among immigrants lies in future expectations and future security. The first generation that held to the "myth of return" saw their future in their 'home' lands. They wanted to secure a living in Turkey. That is the reason why they invested in land and property in Turkey and continued to do so rather than in Denmark where they thought they would have only temporary residence. As the decades have passed by, the second generation is quite aware that there is no going back. Even though the ties are still held strongly between the home and the host countries, for them the main domain of life has become the 'host' country, as its meaning changed to 'home'.

Identity construction through consumption of home furnishing, food, and media

I now present three domains where consumption is highly related to the individual identity construction among Turkish immigrants in Denmark: home decoration, food, and media consumption. Weigert, Teitge and Teitge (1986, p. 50) state that "[m]ultiple identities are communicated through displays of *appearances*, behaviour, and language" (emphasis added). Appearances comprise clothing, possessions, home furnishing, basically things consumed and they are loaded with symbolic meanings that communicate about the self.

Literature on home indicates that "home is a source of personal identity and/or source of personal and familial security [...] it can also provide a sense of place and belonging in an increasingly alienating world" (Mallet 2004, p. 66). It is also stated that "the term home functions as a repository for complex, inter-related and at times contradictory ideas about people's relationship with one another, especially family, and with places, spaces, and things" (ibid., p. 84). Interviews for this research were made in the homes of the informants. There were noticeable similarities among the home decorations of various informants.

This similarity manifested itself through the display of the same types of lace curtains, cabinets, crocheted covers on the shelves, crystal chandeliers and fake flowers. Indeed, these crocheted covers, which are usually part of the dowry, were indispensable objects in every household. It has been suggested that sometimes the immigrants' ethnic backgrounds become more prominent in their country of settlement than in their home nations (Belk 1988; Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard (2005). Ger and Østergaard (1998) find that Turkish immigrants in Denmark have more 'Turkish' possessions than Turks in Turkey, to symbolize what they left behind and to reaffirm their Turkishness. Not only is the Turkish culture preserved through these decorations, Turkish identity is also constructed and reinforced. Transmigrants carry their 'home' culture to their homes in their new settlements. Material artifacts brought from the country of origin symbolize attachments to that country (Mehta and Belk 1991).

Food has social, cultural and symbolic meanings and is a marker of social positioning (Bourdieu 1984). For Barthes (1961, 1997) food signifies cultural meanings to those who consume it and all foods are seen as signs in a system of communication. Food is also central to collective and individual identity (Fischler 1988) and a symbolic marker of membership to any sort of social group. Consumption of Turkish food works towards the reinforcement of the Turkish cultural identity as the members of the immigrant community gather together around a dinner table and share their cultural heritage. While the first generation Turkish immigrants continue to eat in traditional Turkish ways (baking bread and Turkish pastries at home, bringing dried goods from Turkey), the descendants integrate Danish food more into their meals.

The majority of the Turkish immigrants in Denmark that live with the myth of return continue to lead secluded lives with limited contact with the Danish culture. In a big attempt to preserve their Turkish culture, they have stayed away from the Danish heritage in every way. The generations born in Denmark, also grew up in homes where Turkish food was cooked, so they mainly acquire similar eating habits as their parents. Consumption of Danish food products were mainly out of necessity rather than by choice or a preference of taste.

While in Europe the Turkish cultural identity is put forward in every possible way, in Turkey, any product that symbolizes a higher social status/class or economic wealth is consumed conspicuously. As it has become customary to carry bulks of food from Turkey to Denmark, food items also travel in the opposite direction. Tea is consumed all throughout the day in Turkey leaving Turkish coffee as a mid-morning or after meal drink. Instant coffee has become very popular especially among the middle-class urbanites in Turkey. During the closed economy of the 1970s, imported products were scarce, including instant coffee and tea. Even though the Turkish supermarkets nowadays are abundant

with such items, it has become a habit to bring them from abroad. Again they serve as social status symbols, a symbol of Europeanness, being civilized, and part of the modern world.

Food in many forms, cooked or raw, home-made or store-bought travels between Turkey and Europe as the Turkish transmigrants continue their back and forth travels. The familiar taste of the Turkish food satiates their nostalgia for their homelands, it reminds them of where they come from, their cultural heritage and ethnic origins.

