

Emigration Chests in Ankara, Turkey: Tracing Spatial Trajectories of Tatar Community

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journals.sagepub.com/home/sac**Tonguç Akiş¹** 

Abstract

During migration, whether due to war, political conflict, or poverty, immigrants of turmoil carry their limited personal belongings, family items, and supportive objects in their luggage, bags, and, in some cases, chests to their new homes. Throughout this displacement, chests of migration are necessary and valuable witnesses via their materiality and they wait in their specific corners of houses dare to be contemplated. After the demanding journey, some immigrants continue to use both the chest itself and its contents at their new house in the target locations. In addition, used chests and their contents link immigrants to the journey and to the former location. The immigrants often choose to organize, decorate, and arrange their homes and rooms according to these chests and the items within. This rich mutual relationship between chest, immigrant, and house allows for multidimensional readings considering the spatial trajectories and narratives of migration. Moreover, the trialectic relationships of chest, immigrant, and their space within generate the arguments on the production of space in particular. In this paper, decoding of recent in-depth interviews, documentation of chest locations on each space, and revealing archival material of immigrant families in Ankara, Turkey, are systematized to illustrate the journey of emigration together with the particularities of chest keepers' attitudes and feelings. Additionally, inscriptions, contents, types, and paths of chest are unlocked on private and communal spaces of the Tatar community. This paper aims to uncover those implanted, profound, and engrained interactions on space of immigrant during expedition of chest.

Keywords

spatial trajectory, emigration chests, community development, production of space, everyday life

Introduction

My first encounter with the chest was in our house in my grandmother's room. This locked and relatively big object in our home stimulated my childish curiosity even deeper when I was 6 years old. After I learned to read, the name on the chest confused me, since the family name on the chest was and still is not the same with the official family name of ours that I use in the outside

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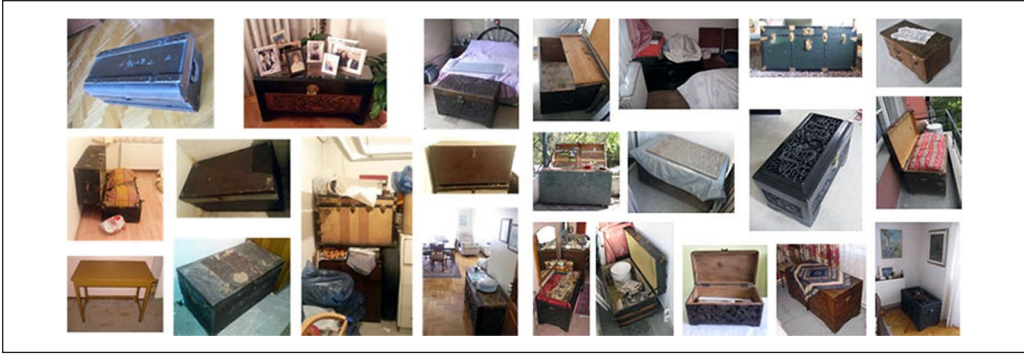


Figure 1. Images of the chests in the examined houses.

world. Akış was quite different than Agishev on the chest. Who was Z. Agishev? Who was I? Whose was this object in our Tatar-, Turkish-, and Russian-speaking house in Ankara, Turkey, and to whom now did it belong? And where did it come from? As soon as I saw that similar chests were also in other houses in the community, I felt more and more curious about the *distinction* in our family names. Since then, the carved images in my childhood have remained deep in my mind. I think, now, it is time to elaborate more on them and merge my childish curiosity about this object with my academic struggle on spatial studies in this article.

This article is based on a study about Tatar people and their chests before, during, and after emigration. It revolves around the personal memories and objects of several family paths within the Tatar community, which migrated “legally” from Manchuria to Turkey after the Second World War. The chests as the silent witnesses of this particular international documented migration are traced to uncover the trajectories of the Tatar community in Ankara, Turkey.¹

Chests as a thing were mostly produced or bought for this particular journey and they were used to store various belongings of the immigrants. However, the immigrants have attributed a variety of meanings to these objects as they associate themselves with the chests during and after the experienced route of emigration.²

According to their different memories and professional backgrounds, the chest keepers may enrich the chests with their historical, cultural and social values over time. The aim of this paper is to depict the micro-stories and trajectories of the old chests interlinked with personal experiences, as silent evidence of emigration. The personal and family narratives help document and remember the displacement of the people involved in the emigration and their particular stories.

I used oral history to cover the chests, the keepers’ narratives and their specific journeys to Ankara. To understand the socio-spatial experience of the chests, the keepers and their chests were approached through semi-structured interviews conducted in April 2015. Twenty-three chests were documented and 13 in-depth interviews held in Ankara while the chests and their contents were photographed. All the images used in the paper were taken and prepared by the author in April 2015 (Figure 1).

The research contains decoding of recent in-depth interviews, documenting of chest locations on each space, and revealing archival material of immigrant families in Ankara, Turkey. Additionally, inscriptions, contents, types, and paths of chest are systematically documented on private and communal spaces of the Tatar community. It is to expose those implanted, profound, and engrained interactions on space of immigrant during expedition of chest. I also documented the spatial locations in the house and the immigrant’s paths in Turkey, in order to trace the movement and displacement of both the immigrants as keepers of the chests and the chests as they move along with the families. Moreover, during the research I contacted immigrants in Istanbul

who belong to the same community and informed the holders of chests outside of Turkey. Various paths of migration on chests including photos of the chests and their narrated stories during the migration to Turkey were documented; however, the focus of this paper is only the ones examined in Ankara.

