

## BEYOND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE HOUSEHOLD AS A SITE OF CULTURAL PERSISTENCE AND ADAPTATION

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### Abstract

The paper examines the idea that the Tunisian migrants in Hungary are capable to preserve the feeling of home by means of conducting their domestic activities. The point is that the sphere in which cultural contingency is the most prominent is not the community life in general, but the very household where the traditions of the cooking process, family life, and ritual activity are practiced every day. Based on a questionnaire survey (N = 100) and 25 semi-structured interviews, these domestic practices remain remarkably stable and are passed to younger family members. It is observed in the analysis that daily activities aid greatly to the continuity of cultures even when the family has migrated; food preparation, hospitality, and the ritual celebrations are ordinary and routine practices that introduce cultural information and principles into the family environment. The results show how domestic heritage helps the migrants to maintain cultural continuity as they adjust to the Hungarian society. This way, they become part of the host culture without losing their identity back home because they remain involved in domestic affairs. In brief, daily domestic activities, create a hybrid experience of integration that upholds cultural identity and adopts new environments

**Keywords:** Tunisian diaspora; domestic practices; cultural transmission; migration and food; transnationalism

**Discipline:** cultural anthropology

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**Absztrakt****A NYILVÁNOS SZFÉRÁN TÚL: A HÁZTARTÁS MINT A KULTURÁLIS FENNMARADÁS ÉS ADAPTÁCIÓ TERE**

A tanulmány azt a feltevést vizsgálja, hogy a Magyarországon élő tunéziai migránsok képesek megőrizni az otthonosság érzését a mindennapi háztartási tevékenységeik révén. A tanulmány érvelése szerint a kulturális kontinuitás leginkább nem az általános közösségi életben, hanem a háztartás szintjén ragadható meg, ahol a főzés, a családi élet és a rituális gyakorlatok hagyományai napi szinten valósulnak meg. A kérdőíves felmérésre (N = 100), valamint 25 félig strukturált interjúra támaszkodó kutatás kimutatja, hogy ezek a háztartási gyakorlatok figyelemre méltó stabilitást mutatnak, és generációról generációra öröklődnek. Az elemzés rámutat arra, hogy a mindennapi tevékenységek kulcsszerepet játszanak a kulturális kontinuitás fenntartásában migrációs kontextusban is: az ételkészítés, a vendéglátás és a rituális ünnepek olyan rutinszerű, mégis jelentéssel teli gyakorlatok, amelyek révén a kulturális tudás és értékek a családi környezetben újratermelődnek. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a háztartási örökség elősegíti a migránsok számára a kulturális folytonosság megőrzését, miközben alkalmazkodnak a magyar társadalomhoz. Ily módon képesek a befogadó kultúra részévé válni anélkül, hogy feladnák származási identitásukat, mivel a mindennapi háztartási tevékenységekben való aktív részvétel fenntartja az otthonhoz való kötődést. Összességében a mindennapi háztartási gyakorlatok az integráció egy hibrid formáját hozzák létre, amely egyszerre őrzi meg a kulturális identitást és teszi lehetővé az új társadalmi-kulturális környezethez való alkalmazkodást.

**Kulcsszavak:** tunéziai diaszpóra; háztartási gyakorlatok; kulturális átörökítés; migráció és étkezés; transznacionalizmus

**Diszciplína:** kulturális antropológia

**Introduction**

The concept of home is transformed by migration. Home to the migrants is about the everyday activities where familiarity and belonging are recreated in the foreign country not only a geographical spot in the homeland. Food and ritual in the context of the diaspora are not usually merely nostalgic representations; more often, they are practical means of preserving stability, strengthening family bonds, and cultural identification (Ray, 2004; Sutton, 2001).

