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Between mass-market conventions and everyday life: The domestication of dining furniture in urban Istanbul

ABSTRACT

Although dining tables and chairs function as the main furniture stereotypes valued for hosting in traditional Turkish households, this practice has been subject to changes and challenges in contemporary urban life in Istanbul. This qualitative study of dining furniture brings insights into the design, production, purchase and use of furnishings from a broad review of literature and from semi-structured in-depth interviews undertaken in the homes of young urban professionals in Istanbul between the years 2013 and 2016. Prescribed as indispensable stereotypes in the furniture retail stores and considered as essential domestic units by the interviewees, dining tables and chairs are found out as not fulfilling their intended hosting functions efficiently or being often replaced by centre tables or coffee tables, because of an increase in casual rather than formal occasions. Domestication of the dining table as an open buffet was considered a practical way to help hold the food and drinks that were also on couches and coffee tables. In addition, the dining table was used for completely different functions unrelated to eating, as study desks or as surfaces for folding and ironing laundry, whereas dining chairs were

KEYWORDS

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used as places to drape coats or clothing. Interrogating the disconnect between the consumption and use context of the dining suites yields deeper discussion about the level of intellectual capital of Turkish furniture industry and the consumer culture which advices the enactment of norms. Insights in these complex, changing and sometimes contradictory patterns may influence the design of domestic furnishings in Turkey. Therefore, more user-based design research and a further examination of contemporary patterns of use in urban households are needed to activate this potential for the Turkish furniture design industry.

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INTRODUCTION

Because hosting practices are connected to objects, the way in which furniture is configured and used tells us about the lifestyle of a home's inhabitants (Schatzki et al. 2001). In that sense, turning food consumption into a special occasion requires a certain placement of furniture and tools for eating. While being served, guests need surfaces upon which to sit and to put their tableware. A strong relationship exists among the accepted table manners, cultural dispositions, and array of relevant objects and furniture used for hosting. The design of the products both influences and is influenced by the practices.

Visser (1992) covered alternative versions of this norm, one of which is sitting on the floor to dine around a tray of food, which was also the norm in the Turkish context before modernization. The traditional Turkish floor table, which was a circular wooden platform on supports over which eating and its rituals were performed (Günay 1999), was used for both serving daily meals and serving guests (Nasır 2016b). Hospitality, which is a hallmark of traditional Turkish domesticity, was represented through the low seating elements. Prioritizing the comfort of guests, welcoming guests warmly, immediately preparing the food without even asking the guests whether they are hungry, inviting guests to the table, and offering food repeatedly and often are traditional conventions of Turkish hospitality (Meriç 2005).

However, starting from the Early Republican Era (1923–45), as westernization and the modernization process infiltrated Turkish culture, dining tables and chairs arrived in Turkish middle-class homes along with western table manners and etiquette (Bozdoğan 2001). But although the dining furniture type and the hosting etiquette changed, the notion that conventional and elaborate hosting is appropriate, and the expectation that most of the work should fall on the hostess, did not change. Even as late as the 1980s, according to Ayata (1988), in the middle class, a specific hosting performance was expected – especially on the part of the hostess – that involved good, fast and appropriate service (Öncü 1997). However, in the context of the changing economic structures of Istanbul, which was followed by neo-liberal policies, a new middle-class culture populated by highly educated young professionals working in large companies with global stakeholders emerged. These

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urban social groups gradually acquired international trends and commodities, in accordance with the notions of individuality, comfort and informality. A modern middle-class home life started to circulate through the urban population. Therefore, an implicit domestic activism against the conventional hosting arose. Notions of putting the guest on a pedestal and sacrificing one's comfort for the sake of guests started to be challenged (Nasır et al. 2019).

This study covers material and practical consequences of the decrease of traditional and formal hosting practice by means of furniture units throughout the fieldwork undertaken in Istanbul between the years of 2013 and 2016. Explored by visiting the homes of an urban professional sample and conducting relevant interviews, the primary focus of the study is on what happens after the dining table is bought from the furniture store and brought home and given its place in the dining room, presuming conventions of hosting are being challenged.

Production, consumption and use are important phases that a designed product undergoes in the course of its lifespan. Recent research focuses on what happens to design in real-life contexts in the post-commodity phase within the context of social interaction (Paavilainen et al. 2016). In this study, different functions and meanings of dining tables in their commodity and post-commodity phases are discussed. The disconnect between the consumption and use contexts is elaborated to apply the concept of domestication both in hosting and non-hosting functions. The term 'domestication', which in the traditional sense is a reference to a wild animal being tamed, when used in the metaphoric sense (Berker et al. 2006) can be understood as the users taming the mass-produced furniture units in their domestic environment by incorporating them into the routines, personal rhythm and everyday activities of the users. In this study, conflict between intention and interpretation is examined regarding the two different contexts of consumption and use throughout the lifespan of dining furniture.

CONSUMPTION CONTEXT

When people buy dining furniture, the purchase says something about how they see themselves and their status. The home can be considered a spatial extension of the self, and the living room and dining room are the most public domestic spaces, open to visitors' gazes. Therefore, these areas and their furnishings play a symbolic role by displaying the owner's taste and by exhibiting class habitus and ownership. People buy furniture aspirationally, to move towards their ideal sense of self and to be perceived in a particular way (Goffman 1959). Thus, the dining room is a locus for impression management. Display cabinets, sideboards and cocktail cabinets are designed and produced with the intent of enabling their owners to display their status to outsiders. Even the very name of the *display* cabinet is about vaunting one's status and consumption.