With the widespread availability of satellite dishes, broadcast media now play an important role in linking the immigrants tighter to their home nations. A range of Turkish television channels can be viewed and a selection of Turkish newspapers is available in several countries in Europe and other parts of the world. In his study on the Turkish immigrants in Germany, Jurgens (2001) points out that “[t]o be Turkish (and/or Kurdish and/or Alevi) is to consume Turkish print capitalism and other popular cultural products” (p. 98). It is a popular pass time for many Turkish immigrants living in Denmark to watch Sunday football games live on television. Through the consumption of Turkish broadcast and print media, Turkish immigrants stay in touch with the current affairs and even the latest fashion in Turkey. The availability of Turkish media in Europe has also enabled the Turkish immigrants in Europe to keep up-to-date with the changes happening in Turkey. Some of these immigrants coming from poorer parts of Turkey had not even been to a major city in Turkey when they moved to Europe. Coming from rural areas they had not experienced an urban lifestyle. Meltem, a second-generation Turkish immigrant living in Copenhagen told me that the advent of satellite dishes in the 1980s, which allowed Turkish immigrants to watch Turkish television channels, had a big impact on these people. People began to realize that what they imagined to be the “Turkish culture” had changed, and Turkey was being westernised and modernised while they were trying hard to preserve their Turkish culture. Young girls and boys started to take their Turkish peers in Turkey as role models.

All these examples indicate that these immigrants, better called transmigrants, continue to hold ties with Turkey through various ways. What exactly constitutes transnationalism and who transmigrants are and are not are highly debated issues (Vertovec 2004). Different conceptualizations of transnationalism include and exclude certain types of immigrants, claiming that not all immigrants are transmigrants. Based on the definition by Basch et al. (1994) that defines transmigrants as immigrants who are engaged in social, economic and political activities that link together their societies of origin and settlement, I argue that a significant number of immigrants today, regardless of being a first-generation immigrant or a descendant, engage in transnational activities across countries of settlement and origin. Even though a retired

immigrant who lives six months in Turkey and six months in Denmark might have stronger connections with his country of origin than his granddaughter born in Denmark who does not visit Turkey so regularly, but listens to Turkish pop music and chats with youth living in Turkey via the internet, they both have transnational connections that influence their consumption practices.

Liminal identities: Transmigrant sense of belongingness

Being caught up in-between different nations, societies, cultures and communities, migrants often feel left out of the mainstream society. In the case of the Turkish immigrants, these liminal identities come forward as they constantly feel like the “other” in their host countries and paradoxically they continue to feel like the “other” in their ‘home’ country. The connotation of the notions of ‘host’ and ‘home’ country change as well as these terms begin to lose their designated meanings to the transmigrants. Some migrants experience a sense of being a constant outsider. With reference to transmigrants’ question of belongingness Salih (2002) suggests that rather than belonging simultaneously to two countries, these migrants feel like “living in more than one country, but belonging to ‘neither’ place” (p. 52). Approaching this phenomenon from another perspective, Jurgens (2001) calls this relation between belongingness and locality “multi-local belongingness” (p. 98). Makbule, a Turkish immigrant housewife in her forties expresses her feelings on this issue as:

We neither belong here nor belong there. We are caught in-between. We are strangers living here in Denmark and we are strangers back in Turkey. (personal interview 2003).

In Turkey, the generic name given to the Turkish immigrants living in Europe is *Almanci*. The word literally means someone related to Germany, as the majority of the Turkish immigrants first migrated to Germany. It has a rather pejorative connotation as it is often used for an emigrant who has newly acquired economic wealth, yet not the necessary cultural resources to be a member of the upper middle class. Since the late 1960s the economic capital of the immigrants has improved dramatically, allowing them to increase their consumption level and move higher in the social class strata in Turkey. However, lacking the cultural capital one needs in order to be accepted fully by the upper-middle class, they are often perceived as *nouveau riches*.

Being a transmigrant means different things to different people. The literature provides an array of concepts ranging from “multi-local belongingness” to “belonging nowhere”. For my informants, a sense of alienation was an overarching theme. Whether they spoke of this explicitly or one could read it between the lines, they all experienced being treated as a “foreigner” both in Denmark and Turkey. Even though self perceptions change depending on the

generation or education and occupation, their stories all resemble one another being that they all struggle to improve their living standards and social status. The quest to improve their living standards that started in the 1960s that triggered these people to migrate in the first place seems to continue. The parents who dreamed of providing a better life for their children, watched them grow in a “foreign” country. They tried hard to preserve their cultural heritage, hoping to continue where they left from, one day when they return to their villages. Not keeping up with the changes in Turkey, nor willing to adopt elements of the new (European) culture they seem to have frozen in a time capsule. Often dissociated by the members of their home and host societies, they live liminal lives that linger between multi-local belongingness and belonging to a neither place.

