

TURKISH LACE

Constructing Modernities and Authenticities

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Turkish domesticity is often associated with lace doilies. While this decoration practice is diminishing, it can still be encountered in a large number of Turkish Dutch houses in the Netherlands. However, Turkish lace appears in a variety of other settings in the Netherlands as well, such as shops and exhibition spaces. In these diverse settings a wide variety of actors give it meaning. While notions of modernity, tradition and authenticity are present in all settings, they are understood in conflicting ways. Non-Turkish actors, handling this lace, co-define it, as well as a broader concept of Turkishness.

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Any person who has visited the houses of Turkish migrants or their descendants in the Netherlands, has probably encountered lace doilies¹ in at least some of them. Typically, lace doilies hang over the front of shelves in glass cabinets, cover coffee tables and very often also cover the upper part of televisions, refrigerators and ovens. Turks are by no means unique in this. The Netherlands itself has had a tradition of lace making and decorating (see Stone-Ferrier 1991). Lace has many old-fashioned, even archaic associations, but I want to show in opposition to those associations that it is a rich vehicle for studying the dynamic nature of material culture. Lace is relevant to the construction of Turkish identities. Turks, or descendants of migrated Turks, however, are not the only ones who possess this 'Turkish' lace and give it meanings. As will become clear in the course of this article, lace that bears Turkish associations figures in many settings and has a complex geography.

By looking at lace in a variety of contexts, I aim to gain an understanding of the different processes of meaning production that surround it and the variety of actors involved. The contexts through which lace moves belong both to the public and to the private sphere. In these different contexts I look at how lace often carries conflicting connotations, how an aura of authenticity is installed, and how this intersects with connotations of modernity. Firstly, the practice of lace making in Turkish families will be addressed. Secondly, the different commercial settings in which lace with a Turkish connotation is traded will come to the fore. Then, thirdly, the paper will deal with two organizations that are professionally involved in the lace making practice. Lastly, the different projects in which the lace making practice is brought into the public arena and festivalised will be addressed.

Contesting a Cultural Practice in the Turkish Dutch Family

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I conducted an interview with a Turkish woman, called Özlem,² and her daughter Hülya.³ I contacted Özlem because she was on a list of participants in a Turkish amateur art festival and had entered a piece of needlework in the contest. She told me that she also participated in a Turkish women's group in a local community centre, in which they made needlework and knitted together. After being shown some of her products, such as a knitted scarf and a richly-decorated hand towel for the kitchen, I asked her about the lace doily that was on the coffee table and was covered by a glass plate. She told me that she did not make this doily herself. In fact, none of the doilies on display in her house, in the glass cases, in the cupboard and on the small round table in a corner of the room, were her own creation. All had been bought in shops. The objects she made herself were made more for fun and social interaction than anything else.

'Do you not have a bridal chest filled with home-made textiles?' I asked. I had previously been told by several people that many Turkish women, especially from the countryside, start working on their trousseau, with needlework and other kinds of textile decoration, something which is called a *çeyiz* in Turkish, early on or preferably even before their teens. Many of them, especially in the past, as was the case with my informant, stopped with their education after elementary school and filled a portion of their days with this very laborious task from that moment onwards. It was expected of a good girl, I was told, that she occupy herself with this task, and in the process prepared herself for marriage.⁴

This practice fits in a specific gender ideology and is effective in keeping women who pass from being girls to becoming women inside the house, where they occupy themselves with 'female' activities rather than children's play. The objects in the chest were said to be used during the rest of a woman's life to decorate her house and, possibly during economic hardship, women could even sell pieces to supplement the family income. Just as in Bourdieu's analysis of the Kabyle house (1979), the practice is the product of

and reflects a certain gender ideology and is effective in naturalizing and reproducing this ideology.

Özlem, in fact, did have a bridal chest, which she had filled while growing up in Turkey. However, the things in it were not fashionable anymore, she told me. Therefore she preferred to buy things from the shops. According to her, the doily on her coffee table was the latest fashion in Turkish households in the Netherlands. Many of her friends had a similar piece. It struck me only after the interview that she did not even show me the objects of her trousseau, even though she fetched everything else the instant that I showed any interest in them, or had her daughter fetch them. This was not something she was very proud of, although she did cherish it. Although the practice of decorating the house with needlework is sometimes interpreted as part of tradition, it has in fact changed immensely. Doilies may be used to claim a modern identity, in combination with Turkishness, much like some forms of the Sari have become means to combine an Indian with a modern identity (Banerjee & Miller 2003).