To scrutinize the consumption patterns of Turkish middle-class consumers, we will first look at the Turkish furniture and retail sectors. This approach will provide an understanding of the alternatives available to consumers and of what they see when they visit furniture stores with the intention of buying dining room furniture. Kesdi (2019) offers extensive information about industrial furniture production in Turkey, starting in the 1970s, from the perspective of industrial design. Correspondingly with an increase in the urban population, in the 1980s the need for contemporary furniture grew (TOBB 2017). Because the laws enforcing intellectual copyright were few, the furniture that was produced was in an imitative vein (Bayrakçı 1996). Small- and

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medium-sized businesses constituted most of the furniture-related endeavours in the 1990s, but government assistance allowed several larger businesses to thrive (Özkaraman 2004). In that same period, the customs union agreement took place, which meant that the local Turkish market included international brands – and that the industries and markets of Turkey were held to the higher standards in place for those global companies (Özkaraman 2004). Another result of the customs union is that local businesspeople are encouraged to invent their own unique types of furniture as a way of being competitive with larger firms (Bayrakçı 1996). Kesdi (2019) indicates that at present, manufacturers of furniture are required to meet global standards.

Sakarya and Doğan (2016) indicate that unique materials and designs, the availability of a strong workforce, and the presence of larger businesses were some of the strengths of the Turkish furniture industry. Other assets were new venues in which to do business, European customers who were ready to buy, and the ability to build more furniture faster. Weaknesses included the presence of many family-owned companies coupled with a dearth of money, government support, skilled hires, design collaboration, intellectual property protections and creative tactics. The opportunity they saw was the chance to increase the use of innovative design. The threat was the temptation to continue to mimic other designers at a lower cost.

A lack of innovation and the tendency towards imitation were also cited in Demirci and Efe's (2006) findings, which suggest that the preference is for copying other models rather than for coming up with new ones. This copying takes place, according to Demirci and Efe, mostly by referring to particular furniture catalogues; it is often conducted by the owner of the company, and most small-scale companies engage in this practice. However, these authors (2006) report that of the medium- and large-sized companies, slightly less than half are imitative while slightly more than half create their own furniture designs.

Furniture designers, manufacturers and marketing experts play the largest role in shaping current dining room settings and contributing to the common dining room discourse. Store showrooms and their websites are ideal places to observe lingering furniture stereotypes. An observation of several large-scale furniture retailing manufacturing sites in Turkish cities (Mosder 2021) again revealed certain living room furniture stereotypes and spatial conventions. For instance, looking at how two large-scale furniture sites, Modoko (2021) and Masko (2021), and the 1128 stores comprising them, address middle and upper-middle-class consumers by making suggestions for constructing a living room, we usually see a division between the dining and the sitting areas as a spatial standard. We also see that the furniture stereotypes of the dining area are maintained through the main standard of a dining table accommodating several chairs around it, although the number of chairs may differ from store to store, as seen in Figure 1. Accompanying storage and display units are also presented. Brochures and showrooms are likely to present similar configurations and repeating furniture stereotypes in an unchanging manner. The dining room setting, which is mostly standardized, creates a certain impression and implies that users should both have one and host their guests at it.

Because these stereotypes and configurations recur, given that a significant weakness of the Turkish furniture industry is the absence of a genuine design process, the industry often neglects the opportunities offered by user research and returns to the pattern of imitating and copying. The choices of the furniture consumer are somewhat reinforced by the dominant consumption

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Figure 1: A conventional dining room setting.

patterns of Turkish middle-class culture. The traditional Turkish home aesthetic includes complete furniture set-ups and suites, intended to create a feeling of completeness and stability. The statement of stability is mostly made with ornamented, dark brown, heavy furniture in traditional middle-class homes (Nasır et al. 2019). Constructing the same arrangement of coordinated pieces displayed in the furniture shop window in living rooms or dining rooms is a way to attain status. Having a complete furniture set is associated with being wealthy, a proper homemaker and a decent person/family. Ulver-Sneistrup (2008) explains this dynamic using the framework of Warner's (1949) communitarian consensus model, in which certain objects still had certain meanings and the members of the community dictated strict rules for aesthetics. Having socially established rules about aesthetics was considered a bridge between traditional society and modernity (Giddens 1991).

Üstüner and Holt (2010) examine the strong norms discouraging individuals from being different, unique or unorthodox throughout the consumer sphere. Because of these norms, status is attained by adhering to conventional consumer behaviours. Turkish middle-class and upper-middle-class consumers, who have strong cultural capital and who tend to see the western middle-class lifestyle as being at the top of their social class hierarchy, nevertheless fall short of western standards. For instance, Ulver-Sneistrup (2008) found in her international fieldwork that bringing the mass-market set-up aesthetic to the home was distasteful to Swedish and American middle-class consumers.

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In contrast, breaking with the traditional set-up style is a challenge for Turkish consumers.

According to Üstüner and Holt (2010), Turkish culture discourages an individualistic and genuine approach to consumption. Most respondents in their fieldwork think that western consumers pursue particular consumption for a means for self-actualization. However, the main approved pattern, especially in the realm of home aesthetics, directs consumers to follow the norms instead of choosing according to their taste and personal needs. Besides the fact that consumers really need the furniture for use in their domestic routines, purchasing decisions may be based on motives arising from the culture of consumption, which tends to revolve around the enactment of norms rather than the celebration of the self and individuality.