The article addresses the problematic of how do cultural continuity in daily domestic life among the Tunisians in Hungary take place? It is not the public sphere (associations, religious institutions, inter-diasporic cooperation) that is of interest, but rather the household where culture is replicated. The significance of this point of view lies in the domestic practices which are not always so obvious to the re-

searchers as the events of the public although, it can be more permanent and more generational.

The empirical discussion is based on the three intertwined areas including: (1) food as daily domestic heritage, (2) ritual practices and continuity in the family, and (3) the cross-border family link that strengthens home practices. The interpretation is based mainly on the practice theory, the way of cultural transmission and a selective acculturation reading.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus offers a useful way to understand the way domestic heritage can be resilient. He defines habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" that, without the need for constant conscious planning, generate and organise cultural practices (Bourdieu 1990:53). This perspective treats culture as actions not only a belief. Without being consciously described as cultural

preservations habitual practices such as cooking, hospitality, and family dynamics become embodied competences. This helps explain why domestic heritage can remain stable even when life outside the household changes rapidly.

Food mostly embodies the idea of cultural heritage as it represents a link between authentic sensory experiences, daily dexterities, and social engagements at home. Sutton (2001) claims that food and memory are strongly shaped by a of sense perception and practice. According to research on migrant families, food and cooking tend to reproduce home in the shape of diasporic space (Ray, 2004). In the other hand, the concept of food is not strict when related to migration as it depends on different factors such as availability and prices. Studies proved that migrant food preparations frequently presents a negotiation between nostalgia and requirements as well as the opportunities that the host setting presents (Ray, 2004; Sutton, 2001).

The intergenerational continuity can be explained by the concept of cultural transmission. Which explains the way the culture is passed down generations through contributing in common activities. The traditional literature on cultural transmission differentiates between several transmission pathways; among them, vertical (parent-child), horizontal (peer-peer), and oblique (institution or other non-parental agents) transmission (Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman, 1981: 77-78). Cultural transmission when related to migration is often defined by the Vertical transmission since the environment around is affected by hosting-country language in addition to the school system and their moral order. In contrast, Home play as a primary piece in reserving the knowledge and bases of the minority cultures to save traditions and inherit it to the next generations.

The cultural continuity can be discussed in the framework created by John W. Berry to understand how it can be combined with the process of adaptation. Berry views acculturation in two important aspects, namely, retaining the original cultural

identity and being a part of the broader society. Out of this interplay of dimensions emerge various possible strategies such as assimilation, separation, marginalisation and integration. The integration strategy can be described as the circumstances where the migrants preserve some of their cultural backgrounds and at the same time engage in the wider society (Berry 1997). Domestic culture continuity could thus not serve as a barrier to the host culture, rather it may serve as a fixed point that enables an individual to engage in other activities beyond the home.

Other perspectives helps to illuminate related processes. Stuart Hall's state that "being" and "becoming" as a cultural identity change is not a loss of roots but simply a unavoidable ongoing process (Hall, 1990:225). Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity describes the "in-between" situations in which migrants interact with more than one cultural framework (Bhabha, 1994). Finally, Steven Vertovec's definition of transnationalism as "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" highlights how regular contact with relatives in Tunisia can reinforce domestic cultural continuity abroad (Vertovec, 1999:447).

### **Methodology**

This study combines a questionnaire survey (N = 100) with 25 semi-structured interviews. It explored the culture and identity concepts transmitted by the family and connections with Tunisia. The questionnaire focused on the daily lifestyle, testing the communication style with the home-country and the hosting country as well as routine practices and adaptation such as the language used during the day which provided a qualitative depth for the survey.

The questionnaire certified a wide range of Participants to ensure diversity so variables like age, migration motivation (study, work, or family) could be neglected. place of residence, primarily Budapest and Debrecen and perceived integration level. This

wide variation allowed the study to include different types of participants (students, professionals, and long-term residents) with different experiences and backgrounds within the Tunisian diaspora in Hungary. Quantitative indicators and qualitative narratives provide a clear understanding on how cultural continuity operates in everyday domestic life.