Interesting were also the comments of the daughter, who was in the first year of a school for intermediate vocational education, learning to become an interior designer. She made it clear to me that she was not planning on creating and assembling her own trousseau as she wanted to 'do everything modern', which, in her understanding of it, was in opposition to everything Turkish.



Ill. 1: Store bought doilies in a Turkish Dutch interior. (Photo by the author.)

– In the past she used to start ‘buy that, maybe you will use it in the future’. I do not want such things in my house. That is, for example, the bridal chest, that you still have. Like pans and cutlery and everything. We just do not want that. My mother tells me, ‘buy it buy it, then you already have it ready’. We just don’t want that.

– But you and your sister, or ...

– Me and my sister want everything modern. Really like a totally different style from the Turkish style.

– So these doilies you would never ...

– No totally not, I now do interior design as an education so I have totally changed my choice.

– But isn’t there something that you do still like, or do you want everything totally different?

– If I would [consider] it modern. I would want a bridal chest, like old ones that you have, I would want to use that as table, but for the rest totally nothing. Just that as the only thing, but next to that...I find this just really typically Turkish, I wanted to say. Because if I go to friends I just see exactly the same. Then I already do not like it anymore. Then I say to my mother, ‘shall we change it?’

Interestingly, this girl saw the antique bridal chest, used as a coffee table, as something modern, but not the new lace doilies that her mother bought in shops. Such chests are infrequent in the houses of Turkish families in the Netherlands, as many *çeyizler* in the Netherlands are stored in plastic bags, cupboards or boxes, whereas lace doilies are plentiful. Possibly also due to the now fashionable colonial style, in which old wooden chests frequently occur, this girl can regard the antique chest as modern.

Özlem told me that the younger generation had no interest in *çeyizler*, a statement that was confirmed by her daughter and in other interviews. Hülya was not going to do any needlework or knitting, even though she appreciated the long scarf her mother knitted for her. The only way in which a bridal chest would enter her house, was as a coffee table, not as a storage place for decorated textiles. But Özlem had also changed her attitude towards needlework. It was

a hobby that she performed at a community centre, in the company of other Turkish women. She did not, however, feel that she had to prove her qualities as a housewife by filling her house with hand-made objects. Rather, she aspired to a modern image, at least within the Turkish community. Following the fashions of her group of reference was one of the tactics she followed. The daughters, like their mother, aspired to a modern image, but their points of reference were not defined by people of Turkish descent, but by school, the Dutch media and music, to name but a few. Their tight, fashionable clothes, showing their midriff, were coherent with this. The mother accepted her daughter’s strive for modernity, even though it took a different shape from her own.

The generational change with regard to the making of needlework is not limited to migrants and their children. Many girls who grow up in Turkey, especially in more urban, educated and wealthy surroundings, also find the practice old-fashioned. A girl I interviewed, who recently came to the Netherlands in order to train to become a doctor, burst out in laughter when I brought up the subject of lace making, much like I would respond if someone would seriously question me about the wearing and making of wooden shoes. To her it belonged to another world; a world to which she did not belong. She stressed the fact that she respects the girls who stayed at home to do their needlework while she was pursuing her education. This can be interpreted as an attempt to compensate for the fact that she, in fact, disqualified them as rather ‘backward’.

With subsequent interviews, the contested nature of this practice became even more prominent. Though some obviously turn their back on it, other women still engage, in one way or another, with the practice, although they give it various meanings. Some of the women I spoke to mentioned that they did needlework and other textile crafts because it relaxed their minds. Other women liked the needlework because to them it represented something of their Turkish past and connected them to this past. One woman put it nicely as she explained that it is the story around the *çeyiz* that attracts her. This woman did not want to have a glass cabinet with lace,

nor lace on her television, tables and cupboards. As a young girl, however, she had a romantic image of marriage. The *çeyiz* making triggered her fantasies of being a princess-like bride in the future. In addition, it was one of the practices she connected with adulthood. In 'playing to be an adult' she once took her needlework with her when she visited a friend, as she saw her mother do when she made visits. During the visit she felt proud that she could show her friend her newly-acquired skill. This sensation soon disappeared when she showed her mother her progress. The mother laughed at the sight of the badly-made piece. That was the end of *çeyiz* making for this woman.