Dynamics of production and consumption culture, like the lack of original design and innovation in the Turkish furniture market and the socio-cultural leverage that blocks individuals from actualizing their distinctive or personal preferences and imposes complete setup styles as a status assertion, are considered reasons for bringing home a complete dining room set. The consumption of the dining suite mostly as the performance of a norm (though also in a genuine desire to fulfil accepted hosting practices) results in middle-class dining room settings that usually include a dining table and six or eight chairs around it.

USE CONTEXT

The use context regarding dining tables and chairs starts with the individuals bringing their furniture home. After the dining room is established, routines, habits and practices are enacted there. If we are to elaborate on the utilization and domestication of dining tables, we must increase our understanding of contemporary hosting practices and relevant acts in Turkish middle-class culture. In his research, conducted among urban middle-class households in Ankara in the 1980s, Ayata (1988) points out cases where a social norm applies to elaborate hosting and the notion of serving the guests in a flawless manner is active. We see that in the 1980s, appropriating the dining table as an emblem of modern hosting became a distinctive practice. In fact, Ayata makes the distinction that whereas intimate and close friends are welcomed in the everyday sitting room, formal guests are invited into the living room. In this practice, the dining table, chairs and sideboards are used for formal hosting, comprising a typical quality defining the relationship between the host and the formal guest with pretence and formality (Ayata 1988). Ayata indicates that a specific hosting performance was expected – especially from the hostess – that involved good, fast and appropriate service. Any need of the guest was supposed to be noticed immediately. In this context, several types of food were served, which were assessed by outsiders for originality and taste. Ayata (1988) implies that formal rules involving associations with objects, behaviours, manners, hygiene, neatness, food choices and spatial qualities established a figurative wall between host and guest. For these more formal gatherings, guests congregated around the dining table.

Recent research discusses how socio-cultural novelties challenged the traditional Turkish domesticity and the disseminated notions of Modernity influenced the status of hosting (Nasır et al. 2019). As global markets opened after the 1980s, western influence created a decisive shift in Turkish culture. More liberal laws enabled people to consume imported goods in an era of increasing globalization (Bali 2002). With the election of Prime Minister Turgut

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Ozal, who felt an affinity with American culture, emulation of American-style social interactions became the goal in Turkey (Bali 2002: 18). In the mid-1980s, Istanbul was seen as a cosmopolitan and economic centre (Tanyeli 2004). In the next decade, with its many new international connections, Istanbul marked the intersection of transportation and communication lines. A new middle class of highly educated young professionals working in large companies with global stakeholders emerged (Öncü 1997). In the context of the changing economic structures of Istanbul, they gradually followed international trends. This new social group was forming a new middle-class identity different from that of former traditional middle-class groups, which had comprised mostly civil servants. They functioned as the most direct representatives of the global consumption culture. According to Keyder's (2000) classification, a globalized habitus was emerging that was performing class distinctions that contrasted with the local and traditional habitus.

In accordance with global cultural trends, notions of modernity circulated through all aspects of civic society; these included notions of individuality, comfort and informality that were used to define modern middle-class home life. Initially influenced by these notions, emblems of modern life became more integral to everyday life and civic society (Dellaloğlu 2016), penetrating the domestic realm too. In addition, increasing rates of female participation in the labour market brought the decline of practices of traditional hospitality (Özbay 1999). Women, who now experienced career satisfaction outside the home, started to become less engaged with the identity represented by perfectly set tables and flawless service and hosting.

Middle-class housewives still assessed themselves and were assessed by others, in terms of attentive and elaborate hosting. But the situation was different for the urban professional middle class in the 2010s in İstanbul. Ulver-Sneistrup (2008) implies that in terms of hosting, anti-traditional urban social groups with high cultural capital rejected the notion that special efforts had to be made for visitors. An implicit activism was taking place throughout the urban profiles, mostly against traditional Turkish hospitality customs, yielding the abandonment of the idea of sacrificing oneself to serve guests (Nasır et al. 2019).

As notions about conventional hosting started to be challenged by urban social groups, the current use (or disuse) of dining tables came into question. Are dining tables being used in frequently? How do people perform and sustain hosting practices, or do they even sustain them? A potential of the disconnect between conventional dining-room set-ups and new notions about hosting leads us to distinguish further between the spheres of consumption and use. In discussing a possible desynchronization between the use of dining furniture for consumption and for everyday life, we must be aware that the main motivations that influence individuals in the consumption sphere might be different from those at play in the context of day-to-day life.

Sometimes people have all the items they need but find that having and doing are still uncoordinated. In discussing this form of consumption, Sullivan and Gershuny (2004) suggest that ownership can be symbolically important even when goods are stored away or rarely used. In one case (Shove et al. 2007), respondents decorated a nice sitting room without including a television, instead putting the television in the kitchen. Rather than spending time in the nice sitting room, everyone started to gather to watch television in the kitchen. Having designed their home improvements around a different model of social interaction, this couple was disappointed: they had failed to live up

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to their own ideals. Shove et al. discuss this case under the title of 'unrealized practices' (2007: 31), in which respondents claim that they have the requisite materials but cannot seem to match these with the 'ways of doing' they wish to establish. Shove et al. surmise that the gap between having and doing constitutes a source of restless unease.