### Fieldwork Materials (Hungary, 2024–2026)

Questionnaire survey conducted among Tunisian migrants in Hungary (N = 100), primarily in Budapest and Debrecen, collected between March and July 2025. Semi-structured interviews with selected Tunisian migrants in Hungary (N = 25), conducted in Budapest and Debrecen between October 2025 and January 2026. Interview guide used for qualitative interviews on identity, domestic practices, and transnational ties. Profiles of selected interview participants, compiled during the interview phase of the research.

### Findings

*Food and Everyday Domestic Heritage.* The most preserved cultural practice for the respondent was cooking traditional food. This is proved by the questionnaire which shows that the majority (88%) of participants prepare Tunisian dishes regularly in Hungary. Which indicates the importance of food in everyday domestic life within migrants. This could also be described by one of the interviewees as he explains it clearly: “When I cook couscous on Friday, it feels like the week becomes normal again. Even if outside I speak another language, at home I return to myself.” (P20). Another interviewee said: “At the beginning I ate anything, but later I needed Tunisian taste. Now I plan my shopping around those flavours.” (P03) Such cases demonstrate the transition of culinary practices from symbolic nostalgia to habitual domesticity, thereby anchoring cultural identity within the private sphere. Socially-Theoretically, cooking is beyond being a symbol to cultural identity. It is about the repeated embodied

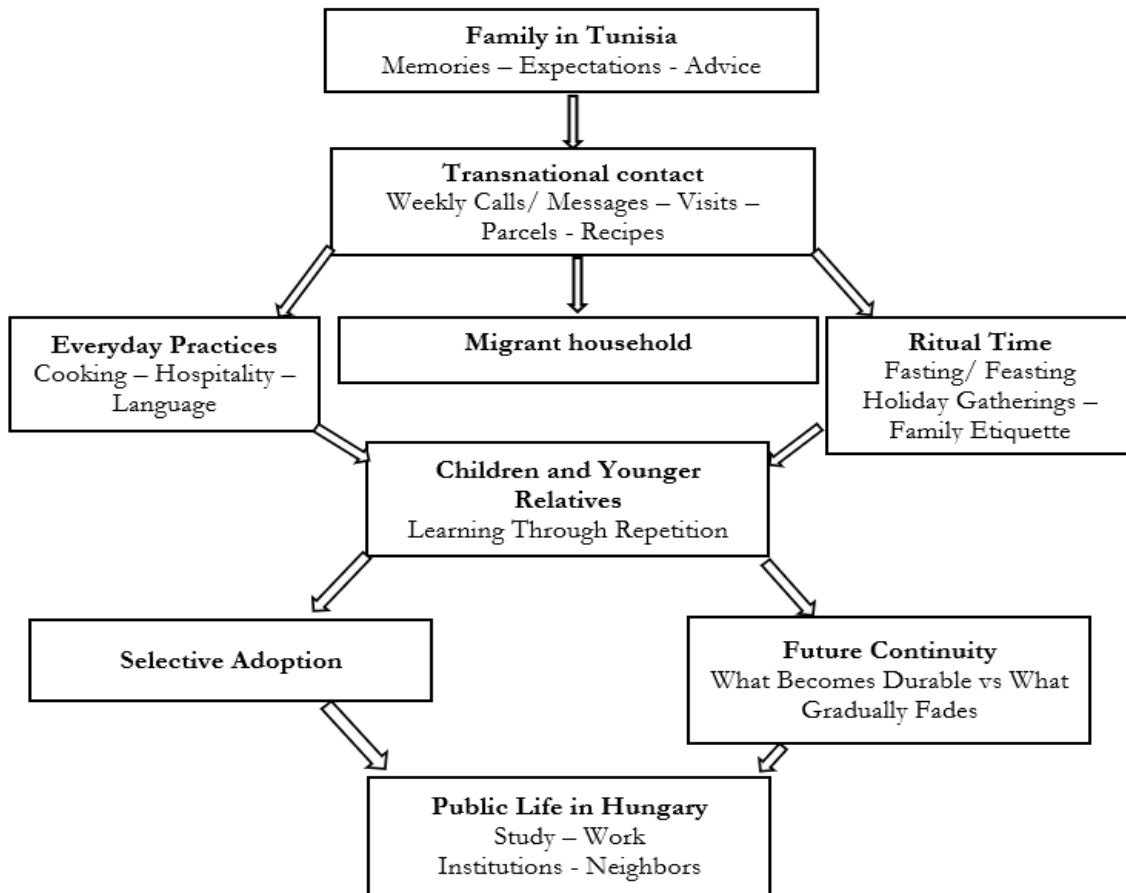
actions: spices and techniques, serving and form of hospitality. Such routines correspond to what Pierre Bourdieu describes as habitus, where the everyday routine and actions is naturalized through a long process of repetition (Bourdieu, 1990). Family interaction is also brought by food. Cooking usually shares tasks among the family members: who cooks, who purchases food, who receives guests, and who initiates the young family members into the world of cooking. Under these circumstances of migration as well, shared meals can maintain social histories and sensory memory as portable archives of identity as the literature on food and memory (Sutton, 2001; Ray, 2004) has already discussed.

