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Exploring the Significance of Diasporic Objects in Sudanese-Turkish Dual-Heritage Households: Insights from the African Diaspora in Turkey

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Abstract

The study of diasporic objects has emerged as a sub-concept of material culture studies, reflecting the interconnection of mobility and materiality, and the importance of objects in relation to the experiences of migrants and diaspora communities. In this article, we explore the importance of diasporic objects within the Sudanese diaspora in Turkey, focusing on the significance of these objects in households of dual heritage. Using thematic discourse analysis, we identify three main categories of diasporic objects, including food and kitchen objects, biographic objects, and socio-cultural objects. Drawing on interdisciplinary research, we examine the potential functions and significance of these objects, as well as the broader social and cultural practices that surround them. Our findings suggest that diasporic objects can serve as powerful symbols of cultural identity and personal history, providing a sense of continuity and connection for individuals in the diaspora. Moreover, these objects can offer a source of comfort and support, acting as emotional companions that help individuals to maintain a sense of belonging and identity during the challenging experiences of migration and displacement. Additionally, this article highlights the specific significance of the diasporic objects in dual-heritage households.

Keywords

Diasporic Objects, African Diaspora, Material Culture, Sudanese Diaspora, Dual-Heritage Households

Introduction

Turkey's diplomatic and political interest in the African continent has been evident in recent times, with a particular focus on the Horn of Africa and a special relationship with Sudan. The relationship between Turkey and Sudan has a rich history dating back to the Ottoman Empire (Zengin, 2013) and has evolved over time to become one of the most strategic bilateral partnerships between Turkey and the African continent (Bayram, 2020), especially during the Justice and Development Party's rule (Altunışık, 2011). Along with these political and economic relations, cultural ties and inter-communal

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exchanges have also grown, resulting in a significant presence of the Sudanese migrants in Turkey (Tirab, 2022), who are expected to be among the largest groups of the African diaspora in the country.

As a consequence of Turkey's strategic foreign policy and growing interest in Africa, academic inquiry into African studies in Turkey has witnessed a marked increase in recent years. Within this context, various academic research endeavors have centered on the African diaspora in Turkey, exploring issues such as migration (Özdil, 2008), resettlement (Dziwornu, 2016), and diasporic, migratory and integration experiences (Suter, 2013; Budel, 2013). Additionally, there have been various academic forums dedicated to analyzing the African-Turkish relationship with a specific emphasis on the Horn of Africa. One such example is the "International Symposium: Re-evaluation of the Last Decade of Turkey-Somalia Relations," which was held virtually in August 2020 (Afrika Vakfi, 2021). Another notable event was the international symposium titled "Sudan in Transition and the Turkish-Sudanese Relationships," which took place in Istanbul in October 2022 (Afrika Vakfi, 2022).

This study is a product of a larger research project that was presented at the aforementioned symposium. As part of this project, a prior study was conducted on the experiences of the Sudanese diaspora in Turkey focusing on the intercultural marriages. During the examination of the intercultural marriage experiences of Sudanese migrants to Turkish nationals and the specificities of the dual-heritage households that result from these unions, it became apparent that the Sudanese diaspora preserve and maintain strong ties to their homeland. This connection is reflected in various ways within the domestic space, including their relationship with the material culture elements of diasporic nature, which was observed to be among the means of maintaining their cultural identity and sense of belonging. This observation prompted further inquiry into the significance and meaning of diasporic objects in dual-heritage households of the Sudanese diaspora in Turkey, marking the initiation for the current research project.

Building on a qualitative research inquiry and within the framework of the anthropological study on material culture, this research aims to first analyze the presence and symbolism of material culture in relation to the diaspora experience. Afterwards, the investigation delves into the additional meanings attributed to these objects within the context of dual heritage households. In this framework, this research does not aim to compare the symbolism and meaning of material culture between dual heritage households and single Sudanese households in the diaspora, but rather focuses on the unique utility, functions, and symbolism that material culture and diasporic objects possess within the context of dual-heritage households.

The article sets out by bringing together literature on material culture and diasporic objects, linking these debates with accounts on dual-heritage households. Following

details of the research methodology and the investigated case study, this article presents an analysis of three key categories of diasporic objects and their meanings based on the perspectives of interviewed Sudanese-Turkish couples. This leads to a conclusion highlighting the distinctiveness of these objects within the context of dual-heritage households.

The following work affirms the literature accounts in relation to the importance of the material culture for diasporic communities (Buchli, 2020) and sheds the lights on the additional role of diasporic objects within dual heritage households as: first, a communicative agency of diasporic objects in the context of couple relationships, second a tool of inter-generational cultural transmission, and, finally as a coping and self-protection mechanism in the setting of xenophobic social dynamics. Additionally, along with attracting the attention to the importance of the African diaspora in Turkey, the ensuing discussion highlights the need for a differentiated analysis of diasporic objects in light of their owners' post-migratory experience.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Although the study of objects is primarily a component of material culture studies (Berger, 2016), the concept of diasporic objects has emerged as a new sub-concept that may be considered to be a result of the interdisciplinary research inquiry. Additionally, the inter-connection of mobility and materiality established the need to study different objects in accordance with the specificity of the human movement' experience.