Shove et al. (2007) provide a good venue for the discussion of the gap between ownership and utilization. In order to interpret the different appropriations of dining tables for other than the intended design purposes, the concept of domestication, which originally focused on media and technology products and services, is applied to the design of dining furniture and hosting practices. By tracking commodities even long after they are purchased, domestication tracking expedites studies relating to consumption and 'use'. Fallan (2008) indicates that the materialization of the designer's more or less informed presumptions about the utilization of a product become an effort to ordain the users' understanding of the product's use and meaning. However, the users may not play the role ascribed to them by the designers. The users may misunderstand or discard the instruction manual (2008: 63). Although the functions of dining room furniture are pre-determined by designers and producers, these functions might be redefined through the cosy lens of everyday life. The fieldwork analysis will demonstrate how respondents comply with, challenge or appropriate these predetermined configurations.

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

The research method for this study comprised a survey and fieldwork. A purposeful sampling approach was adopted to provide data befitting the goals of the research (Tracy 2013). The respondents were middle-class urban professionals living in Istanbul, Turkey's most globalized city. My intent was to scrutinize the urban condition and taste and to observe the changes in hosting practices and use of dining tables when the household members have busy work schedules in the context of middle-class dynamics.

Bourdieu categorizes society by profession. He considers a person's education, profession and father's occupation in defining their cultural capital. Following these definitions, I selected respondents who manage global companies with foreign stakeholders in the service sectors, professionals and educators in the creative fields, and teachers (Bourdieu 1984; Featherstone 1996). Using a snowballing technique, I gathered a sample until saturation was achieved.

In the survey phase, closed-ended questionnaires were administered to 30 respondents in 2010. Fieldwork was conducted between 2013 and 2015, as a part of my doctoral research (Nasır 2016a). It included in-depth interviews and participatory observations of the living rooms of eight households, six of which comprised couples and two of which were single-person households (see Appendix 1). As a researcher, I was a visitor in their homes at the same time and was able to experience their hospitality, which gave me the opportunity to carefully make observations, take notes and conduct an analysis.

The interviews, which lasted from one hour to two hours and fifteen minutes, were audio-recorded and then transcribed orthographically; all spoken words, along with memos, field notes and photographs, were reproduced. Once I had identified an extract of data to code, I wrote down the code and marked the text associated with it. The coding stage ended when the data relevant to each code had been collated. Afterwards, my analysis started

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to take shape as I shifted from codes to themes. I developed my themes for capturing content in relation to the research question; these themes reflected some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006: 82). Throughout the qualitative analysis, repeating emergent themes were interpreted and discussed (Saldana 2011). Pseudonyms like Deniz, Atakan and Beste (see Appendix 1) are used for addressing respondents instead of their names in the analysis section in order to anonymize the respondents.

THE DINING TABLE AS AN ESSENTIAL FURNITURE STEREOTYPE IN THE CONSUMPTION PHASE

In our research, we found that all the respondents had a dining suite comprising a dining table and six or eight chairs. They all considered the dining table to be an essential element of their domestic space. When I stepped into *Deniz*'s living room, she invited me to the lounge area to sit on their L-shaped couch. *Deniz* and her husband, *Atakan*, had purchased their living/dining room furniture from Masko (2021) as they prepared to marry in 2006. Like most of the interviewees, Deniz implied that she considered the dining table an indispensable element of a living room (Figure 2).

> Researcher: What makes a living room a living room?
> Deniz: Couches… err… dining tables, for guests…

Figure 2: Deniz's living room.

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Deniz's living room setting was quite similar to that seen in general mass-market configurations. Behind the lounge area, in which we conducted the entire interview, stood the dining table and six matching chairs. Deniz started to tell me about her and her husband's decision-making process while they were purchasing their living room furniture:

> Deniz: While selecting our furniture with Atakan, we decided on what we would buy after spending two or three days at Masko. But in a way that… emm… it (the furniture) was bought in such a mentality that… emm… it was bought in order to get the thing done. Because although I wanted to see many options, Atakan preferred to buy everything from the first shop we visited in order to finish shopping as soon as possible. These [Atakan's living/dining room furniture] are things that we bought so that we wouldn't be without couches or tables.
> Researcher: Why did you do it in this way?
> Deniz: Well, it must be something about the Turkish shopping style in a fast manner.
> Researcher: How is it like the Turkish shopping style?
> Deniz: They [Turkish people] generally don't like to get lost considering many options. Once they trust someone or feel the trust, they immediately fall into that person's hands and complete the shopping.

Although Deniz was herself Turkish, she had applied this common stereotype to her husband's way of shopping. Or she meant that deferring to her husband, Atakan, who made the final decision, was applying the 'Turkish style' to their consumption phase. Probably she considered herself closer than her husband to European habitus in terms of cultural consumption patterns; or she thought of her husband as more Turkish or eastern than herself.

The way Deniz described the consumption pattern as the Turkish way of shopping reveals so much about the furniture consumption phase. First of all, the furniture is bought to adhere to a domestic norm – 'not to live without couches or tables' – rather than in response to specific and genuine personal desires and needs. Second, all the living room furniture is bought from one retail store. The furniture was set up in the living/dining room of this household according to the mass production aesthetics suggested by the furniture store. Atakan and Deniz (or mostly Atakan) complied with the designers' and producers' presumptions and visions regarding how to live in a dining room in their home. They had their dining table and six chairs around it, accompanied by a sideboard and a storage-display unit.

