

## **Dowry: A Cherished Possession or an Old-Fashioned Tradition in a Modernizing Society?**

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Tradition and modernity are generally viewed as polar opposites in classical sociological thinking. According to the linear model of development (e.g., Lerner 1958; Rostow, 1960), as societies modernize, tradition gradually loses its significance and its role as a support mechanism. An important assumption in this model of change is that traditions are impediments to the development of a modern society and are things of the past. It is now clear, however, that neither traditional societies are homogeneous and static structures, nor are tradition and modernity mutually exclusive systems. There is an increasing awareness that the old is not necessarily replaced by the new, and the outcome of the fusion of modern and traditional forces is often a hybrid formation, rather than clash of opposites.

The notion of “detraditionalization” appears, at first glance, as a reiteration of the tradition/modernity polarity but offers some important differences. Beck and Giddens, among other advocates, argued that at the early stages of modernization, many institutions depend heavily on traditions characteristic of premodern societies. But moving toward advanced phases of modernity—“reflexive modernization” in Beck’s (1992) terms and “high” or “late” modernity in Giddens’s (1991) terms—the role of existing traditions as support mechanisms for social activity become increasingly undermined. This does not mean that traditions altogether disappear in the modern world, but that their statuses change. No longer unquestionably true and taken for granted, they become subject to public debate, reinterpretation, and renewal. Thompson (1996) argued that in the modern world traditions lose their normative authority but retain their role as a means of making sense of the world and as a way of creating a sense of belonging. However, whereas traditions retain their significance, they become “uprooted from the shared locales of everyday life” and “are continuously re-embedded in new contexts and re-moored to new kinds of territorial units” (Thompson, 1996, p. 94). Mediated in-

creasingly by the media and advertising industries and consumption goods, traditions become delocalized and less dependent on ritualized reenactment.

This study explores the relation between tradition and modernity by focusing on dowry practice—a form of marriage payment—in Turkey. It investigates the differences and similarities in meanings and experiences of dowry among different social groups, and discusses how dowry practices transform as a result of modernization and a rapidly developing consumer culture. Two reasons underlie this interest in the dowry practice. In some Asian cultures, including Turkey, dowry constitutes an important component of the wedding. The wedding is a major rite of passage and, as Cheal (1988) observed, it still retains its original significance even in postindustrial cultures. Several studies, including the research on the wedding cake (Charsley, 1987), the wedding gown (Freise, 1996), various wedding artifacts (Otnes & Lowrey, 1993), the wedding gifts (McGrath & Otnes, 1993; McGrath & Englis, 1995), the bridal magazines (Currie, 1993), and the bridal salons (Otnes, 1998), demonstrate the sociological and economic significance of the wedding. This study extends the literature by examining a component of the wedding that is not observed in Western contexts and contributes to the understanding of the ritual dimensions of consumption (e.g., Belk & Coon 1993; Lowrey & Otnes, 1994; Rook, 1985; Sherry & McGrath, 1989; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Second, exploring contemporary practices of dowry in Turkey helps explicate the relation between dowry and patriarchy. Many regard the tradition of giving and taking dowries as an indication of the patriarchal power (Banarjee, 1999; Bhopal, 1997; Sharma, 1984; Tambiah, 1973). The fact that dowry is given only to women and not men may suggest that women are sold to men for marriage as property and, thus, dowry reproduces gender inequalities. This discussion explores how the changing social status of women transforms wedding practices, and to what extent dowry operates as a tool for reproducing patriarchy in Turkish society.

## DOWRY PRACTICES

Along with bride price, dowry is a form of marriage payment that is mostly observed in South Asian cultures. Bride price refers to goods or money given by the groom's family to the family of the prospective bride in return for the realization of the intended marriage. Dowry, on the other hand, involves the gifts given to the bride, the groom, and the groom's family by the bride's parents. Gifts include embroidery, jewelry, kitchen items, bed linens, clothing, durables, and property. The total cost of the gifts given may be quite high, suggesting that the female's family begin accumulating these articles while their daughter is merely a baby. The motivation and the experience of dowry show great variety across the cultures in which it is practiced.