Even though she did not make needlework, this woman felt she belonged to the story around it. Her mother made a *çeyiz* for her wedding even though she always said she would never use it. After her marriage she took some of the pieces that she particularly liked and some that were practical, but left the rest with her mother. She told me that when she would have a daughter, this daughter would have something like a *çeyiz*. She did not expect her future daughters to use it, but this was a way for her to include them in one of the stories, not only about her own family and upbringing, but also a story that, in her mind, connected people from Turkish descent, which was particularly important to her as she married a Dutch man. They were important life story objects (Lene & Pederson, 1998), to her.

The *çeyiz* practice proved to be a topic that many people thought about, as it dealt with deeper issues, such as modernity and Turkishness. It also illustrates the varied meanings given to cultural practices. As Cohen (1985) argues, many practices that are used as symbolic markers are contested and have a multitude of meanings projected onto them.

Even though there is diversity in the valorisation of needlework, there still seems to be one central meaning that is widely accepted. The practice is dominantly evaluated as something constituting a 'Turkish identity'. The designs of the needlework show many regional varieties (see also Onuk 1981), giving women ample opportunities to focus on those differences as a vehicle to stress a regional

background. However, this is not what they are doing. They consider it as something shared throughout the Turkish state territory. The varieties are seen as inherent in the richness of Turkish culture rather than as a threat to national unity, which is a very common aspect of Turkish nationalism.

The meanings people give to the lace are intertwined with their material practices. Through them they also position themselves vis-à-vis the making and using of lace and the group that associates itself with this lace. In some cases women decide to keep all doilies out of their house. As they are aware of the custom, this can be seen as a way of positioning themselves against the people they associate with it. One woman I visited is interesting in this respect. Although she does have two glass cabinets, a place where many Turkish women would put their doilies, her objects stand directly on the glass. She expresses a strong dislike for this practice, with which she is very familiar. Seen within her social context, even though she can decide not to engage in the practice, she cannot easily escape positioning herself against it (see also Katschnig-Fasch 1998).

Women who are critical of the practice sometimes tie it to certain gender expectations that they are confronted with. In several cases, women pointed out that they actually felt held down by the doilies. As they had to be cleaned and ironed regularly this consumed a lot of time, time that you could spend in many other ways. But it is not just the using up of time that they object to; it is that of time spent in the role of a particular kind of housewife. The doilies forced them into a performance that they are unhappy with. It is, to a large extent, this performativity that constitutes certain gender identities (see also Butler 1990). Interestingly, the material objects themselves add agency to the performance. In two cases, daughters removed the doilies in their mother's house because they did not want their mother to be cleaning them all the time. Two women replaced the doilies with plastic coasters. These coasters could be cleaned easily, but, on the other hand, were consistent with the idea that decorative objects have to stand on something and with a notion of female 'care for the home'.

Commodifying Turkish Lace

Whereas various historians, anthropologists and ethnologists have given us very nuanced descriptions of the varieties of shopping experiences and settings (see for example Miller 1994, 1998), much of the recent work that has been done in consumption studies, pays little attention to the variety of practices that fall under this general header of 'consumption'. At the same time, a division is made between 'good' shopping and 'bad' shopping. The good, to take the example of Zukin's recent book (2004), is small-scale, organic and of superior quality and is sold by true craftsmen who know about their product and are proud to share it with you. The bad is personified in Gap, Dolce & Gabbana and Banana Republic, or, in a European context, Hennes & Mauritz, Ikea and Mexx, characterized by its large-scale, bored employees and overall lack of 'authenticity'. There may be some merits in this evaluation, and I do not wish to dispute it now. What I do regret, though, is that this moral division is so powerful that it blurs a view on the immense diversity in shopping experiences and how it interacts with other cultural practices. Miller (1998) deconstructs this moral division and shows how big brands such as Heinz' soup or Kellogg's cereal can become the objectification of family tradition and love between family members. Through consumption, such objects become personified, and develop into the expression of our intricate social relations. In this section, a wide variety of settings in which 'Turkish' lace is commodified, is reviewed. Although they are positioned on both sides of the aforementioned moral division, strikingly similar processes take place.

The first keeps us within the houses of Turkish families. During my visit to Özlem's family, a neighbour came into the house, inviting all women to come to the house three doors down the road. As she explained, a woman was selling headscarves with a handmade border of needlework there (*oya* in Turkish). As I had expressed my interest in handmade objects, I was taken along. Everybody kissed each other at least three times on the cheeks and the women did not make an exception for me. After we sat down, one older woman, the one who was sell-

ing the scarves, picked up her needle and thread and continued with the piece she was working on.