Another case demonstrating the dining table as an essential element of the middle-class Turkish home was that of Ezgi and Bora, who lived in an upper-middle class apartment as a household of four with their daughter and their cat. They had visited *Siteler* – one of the largest stores offering mass-production furniture in Ankara – to buy furniture for their new home before their marriage in 1990s. Ezgi defined their purchases as pieces that were consistent with the stereotypical furniture that is mass-produced: 'couches from Tepe Home, side tables from the furniture store in Maltepe; dining table, chairs, buffet and that display cabinet from Kelebek Mobilya. All these things from the time that we were getting married'. The furniture stores that Ezgi listed were of some of the most established and significant mass-produced furniture companies in Turkey (Kelebek 2021; Tepehome 2021).

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This couple also purchased their dining furniture as a complete set. Here a repetitive pattern occurs: the tendency to procure a complete, matching set-up as part of the preparation for marriage. It is on the tacit to-do list for wedding preparations. The depicted pattern of getting a dining table, dining suite or sitting group as a complete set (sometimes in one short period of decision-making) and as an accepted element of preparation for married life aligns with what has been described as a typical Turkish home-consumption pattern. Üstüner and Holt (2010) interpret Turkish culture as discouraging an individualistic approach to consumption. Thus, domestic consumption tends to revolve around the enactment of norms rather than the manifestation of individuality.

Furthermore, when consumption takes place in the context of marriage preparations, the pressure exerted by social norms gets even stronger. Marriage is seen as an important phase in which the parents and elder relatives get involved in homemaking and making choices about purchases. At this stage, couples are likely to set up a conventional dining suite in a quest for approval, feeling even more likely to bow to conventions of consumption culture. Because dining tables and chairs are the inevitable elements exhibited in mass-produced furniture stores, interviewees ended up bringing these *essential* units home.

The *must-have* quality of dining tables is also consolidated by social constructs, hosting norms and family ideals, as Shove et al. (2007) indicate. In the case of Ezgi and Bora, they had a big struggle about the number of dining chairs. Bora wanted to have six chairs around the table, but Ezgi insisted on having eight. Bora thought it unlikely that they would have that many guests at once. But Ezgi had considered her family and relative circles that would visit them after they were married.

At this point, it makes sense to mention the tradition of 'ev görme', a Turkish idiom which literally means 'seeing one's home'. *Ev görme* is a tradition that when a couple gets married, family elders and relatives come to visit the couple to celebrate their new home. The bride is supposed to host these guests properly, and the visitors give valuable presents as a courtesy. The couples who want to be approved as 'properly homemaking' by their community install complete furniture suites in their living rooms. This gesture indicates that the couple have successfully become part of the adult and marital worlds. The ritual of 'ev görme', which also signals appropriation in the urban context, gives us an idea of how family ideals both shape and are shaped by Turkish consumption patterns.

A DISCONNECT BETWEEN INTENTION AND USE IN THE CONTEXT OF DINING TABLES

What happened to the dining tables of interviewees after the tables were brought to their homes? Visiting Ezgi's house, I brought tiramisu, and she brewed and served me tea at the coffee table. Ezgi and Bora, who had a conventional dining suite – even including eight chairs – for their home, did not have a circle of people who could visit them after they had moved to Istanbul from Ankara (see Figure 3). They had rarely hosted guests since moving.

> Researcher: Do your friends visit you?
> Ezgi: No, actually we prefer the other way. If we are to get together, we prefer to meet out. For instance, we love our next-door neighbours very much. But we love even more doing things outside the home. Their

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> lifestyle is very similar to ours. Dual earners […] that means we don't drop in on each other spontaneously, and it's not a situation where we host them and then they host us in return […] instead of that, we prefer to eat out.
> Researcher: I understand. So some guests visit you once in two to three months. How do you serve them when they come?
> Ezgi: If they come during dinnertime, which is very rare, we serve dinner at the table. They did actually […] Some relatives visited us. Actually, our neighbour also had come over at dinnertime once. But more frequently at teatime […] Just like this [the way Ezgi was hosting me].

Throughout the interview analysis, I hardly saw any trace of hosting guests in Ezgi's case. It seemed as if hosting was possible, but not likely or frequent. When guests did come, the couple usually hosted them around coffee tables rather than around the dining table. It was interesting to recognize the contradiction between the consumption phase, which included arguing for the importance of including eight chairs in the dining suite, and the use context, which covered hardly any hosting occasions in this case. This odd juxtaposition shows the nature of domestic conflict and problems that can arise in discussions about how to arrange and use elements of the household (Ang

Figure 3: Ezgi's dining table and eight matching chairs.

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1992). Conflicts arise between the social constructions of *home* and the use practices of everyday life.

The idleness of the dining table was also a theme in Hale's interview. Hale and her husband, Aykut, had an open-plan living room configuration that incorporated the dining, sitting and kitchen areas. The dining set included a table and six chairs. Hale had drawn the blueprints and determined the dimensions of the table and got a carpenter to craft the table she had designed.

I was invited to sit on one of the couches. Hale put bowls of some finger food, like snacks and chips, on the centre table, serving me a cup of tea. After asking questions about the ways they use their dining table, I got to hear some interesting truths.

> Hale: It has never been a *dining* dining table for us […]
> Aykut: We hardly use the dining table for dining. We don't use it for its proper purpose unless my mom and dad come over or a very formal guest visits our house. We mostly use the centre table […] The dining table stays idle there.