Most of the studies published to date focus on India, where the marriage institution is historically characterized by many forms of financial settlements (e.g.,

Caplan, 1984; Ifeka, 1989; Roulet, 1996; Tambiah, 1989). Traditionally, dowry practice was mainly restricted to propertied upper castes in Indian society and was mandated when a woman of inferior rank was to be married to a man of superior social rank. Traditional dowry included two components: a woman's inheritance and the direct gifts to the groom. In recent decades, as Banarjee (1999) observed, several changes have occurred in India with respect to marriage payments. Dowry has progressively displaced other forms of settlements and spread from upper castes to virtually all social groups (J. Caldwell, Reddy, P. Caldwell, 1983; Rao, 1993). Second, modern dowry has acquired the character of a transfer of assets from a woman's family to a man's family, involving periodic payments of cash or goods to groom's family even after many years of marriage (Banarjee, 1999; Billig, 1992). The shift from bride price to dowry is linked to demographic factors, namely, to the scarcity of grooms (Caldwell et al., 1983), as well as to the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and consumerism (Banarjee, 1999).

Bride price and dowry are also common in China despite the 1950 ban on all forms of marriage payments. Although the Communist regime perceived bride price and dowry as indicators of feudal extravagance, the practice of marriage payments never ceased (Croll, 1984; Siu, 1993; Yan, 1996). As Yan (1996) reported, since the economic reforms of the late 1970s, high bride price and lavish dowries have reappeared all over China. In contrast to India, bride price and dowry coexist in China, and are practiced among all social classes. Traditionally, dowries were subsidized through the bride price paid by the groom's family to the bride's family, a practice characterized by Goody (1990) as "indirect dowry." Recent studies report that there has been a change from indirect to direct dowry, and the nature of marriage payments has transformed from "a form of gift giving between families to a means of wealth allocation within the family" (Yan, 1996, p. 177). Furthermore, it is reported that brides and grooms play more active roles in contemporary marriage transactions and assume full control over the disposition of the bride price and dowry (Yan, 1996).

The meaning and experience of dowry in Turkey differ from the Indian and Chinese cases. Although both dowry and bride price exist, the practice of paying bride price is very limited and increasingly unwelcome. Dowry, however, remains to be a prevailing custom. Traditionally, dowry in Turkey was largely confined to textile products such as embroidery, clothing, bed linen, and carpets that are manually manufactured by the bride before her wedding (e.g., Çelik, 1987; Öztürk, 1983; Tezcan, 1997). This version of dowry had a clear pedagogical motivation. Dowry preparation was a major skill for young females living in the rural areas, who had little opportunities for education and employment. Typically, a daughter was instructed to start preparing her dowry between age 10 and 12 and was taught to knit, weave, and do needlework. In many instances, she was also given a wooden chest in which she could store her dowry. The daughter's interest in preparing her dowry was further encouraged by informal competitions organized among a neighborhood in which young females demonstrated their abilities and various

items of dowry (Öztürk, 1983). Thus, traditionally, dowry functioned mainly as a symbolic tool to reflect the abilities and competencies of a bride-to-be in weaving, knitting, and embroidery. Her craft and labor of many years were finally appreciated and publicized through a ceremonial display of dowry just prior to the wedding day. The display of dowry not only honored the bride-to-be, but also publicly verified the content and scope of the dowry she was taking with her. In some areas, the dowry displayed was put into a written record and signed by the bride's and the groom's parents, as a reference in the case of a dispute or divorce in the future. If the marriage resulted in divorce, then it was customary for the husband to return the dowry back to the wife.

Studies conducted in different cultures suggest that dowry practice remains to be a strong tradition, but transforms as a result of various cultural, economic, social and political developments. Despite its significance and prevalence, however, there exists no ethnographically oriented research that investigates dowry practice and its transformation in contemporary Turkey. Motivated by this lack of research, this discussion explores dowry practices of different groups of consumers and seeks to understand how its meanings and experiences are negotiated, resisted, or accepted. Similar in many ways to India and China, the economic and cultural modernization of Turkey affects the role and composition of rituals and traditions, including dowry practices.

## **MODERNIZATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF MARRIAGE RITUALS IN TURKEY**

The demise of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 mark a dramatic shift in the social, cultural, legal, political, and economic orientation of Turkey. At the core of the republican ideology was the desire to construct a "Western" society—modern, urban, secular, democratic, liberal, and rational—out of the Ottoman heritage of "the Oriental" that was equated with religiosity, traditionalism, backwardness, and peasantry. The first two decades of the republic witnessed a massive social reengineering project that aimed to restructure all domains of the public and private lives. As Robins (1996) noted for the republican elite, "It seemed as if the principles of modernity could be accommodated only on the basis of a massive prohibition and interdiction of the historical and traditional culture" (p. 68).