For instance, Refugee studies emphasize the importance of material culture and objects for refugees (Dudley, 2010), taking into consideration the significance and value of these objects along and during the experience of displacement. Objects, in this context, can serve as sources of comfort, familiarity, and continuity in a new and often hostile environment (Dudley, 2015).

In migration studies, major shifts in the field occurred and over time and the study of migration has expanded to include a wider range of social relationships, meanings, and practices, moving beyond the traditional understanding of migration as solely an economically driven process. As a result, research approaches that focus on personal accounts of migrants and their lived experiences have emerged. Within this context, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of objects and material culture in relation to mobility (Van, 2017). Scholars argue that the objects that migrants bring with them from their home countries (Basu, 2008; Pechurina, 2015), or acquire during their migratory journey (Miller, 2008), serve as tangible reminders of their cultural identity and personal histories (Hahn, 2013). These objects can serve as a source of comfort and connection to their past, as well as a means of expressing their cultural identity in their new environment (Ahmed, 2003). Overall, the study of material culture in the context of

migration has enriched our understanding of the complex social and cultural dynamics of the migrant experience.

Similarly, in the frame of the diaspora studies, the focus on the experiences of post-migration communities has led to an interest in the role of objects and material culture in the diaspora and as a possible reflection of the diasporic experiences (Pechurina, 2015). This has potentially contributed to the emergence of the concept of “diasporic objects” in which we take interest.

The “Diasporic Objects” concept builds over the special value of material items that “people decide to keep when they move places are more special, since they become invested with the identities of their owners and so embody personal memories and family history” (Pechurina, 2015) making them symbolically and emotionally significant. Hence, these specific travelling objects would be of a certain value.

They may reflect the connection between cultural identity, memories of the homeland (Savaş, 2014), and the process of building a sense of belonging within the diaspora (Knott et al., 2010). Furthermore, as Miller (2008) and Bachelard (1964) argue, the act of bringing and displaying objects from one’s home country serves as a means of feeling safe and at home in the diaspora and creating “proofs or illusions of stability” – a feeling that is particularly crucial when individuals are far away from what is familiar to them.

Although, due to the extensive possibilities and sorts of objects that a person may possess, the literature has posed the need to the diasporic nature of a specific item (Pechurina, 2015). It has been established that specific criteria can be used to differentiate between diasporic objects and other elements of material culture. In this sense, it was suggested that any object used by the owner to articulate their sense of belonging while staying abroad can be defined as “diasporic.” However, there are no hard and fast rules to determine whether an object is diasporic. Scholars suggest several criteria that could be used as a framework for identifying such objects, such as whether the object reflects the movement and migration of people across time and space, holds significant symbolic meaning for a particular community in the diaspora, or serves as a tangible connection to the homeland or to the memories and experiences of the diasporic community. Although, what is of a primordial reference is the significance of these possessions for their owners. This means going beyond merely describing objects and instead examining their meaning, use, and interpretation within their domestic context and in relation to the diasporic experience. In other words, deciding about the diasporic nature of a specific object involves looking at how the objects are utilized and understood by their owners, the tangible attachment to them, and exploring the broader social and cultural practices that surround them.

In line with this, the research identified specific categories of items that could be classified as diasporic, based on the accounts and narratives of the participants. This was

accomplished using thematic discourse analysis of the narratives. As a result, this work discusses three main categories of diasporic objects that have been previously explored in the literature.

The first diasporic objects' category is related to food and kitchen objects. In fact, food and food-related practices have gained special attention among migration and diaspora studies scholars, as they are considered to be powerful expressions of identity and belonging (Pechurina, 2015). As they reflect an ethnic background and specific cultural heritage, food objects becoming symbols of diasporic presence and autonomy in host countries. For example, couscous and couscous pots (Durmelat, 2022) are among the most solid representations of the North African diaspora in Europe, particularly in France and Italy. The consumption of couscous as an overtly ethnically coded food reflects a sense of belonging and identity for the diasporic community.

The second category is related to the study of biographic objects, as we found them to have a solid significance in relation to the diasporic experience of their owners. In fact, as a component of material culture, biographic objects have been the subject of numerous scholarly investigations, particularly in regard to the personal belongings, artifacts, and memories that reflect the personal history of the owner or the collective memory of a family or family member (Thomson, 2011; Harrington-Watt, 2014; Pitt, 2015). In the context of diaspora, these biographic objects often serve as a link to the individual or group's past and their culture of origin and are considered to be of critical importance in maintaining their identity and connection to their heritage (Pechurina, 2020). Hence, biographic objects are even more valuable as they serve as a means of autobiographical remembering, often interlinked with feelings of love and attachment. This is why they were described as "evocative objects," as defined by Turkle (2011), becoming "emotional companions to our lives." Additional research has highlighted the therapeutic value of such objects, which not only protect a sense of belonging and identity but can also bring a feeling of consolation and well-being to their owners (Ahmed, 1999; Marcoux, 2001; Miller, 2008; Turkle, 2007).