The interviews were shaped by a theoretical framework and consisted of a set of questions about the chests. Series of questions are asked during the research. Some of those include these themes: the historical expedition of chests, the memory of the keeper related to the chest, the recent conditions of the chest in the house, the functional usage and transformations of the objects, the attachments of the keeper, and the spatial locations of the chests.³ The immigrants, including my family members, were asked to narrate their own journey with the chest that they brought to Turkey in the early 1950s. The informants were between 42 and 92 years old, and only two of them did not experience the migration directly, but still keep the chests in their own flat. These inquiries on the history of the chests and the narratives of emigration were an integral part of the research. In addition, the trajectory that the chest went through to reach its current situation was documented. I recorded the specific locations of the chests in the houses and their changing function over time. I also questioned the meanings attributed by the keeper and chest keepers' feelings during the study. Opinions about the chests and their personal attachments were traced as the migrants referred to the journey of the chests as well as their changing position in the house over time.

There are a couple of scholars concentrated on the relationship of household objects and space in Turkey.⁴ However, there are limited works on the usage of chests in houses particularly. Hence, through the unresearched case study of the Tatar immigrants and their chests, this paper makes a contribution to the wider scholarship focusing on the link between things, people, namely immigrants, and space in Turkey.

Chest as Thing and Commodity

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) explore the meaning of things in their book, which consists of a broader academic project to examine the domestic symbols and the self. This particular study not only reflects the multiplicity of meanings attributed to or associated with things, but also underlines the changes in the ascribed meaning during the construction of the self through objects. The opinions on the objects as being a sign of social status and of social integration are documented through 80 family interviews. These underline the ecological effect of the things with *psychic value* and the defining role of the mutual relationship between things and people.

The objects of the household represent, at least potentially, the endogenous being of the owner. Although one has little control over the things encountered outside the home, household objects are chosen and could be freely discarded if they produced too much conflict within the self. Thus household objects constitute an ecology of signs that reflects as well as shapes the pattern of the owner's self. It might be noted in this context that the term "ecology" literally means the study of households. (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 17)

This particular method of inquiry with open-ended questions to trace the object-people relations especially introduces a *spatial* dimension to this paper. The journey experience appends attributed meanings to things because of its role as evidence, especially in long displacements. The relationship of people and things gets deeper and stronger as the duration increases. The role of time and space in the contacts between things and people is the key question in our long-term project.

Additionally, the chest starting as a commodity is then enriched by memorial, sensual and historical attribution as time passes in its social and cultural contexts. The initial value of the

chest, being free from the personal and historical values, changes as it turns into an exchange commodity. Although none of the chests I observe is an object of consumption or an item of trade now, this aspect is inherited in the chest as a potential value.

The unique character of the chest makes it a potential commodity unless it turns into an exchange item during trade activity. However, objects transferred in the chests like silk tablecloths or socks were in the “boxes of trade” since it has an economical value. In our research, I witness that the decorative chests were aimed to be sold in Turkey (C16: this coding used in the text is to differentiate the particularities of each documented chest). The objects inside the chests were also intended for trade, as an informant underlined. For example, the keeper of C06 explicitly expresses the commercial value of the chest during the emigration. It was seen as a “guarantee” or “exchange piece” for the hard days in Turkey.

I had brought two pairs of silk socks inside the chest. I sold one of them at a good price. Then a doctor saw this pair of sock and asked me to sell the one that I was wearing. Then I washed the socks and the next day I sold it to the doctor. If I would known that I would have brought more socks. (Keeper of C06)

Our chest was not empty. We had put lots of tablecloths in it. We sold it here in Turkey when we arrived. We earned a certain amount of money at the beginning. We used this money as a start. (Keeper of C22)

Parkin (1999, p. 305) underlined the inevitable character of transitional objects during migration and discussed the relationship between things and their individual memories through implanted dimension of material exchange. Moreover, trading the brought commodities in the receiving country emerges as a tactic of the immigrant to survive in the early days of emigration. The notion of tactic used by the *other* in foreign context is argued by de Certeau (1984) as follows:

I call a “tactic”, on the other hand, a calculus which can not count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. (de Certeau, 1984, p. xxi)

The exchange value of commodities is underlined and analyzed in Igor Kopytoff’s article (1986). Additionally, he argues that the cultural artefact, as in our case the chests and their biographies, helps us to understand the cultural materiality of social life that covers different narratives and different displacements:

Biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure. For example, in situations of cultural contact, they can show what anthropologists have so often stressed: that what is significant about the adoption of alien objects—as of alien ideas—is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use. (Kopytoff, 1986, p. 67)

In the next part I’m going to give a few examples to understand the biography of the chests and their spatial journeys after some brief information about the journey. The biography of things and their spatial transformation is grouped under the following subtitles, and the correlation of immigrant to chest is documented using numbers in quotations. Let us have a short look in details for the journey, the dimensions, the objects within the chest and those from it left behind, and the locational change of the chest in the house in details.

Journey of the Chests

Displacement of people often happens because of war, conflict, hunger, governmental decision, extreme natural phenomena, or poverty. Mass of immigrants and individuals in turmoil often