Hale's case shows that the reason for the disconnect between consumption and use might not be the limited and repetitive options offered by the furniture stores. Even when the consumer herself designs the dining suite, she might end up not using it when hosting. Yet the societal norm leads consumers to see having a conventional dining suite as a must. Nominating the dining table as one of the most essential elements of the living room but not utilizing it for the intended hosting practices may be a good example of the type of ownership that Sullivan and Gershuny (2004) define as symbolically important even when the goods are stored away or rarely used. Therefore, we see that there is a desynchronization between the original purpose and the eventual use of dining tables.

COFFEE TABLES AS SIGNIFICANT INFORMAL HOSTING UNITS

Cases show us that acquiring dining tables, along with the other stereotypical elements in a conventional suite, as an essential part of attaining family ideals did not often work. Respondents were to some extent interested in hosting guests; even though the sample included urban professionals, they were not entirely against the idea of making extra efforts for guests. Throughout the survey, respondents were asked whether they considered sustaining the convention of putting in extra work for their guests. Twenty out of 30 respondents disagreed with the informal hosting motto that implies that guests should not receive special treatment. Four respondents stayed neutral, while six respondents indicated that they agreed that guests should not receive special treatment. Respondents mostly did not abandon the idea of working to prepare for guests. We see that offering some special treatment for guests was still a concern.

Guests were hosted, but what about the use of dining tables? The respondents were asked which furniture units they utilized when serving offerings to their guests. We see the competitive positions between the two actors of hosting – the dining table and centre table – clearly in Table 1. It is seen that utilization of dining tables as a hosting style received 41 marks from the sample respondents. However, the utilization of couches and centre tables received 31

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	Course					
	Dinner	**Drinks/snacks/coffee/tea servings after dinner time**	**Five o'clock tea**	**Breakfast**	**Brunch**	**Total**
Furniture						
Kitchen table	4	1	2	2	1	10
Dining table	22	0	2	10	7	41
Armchairs and centre/service tables	1	19	10	0	1	31
Eating out	1	2	0	1	2	6
Total	28	22	14	13	11	

Each respondent chose as many options as were applicable.

Table 1: Cross-tabulation of furniture and course types preferred by respondents for serving guests.

marks, 19 of which involved serving drinks/snacks/coffee/tea after dinner and 10 of which involved five o'clock tea servings.

While the respondents were filling out the form regarding this data, they were encouraged to mark all of the hosting styles that they performed independent from usage frequency. So a person who used dining tables for hosting once a year and coffee tables every week or month could mark both of the options. That being said, respondents were not restricted to choosing only one option for the related inquiry in Table 2. It is seen that dining tables were the furniture that the respondents reported utilizing for hosting at the highest rate. Meanwhile, centre tables and/or smaller service tables were a close peer furniture in the context of hosting.

To examine the uses of dining tables, another question was asked about the main role of dining tables. Having a proper dining suite implies that guests will be hosted for an extensive dinner at a proper dining table, sitting upright in chairs. And how interested was my sample in organizing large-scale dinner parties?

Survey respondents were asked whether they organized large-scale dinner parties and which units they made use of for such parties. Of the 30 respondents, eighteen organized dinner parties at home while twelve did not host guests for special occasions. It was interesting to note that service tables and armchairs were also used on these occasions, although such events are primarily associated with dining tables. Tables 1 and 2 do not provide information about the furniture that was used in hosting or about the frequency of hosting. However, these topics were addressed in the interviews.

Interview analysis showed that participants repeatedly emphasized the idleness and dysfunctionality of the dining table. In Hale and Aykut's case, the rare situation that occasioned formal hosting and the use of the dining table was the visit of elderly guests and formal acquaintances. Hale stated: 'If an elder guest visits, you have to use the dining table. If someone of your own age visits, the centre table can be used, too'. Hale emphasized the obligation of setting a proper table and offering fine dining with conventional forms and etiquette when hosting parents, elder relatives and formal guests. There was a clear correlation between the type of guest and the furniture pieces used

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Large-scale dinner parties (New Year's Day, family gatherings)		
	Organizing	**Not organizing**
	18	12
Types of furniture used		
Dining table	16	
Armchairs and centre/service tables	13	
Kitchen table	1	

Table 2: Organizing large-scale dinner parties.

for hosting. In other words, the dining table of this couple did not fulfil its intended purpose and prescribed use except for on formal occasions, which were rare.

The more frequent practice this couple engaged in was hosting close friends of their own age around the centre table. Hence Hale and Aykut performed far more informal practices when their intimate friends visited them. What surprised me most was that the guests brought their own food with them.

> Hale: Recently, they (their friends) visited and brought their own food and ate it. They brought chicken. But the same thing happens when I visit them. Because they are all young working people, nobody cooks.

The guests had no expectations of being served. Their choice of sitting style was to recline. Hale mimicked a very upright sitting position: 'You know, you never sit in this way. You always sit a bit reclining. You extend your feet'. The concern for comfort meant couches were preferred over dining chairs. Moreover, Aykut explained that when a large group of friends came to their house, people sat on the floor on cushions to watch a football game together. This happened when the number of the guests exceeded the living room capacity. Therefore, the rising informality resulted in the use of the centre table, comfortable couches and even the floor and cushions for hosting guests. This can be considered *domestication* of a whole living room and its contents for hosting.