From another side, ethnographic research and material culture literature often explores objects that carry socio-cultural significance, such as those representing social norms, cultural symbols, historical events, leaders, or religious items. These objects can highlight a certain identity marker and helps migrants generally and African diasporas specifically "to maintain their unique national identities, continental identities, ethnic, clan, or tribal identities, their linguistic, religious, and class characteristics" (Arthur, 2012, p. 2). Therefore, as similar objects were encountered in this research, we consider socio-cultural objects as third category of diasporic objects to be elaborated in the upcoming pages.

Building on this rich literature, this study is situated at the intersection of material

culture and mobility, drawing on interdisciplinary research to investigate the significance of diasporic objects within the Sudanese diaspora in Turkey. The purpose of this research is to explore the importance of material culture for the Sudanese diaspora in Turkey and to examine the additional meanings and specificities that these objects may have in households of dual heritage.

In this sense, this article contributes to the existing literature by examining diasporic objects and their potential functions and significance within households of dual heritage. The study involves participants who are not only migrants, but also have a Turkish partner through marriage. By considering the significance of this particular diasporic experience and the dual-heritage aspect of domestic spaces, this research aims to add to the literature by exploring the potential significance of these diasporic objects in dual heritage households.

Research Method and Data Collection

The empirical data for this article was collected as part of a larger study that investigated the experiences of the African diaspora in Turkey, including the intercultural marriages involving Turkish and Sudanese nationals. The initial results of the research were presented at the African-Sudanese Research Symposium in Istanbul in October 2022 and published as a conference paper in a book published by the African Foundation (Özcan & Köse, 2023).

In the frame of this previous project, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with six couples of Sudanese and Turkish descent who have lived in Turkey for periods ranging from 10 to 30 years. The primary focus of the research was to explore their experiences in intercultural marriages, but a significant part of the data gathered also pertained to the strategies they use to preserve and present their heritage in their dual-heritage marriages and households. The study emphasized the significance of material culture and revealed that diasporic objects play a crucial role in the diasporic experience of the Sudanese migrants. Hence, it was deemed necessary to further investigate the topic carrying out further investigation focusing on a particularized conceptual and theoretical framework. Therefore, to collect more specific data and focused insights, additional home-based semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same sample of Sudanese-Turkish couples living in Istanbul.

To enhance the explorative interactive dimension of this work, an ethnographic approach was adopted for this research, which emphasizes the utility of home-based semi-structured interviews and conducting the investigation in the context of the participants' everyday lives and domestic spaces (Small, 2009). Hence, beside the primordial data previously collected, five additional home-based interviews were conducted in Istanbul, with Sudanese migrants and their Turkish wives. All of the participants have been

married for more than a decade and have been always residing in Turkey since the initiation of their relationships. Additionally, all the interviews were conducted between May 2022 and January 2023.

The primordial goal of these interviews was the understanding of the nature and meaning of diasporic objects and their functionality in the context of dual-heritage households. Therefore, while general questions regarding the couple lives and relationships were included as an introduction, the home-based interviews were structured around the observed objects in the domestic space, and discussions were conducted accordingly. The interviews were recorded and thematically transcribed. The researcher took an explicit consent from the participants to use quotes from their testimonies and tell their stories in the frame of this academic work.

When it comes to the data analysis, a thematic analysis was adopted and only directly related passages to the research question were transcribed and categorized in light of the noted observations during the interviews. Moreover, the case-comparative method was utilized to perform an inclusive analysis of the collected data and testimonies, with the objective of comprehending the shared meanings given to diasporic objects. In fact, thanks to this comparative approach between the narratives of the participants we were able to enhance the analysis of the data and support the identification of the most important diasporic items and their significance.

The results of this study indicate the special significance of three main categories of diasporic objects that were unexceptionally present within all the visited households and mentioned in every conducted interview. The selection and categorization of these objects were based on the participants' narratives, each partner's commentary on the specific objects selected and positioned in the home by their partner, and the similarity among the objects, descriptions, and narratives of the interviewed families. The research observed the importance given to specific objects in the homes of the interviewed couples and especially for the Sudanese participants. Based on the above explained elements of selection and categorization, the analyzed data underlines these categories of diasporic objects: first, food and kitchen objects, secondly, biographic objects, and thirdly, socio-cultural objects including religious items.

We can also indicate that the results of this research established a significant conformity with existing literature, revealing specific characteristics derived from the unique nature of the diasporic case, the studied sample, and socio-cultural spatial context. The additional importance and significance of diasporic objects within dual-heritage households was specifically investigated through conducting these interviews with Turkish-Sudanese couples in a home-based context.