The republican ideology perceived the liberation of women as a necessary condition for the modernization of the society. Previous restrictions on education and employment were diminished and women were admitted to the public schools, the civil service, and the private professions. The 1934 Amendment to the Electoral Law granted suffrage to women and allowed them to be elected to public of-

fice. Several changes focused on redesigning marriage and family institutions. Civil law mandated secular marriage, abolished polygamy, prevented child marriages by setting minimum ages for marriage, recognized women as legal equals of men in inheriting and maintaining property, and gave women the right to file for divorce. However, the impact of the reforms was uneven across different social groups. Initially, the changes imposed by the state remained mostly ineffective in the rural areas. In villages far away from the reach of the administration, arranged marriages, polygamy, and religious weddings continued. Those who benefitted most from the new rights were urban middle- and upper-class women who had easier access to education and employment opportunities than rural women who more strongly felt the power of traditions and Islamic conservatism (Arat, 1994; Kadioğlu, 1994).

Whereas the state attempted to reorganize the marriage institution and restate individuals' rights and obligations, it never explicitly interfered with the wedding traditions. Indirectly, however, it sought to promote Western styles of weddings (Lindisfarne, 2002). In place of old ceremonies, which were perceived as too exaggerated, rural, and religious, the republican elites favored simpler, secular, and "modern" ceremonies. The propaganda had stronger effects among the secular, urban groups of the population who associated themselves more with the republican ideology of modernization. Modern wedding ceremonies differed from traditional ones in many respects; some ritual components were abandoned altogether, others transformed substantially. Whereas traditional weddings lasted 3 to 7 days, modern weddings took place within a single day. In traditional ceremonies, it was customary for the groom's family to organize gender-segregated dinners. Typically, male and female guests were invited to separate houses and were served traditional Turkish food. Modern weddings, on the other hand, eliminated gender-based segregation and transported the ceremony from the confines of the homes to clubs and wedding salons. Female and male guests intermingled freely, danced, and listened to live music while enjoying beverages and snacks. The clothing styles of the modern weddings were also different. The mandatory replacement of traditional dressing with Western dressing code in 1925 has already transformed the clothing styles of the urbanites. Western-style wedding dresses were soon adopted by the secular elites, and it became customary for the bride to wear the white wedding gown and the groom to wear the black suit or tuxedo. Henna night ceremony was a prominent feature of traditional weddings (Üstüner, Ger, & Holt, 2000). Because henna night was strongly associated with Ottoman society, it was equated with backwardness and peasantry in the modern imagination and was abandoned in modern weddings.

The gap between the lifestyles, values, and gender role definitions of urban and rural populations widened over the years. Rapid industrialization during the 1960s and 1970s led to large-scale immigration from rural towns to big cities. Those who migrated settled in the periphery of the cities, creating not only shantytowns, but also a culture of their own that mingled their rural traditions with the values of modern city life (Bolak, 1997; Erman, 1998; Robins, 1996). Contempo-

rary Turkish society is characterized by significant cultural, social, and economic differences and resultant varieties in lifestyles and consumption behaviors (Sandıkçı & Ger, 2002). Certain segments hold tightly on to traditions and face severe social and physical consequences in the case of deviation. Others disdain traditions as they perceive them to be a threat to their modern, secular, and urban identity. Yet, in other segments that have adopted a Westernized lifestyle but are not fully satisfied with the symbolism of the republican ideology, there is a return to traditions, an attempt to reinterpret traditions from the lens of the present. Üstüner et al. (2000), for instance, reported that a new, secular, and urban interpretation of the henna night ritual has emerged in recent years. According to the authors, the emergence of new forms of henna night ceremonies "can be seen as an example of the recent urban interest in the forgotten old and the authentic Turkey," and are indicative of the tensions between modern and traditional identities (Üstüner et al., 2000, p. 212). Wedding ceremonies and the various rituals they incorporate are rich symbolic phenomena through which culture and identities are not only enacted and reproduced but also contested and negotiated. In this respect, similar to the henna night ceremony, dowry practice is a symbolic domain in which various tensions between urban-rural and modern-traditional are played out.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is explanatory in its nature and aims to offer a preliminary understanding of the dowry practices in Turkey. The explanatory and discovery-oriented character of the study required employing methods that provide in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Qualitative research with its "interpretive and naturalistic approach to subject matter" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2) better suited the objectives of this study than more structured approaches. The case study method (Hamel, 1993) was adopted and data was collected through "long-interviews" with a small set of informants (McCracken, 1988). Focusing on a select number of cases enabled interviewing and observing informants in-depth, and permitted a detailed understanding of the subjective meanings and experiences that characterize the dowry practices of the informants.