In the context of the domestication of the centre table, there was a relationship between the food types and the matching furniture unit. Deniz elaborated on her hosting style and offerings, saying:

> I usually serve them snacks. We also order food. The most common food we order is pizza […] that we could eat altogether. I generally serve white wine. Something like pizza, wine, and a cheese plate. We usually have deli food in our home. It is because we like quick meals.

Deniz was unable to cook labour-intensive homemade food after her busy workday. The survey results had revealed a concern about trying to give guests special treatment; however, in this case, this treatment consisted mostly of offering easy-to-prepare food, ordered food or a combination of these. The food Deniz served had practical qualities that did not require many utensils,

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because it was usually a type of finger food. This type of pre-prepared fast food did not include soups, sauces or creamy components and therefore did not require a proper table setting. From this description, one could easily conclude that there was no (literal) *dining*; therefore, there was no need for a dining table. For that reason, it was convenient to use the centre table instead of the dining table, and it made sense to do so. The type of food served shaped the need for the furniture upon which it was served, and vice versa.

When it came to the food offered the *utilization of the centre table* was far different from the formal hosting style Ayata (1988) described, which consisted of laboriously cooked homemade food that typically included several courses and was served around the dining table. Another difference from the former formal practice was the intimacy level between the host and guest. The comfort of hosting with quick meals promoted an unpretentious relationship with close guests, where the guest was not in the position of evaluating the host's skills at presentation. Hosting informally was like an unspoken agreement among the circle of friends, where each member could perform the same simple practice without feeling unduly pressured.

Recently, it seems as if the structured and formal gathering around the dining table has lost its power to define the urban hosting style in a Turkish context. A more casual approach has emerged in an ongoing mimicry of contemporary western *informality*. Visser describes a typically modern event as one in which people wear everyday clothes, have fewer rules about eating and are less reserved: 'People "come as they are", sit anywhere, throw up no conscious barriers of demeanor' (1992: 344). The metropolitan social groups in Turkey valued and were influenced by western informality.

DOMESTICATION FORMS OF DINING TABLES

Our cases demonstrate different forms of domestication practices regarding dining tables. Silverstone (2006) suggest that the process of domestication results from the reciprocal relationship between people and things. In other words, while using products, people are consumed by the products they consume as they respond to them and engage with their properties, functions and forms. Dining tables offer a large surface that can be used for many other daily activities. When hosting, for example, some liked using the dining table as *açık büfe* – or a buffet – as a practical way to display and offer food and drinks on couches and coffee tables. But when not hosting, owners displayed a pattern in which dining tables were used as study desks or as surfaces on which to fold and iron laundry, with clothing draped over the chairs.

Domestication of dining tables in the hosting context

Entering the living room, *Beste* invited me to sit on a comfortable couch in the lounge area (Figure 4). Beste brought a tablecloth and spread it over the centre table. I observed her carrying many bowls of various patisserie foods, like little pizzas and breads, from their kitchen to the living room. This food was the hospitality offered by this couple. Beste set the items on her centre table, as seen in Figures 4 and 5. She positioned small service tables in a C-shape, within everyone's reach. I set my own glass of tea and my food plate on my service table.

The tablecloth that Beste spread over the centre table was decorated with a traditional pattern and looked as if it had been designed for a *dining table*. She

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did have a dining table with matching chairs but explained that she generally hosts guests around the centre table. Beste was torn between a desire to sustain hospitable norms and a desire to make use of the comfort of her couches, along with other constructs of informal hosting. Nonetheless, her dining table was not left idle. Beste utilized her dining table as a large stand to accommodate various dishes and appropriated it as an *açık büfe*. Not only was this arrangement more comfortable and informal than sitting on chairs around the dining table in an upright posture, but it also provided ample space for her offerings.

Beste transformed the position of the dining table from a piece that was not being utilized to a useful actor. Dining tables, which were considered a chief element of hosting and were used only for formal occasions, had now been recruited as an understudy for informal hosting practices.

Figure 4: Beste's offerings.

Domestication of dining tables in a non-hosting context

Hale's dining table has never been a *dining* table for her. What was it, then? The answer is that it was appropriated as Hale's study desk. In this case, we ask: what happens to a dining table if it no longer serves a purpose for hosting and eating activities? Studying is clearly a component of everyday life for this couple, as both Hale and Aykut are academics. Hale, who is a professor

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Figure 5: Utilization of side tables.

and has a great deal of work to do at home, studies at her dining table, while Aykut uses one of the back-stage rooms for his research-related work. The main components of Hale's work are reading and writing articles, grading exams and checking assignments, which she does at the dining table. Hale uses her dining table as a semi-permanent study area.

The interesting aspect of this case is that the user herself had designed her dining table and had hired a carpenter to craft it. Although she controlled the design process from the outset, she did not consider a table that was specifically designed for studying. Therefore, we understand that establishing the conventional dining suite – the dining table and six chairs around it – in the consumption phase has a tremendous importance. This case of contradiction demonstrates the consumption standard as not being questioned by the interviewee. Nevertheless, domestication is already considered as conflict-ridden and dynamic, defining a multidimensional process of negotiation that involves users and products (Fallan 2010). After the dining table has been brought

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Figure 6: Ezgi's study spot.

home, study activities, which dominate the domestic routines of this couple, find a home at the dining table. This couple also construct models and do puzzles at their dining tables.

Ezgi and Barış, who had argued over whether they should purchase six or eight chairs to go at the table, were not likely to host guests lately. Ezgi used one of the corners of her dining table for studying. She also described a very mundane use for her dining table.