Food and Alimentary Products as A Dimension of Interculturality

In all the home-based interviews, the subject of food came up as soon as we were offered beverages as a welcoming gesture. The Sudanese-Turkish hospitality started by asking if we would prefer to have a Turkish tea or a Sudanese Karkade. It was generally the way we stated the discussion about food and food objects with the participants, who usually would offer us a Sudanese treat mentioning that it was specifically brought from -not only Sudan- but their village or city. Asking further questions about the possibility to find these food products in Turkey and from where they purchase them, Sudanese participants explained that they give much importance to bring with them specific traditional ingredients and food products from home, even if they became more and more available in the Turkish markets. It is not only the easily carried light foods such as Sudanese tea, Karkade, or Molokhia but they even bring kilos of Mango to Turkey:

My wife is always asking why I go through the trouble of bringing kilos of Mango with me from Sudan. She says that “we have mango in Turkey.” What she doesn’t understand that it never tastes the same, at least not for me (Abdelkarim, September 2022).

We observed that the participants did not only have Sudanese ingredients and alimentary products but also brought a few cooking objects from Sudan. When asked about these specific objects and their use, they all linked them with being a part of the food preparation process and an essential element ensuring the authenticity of the prepared food. and that it made food “look really Sudanese” when served in these trays. Some participants recounted their recollections of transporting their cherished aliments, ingredients, and food objects from Sudan to Turkey via plane. They shared how they were cautious in handling the items, expressing their efforts over ensuring their safe arrival in their new homes. This demonstrates that the effort invested in bringing these food products and cooking utensils from their former home to their current one reflects something deeper than mere consumption or preference for taste. It highlights the sentimental value attached to these items, embodying a connection to their cultural heritage and identity. They are tools into creating a familiar space and a way to construct the ideal home. Another important fact about food and alimentary elements as objects of belonging and a form of cultural connection with the origins, is that it comes with a practical side, that enhances the feeling with an action or a ritual. The participants stated that these traditional Sudanese plates are being cooked with a special ritual even if it is not prepared for a special occasion.

I honestly prepare Sudanese food in special days or when we are receiving family or friends, it is not a daily activity, that’s why it is even more

significant (...) I usually play traditional Sudanese song, wear a clothing reminding me of home (even a colorful headband I brought from home), I use special cooking objects to cook and very frequently I call my sister to ask her for the recipe even if I am quite sure about it... (Sabri, December 2022).

Food and associated practices play a key role as a belonging expression among the diaspora supporting the construction and the continuity of socio-cultural identities. It was described by the participants to be rather a remembering process and an opportunity to re-live common daily life moments with family members. More than that it was described by a participant to be a proof of belonging. Making the food of home in the diaspora was as well expressed to be a form of recognition to the person's heritage and belonging and a proof of attachment to the home and the family back home. Through the narratives of two female participants, it seemed that cooking was a way to escape a feeling of blame or shame they sound to be facing due to their decision of migrating. When it comes to the Turkish partners, they clearly stated that preparing Sudanese food was their partners' way to feel home, to bring a piece of his/her childhood to their common life, and to pass his/her culture to their children.

One of the participants, a Turkish wife, mentioned that she would feel concerned about her husband when he decides to prepare Sudanese food if it is not a special day or occasion. She felt that making Sudanese food was her husband's way of dealing with sad events he may be facing, and that making "the food of his mother" was his way to find peace and feel safe. When we asked the husband about this, he just said, "maybe she is right." In this context, It was remarked throughout the interviews, that all the narratives and answers related to the food objects and the process of preparing food were frequently linked with remembering the mother, the mother's recipe, the mother's style, the smell of the mother's cooking, which is another form of seeking comfort, peace and stability through recalling the mother figure.

Overall, preparing food in the diaspora is a ritual that connects people to their past and their heritage, and it is often linked with memories of the mother and her cooking. It is a diasporic practice that reinforces attachment to identity and helps to recognize the past, bringing the smells, feelings, and practices of the past home to the new domestic space.

The Biographic Objects and The Memory of Sudan

During the home-based interviews, we were primarily welcomed into the living rooms of the households we visited. Whenever participants wanted to share a specific piece of information or show us a different object located in another room, they would invite us to join them to another part of the house and return to the living room afterward. The

living room, for both Turkish and Sudanese cultures, is the place where guests are received, conversations take place, and time is spent together. It is a space designed to welcome others and present the family. As a result, the living room was the primary space for displaying meaningful objects for the families, objects that spoke of the old home, the new home, and the life in between. This is one of the reasons a significant portion of the interviews took place in the living room, as we would ask questions about these objects and the participants shared with us different stories about each of these objects, their meanings, their stories, and the memories they evoked. In this section, we will focus on the biographical objects, primarily photographs and documents, that we encountered in these dual-heritage households.

Very old family pictures of the Sudanese partners' families were almost always present in each home and were typically located in the living room. We asked the participants about these pictures, including, who were the people in the photographs, how long they had had the photographs, and how they had made their way to Turkey. Each photograph had a different story and brought with it complex and overlapping memories that sometimes-involved memories of past lives in Sudan and memories of life in the diaspora.