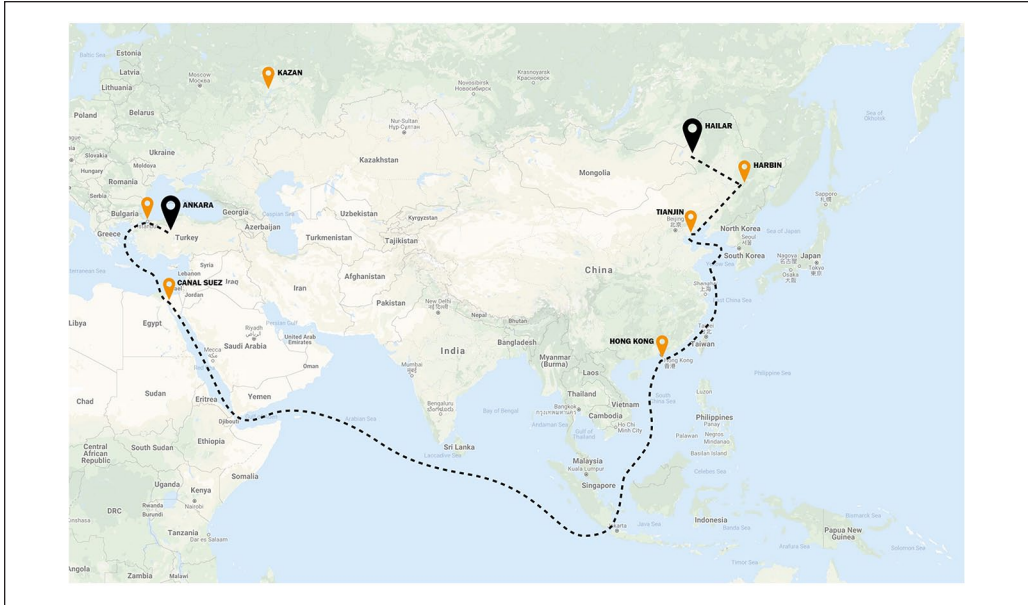


Figure 2. A sample route of C06 (produced by Google Map).

suffer from those particular social exclusion, economic struggle, cultural threats, or unsafe living conditions in former country, and these harsh situations force them to move into next target location. In our case, according to the informants, the main reason of displacement was the harsh and restless conditions of war at the time. For example, the house of an informant was bombed one year before the migration. As Moustafine (2010) mentions, instability of the region because of the First and the Second World War triggered most of the families to change location. Additionally, Rorlich (1998) also discusses changes in the historical and spatial positions of the Tatar Community with the impact of Soviets after Second World War in the region. In our case, the migration caused to change country and was mostly a “documented migration,” as mentioned earlier, meaning that the two countries were directly involved in and controlled the displacement procedures.

As already mentioned briefly, the migration route followed in this research is from Manchuria (the northern region of the now People’s Republic of China) to Turkey (Figure 2). However, Manchuria is not the place of origin the community identifies with; it was in itself a place of settlement as a result of an earlier yet emigration. The original homes of most of the Tatar community that I researched were near İdil and the Kazan region. The family of the informants had formerly undergone another dislocation experience in their history, because of the restless political conditions of their former country, now in the limits of the current Republic of Russia.

In the latest wave of emigration, studied here, the religion and language factor triggered the choice of country. Most of the immigrants also thought that Turkey was a safe target country since it was a secular state. Some of the immigrants chose to move further to other countries like Germany, the United States, Australia, or Canada after staying for a certain time in Turkey. Hence Turkey turned out to be a hub and a station in the migration process of the Tatar community.

The movement of the immigrants to new homes happened in more than one wave during the period from 1949 to 1959. According to the research data, members of the Tatar community applied to the International Refugee Organization (IRO) of the United Nations in 1949, 1956, and 1959. This happened with the help of the Tatar-Japanese Association, since the Chinese government was not politically recognized by Turkey in the 1950s (Dündar, 2004). This

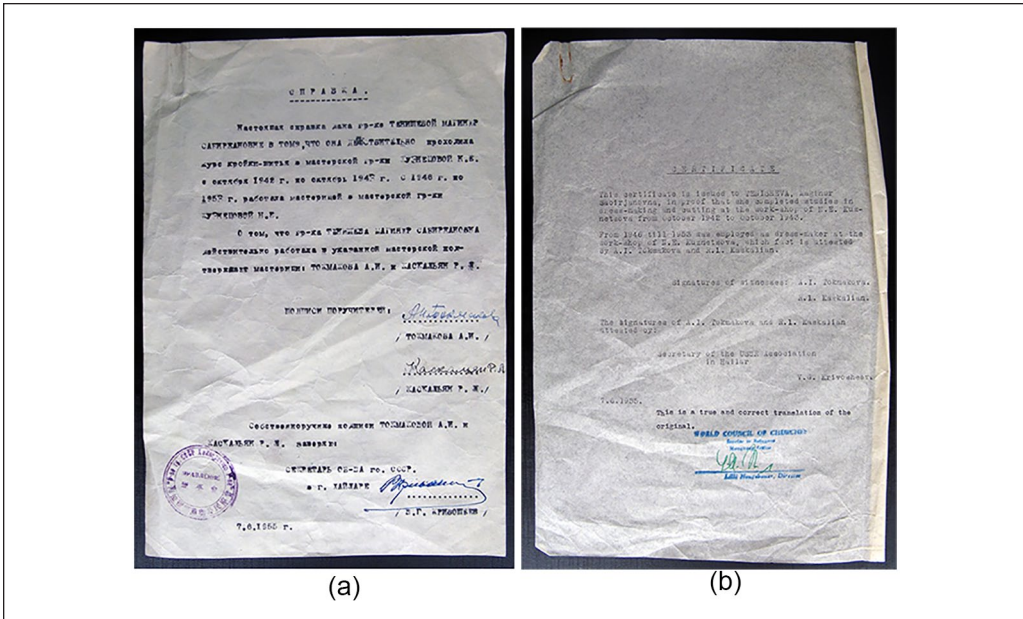


Figure 3. Translated documents prepared before the migration from C12.

administrative condition brought some of them in contact with the Tatars in Japan. In order to apply for emigration, they had to prepare documents recording their professional life (Figure 3a) or translate certificates, a procedure which delayed the journey and prolonged the waiting, sometimes for years (Figure 3b). During the research, I witness that some children of families that migrated together on the same ship developed relationships that continued in Turkey within the Tatar community.