> When we moved to Istanbul, it happened that no guests visited us. Those two chairs got obsolete. But now we need them! I'll admit it: I am ironing shirts, so I hang the shirts on the backrests of the chairs. That's why I need them! [Laughs]

Ezgi appropriated the backs of the dining chairs as dress hangers. She implied that shirts that were ironed on Sunday evenings might stay on the chair backs for a couple of days. Her husband and daughter could get their shirts from the chairs while getting ready for work or school on Monday mornings. At that point Ezgi's husband added to the conversation, suggesting putting extra apparatus on the dining chairs to keep the shirts presentable. Ezgi also used to utilize the tabletop for folding other laundry and appropriated it as a distribution space of folded laundry.

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Figure 7: Deniz's dining chairs utilized for hanging coats.

Shove et al. (2007) contend that the gap between having and doing constitutes a source of restless unease. Ezgi was probably satisfying the unease generated by having her obsolete *dining* table by developing everyday domestication forms. Sorensen (2006) suggests that domestication is what happens when the intent of the designer and the needs of the user are negotiated. So we can understand that Ezgi's dining table can be an actor because of what it symbolizes and mediates. The dining table is considered an *essential actor* in the construction of a living room. However, everyday domestication forms of dining tables are observed to be different from models in furniture showrooms. Dining tables negotiate between their status-infused meanings and their mundane uses.

Deniz and Atakan also use their dining room furniture for their daily routines. Before going to work and after coming home, they hang their coats and bags on the backs of their dining chairs (Figure 7). They put their laptops on the sideboard, where the computers sit until their owners pick them up again in the morning as they head to their offices. Deniz occasionally uses the dining table for doing some work in the evening. To reiterate the initial question: what happens when users bring the dining table home? After the table is barely used for formal hosting and eating, it transforms into a humble servant of ordinary life. The dynamics of daily routines permeate the surfaces of the dining set, which provide affordances for many mundane activities. The

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family's original intent in buying the set slowly fades as the table and chairs become basic elements of everyday cosiness.

CONCLUSION

In the research analysis, hospitality norms were discussed, questioned and negotiated using the lens of furniture units. A countermovement towards informality is obviously taking place. Norms that scripted the dining table as the main actor of hosting are being challenged. So, should the designers design study desks instead of dining tables? Although this is not necessarily the point, it is possible that this study could persuade the furniture stores to offer different configurations to meet different needs. Although the design discipline is largely engaged in the production process, it is not as involved in the consumption phase and is even less involved in the uses to which designed objects are put by the users in their everyday lives. However, the phase in which users purchase the products and start to use them, considered by Attfield (2000) to be the post-commodity phase, may also influence the design discipline. The domestication of dining tables in non-hosting contexts demonstrates the actual needs of the household when the table is used for studying or ironing, or as a cloakroom or an office. Brandes et al. (2009) assess the private quality of home life for discovering instances of repurposing and auxiliary uses in their project.

Instead of applying the unchanging stereotypes and configurations, the designers could encourage the users to buy according to their actual needs rather than out of tradition or a need for status. For a consumer, it would be encouraging to see several alternatives of living/dining room units so that any social stigma in Turkish culture arising from being different could start to diminish. To inform the design discipline, the concept of domestication could be effectively used as a tool with which to carve out new areas of inquiry. Suri (2005) suggests that things used in unintended ways usually indicate something about people's needs – and recognizing that something often translates into design opportunities. As users make interpretations about the objects and products around them, they develop an awareness of the possibilities and sensory qualities of different materials, forms and textures in their daily lives. Suri (2011) also indicates that ethnographic-style observation could provide inspiration and grounding for innovation and design. Thus, ideas would respond to real needs, thereby having the desired social or market impact. The assumption of Brandes et al. (2009) that everyday life has enormous potential to influence design is somewhat aligned with Jane Fulton Suri's implications. Understanding people's practices, appropriation and domestication of objects and products would provide a rich source that design researchers could draw from. Analysing domestication of furniture units would contribute significantly to the Turkish furniture industry. Regarding the limitations of the current research, more large-scale user researches could be conducted in efforts to improve home lives through design. Design practice could benefit from extensive analysis of the post-commodity phase.

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APPENDIX 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROPERTIES OF FIELDWORK RESPONDENTS (FR)

	Occupation	Education	Age	Monthly income (Turkish Lira)
FR 1a	Engineer	Master's	36	10,000–15,000
FR 1b	Engineer	Master's	36	
FR 2a (Hale)	Academician	Ph.D.	34	5000–10,000
FR 2b (Atakan)	Academician	Ph.D.	34	
FR 3a (Beste)	Architect	Ph.D.	33	5000–10,000
FR 3b (Kaan)	Engineer	Bachelor's	33	
FR 4	Regional manager	Bachelor's	41	5000–10,000
FR 5a (Ezgi)	Academician	Ph.D.	47	10,000–15,000
FR 5b (Bora)	Engineer	Bachelor's	43	
FR 6	Interior architect	Ph.D.	40	5000–10,000
FR 7a (Deniz)	Fashion designer	Bachelor's	35	10,000–15,000
FR 7b (Atakan)	Sales manager	Bachelor's	40	
FR 8a	Teacher	Bachelor's	35	10,000–15,000
FR 8b	Senior consultant	Ph.D.	35	

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