On the coffee table was a plastic bag with a pile of about ten neatly folded cotton headscarves, each with a needlework border. They sold at ten euros apiece, which seems to be a small amount considering that it took the woman three days⁵ to make one. The woman, described as *kapalli*, or 'closed',⁶ by Hülya, was not allowed to work outside. This was one of the acceptable ways for her to add to the family income. The selling of headscarves in this fashion was not only guided by economic motives, but also gave an arena for the stressing of cultural values involved in the practice.

The women discussed the colour schemes of the scarves. One woman told me that a reason for making the border oneself is that the colours can be picked and combined better. Similar bordered scarves are also for sale in shops, but, according to her, the colours of these often do not match. Also, she explained, the patterns often change and inventors of new patterns often try to keep the instructions for making them to themselves. These innovations are simultaneously sign, consequence and cause of the fact that it is a practice that is considered alive and not to be relegated to the realm of history or forgotten traditions. Even though the women there also realized that it was not as widely practiced anymore in the Netherlands and also diminishing in importance in Turkey, they still adhered to the virtue and importance of the practice. By means of this selling, they were able to express their prolonged adherence to the practice and the idea that Turkish women should engage in it. The two daughters were addressed in this respect. Somebody said half serious, half laughingly that they had to start doing their needlework as well, as they were reaching their marriageable age. One of them smartly replied that they were an exception and did not have to do this.

For Özlem, the practice forms part of her spare time. It is a hobby and she would not dream of making it into a trade. With her cleaning job she can earn much more than one could ever earn by selling headscarves, whereas selling, and thus commodification, was part of the reality of lace making for the family

in which the scarves were sold. The tradition and the commodification are intertwined. Commodification even served as a vehicle for emphasizing the values that support the practice.

An almost diagonally different setting in which Turkish lace is commodified can be found in the wholesale company called the *Woonkaravaan*, or 'living caravan'. Plastic fake lace, sold on rolls, is the best-selling item of this company, which is specialized in imported goods from Turkey. The plastic lace is sold to trendy home decorating boutiques throughout the Netherlands. Alpay, with whom I held an interview in February 2004, has a Turkish father and a Dutch mother and is the founder of this wholesale company. She travels to Turkey once every six to eight weeks, visiting shops, workplaces and factories throughout the country, on the lookout for products that are both 'oriental' and modern. She does not search for objects that would, in her words, fit into a 'thousand and one nights' fantasy interior – the interior imagined to have been present in the harems and other rich places of the Ottoman Empire. Rather, she looks for things that can fit in a Dutch trendy middle-class home: things that can be matched with designer furniture and light modern spaces. On the other hand, the *Woonkaravaan* uses the exotic or oriental feeling that certain products from Turkey entice in Dutch middle class consumers. It is this that, according to Alpay, attracts them to buy.

Plastic lace imported from Turkey is put to different purposes in the showroom of the *Woonkaravaan*. On the table at which we sat during the interview there was a bright-coloured tablecloth, which was covered with a lace runner. The lace also covered the bottom of some of the wooden boxes that were used to create a showcase. In some cases it hung over the front, making an attractive-looking border and reminding me of the way in which glass cabinets and kitchen cupboards were decorated in many Turkish homes I visited in the Netherlands. Above the table at which we sat, a massive lamp covered with lace hung from the ceiling. The metal saucer, from which we ate a piece of cake, was also covered by a small piece of plastic lace, as were some of the Turkish

tea glasses on the windowsill. Alpay explained that it was an idea she got from visiting a Turkish rural family, in which the woman presented her tea in that fashion. Alpay expressed her enthusiasm for this, by her account, very creative way of making something out of virtually nothing. She believed this creativeness to be typical for the rural women who are, in her words, more pure and less spoiled by modern consumer culture.

This statement is a clear illustration of Alpay's double relationship with this consumer culture. On the one hand she is evidently part of, and contributor to it, as she is in the business of selling consumer goods. On the other hand, she uses a very common train of thinking in which consumer culture is seen as diminishing authenticity, a critique that, in the academic world, was most strongly voiced by Adorno and Horkheimer (2000[1944]). On yet another hand, her company tries to sell products with an aura of authenticity and thus commodifies this authenticity. She needs the story that connects her plastic lace to the women of the Anatolian heartland in order to sell her product.

Even though what is referred to as Turkish lace here, is a completely different object from what is encountered in Turkish-Dutch houses, some of the connotations are strikingly similar. Especially the connotations of Turkishness, authenticity and tradition in this setting are shared with the Turkish women discussed before. A cynic might say that these connotations are appropriated, even annexed out of their original context in the quest for profit. I would suggest another explanation. In addition to the polysemic meaning of objects that different authors have brought under our attention, we must not lose sight of the social fabric within which this polysemicity takes shape. Within societies, some meanings gain an almost incombattable pervasiveness, even though different people appropriate these meanings differently in their lives and practices. This makes it insufficient to testify merely to the occurrence of polysemicity. Some meanings are more constant or become symbols themselves by means of their polysemic meaning.