The journey researched here has two different parts, since I'm tracing the route of both the immigrants and the chests. While the chests were brought from Tianjin to Istanbul by cargo ships, the immigrants took longer routes. For example, the keeper of C23 travelled from Minduhi (the initial location) first by train to Tianjin, then by ship to Hong Kong (a journey that lasted for 12 days and was followed by a 7-day stay in Hong Kong), then by plane to Istanbul, and, finally, by train to Ankara. The plane stopped at Karachi, Bangkok, and Tehran airports. Meanwhile, as the Suez Canal was blocked, the sea route presented important problems for the transportation of the chests.

Chests in Detail

The unique journey of the chests started from their production in the boundaries of what is now the People's Republic of China. The chests can be categorized according to two broad groups: the ones which were produced specifically for this emigration as a protecting shelter or container for transported goods (Figure 4), and the ones which were aimed to be brought into Turkey as a commodity to sell. The latter have different textural characters and connotations, depicting scenes from Chinese cultures rather than the keeper's own culture. These Chinese depictions have two themes in particular: moving people and protecting inside. In the first category, one can depict images of strong creatures symbolically guarding the things inside of the chest from dangers of the outside world (C03) (Figure 5a). For the second category, one can recognize the chest lid with a carved image depicting a group of people crossing a traditional bridge on water. It seems to connote literally the dislocation of people (C09) (Figure 5b).



Figure 4. Simple wood chest (C02).

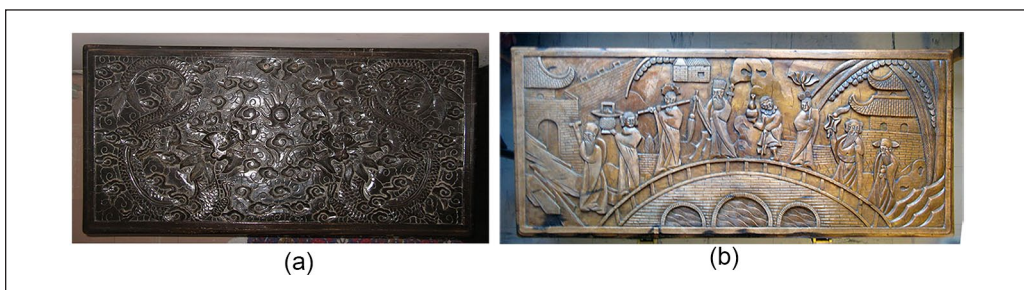


Figure 5. Top views of chests.

Both chest keepers are almost certain that the ready-made chests (which are not commissioned by the immigrants but found in the market) were produced by Chinese (Manchurian) craftsmen before the migration, in the 1950s. Some are just basic boxes bearing the names of the keeper. There are also examples of ready-made ones that were bought from Hong Kong, at the second stop of the migration path, after the train journey from inner Manchuria.

The sizes of the chests in centimeter vary from $31 \times 17 \times 16$ to $110 \times 60 \times 60$. The latter proportions are the limits set by the cargo ship regulations. One of the informants said that when this information was given by the cargo company, it triggered the immigrants to prepare the chests. The ready-made chests were also restricted to this specific regulation. This critical size of chests also shapes the choice and type of contents.

The production of chests has different stories. For example, C01 had been produced in the garden of the house at the initial location and the keeper remembered his father's actions:

My father made this chest from scratch. He assembled the wooden pieces. I remember the sound of the axe in the garden. He bent the corner brackets by himself. (Keeper of C01)

Some of these ready-made chests are made of a special wood, which leaves a strong scent as one opens the top cover; the informants commonly call it *konfer* chest which is the Russian word for cedar tree. These particular chests are decorated with carvings and embossments depicting traditional figures from Chinese narratives, and made by wood masters in Manchuria region. These particular chests triggered a sensual experience as the scent of the chests was diffused in the room during each interview. The unique character of these chests enriches the verbal and visual



Figure 6. Small konfer chest (C05).



Figure 7. Leather chest with steel frame (C08).

narrative. Inside the konfer chests, there are wooden and removable drawers located at the top part closer to the lid. The lid is carried by steel hinges located at the long sides of the chest as seen in C05 with a secondary support in the short side ($31 \times 17 \times 16$ cm) (Figure 6).

Three smaller types of chests were documented during the research. These are used for keeping letters, jewelry, make-up tools, etc.

There are also leather ones with steel construction (Figure 7). For example, C22 is a special steel-framed chest which can transform into a dressing cabinet and can be used as moving furniture.

The flexibility and changeability of objects both in terms of meaning and location is examined together with the mental construction of the self in this study. While reflecting on the psychic value of this materiality, namely the changing attribution and significance of the object overtime,



Figure 8. C10 transformed into a working table in the bedroom.

the authors refer to the chests in the research of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981). After noting the particular history of the painted and sanded chest of a respondent, they continue as follows:

. . . These actions [painting and sanding] change the appearance of the thing while preserving its identity; they appropriate the object at different stages of its relationship by stamping the identity of the owner on its appearance. (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, pp. 61–62)

Similarly, in our research, C10 is now a working table used in the house located in one of the bedrooms of the keeper (Figure 8). The wooden pieces of the chest were transformed into a table as they arrived to Turkey. This functional change not only depicts the appropriation of the chest as a thing, but also elongates the social life and duration of the chest itself. The narrative of the keeper reflects that this particular wooden table has a strong personal value as the transformed chest remains a trace of the emigration. It is a piece from the history of the family with its physical materiality and functional usage.