Consumption as a signifier of social status

Migration does not only allow one to move from one society to another, but it also allows a change in social class and status. Many of the first Turkish immigrants that immigrated to Denmark more than thirty years ago came from rural parts of Turkey and had low social status in their country of origin. Upon arrival to their host nation as guest workers, having low status jobs, mainly in factories, they also had low status in the Danish society. Their main aim was to return to their towns and villages as wealthier people with an elevated social status. Years later they came back to the villages that they once left as landowners. As Jurgens (2001) puts it, “many of them hoped for a permanent and triumphant return as self-made men and women after only a few years abroad” (p. 96). In the 1970s, the heyday of migration, it was common to see convoys of Turkish immigrants driving from Europe with their cars full of European goods which were not available in Turkey at the time. They bought mainly electrical appliances such as VCRs, colour TVs, which were items of prestige and status symbols among the immigrants. They brought these appliances to villages with no electricity at the time, only to stack them up in rooms waiting for the electricity to be connected (Abadan-Unat 2002).

Different identities are at play with regard to social status in different localities. The same person, who wears second-hand clothes, lives as a working-class immigrant in Denmark but gives rather expensive gifts to his relatives in Turkey as the “rich uncle from Europe”. Erdem captures this in the following comment on how the lifestyles of these immigrants change from one community to another:

You know what this man does? In fact there are many who live like him. For example he goes and buys a house or an apartment in Sivas [a town in Turkey]. He is quite well off in relation to his neighbourhood. When you go to Turkey and exchange your foreign currency, it pays well. But he receives social benefits here [in Denmark]. He saves money here and buys a car in Turkey. Because he is going

to drive it only one month when he goes there. The car waits for him in the garage for nine, ten months. He also decorates his house nicely. This is like fasting. I mean in order to drive a car for one month you live poorly here for so many months (personal interview 2002).

“Conspicuous consumption” can be observed among the immigrants who give a higher degree of importance to own property and spend their money in Turkey rather than in their host country. It is their local communities in Turkey that matter most for them in terms of attaining and maintaining a higher social status. The prestige of owning a Mercedes Benz car in Turkey, even though it might only be used for a few months each year, is worth the money-saving bus rides in Denmark for the rest of the year.

The situation for the second-generation immigrants is somewhat different and is changing, especially among the better educated ones. Yet they remain having a lower social status both in Turkey and Denmark. The main difference between the first generation and second generation immigrants is the social community where they want to achieve the higher status. For the first generation immigrants it remains to be Turkey, whereas the second generation immigrants are changing their consumption practices and lifestyles in order to achieve a higher social status in Denmark. The discrepancy between their actual social status and their desired social status provides an incentive for them to change their lifestyles which can be observed through their consumption practices.

Summary

Rather than a conclusion, I would like to end this paper with a summary, as this work is part of ongoing research. Due to advanced communication and transportation technologies, more and more migrants today are forging and sustaining communities between their nations of origin and settlement. It has been argued that a new type of immigrant, the “transmigrant”, has arisen, forming communities that stretch across borders. These communities are interwoven by social networks which link different localities to one another. In a world of complex mobilities, the normative character of the western nation-state has been called into question (Xavier Inda and Rosaldo 2001, p. 21). Despite the fact that most economic and political relations take place between nation-states, with the rise of nationalism and globalization, the relations between social and geographic spaces are being contested, and new social spaces expanding over several geographic spaces are coming into being. The emergence of transnational social spaces contests the idea of a one-to-one correspondence of social spaces with geographic spaces, especially in the realm of social sciences, which had previously been taken for granted for so long. The rise of transnational migration, international organisations (i.e. the European Union), and transnational enterprises means that we must look beyond the

limiting borders of nation-states when analyzing the consumption practices of those operating in the newly created transnational social spaces.

As transmigrants travel back and forth between their countries of origin and settlement, they are also travelling between different national, social and cultural contexts which results in a changed social status and having multiple identities. Consumption in these transnational social spaces acts towards the construction, negotiation and maintenance of these changing attributes.

The findings of this study reveal that transmigrants' consumption practices change across generations, time and borders. Expectations of the future determine the direction to which transmigrants divert their investments and efforts in maintaining a higher social status. While most of the first generation still live with the desire to return to their countries of origin, the later generations are more and more searching for a future in their country of settlement.

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Aalborg University

Fibigerstraede 2

DK-9220 Aalborg OE

Denmark

Phone + 45 96 35 84 38

Fax + 45 98 15 11 26

Web: <http://www.amid.dk>

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The Academy for Migration Studies in Denmark

Director: Professor dr. phil. Ulf Hedetoft

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