In Haarlem (a city in the Netherlands), on a day

of casual shopping, I noticed another commercial setting in which a sense of ‘Turkishness’ was constructed. The shop was called *Ottomania*, referring to the Ottoman Empire, an empire of which Turkey is usually seen as the inheriting state. The shop looked luxurious and bright. It had a decor that seemed eager to appeal to the Dutch trendy middle class, rather than to the Turkish population that also lives in the city. This was also reflected in the visitors I observed during my visit, as none of them were Turkish. On display were objects that I recognized as Turkish, both from my own visit to Turkey and from my visit to the Woonkaravaan. Hardly any of them were similar to objects in the import export or impex shops run by Turks, or in the houses of Turkish families I visited. And the selection was also different from what was on display at the Woonkaravaan, showing more handmade objects and a sense of Ottoman splendour and archaic authenticity. Strikingly absent were any plastic products, including Alpay’s best-selling plastic lace. What I did see, however, and much to my surprise, were the same items of needlework, or oya’s, that were attached to the scarves sold by Özlem’s neighbours. The borders were presented in such different manners and to different purposes that they were hardly recognizable as the same thing. They were sold separately as strings, to be used in home decoration, for example as accessories in curtains. The latter were, in line with everything else on display, made of natural fabrics, rather than of the synthetic fabrics with which the windows of Turkish houses in the Netherlands are often dressed.

When comparing *Ottomania* with the Woonkaravaan, although they share the quest for objects with connotations of authenticity, it is apparent that they are conceived in very different manners. In the latter, the mass-produced, such as plastic lace, is constructed and displayed as more authentic, as it is supposed to be closer to everyday life and induces a feeling of nostalgia for one’s own past or a different, more exotic country. Mass production and consumption are part and parcel of these imagined worlds. In *Ottomania*, on the other hand, there is a search for authenticity in ‘the real thing’, defined in opposition to mass production and consumption

as handmade, made of natural materials, and with a long history. In both cases, however, the products are placed in a very similar context and had more to do with trendy Dutch middle-class taste than with Turkey or houses of Turkish families in the Netherlands. Both commercial spaces, moreover, produce meanings about those objects that Turks usually, with or without pride, call their own. In addition, although the objects are very different, hand-made needlework versus plastic mass-produced lace, the meanings associated with them are similar. While Schneider (1994) describes synthetic fabrics as stigmatised as inauthentic and belonging to the lower middle class, the Woonkaravaan shows how a plastic version of a certain cloth – lace – can also become labelled as authentic and fit for ‘sophisticated’ consumers.

Both companies also capitalize, in different ways, on an imagined Orient. It is interesting to see that, although the structure of Orientalism has remained rather similar to what Edward Said described in 1978, being, in short, a practice of othering in which the other both appals and attracts (see also Baumann 2005), it is connected to different visualizations and commodifications. The most familiar is a lavishly decorated style, with dark colours, gold and other metals and abundant patterns that mostly Moroccan shops cater to in the context of the Netherlands. Both the Woonkaravaan and *Ottomania* search for a brighter Oriental style. Clearly, visualizations of the imagined Orient are more dynamic than the underlying structure of Orientalism, as Said already noted. This is not due primarily to the changes in fashion in the ‘Orient’ itself, but more to changes in the countries of the ‘Occident’. This illustrates again the fact that Orientalism is not a product of the East or a reflection of it, but a product of the West. The Oriental other is shaped by the West and by the image it has of itself and therefore of the other. In various critiques on the work of Said it was claimed that Orientalism could not be regarded as a mere ally to economic imperialism. The desires and fears for the other in the West, plays its principal role within the West itself (see for example Macfie 2002; Roodenburg 2003).

Does this commodification reach back to the private sphere of Turkish families in the Netherlands? As the two shops target a middle-class Dutch audience, this cannot be traced directly. However, Turks in the Netherlands are indirectly confronted with the new meanings and functions that are attributed to 'Turkish' objects such as the lace that is central to this article. In both shops changes in function are important vehicles for changing meaning. Although women in Turkey may use the plastic lace for a variety of purposes, the most common purpose is as doilies. When Alpay showed the lamp made of plastic lace to Turkish friends of her parents, they, at first, did not even recognize it as Turkish, followed by a sense of recognition, after which they touched it up and then, as if it was something polluted or weird, let it go again. Apparently, they strongly connected object with purpose, which did not give much space for flexibility. In Alpay's account this is a bodily experience. Much of our experiences in daily life are lived not by the conscious brain, but by the body that moves through and perceives the material environment with all the different senses. The material here is not just a passive receiver of meanings, but interacts with and has an effect on human bodies as well.