This transformed chest reminds me of my family. It is the leftover piece after migration for me. The other one was thrown into the stove in the first days when we arrived here. (Keeper of C10)

Inside and Outside

There are objects still located in the houses of the keepers: samovars bought from the original home, before the first migration from Penza (now within the boundaries of Tataristan), wool shoes, simple washing equipment, accordions, violins, silk dresses, postcards, cloth rolls, sewing machines, handbags, kitchen equipment, souvenirs, etc. In some cases, there are also decorative items, kept in the living room now. Some of them are still kept inside the chest, as in the case of C12: the Quran, *uyuk* (wool boot), make-up tools, washing equipment, samovars, a handbag, etc. (Figure 9 a–f).

What was not included or did not fit into the chests also comprised a question asked during the research. Musical instruments, musical notes, childhood ice-skates, gramophones, animals, books, etc., were left behind at the location of departure. Displacement imposes a limitation and the conditions of the journey structure the future life of the keeper in the receiving location.



Figure 9. Objects from C12.

There were sleeping blankets in the chests. We waited two months to get them. However, when we opened the chest, we saw that the blankets were in terrible condition. The smells of the blankets were terrible. We understood that the chests fell into sea or were damaged by the rain. We hanged them to dry. The blanket had traces of rust because of the iron materials in the chest. This was a complete disappointment. (Keeper of C02)

I remember that I had ice-skates when I was a child. The dimension of the chest was not appropriate to bring my ice-skates. (Keeper of C01)

I was wearing *uyuks* in the house when I was a child. It was so comfortable and hot in the cold days of Ankara. (Keeper of C12)

I'm a piano player. I had played piano in the studio of the Russian Ballet for a couple of months. Also, I had given piano lessons to people. My musical notebooks and my long plays, together with the books in our large library at home, had to be left behind. Chinese officers came to our house and examined the house. The 8th Brach of Chinese Army took them all after we had moved. (Keeper of C22)

The things inside (brought to the receiving country) or outside (left in the former country) of the chests together within the context of Turkey are the relations that enhance the production of habitus. In the above text, Bourdieu's (1990) notion of habitus is used to analyze the relationship between people and objects. He mentions the notion of habitus in these words:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, *structured structures* predisposed to function as *structuring structures*, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the *operations* necessary in order to attain them. Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53)

The informants and their families still use these particular old objects in special days of gatherings with the Tatar community in their houses, or in the Tatar association. Near the chests in the living room, long dinners are given and Tatar, Russian, or Turkish tunes are played on the piano or the accordion while they drink black tea with milk, sometimes prepared in the old samovars to remember the old days in Manchuria. These regular or random gatherings both in houses and association have helped the community share collectively the memories of emigration and cultural identity, too.

I'm personally still using the sewing machine in my home. It was from my grandmother. Singer is the brand. It was bought from Russia. We used it in Manchuria and then brought it here to Turkey. (Keeper of C01)

After we had arrived to Turkey, they offered us a breakfast. Tea, cheese, loaf of bread, and small plums. The cheese was so salty. We tasted the plums first, it was completely disappointment. As soon as we had eaten them, we all spit them out and threw them away. We thought we had come to an awful place, since the plums were terrible in taste. After a while, we recognized that they were actually olives. We had not eaten an olive before. We had not had such an experience. (Keeper of C07)

This gastronomical distinction was enhanced by the cooking devices brought in the chests. The stew pots for *poza* (Tatar dumpling) and thick pans for *peremeç* (Tatar traditional food) have stayed in the deep cupboards in each kitchen. In the early years, soy sauce was supplied by relatives who had a chance to visit abroad, especially to the United States or Canada. Packages from relatives supported the Tatar cuisine in the kitchens.

Chest Inscriptions

Inscriptions on the chests are of three types, and they are the written evidence enriching the biographies of the objects. The first type is the hand-writings with oil paint on the front outer face of the chests, depicting the final destination and the family name. The second is company labels on the chests which give a clue about the international atmosphere of the starting location. The third type is the texts on the locks of the chests with Chinese characters.

There are some surviving chests which still have the family names. The textual quality of the lettering reflects the former name of the family and leaves a unique trace on the household as a mark of appropriation (Figure 10). At that moment of appropriation, the identity of the chest turned into another level and became a sign representing both the starting point of the displacement and the concrete materiality of the emigration. It helps people to verbalize their own emotional attachment and develops the biography of the object.

My brother wrote the name of my father on the chest during our Hong Kong days. This is an important moment and a significant memory for me while remembering the journey. (Keeper of C23)

On one of the ready-made chests there is also a mark of the company by which it was produced. This particular sticker on the inside of the chest reflects the internationality of the migration context with its text in Japanese, Chinese, and English languages (Figure 11). This particular sticker underlines the former location of the displacement and also gives a clue about the production of the chest.

Moreover, the mechanical locks of the konfer chest have Chinese ideograms, although they are kept by different families. Three of them have the same Chinese ideograms saying “peace for family” which is a phrase originally from the Tang dynasty and is written quite differently from the contemporary Chinese language (Mandarin) (Figure 12). This particular apparatus of chests reflects the cultural context and differentiation in the categories of the chests.



Figure 10. Family name on C23 with oil paint.



Figure 11. Company label on the inside of the cover C08.

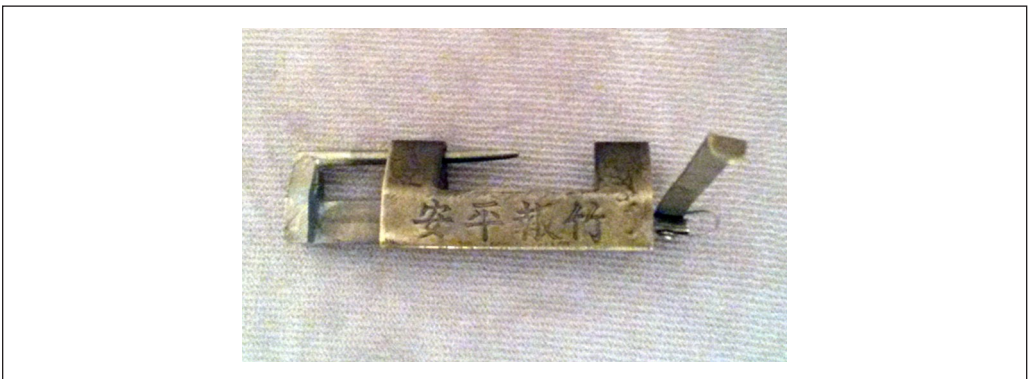


Figure 12. Steel mechanic lock of C16.