This is a picture of my father. He passed away a few months before I came to Turkey in the beginning of 1990. I brought it with me, and it hasn't left me since. It reminds me always of what my father wanted me to be and how to be a good son to him...this photograph also reminds me of my son's first words. He was in my arms, and I was trying to get his attention, showing him these pictures. He took it and looked at it for a long time, as if he was asking about the man in the picture. So, I told him, "This is 'dede', your grandfather Muhammed in Sudan." He looked directly into my eyes, and it was his first word, 'dede'...as if he knew how much this photograph meant to me, he chose to say his first word talking about it. (Abubakir, January 2023)

As Abubakar's story illustrates, these diasporic objects have their own biographies and become representative agents of the intersectionality of different memories. While they were primarily reminders of biographical events happening in relation to the old home, they have also witnessed the lived experiences of their owners, becoming holders of life-long accumulated memories. Confirming previous academic conclusions, throughout their migration experience, the meanings and significance of these objects may change and evolve. They may reflect new memories formed during the journey, while crossing borders to new geographies, settling in new locations, and forming new relationships and families in the diaspora. As suggested by Kopytoff's concept of the "biographies" of objects (Kopytoff, 2009), these diasporic biographic objects gain their own unique history and significance. The possessions of the diaspora live more than one life,

gaining accumulated meanings and becoming imbued with a soul for their owners. In other words, the biographic objects of diasporic nature encountered in the dual heritage households are observed to be powerful agents of intersectionality in terms of the memories they hold.

Furthermore, our research highlights the added importance of these diasporic objects during times of instability. Participants mentioned that during difficult times, they often turn to these objects for comfort and as a way to hold onto their cultural heritage. Additionally, when facing rejection or racist behavior in public spaces, these objects become even more important for their owners as a way to assert their cultural identity.

To be honest, I don't face similar behaviors and racist comments anymore, but I remember that I would be very sad because of some comments about my color or some jokes that made me feel humiliated (...) I always came back home hiding my feelings from my wife, I look to the picture of my father, my family that I left, look to my diplomas on these walls, and remind myself that I have given enough and that I have to be strong and ignore everything that may make me doubt my life decisions (...) everything hanging on these walls is very dear to me (...) (Abubakar, January 2023).

Hence, as shared by Abubakar, these biographic objects and especially the photographic items, became a remarkable source of compassion and support to their owners. These diasporic objects can be symbolic of the owner's connection to their homeland, representing a tangible connection to their past and their cultural identity, and a significant reminder of the owners' goals, motivations, and sacrifices. These objects hence became a reminder, a motivator, and a source of continuity in a new and often hostile environment, providing a sense of stability and belonging.

In addition to the photographs and documents that were prominently displayed in the living room, we also observed other biographic objects that reflected the communal life and experiences of the Sudanese partners after they had come to Turkey. These objects were also typically showcased in the living room and included pictures from the wedding day, diplomas earned by the Sudanese partners (especially those who came to Turkey for educational reasons), and pictures of the children in important moments such as their first day of school.

Interestingly, two of the older participants in their late fifties who had come to Turkey in the early 1990s showed us old letters they had received from their families in Sudan. These letters were unexpected, and it was intriguing to see how the participants considered them as diasporic biographic objects. The two participants explained that even though phones and internet were used 30 years ago, their parents still sent them letters due to the convenience of this tool for the older generation as well as the affordability

of letter-mailing at that time. Some of these letters delivered family news and were sent along with pictures of important events such as weddings or the birth of a nephew.

It is becoming increasingly rare to encounter letters and telegrams in ethnographic research due to the advancement of communication technology, but this was an opportunity to observe the importance of the epistolary agency as an element of material culture and as a diasporic object. These letters, like the photographs and other objects, held memories and stories that were unique to the participants and their experiences of living in a dual heritage household.

To conclude, the biographic objects of diasporic nature we encountered in the dual heritage households during this research have proven to be powerful agents of intersectionality in terms of the memories they hold. From photographs of family members to diplomas and letters, these objects not only serve as reminders of the past life in the old home, but also hold within them the lived experiences and accumulated memories of their owners. In the next section, we will delve further into the topic of diaspora by exploring the socio-cultural significance of objects in these households. Top of Form

Reflecting Dual-Heritage

In this final part we look at socio-cultural objects and we delve into the material culture of dual-heritage households, specifically focusing on objects that hold socio-cultural significance for both Turkish and Sudanese heritage. These specific objects may be “with national symbolics, figures of popular personalities, and various folk crafts do act as visible symbolisations of a country (...) some of them reveal further meanings, which are rarely straightforward and often ethnographically rich” (Pechurina, 2015). In fact, such items were found throughout the household, showcasing elements of both Turkish and Sudanese cultures, often side by side, and highlight common cultural elements shared by both heritages. Meanwhile, a number of these socio-cultural objects also underline the validity of the African and Sudanese heritage in this household.

For instance, one of the key findings of this study is the presence of African cultural objects in all of the households we visited. These items, such as African masks, souvenirs or decorative objects featuring animal figures, are considered important elements for highlighting the African identity of Sudanese participants. They also serve as markers of belonging and connection to Africa, especially for the Sudanese diaspora in Turkey.