In contrast to the older friends of her parents, younger acquaintances were enthusiastic according to Alpay. She described a Turkish second-generation girl as her 'biggest fan'. These youngsters think it is fabulous that something Turkish, that they are used to equate with 'non-modern', can become modern and fashionable by placing it in another context. In contrast to their parents, they have no problem with the changes in use. They want to express a Turkish identity without being unfashionable and traditional. Changing the use of objects is a means to this end. Hülya, the daughter of Özlem from the beginning of this article showed the same inclination when she told me that a bridal chest was the only Turkish thing that would enter her house, but used as a coffee table. Thus meanings produced through commodification may directly or indirectly re-enter the houses of Turkish people in the Netherlands and in Turkey.

This shows how the habitus, or a set of embod-

ied repertoires of practices, is never automatically transferred from generation to generation. Children of immigrants, who grew up in the Netherlands, have different experiences in childhood from their parents. This may be an explanation for the fact that the knowledge they have of cultural customs is less habitus-like and more conscious. In addition, the knowledge of the cultural repertoires of their parents is added to the knowledge of other cultural repertoires, most notably those of their country of residence. This consciousness puts them in the position to strategically manipulate identities and use the meanings produced around objects in the process of commodification. They are able to opt for a more symbolic or strategic variant of ethnicity as described by Gans (1979, 1994). The attribution of all changes in decorating and other practices to a second-generation status should, however, be avoided. In all families, also those who never migrate, there are great changes between generations.

Lace in the immigration setting of the Netherlands moves from a self-evident element of the material and ritual landscape, to something that helps constitute the distinctness of Turkish identity. In this setting, lace becomes a mediator of this identity towards outsiders. And therefore it must enter into the public realm, as becomes clear in the following two sections.

Organizations: Between Art and Tradition

According to Alkanlar, Turkish houses should be seen as treasure chests hiding marvellous artistic expressions. He is a member of an organization called Sanart, a combination of the English word 'art' and the Turkish word for art, *sanat*. Sanart works to promote Turkish art in Dutch society. While doing this, it focuses on the 'art' made by common Turks rather than the high-brow art made by professional artists. Primary examples are the textile-based handicrafts of women. But, though never realized, Turkish food was also considered by the organization as something that could be exhibited in much the same way as paintings by Picasso and Rembrandt. By defining particular cultural expressions as art, they become almost consequently part of the public sphere. They

need to be shown to the public, exhibited and thereby celebrated. This was what happened during the two editions of the Göz Nuru Festivali in the years 2000 and 2001. Both festivals consisted of two parts: a competition for which seven hundred objects were sent in by amateur artists, and a festival weekend. The emphasis was on traditional arts, most notably textile arts. All objects were judged by a jury and exhibited during the festival weekend. During the weekend there were also exhibitions of professional artists with a Turkish background living in the Netherlands. In addition, there was a programme of lectures, workshops and demonstrations.

The organization Siri Sunna also operates in the field of Turkish art and handicrafts. This organization, which is operated and founded by Van Onna, takes an entirely different angle. Rather than celebrating the lace making practices of Turkish women, Van Onna tries to redirect these practices into something that better fits into her view of art, which stresses individual creativity and lack of function aside from beauty. This is a conception of art that is dominant in the Western world. Under the name *Zanaat*, Turkish for (handi)craft or trade, she organized a ceramics course for Turkish women, whose needlework practices it aimed at 'transforming'. These, in contrast with Sanart, were not considered as art, but as work, since Turkish women, according to Van Onna, have not learned to employ free time in a suitable manner. When the work is done, they take up the needlework and again occupy themselves with something useful. During the course the participants, according to Van Onna, constantly wanted to go back to making vases, cups or bowls, or other things with some sort of practical purpose. The teacher, a Turkish professional ceramist of urban background living in the Netherlands, tried to convince his students to make objects that were not functional, but solely creative. He also tried to divert them away from techniques that would lead to routine in their work. In the evaluation brochure he writes:

With the standard techniques they lapse into a certain routine. Then you can no longer speak of

a certain uniqueness and replicas are the result. For example, they looked at what was present in the ceramics atelier and copied that. You also see this in the lace making, where copying is taught. That is also a style but it is not unique. Instead, I want the individual to create the technique and aesthetics for themselves. I wanted them to show something of themselves (Siri Sunna 2003: 23, my translation).