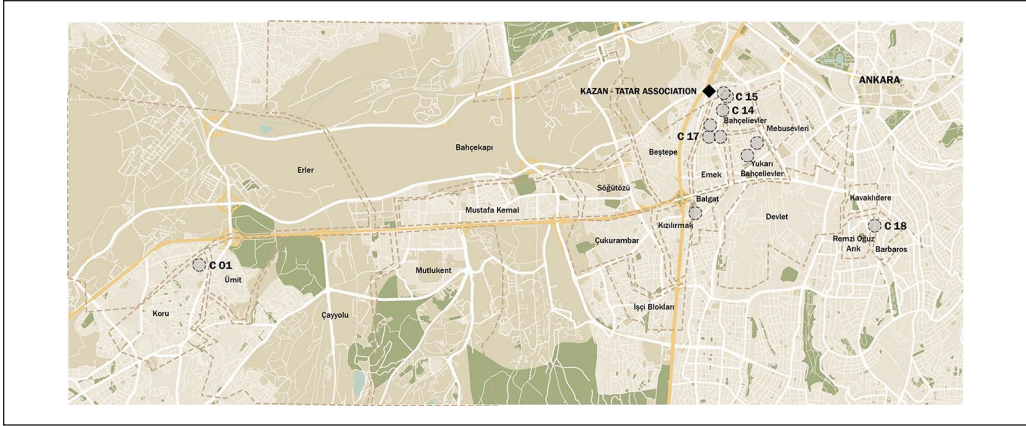


Figure 13. Spatial distribution of 23 Chests in Ankara (produced by Google Map).

Paths

If we follow Massey’s argumentations, then “space” can be defined as a platform of interrelations, which connotes and inherits a multiplicity in possibilities without definite boundaries, and is a production that changes in time (Massey, 2007, pp. 9–15). This tripartite construction of space crystallizes in the production of space in Ankara houses belonging to the Tatar community. The rooms and kitchens in these houses with the materials brought from the former country develop to produce distinct experiences in the house. Moreover, the association *Kazan Kültür ve Yardımlaşma Derneği* (Kazan Culture and Solidarity Association) develops gatherings to form spaces other than the houses. The significant point of this research is the changing spaces in which the Tatar community lived. These particular spaces are not that definite and bounded, but are more flexible and mobile both in terms of interior and exterior activities. When better opportunities come into existence, the people do not resist settling but quite the contrary they chose to move to other places as they did during the migration years. There are people in the community that visited the former country and made public representations in the association to fulfil the curiosities of the other members of the community.

Throughout the research, I also tried to trace the path of the chests starting from the initial point of emigration to their current location. To repeat, the initial point of the chest is the location where the production started, namely in most cases it is the Manchuria District. For some chests, the final location was written on the chests in oil paint. The general path was: Manchuria—Tianjin—İstanbul—Ankara. However, a detailed research uncovers multiple trajectories of the chests and the families.

On some of the chests, in addition to the final destination, the name of the keeper and the number of the chests are also depicted. Migrant families gave numbers to the chests if they had more than one to carry and had more money to pay for shipping. The chest then travelled by cargo ship to Istanbul. From Istanbul it travelled to Ankara by train. In the train station of Ankara, it was transported by horse carriage to the temporary accommodation of the immigrant. This particular path is the general route of the chests on international and local scales. Chests did not stop their physical journey in the 1950s. A chest would move from one flat to another within the district of Balgat, Emek, and Bahçelievler, which are quite near to the association building founded in 1965 (Figure 13). The stations were the houses of the immigrants and as the immigrants moved from one place to another, the chest also changed its location.

Examples from the routes are as follows:

The route of C16 (1958–2015)

Hailar—Tianjin—İstanbul—Ankara

Ankara (65. Street – 65. Street – 65. Street – 67. Street – 4. Avenue – 65. Street – 54. Street – 66. Street – 65. Street – 66. Street – 44. Street – 44. Street)

Always in living rooms

We always lived in the neighborhoods of Emek and Bahçelievler. I had been living with my mother in Emek and then I moved to Bahçelievler after I got married. We have changed a couple of houses, but we never left this neighborhood. (Keeper of C16)

The route of C17 (1958–2015)

Hailar—Tianjin—İstanbul—Ankara

Ankara (1. Avenue – 64. Street – Etiler Sitesi – 77. Street – 35. Street – Balgat district – 70. Street – 20. Street)

Always in living rooms

The route of C23 (1957–2015)

Hailar—Tianjin—İstanbul—Ankara

Ankara (66. Street – 70. Street – 75. Street – 72. Street – 34. Street)

Living room, bedroom, bedroom, bedroom, apartment's storeroom

The community institutionalized its existence through the association building located in Emek starting in the 1950s. The institution takes its name from the city of Kazan, the capital city of the Republic of Tataristan, which is part of the Volga Federal District of Russia. This particular two-story building houses the traditional and modern meetings of the community. Routine meetings on special days of the year, regular *peremeç* gatherings initiated mostly by women, welcoming parties for relatives visiting Ankara from abroad, meetings on national holidays, etc., are the local activities in this hub of Tatars. The adjacent street was named after Gabidullah Tukay in 2009 with a governmental ceremony, and a statue of this famous Tatar poet and intellectual was established just near the association building. This particular location symbolizes a spatial center for the keeper of the chests in addition to its socializing function. New Year celebrations, Bayram gatherings, memorial days, tango nights, etc., have taken place in this two-story community building which has a significantly big hall, kitchen, bar, and audio room upstairs with a cloakroom downstairs.