Many of my friends in Turkey, asks why I am having this masks, structure, and artifacts in my home. They think that because I am a Muslim who prays than I shouldn't be having such objects in my home. Well, they are wrong! I am a Muslim of course, but I am also a Sudanese and an African man, and we have a different understanding and a different way of

living our religion in tune with our culture. We are not regressive, and God won't forbid us to celebrate our heritage and our ancestors (Naji, January 2023).

Naji sees the presence of these objects as a way of celebrating his cultural and ancestral heritage, which is important to him as both a Sudanese and an African man. This quote shows that socio-cultural diasporic objects play a crucial role in helping members of diaspora communities maintain a connection to their cultural heritage and identity, especially in a new and different cultural context and regardless of the social judgement. In this case, the presence of African cultural objects in Naji's home serves as a way of highlighting his African identity and heritage, which is an essential aspect of his identity that he wants to preserve expressing at the same time the different understanding of Islam he has as an African. The presence of these objects is also an indication of the specific Muslim religious identity of the Sudanese people that is mixed with African heritage as a form of richness and authenticity that reflects their complex history and heritage.

By combining their Muslim religious identity with their African cultural heritage, Sudanese people have created a distinct and multifaceted cultural identity that is reflected in the objects they choose to display in their homes. Additionally, it was clear that these objects served as a tool to challenge prejudice and present what the owner considers to be a correct. In this sense, material culture and diasporic objects seem to be a tool to fight against social prejudice in the diaspora. By displaying cultural objects in their homes, members of the Sudanese diaspora community aim to challenge negative stereotypes and promote a positive or a correct image of their culture. As mentioned in previous research, when individuals from a diaspora community display cultural objects in their homes, they are actively promoting their cultural heritage to others. These objects can serve as a way of educating others about their culture and challenging negative stereotypes.

In addition to the above-mentioned items that reflect African identity, other socio-cultural objects in the dual heritage households reflected key elements of Turkish culture and history. Depending on the interviewees' ideologies, the displayed objects would relate to Ottoman heritage on one hand or Turkish republican identity on the other. We observed pictures of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in two of the homes visited, and Ottoman armoires in the other two. Despite their ideological meanings and affiliations, these objects were described as "representing Turkish culture and heritage." Other objects that represented Turkish cultural heritage were also present, such as Sufi figures, miniatures, and souvenirs from specific Turkish cities. It was clear that each of these socio-cultural objects had a different story. While many of these objects were received as gifts from family members, some were bought during family visits or had an additional significance for the couple.

These were a wedding gift from my friend who is from Konya (showing three small structures of Ancient Sufi Dance and RUMI'S Whirling Dervishes) and I love them of course, but this one (showing a handmade Ramadan lantern) is very meaningful for us, we got it in 1993 in our first visit to Sudan as a married couple (Nalan, January 2023).

What Nalan (spouse of Naji) explained telling the story of decorative items in their living room, reflects the use of objects in dual-heritage households reflects the complex and multifaceted cultural identities of the individuals and communities from where they came, as well as the personal experiences of their owners. For instance, these objects often have unique stories and meanings that reflect the personal experiences of the individuals and families that own them.

The presence of socio-cultural diasporic objects, whether they represent African or Turkish cultural heritage, plays a vital role in helping members of diaspora communities maintain a connection to their cultural heritage and identity, even in a new and different cultural context. These objects provide tangible markers of cultural identity and heritage and serve as a reflection of the intercultural exchange and understanding as a main specificity of the couples' relationship as an intercultural marriage.

Also, religious items were a common feature in the households visited and as described during all the interviews. While some academic research distinguishes religious objects as a distinct category of material culture due to their significance for individuals in the diaspora, we have chosen to include them in the broader category of socio-cultural objects. This classification is based on the participants' narratives, who generally referred to specific religious items as representing a shared Islamic culture between the two countries, rather than as specific religious items. Regardless of religious practice, all of the couples mentioned and described religious elements as objects of cultural significance that represented both Turkish and Sudanese culture. Hence, in our study, religious items were significant as an underlying marker of the shared identity of the couples, rather than being an expression of religious belonging of the migrants.

This lack of emphasis on religious identity may be explained by the fact that all the couples in our study were Muslims and Turkey has a majority of Muslims with a Muslim heritage. As members of the Sudanese community in Turkey, our participants did not mention feeling a specific need to highlight, protect or speak out for their religious identity. Therefore, the religious identity was not perceived different and was not rejected by the society in Turkey. Rather, these objects were significant in highlighting the shared cultural elements of both Sudanese and Turkish heritage, and how these elements were combined and expressed in the households of the Sudanese diaspora in Turkey.

The religious items, particularly the Quran, were not described as diasporic objects or

linked to the Sudanese partner's heritage. In fact, when we asked the participants about the most valuable object that they brought from home or reminded them of home, none of them mentioned a religious object. This may be explained by the fact that different religious items would be found in Turkey as well as in Sudan. We intended to explore this and instead we specifically asked about the meaning and the story of specific showcased religious items, and it was how we got some insights in this framework. Therefore, the religious objects don't seem to have a specific significance in the context of the diasporic experience in the frame of this case study and for this specific sample. Although, a clear attachment to religious identity as a shared cultural element was established through the couples' discourse.