Later in the evaluation, he claimed that even though women had reduced the distance towards art, they still seem 'stuck' within the functional. Taskin saw this 'lack of individuality' as the result of 'brain-washing'. According to him, by removing this layer the individual character is allowed to surface.

At the basis of the Zanaat project lies a modernist understanding of art, in which art is individual and creative, an understanding which stands in contrast to the repetition, functionality and emphasis on technique that is considered part of the lace making practice. This stands out against Sanart, as this organization tries to define 'folk art' and handicraft as art that deserves a place in the spotlight. The names themselves are interesting as well. *Zanaat* in Turkish roughly refers to handicrafts, whereas *sanat* refers to art, which can be both traditional and modern. The Zanaat project emphasizes the non-art qualities of the objects Turkish women make. Sanart, on the other hand, not only emphasizes the art-character of these objects, but also, with the introduction of the 'r', making a combination of the English 'art' and the Turkish 'sanat', tries to overcome the gap between a Western conception of art, and a Turkish conception which includes the traditional art made by craftsmen and -women.

Bringing the Domestic into the Public: Festivalising a Domestic Practice

The Göz Nuru Festivali mentioned before did something else aside from positioning itself in a debate on art, authenticity and tradition. It moved something that was usually confined within the privacy of the house into the public sphere. It is part of a process of 'museumization' (Rooijackers 2000). The con-

tents of Turkish bridal chests were brought within the reach of the public gaze. It is a crucial moment within biography, as the movement of objects from the private sphere of the house to a museum setting alters the meaning completely (Appadurai 1986).

The Göz Nuru Festivali does not stand alone in this act of museumization of Turkish material practices. On the 22nd of May, 2004, I walked towards the building of Milli Gorus⁷ on the Jurrienstraat in Deventer, where a Turkey festival was announced. On the square in front of the building were a number of activities, and stalls with food and drinks. After having looked around for a little while on the square that held about thirty mostly Turkish people, my companion and I were approached by a girl who offered to give us a tour. After a photo exhibition we entered a room that was made into an exhibition space. First we were led to the right-hand side, where a sign read 'bridal room mother'. A bedroom on the day of the showing of the bridal outfit was represented here, as we were told. This 'showing' is one of the rituals that often precede marriage for a Turkish woman, together with the henna night, even though it is now less common. The centre piece of the room was a bed covered with a shiny blue blanket; pink cushions made of satin fabric which was folded to make small squares; blankets with colourful cross-stitches; a patchwork blanket; a long head pillow stretching the whole width of the bed; and a cross-stitched border with lace edging that hung to the ground and removed the structure of the bed itself from sight. In a cupboard there were piles of blankets, pillow covers, and headscarves, all beautifully decorated. On the windowsill was a cactus made out of green fabric, in front of the window two glass balls with crocheting around it. This fashion supposedly started in the Netherlands and Germany and was then transported to Turkey (Hasirci 2001). Striking was also the big television on a wooden table in the corner with a lace doily on top.

In the other corner of the room there was a similar set-up. It was less prominent than the former and it lacked the benefit of windows letting light in. Here the accompanying text read: 'daughters' bridal room anno 2004'. We were explained that the items in this



Ill. 2: 'Bridal room mother' display at Turkey Festival, Deventer, 2004. (Photo by the author.)

room were not all handmade, in particular the bed set, which had lace borders and looked very decorative. Our guide seemed to have a bit of trouble in deciding what exactly it was that made this room modern. The fact that some of the towels and doilies were handmade, but not all of them, appeared to be the decisive difference to her.

The 'mother', who was represented by the bridal room, is envisioned as more traditional and also closer to a supposed core of the cultural custom in Turkey. She makes everything herself, whereas the represented 'daughter' is a shopper as well as a craftsperson. Also the daughter has activities outside of the house, limiting her time for hand working, thereby combining something perceived as traditional and Turkish with something perceived as modern and Western. The room of the mother is given the central position, it is portrayed as something belonging to history, whereas the room of the daughter positions her as both a 'good Turkish and Islamic woman' but also as a modern, capable member of the Dutch society.

Conclusion

In the above I have discussed several pieces of fieldwork material surrounding lace and needlework. This selection was not intended to tell the whole story about Turkish lace or lace-like products, but serves to show how different actors and contexts are involved in the production of meaning around it.