The route of the chests within the flats is also different in some cases. C23 first became a functional furniture, sometimes used as a base for beds to sleep, and then it was located in the living room and the main room of the house when the family lived in a single-room flat at some point. Mostly, as the immigrants found better options, and as their financial income increased, they moved into larger flats, and then the location of the chest also changed within the house. As the immigrants integrated economically in the society, the location of the chests changed, and as the amount of the furniture increased the usage of the chests changed over time.

For some cases, the chest turned into a simple storage for different equipment. The C01 is used in the garden of an apartment block to store garden tools, and C04 is used as storage in the balcony like C02 and C12. These last two are used to keep the things that were brought from Manchuria. Some stay in the bedroom as a personal “safe,” with a renewed lock, like C06. In some houses, the decorative (konfer type) chests turn into an object of display. The chest is usually placed in the living room. Family pictures on the chest turn that corner of the house into a family memorial niche.

While exploring the chests' microhistory through spatial paths, it became apparent that the generation who migrated to Turkey underlined the importance of the chests as a commemorative object. This particular attachment is also transferred to the next generation. In the biography of C16, although the keeper of the chest is not the one who participated in the journey, it is accepted as a cultural heritage from her mother and the keeper insists on keeping the old chest in her house

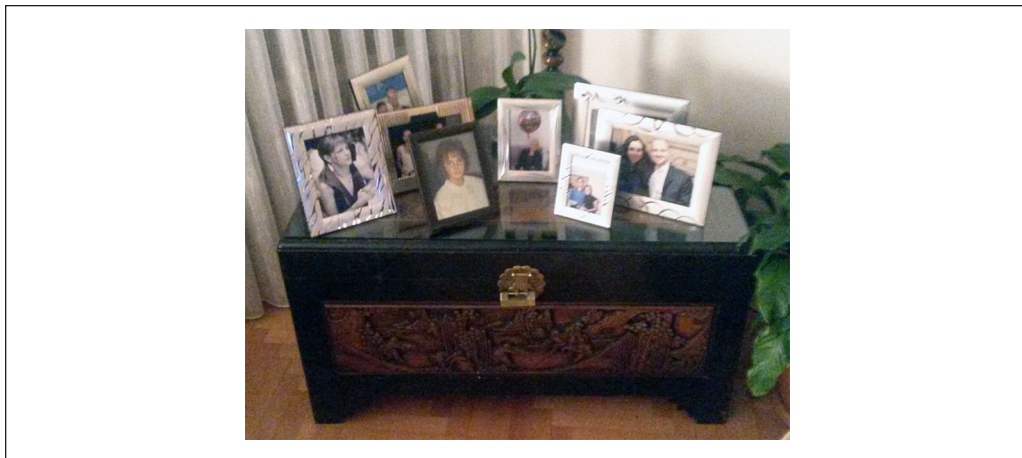


Figure 14. C16 located in the living room with family photographs.

(Figure 14). The common tendency of the keepers is not to throw away this witness of emigration; it is to pass on the old chest as a memory object to their children:

I never consider throwing this chest away. It is a souvenir from my family, and I hope it will stay in the house of my grand grand grandchild after I die. (Keeper of 23)

Conclusion

This analytical attempt in understanding emigration through a single type object, mainly the chest, exposes potentials to comprehend the initial and current lives of the participants in the research. The personal narratives revolving around the chests gave significant information about the migration experience. In addition, the relationship between chest and keeper covers different paths in understanding the international displacement in a deeper way. Collecting biography of objects during the detailed exploration of microhistories helps to develop a different perspective in exploring similarities and differentiations of emigration. Juxtaposing narratives and differences in the same emigration experiences can be a further academic adventure paving the way for a broader research on the interactions of people and things.

This limited research demonstrates that the spatial journey of the chests in the city do not stop after the migration in the target country. While the houses of the immigrant changed, the location of the chest and its attributed meaning changed. In some examples, the chests were moved from İstanbul to Ankara or from Canada to Ankara.

Moreover, attachment to the chests varies according to the migration narratives. In some cases, this attachment to the objects somehow maintains the former traditions or habits. The influence of the owner's brother on C23 shows a more personal, emotional, and memorial attachment. The transformation of chest into table in case C10 seems more functional than personal. The appropriation of the chest as household furniture demonstrates the diffusion of the migration experience in the house, and this attitude creates daily attachment in the lives of the immigrants. In each case, the chests are an integral part of the everyday life of the immigrants. As shown above, the attachment to the chests shapes the everyday practice of the keeper.

The term *habitus* also connotes a realm housing the social, cultural, and economic capital of the individual. In this limited research, the cultural object and its social biography, namely the chest within the keeper's environment, give some detailed clues about the habitus of the Tatar

community who migrated from Manchuria in the 1950s and 1960s. The decisions of some immigrants to live in the same neighborhood underline the attachment of immigrants to the other families, which share a common history. This commonality seems to enhance the role of the association of the Tatar community as well.

Through this particular research, the appropriation of, attachments to, memories about, and positioning in the house of the chests construct and reflect a physical and mental environment. As I observed, the original material of the chests reflects the economic capacity of the keeper since it reflects the commercial value of the chest. The konfer type chests and the regular wood chests without any particular decoration have different economic and cultural value. The keeper also underlines the economic survival strategy, which is parallel with the economic status. Additionally, this particular variation in the chests is telling of the starting economic capital and capacity of the family to adapt to the new life in the target country. In addition, the stored material coming out of the chests together with the chest itself enriched the cultural capital of the family with its historical and cultural value. The chests as the object of migration stand in the microhistory of the family and become a memorial object and heritage that pass to the next generation of the family.