- This tableau (pointing to A tableau of Quran verses in calligraphy) was a gift from my parents and they got it from Al Medina when they were doing Umra, it is very valuable for me and for my wife, not only because it is a gift from my parents but also because it came from the most beautiful place in this world, where our prophet is (...) and it was very useful as well in teaching my son.
- How was that? (The researchers)
- Well, I tried to motivate them to learn Arabic, sent them to school and tried to teach them myself, but it was challenging, when we got this table, my son asked me about what was written in it, and what was the meaning, so I challenged him to read it and I promised him that I will send him to spend the summer in Sudan if he does, he loved going to Sudan in that time. Well, he did, he spent weeks working on it and trying to figure out the letters and it was very useful to make him study Arabic (Abubakir, January 2023).

As made clear in this quote, the Quran tableau had a significance as it was a gift from the parents and as it reminded of a story the father had with his son. Here, we could also note that religious items, as a part of the socio-cultural objects were a tool to educate the next generation and enhance their awareness and knowledge about their culture and heritage, including their religious identity. Additionally, the religious items could be described as being a reflection of the shared identity marker within the dual-heritage household. It is important to note that this finding is specific to the sample and context of this research, and conducting the same research with a different group of people in a different country may lead to different conclusions and results. For example, members of the Sudanese diaspora living in a country where Islamophobia is prevalent may have a different perspective on the role of religious objects in the diaspora. In such a context, religious items may be perceived as more significant as diasporic objects, representing a connection to their cultural and religious heritage that is under threat or in need of protection.

Moving to another point, it was also clear that the Sudanese partners did not place much importance on the utility of these socio-cultural objects, and many of them would be conserved for decades even if they were not usable. For instance, both Sudanese male and female participants brought Sudanese traditional clothes with them and even for their children, although they acknowledged that it was not possible to wear them in Turkey due to the environmental differences between Sudan and Turkey. For instance, The Sudanese traditional clothing is designed to be light for the hot weather in Sudan and thus not suitable for use in Turkey's colder climate. Despite this, the Sudanese participants still brought the clothes with them, and wore them on special days and religious events, "even if only for a few minutes to take a picture and celebrate the moment" (Naji, January 2023).

Finally, when asked about how they thought of their homes, we had two significant answers, one from the Sudanese partners and another from the Turkish spouses. For instance, Nalan told us the following:

All of these objects are very valuable for me, they tell the story of my husband, the story of our love, they reflect how special is our family and our relation (...) whoever comes to our home spends a lot of time asking about these items and finishes telling us that our home looks like a museum (Nalan, January 2023).

Naji in the other hand, answered the question very differently comparing to his wife Nalan saying, "For me, our home is my refuge from the world and is a mosaic with pieces of my memories and many of these pieces brings Sudan here" (Naji, January 2023).

Hence, while the dual-heritage household was a reflection and expression of the intercultural specificity of this marriage for the Turkish spouses, it was of an additional value for the Sudanese partner as it was considered as a safe place that presents their legacy and tell their stories through the presence of these different objects.

To sum up, this section has shown that the material culture of dual-heritage households reflects the unique blend of Turkish and Sudanese cultures, with objects holding significant socio-cultural meaning for both heritages. This reflects the nuances and complexities of intercultural marriages and the ways in which material culture can serve as a marker of cultural identity and belonging.

Conclusion

The assumption of this article was that, as specific as they may be, material culture and diasporic objects would play additional roles and hold other meanings in the context of intercultural marriages. This is due to the potential influence of the nature of the intercultural marriage relationship and the spatial reality in which it takes place. The current

research conducted with the previously described sample has shown the validity of this assumption, revealing that diasporic objects hold an additional importance within dual-heritage households for members of the Sudanese diaspora in Turkey who have entered into intercultural relationships by marrying a Turkish spouse.

In this work, we elaborated on the participants' narratives on the role and significance of three main categories of diasporic objects within the dual-heritage households being, first, food and food objects, second biographic objects and finally the socio-cultural objects. Different objects in this context were observed to have a principal significance for their owners in relation to their experience of diaspora as well as an additional value and meaning within the dual-heritage household.

The importance of diasporic objects in this context can be described through four main points. The first significance pertains to the meaning they represent for their owners, the Sudanese migrants in Turkey. These diasporic objects were described as essential for the Sudanese migrants' feeling of belonging within their new domestic space and were considered to be containers of their personal memories of their previous home, culture, heritage, as well as their lived experience of migration. While these are commonly described results, the specificity in this context is that they make the person feel that they are not dominated in their space of belonging, and that it is a space of safety and acceptance.