Objects and the production of meaning have specific geographies. This helps us to think about the way in which the spatial interacts with the social. The house, the open-air festival and the shop are different kinds of spaces and, as such, affect agency differently.

First of all, ethnic meanings are not only produced by members of an ethnic community, but also by business entrepreneurs and their designers and marketers. The former may claim to be the true 'knowers' of the meanings of an object that they claim for their ethnic identity, but, from an academic perspective, there is no reason to give them a privileged position or see them as more authoritative. There is no essential meaning of objects, only different meanings produced by different actors. It is therefore relevant to find out whether and how these different processes of meaning production confront and interact with each other and are mutually appropriated.

Secondly, it illustrates the different processes of commodification that cut across the production of meanings. Commodification is sometimes presented as a singular process. However, the above shows that similar objects are part of very different processes of commodification and thus of meaning production. Commodification is rarely restricted to the exchange of use value for money. In the majority of cases something else is traded, namely symbolic value, which varies according to the different processes of commodification. Ethnicity and its icons cannot be seen apart from the capitalist system. An essentialist treatment of ethnicity would be inclined to keep commodified things, especially if this commodification does not involve an ethnic circuit, out of the analysis. However, rather than diminishing the ethnic meaning it may also be seen as enhancing it, which is reflected in the fact that the consumer finds it attractive because of the added symbolic value.

An ethnic meaning may arise out of a circuit of shops and customers that are given the same ethnic label. The Turkish import and export shops that cater mostly to Turkish and Moroccan customers who live in the same neighbourhood as where they are located may be seen in this light. The selling of headscarves in the privacy of Turkish houses, to friends, relatives and acquaintances is another case in which ethnic

meaning arises out of the specific ethnic circuit involved.

On the other hand, as the Woonkaravaan and Ottomania do, products can be intentionally marketed as ethnic within a non-ethnic shopping circuit. This meaning may or may not be accepted by the group whose ethnicity is involved, but they are not the ones targeted as possible consumers. 'Their' ethnic identity is produced and commodified without them having a real say in it. They share the field with consumers of all sorts. This commodification of tradition and identity means that sellers of objects become more and more important in shaping and giving meaning to these objects, and that ethnic members become consumers, appropriating ethnically-laden products, even as they are simultaneously producers of meaning.

And, thirdly, different forms of authenticity figure within the different settings. Commodification, rather than diminishing authenticity, has a large role in creating and increasing authentic meaning. Are the doilies sold in impex shops less attractive because they are not handmade? Certainly not to Özlem. She prefers the bought doilies, that are more fashionable in the Turkish circuit of family and friends in which she operates, over the things getting dusty in her wedding chest, whereas Ottomania connects desirable authenticity with the handmade.

Modernity is another concept that penetrates all the different fieldwork settings in a different manner. Özlem's daughter Hülya defines lace as belonging to Turkish identity and subsequently to the non-modern, as she places modernity in a dichotomous opposition to everything Turkish. The antique chest, on the other hand, she can see as modern. These chests are rarely encountered in houses of Turkish families in the Netherlands and as such do not constitute a 'Turkish mainstream' for her. The Ottomania shop that sells 'traditional old and handmade objects', however, presents the objects in a fashion that locates them within modern, luxurious, fashionable and Western home decoration. The Woonkaravaan turns mass-produced objects with nostalgic associations into camp. Through this process, the old-fashioned becomes hip, fashionable and modern. The

Zanaat project defines the lace making practice as old-fashioned, undesirable and non-modern. It tries to lead Turkish women into the world of modern art. Sanart and the Turkey festival also define lace as traditional and old. By reinventing it, however, as suitable for public display, it connects with a modern custom of museumization and display. Paradoxically, especially by this museumization, a history of needlework is juxtaposed with a modern present in which this practice has to be preserved, because it is, in fact, archaic.

Notes

- 1 The appropriate technical name is needlework, however informants refer to it as lace. I use both terms liberally.
- 2 Names of private informants are pseudonyms; those of professionals are real names.
- 3 About fifty interviews were held in total, and I have translated the quotations used in this paper.
- 4 Some people believe it is the task of the mother to prepare a çeyiz for her daughters.
- 5 Several hours each of those three days.
- 6 There is a very commonly-used emic dichotomy between closed and open people, the former being more traditional and strict and the latter being more modern and liberal.
- 7 A Turkish Muslim organization, which operates mosques separate from the State-led Diyanet mosques.

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