*Ritual and Family Continuity.* Another dimension of cultural continuity is also religious holidays. Based on the answers on the questionnaires, 82% of the participants declared that they continued to contribute in religious activities and celebrations like Ramadan and Eid. These events regather people and provide a shared sense of meaning to the family members. Cultural learning often occurs through ritual practices as well. In These events children are taught some family traditions as well as sharing values and greetings. In this respect, ritual events serve as informal cultural educational events. Also, in the questionnaire respondents were asked if they teach their children or younger relatives the Tunisian traditions, and it shows that more than half of participants answered positively. And this cultural transmission happens step by step in the small daily activities. They would encourage the children to try traditional food and what common phrases should they use in certain situations. One participant described this process clearly: “I teach my little sister the expressions we say before eating, because if she forgets, it is like forgetting respect.” (P12), These patterns correspond to what cultural transmission theory describes as vertical transmission, where cultural knowledge passes from parents or elders to younger generations (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981: 77–78)

*Cross-Border Family Ties.* Another significant area that strengthens the continuity of domestic culture is the frequent interaction with family members in Tunisia. Based on the questionnaire, 81 % of the respondents indicated that they contact their family weekly. Those calls could include sharing news and updates or discussing matters or exchanging ideas or even a pointless cozy call with the family. Such patterns correspond to the concept of transnationalism described by Steven Vertovec as “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (Vertovec, 1999: 447).

In the domestic arena, these transnational relations play the role of maintaining cultural norms. Frequent communication with family members back home in Tunisia also serves as a booster when it comes to keeping up with the first language, celebrating traditional holidays and carry-ing on with daily cultural activities. One interviewee described this dynamic in the following way: “When my mother calls, she asks what we cooked, what the children said in Arabic, and if we remembered the holiday. It keeps us connected and also accountable.” (P22) In this sense, transnational communication does not simply maintain emotional ties. It also supports the reproduction of cultural practices within migrant households.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of cultural transmission and adaptation in the Tunisian diaspora in Hungary.



### Discussion

The research concludes that Tunisian cultural lifestyle in Hungary is maintained by everyday lifestyle. This unique culture is implanted by every individual through common interactions in domestic real not by some kind of formal institution or public practices. In theoretical terms, this trend aligns with the concept of embodied cultural reproduction, which is drawn from practice-based theories of cultural transmission. Everyday practices can be explained by habitus as Pierre Bourdieu proposes that routine manners are responsible of bringing back and maintaining cultural patterns, instead of making declarations about themselves (Bourdieu, 1990). The data proved that saving cooking and hospitality patterns (routine actions) ensures the continuity of patterns.