The second idea relates to the communicative role of diasporic objects in the context of couple relationships. The Turkish partners interviewed in this research expressed that the use of these objects by their partners in certain times would tell them about what their spouses may be feeling, or if they are going through a difficult time. The use of these objects could be as simple as being part of a celebratory action (when used in special days) but may reflect the psychological state of their owners. Additionally, it was noted that the Sudanese partners consider the respect and care given to these objects to be an expression of love and consideration from their Turkish spouse, as well as a sort of respect for the culture, heritage, and memories of the Sudanese spouse. As a result, the use of diasporic objects in intercultural couples has a special importance in the relationship dynamic.

The third additional role of these objects within dual-heritage households relates to the role of diasporic objects in inter-generational cultural transmission. The Sudanese participants clearly aimed to remind their children that they are Sudanese and have a dual identity. In this sense, the interviewees recognize that through making their children eat Sudanese food, listen to Sudanese music, use Sudanese objects, and see elements reminiscent of Sudan on a daily basis, they aim to enhance the feeling of belonging to Sudan and make their children aware of their Sudanese identity. These diasporic objects were used as tools to pass cultural codes to the new generation, and to raise the children with a feeling of belonging to, and an awareness of, their Sudanese identity. Hence, diasporic objects in

dual-heritage households become tools of education for future generations, playing a role in the identity construction process of the younger generation.

Finally, the advocative role that diasporic objects play within society in dual-heritage households is of a capital importance. These objects become for their owners an expression of the specificity of their cultural heritage and belonging and a sort of resistance towards prejudice or the social denying attitudes they may face in the diaspora. The process of establishing social relationships and being able to assert one's existence can be difficult for those who are part of a diaspora, and these objects serve as a means of asserting that existence and asserting one's cultural identity.

To sum up, this research has made a valuable contribution to both the field of African diaspora studies in Turkey and to the study of material culture and diasporic objects. However, it is important to note that there are several limitations to this study. Firstly, the sample size was limited, and further research involving a larger and more diverse sample could provide a more detailed understanding of the topic. Secondly, the research was specifically focused on Sudanese-Turkish couples in Turkey, which limits the generalizability of the results to other communities of the African diaspora in Turkey. For example, the same research conducted with North-African diaspora in Turkey may yield different results. Finally, the study heavily relied on participants' self-reported psychological aspects, which would benefit from further investigation by interdisciplinary socio-psychological experts. Overall, it should be acknowledged that the findings presented in this study are preliminary and should be used to spark further academic research in the field.

This study sheds light on the importance of material culture and diasporic objects in the context of intercultural marriages and dual-heritage households. Although, many of the mentioned results are specific to the selected sample and to the context of this study. For instance, the same research may show different results if conduct with another group or in another country. Additionally, another limitation of this work is related to the number of the conduct home-based interviews that were only five comparing to the number of semi-structured interviews which were conduct in an external space.

Further research in this area could explore the role of diasporic objects in other cultural contexts or in for other African communities in Turkey and the impact of these objects on the formation and maintenance of cultural identity. It is our hope that this study will contribute to a greater understanding of the complexities and nuances of intercultural marriages and the diaspora experience, and the role of material culture in shaping these experiences.

Annex 1: Participants' Demographic table

- The real names of the participants have been changes to protect their privacy and maintain their anonymity.

- The home-based interviews were conducted with the specific goal of consolidating the results of the initial interviews conducted as part of our research on interracial marriages in Turkey and the diasporic experiences of Sudanese migrants.

	Name	Gender	Origin	Age	Relationship time	City	Date of interview	Modality of interview
Couple 1	Figen	Female	Turkish	54	27	Ankara	May 2022	Face-to-Face interview
	Hassan	Male	Sudan	59				
Couple 2	Türkan	Female	Turkish	51	25	Ankara	September 2022	Face-to face interview
	Mohamed	Male	Sudan	56				
Couple 3	Fatma	Female	Turkish	57	31	Ankara	September 2022	Face-to-face interview
	Khalid	Male	Sudan	60				
Couple 4	Zeynep	Female	Turkish	54	28	Istanbul	November 2022	Online interview
	Yasir	Male	Sudan	58				
Couple 5	Amira	Female	Sudan	53	25	Konya	November 2022	Online interview
	Selcuk	Male	Turkish	52				
Couple 6	Merva	Female	Sudan	38	10	Bursa	November 2022	Online interview
	Ali	Male	Turkish	40				
Couple 7	Mai	Female	Sudan	35	11	Istanbul	December 2022	Home-based interview
	Ahmet	Male	Turkish	38				
Couple 8	Nalan	Female	Turkish	52	26	Istanbul	January 2023	Home-based interview
	Naji	Male	Sudan	56				
Couple 9	Fatma	Female	Turkish	55	30	Istanbul	January 2023	Home-based interview
	Abubakir	Male	Sudan	58				
Couple 10	Selma	Female	Turkish	37	12	Istanbul	December 2022	Home-based interview
	Sabri	Male	Sudan	41				
Couple 11	Betül	Female	Turkish	51	31	Istanbul	September 2022	Home-based interview
	Abdulkarem	Male	Sudan	57				

- Not all participants have been mentioned in the article, as only selected quotes have been included.

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