Moreover, the changing location and the appropriation of the chests in the house are associated with the notion of “tactics” of the “users” within everyday life, as suggested by de Certeau (1984). The functional journey of the chests, from the bedroom furniture to the living room furniture and then to the storage of rarely used things, becomes a distinctive decision of the keeper; like the immediate decision of burning the chests after the migration in the stove as a source of energy in the house. These two different dislocations can be interpreted as and lead to gradual or rapid forgetting of the emigration itself since their visual existence in the house is absent. Moreover, the historical transformation and translocation of the chests from a vital element of the house in the living room to secondary furniture in the house appear as the tactical decision of the keeper. This can be read as the declining impact of emigration or the migration journey since the chest becomes less visible in the house. Some of the informants chose to keep their chest in the bedroom, a space perceived as a place of privacy. This kind of attachment to the chest and calling it as a *safe* (C06) of their own life show the strength of the relationship between the experienced object and the self, a relationship that has roots in the past experiences of the people. In addition, the existence of the konfer type chest as a decorative furniture occupying the major part of the living room, which is the most visible room of the house to the visitors, may underline the transformation of the character of the chests into a display object in the house with family photographs on top of it. Additionally, the survival strategy that some of the immigrants chose to develop is trading during and after the migration. As I underlined before, the things inside the chests helped them to start a new life since they sold pieces brought from the former country.

If we consider the space, namely the houses and the other places used by the community, the boundaries and impacts of the chests and the materials brought from the former country have shaped the everyday life of the people. The living spaces in houses and hall of the association define a hub for the immigrants in Ankara. These particular social spaces help them to develop a traditional identity. The social space in those environments exposes and triggers the arguments on the relationship of collectivism and space and leads us to understand (social) space as (social) product (Lefevbre, 1991b). The gathering activities and memories attributed to the chest generate a unique physical and mental environment for the people.

To conclude, it is helpful to remember the visual and emotional image in a moment during our research that the keeper of C18, a musician, still near her piano and ready to play the next classic, Tatar, Russian, or Turkish tune. Although she knows that her old musical notebooks and her friends' ice-skates left behind will not come back, she still keeps her silent chest in her bedroom as a trace from her past.

Authors' Note

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Notes

1. The term *documented migration* refers to the migration between two locations which follows legal procedures. The number of the immigrants is known and the governmental institutions both at the former location and at the final destination are involved in the migration process by accepting people as citizens and legal refugees. The migration documents, passports, and protocols are prepared in advance and the migration route is known and controlled. In addition, a particular institution may support the economical expenses needed for emigration. It is quite different than the forced migration or illegal emigration since the immigrants can mostly chose illegal ways to migrate from one place to another (Kalaylıoğlu, 2014)
2. "Even if our own approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with, the anthropological problem is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulation of things. For that we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories" (Appadurai, 1986, p. 5).
3. The theoretical framework used in the paper dwells on the question of understanding the cultural *biography of object* as historical journey of the thing itself within its social, economic, and cultural background. Moreover, I examined house interiors in order to understand the spatial trajectories for the biography of chests. This helpful term is borrowed from Kopytoff (1986). Additionally, the concept of *psychic environment* by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) and the notion of *habitus* by Bourdieu (1984) develop a broader perspective to the relationship between chest and immigrants together with its microhistories and its spatial continuation. De Certeau's (1984) conceptualization of *tactic* has been used in the paper as a tool for understanding the immigrant's choices in everyday life. Additionally, discussion on chest as commodity, but not thing, generates the micro-level arguments of economic power relations referring to historical materialism with the book *Critique of Everyday Life Vol. 1* of Lefebvre (1991a), specifically chapter 3 on critical knowledge of everyday life. On the other hand, New Materialism has developed significant and novel arguments in understanding the relationship between human and "thing" (unhuman) recently. However, for some scholars, it provokes substantial criticisms of being the popular version of historical materialism, missing the notions of asymmetric power relations, ignoring the role of history, and having issues on ontological formulations (Choat, 2018).
4. Nuri Bilgin and his team elaborated on the relationship between people and things (Bilgin, 2009). The research, which involves two phases with a temporal distance of 30 years between them, traces social change through the dialogue between objects and people by observing the four different social groups. It examined houses in villages of Afyon, the province of Sandıklı (Afyon), the Gültepe squatter district in Izmir, and nomads (Yörükler) wandering around the mountains of Muğla and Aydın, and documented the changing character of the nomads and their relationship with objects as well as the

development of a consumer society and the transformation of the social life in villages and cities within 30 years with reference to household objects.

In addition, Zerrin Arslan's doctoral thesis discusses the middle-class furniture and furnishing in Ankara. In her detailed analysis on two urban districts, she introduces the notion of habitus while examining housing decoration and interior space production (Arslan, 2011). Additionally, the work of Çağlar (2002) explores the taste of Turkish immigrants by examining their households in Germany and Turkey. She studies the material culture of immigration by making comparison of two generations and their spatial choices in the built environment. In terms of the specific object category of chests, dowry chests in this particular geography are diffused in the houses as historical, decorative, and functional house furniture (Yalçın Usal, 2010). Yalçın Usal's study traces the chest as object of modernity within/in relation to nomadic culture while documenting the readings and inscriptions of this unique traditional and decorative artefact. However, very few spatial academic studies have been held in Turkey that investigate the relationship between chests and immigrants, despite the fact that there are institutions which patronize such research. For example, the Migration Research Center at Koç University (MiReKoc) has been sponsoring academic research on social, economic, and historic dimensions of migration studies since 2004.

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