Simultaneously, cultural maintenance is not always associated with social division, specially when domestic cultural practices are frequently involved in Hungarian social life. Participants also try their best to integrate into the hosting country styles in work field or educational level but also carry their cultural practises. This trend is associated with the integration strategy outlined by John W. Berry where migrants save some parts of their original cultural Identity and meanwhile trying to involve in the bigger picture of social context (Berry, 1997). Domestic cultural continuity serves as a grounding framework that supports, rather than hinders, the transition into a new society. It provides the internal stability necessary for successful external adaptation.

The result, furthermore, revealed the family-based transmission in perpetuating the practices of cultures between generations. Common behaviour are taught around and by family which indicates the reproduction of cultural knowledge in the day-day interactions. This active process is related to the vertical transmission process mentioned in the cultural transmission theory where the cultural knowledge is transferred from older generations to

younger generations (Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman, 1981).

Within migrant contexts, the household plays a primary role in preserving and transmitting the cultural knowledge of the minorities. The other significant point that the data has shown is the influence of cross-border family communication on the formation of domestic culture life. The fact that migrant still interact with transnational network is evidenced by frequent contact with relatives in Tunisia. According to Steven Vertovec, transnationalism entails long-term social networks that tie migrants to their countries of origin (Vertovec, 1999). Within this study's framework, such communications bolster domestic cultural expectations and shared rituals, effectively sustaining a continuous sense of cultural belonging.

Lastly, the narratives of the respondents describe how migration is a concept where two cultures face each other and this controversial concept result in the dynamic identity, and it also contradicts the idea of mere switching of cultural identity with one another. This view is an indication of the argument by Stuart Hall that cultural identity ought to be perceived as a being and becoming process (Hall, 1990). This regular practice where migrants adapt to new social conditions of the domestic in which they can serve some stabilizing point of reference and can preserve some sense of continuity. Such interim niche places can also be understood through the notion of hybridity which was introduced by Homi K. Bhabha, and emphasizes on the way of negotiating cultural meaning in various social contexts (Bhabha, 1994).

Combined, everyday interactions between domestic activities results in preserving the flow of cultures within the context of diaspora, in addition to social and family relationships as well as domestic activities. The study of these processes will aid in understanding more about how migrant communities can maintain cultural points of reference and

simultaneously adapt to new social and institutional contexts.

### Conclusion

The generalizing idea of this research is to study the continuity of migrant's culture and how it is usually determined by the daily organisation of domestic life. The feeling of home in foreign country is embodied in daily routines whether it is food or custom or even when the native language is spoken, not by official bodies or blatant cultural endeavours. In such cases, the household itself plays as a spot for cultural reproduction as migrants integrates to new cultures. Moreover, this idea also points at the process of heritage preservation; where its used everyday life and not only in public. The implications of the findings to the policy-makers and practitioners are that, to reinforce the integration without imposing assimilation, it is worthwhile to support family-centred cultural programmes (such as bilingual family education, community kitchens, cultural holidays etc.).

Going forward, two directions of future research would be assumed upon this work. firstly, the significance of domestic rituals could be further evaluated by performing comparative research across a diverse range of migrant groups. (such as other North African or Middle Eastern groups, or other Tunisians in other countries). Secondly, Incorporating the perspectives of younger generations would enrich longitudinal research, offering deeper insight into how these domestic rituals evolve over time and shape the identity of the second generation. Further studies on the contribution of digital

media to the sustenance of transnational family relationships will also be useful, yet the two directions mentioned first are the most important to comprehend how heritage is being passed and transformed in new contexts.

To sum up the foregoing discussion, this research indicates the importance of the daily domestic life in preserving cultural identity as it occurs in the process of migration. The family ties and the rituals practiced by households as the main process of reproduction of the heritage enable the migrants to retain their original culture despite creating new ones in new surroundings.

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