Informants were purposively selected to maximize chances of uncovering differences and similarities between urban and rural dowry practices (see Table 8.1 for the description of the informants). Previous studies on Turkey report significant differences among urban and rural populations regarding their attitudes toward traditions (Yazıcı, 2001; DIE, 2002). To understand rural dowry practices, informants living a small village located in southern Turkey were interviewed. In line with the demographic structure of Turkey (DIE, 2002), these informants were either illiterate or had only primary school education. They had been living in this small town for many generations, and were mainly responsible for household

work. All of the urban informants live in capital city of Ankara. They are educated, with at least high school degrees, and are either employed outside or used to work as a professional. With their education, income levels, and lifestyles they are representative of urban middle- and upper-middle-class families in Turkey (Güvenç, 2001). The third group of informants is selected from shantytown dwellers, or those who have emigrated from small towns to big cities and occupy an in-between place in the socioeconomic map. Typical of the first generation immigrants (Erman, 1998), the older informant in this group has neither formal education nor paid employment. The younger informant, on the other hand, is a high school graduate and has a blue-collar job.

Given that dowry practice is primarily associated with brides, data was collected only from female respondents. In all three groups of informants, interviews were conducted with both the mothers and the daughters. Variations in age and life cycle allowed for explication of generational differences. All of the daughters were engaged and some got married during the course of the research. They all lived together with their parents, a behavior typical in Turkish society (Yazıcı, 2001). As a comparison, the study also interviewed one single and one divorced woman, both professionals that had been living independently for many years. Very few women in Turkey live alone, and such behavior connotes, sometimes pejoratively, an independent, modern identity and more liberal values (Yazıcı, 2001). There is some evidence in the literature that women who chose to live on their own or cohabit with their boyfriends have a more liberal attitude and tend to resist accepted norms and traditions associated with marriage, including the dowry practice (Banarjee, 1999; Bhopal, 1997). This comparison allowed for exploration of how economic and cultural independence transform women's relationships with marriage institution and traditions.

Data were collected through a series of semistructured "long interviews" (McCracken, 1988) conducted during the spring/summer 2001. The second author, who is a second year PhD student, interviewed the informants under the guidance of the first author. Both authors are single Turkish females, who have never been married and, thus, do not have personal experiences of dowry or other wedding-related rituals. The interviews were conducted in Turkish and sought to yield information on the artifacts, behaviors, actors, and audiences involved in dowry practice. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by the second author. The transcriptions produced about 80 pages of single-spaced text, and were translated into English by the first author. To ensure correct translation, the texts were translated back and forth to Turkish and English until both authors reached to a consensus on their accuracy. In addition to interviews, visual data were collected. The interviewer visited the informants at their homes many times and took several pictures of their dowries. The photographs assisted as visual records of symbolism encountered in different dowry items and performances. Sample photographs are included in the text to clarify and illustrate various artifacts and themes.

TABLE 8.1  
Description of the Informants

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**Arife:** is 19 years old and engaged. She lives in a small village of Kas, a tourist town located in southern Turkey. Arife has a primary school education and, except for the summer months when she works at nearby farms as a harvester, she is not employed. She regards herself as a "housegirl"; she helps her mother in household chores and, in her spare time, prepares her dowry.

**Arife's mother:** whose family has been living in the same village for generations, is in her early forties. She is illiterate. She primarily takes care of the household. In the summer she also works as a harvester.

**Dilek:** is a 20-year-old high school graduate. She was born in a shantytown of Ankara and still lives in the same neighborhood with her parents. She works as an assistant hairdresser at a hair salon located at a middle-class neighborhood in Ankara. During the course of the interviews, she got married to a man whom her parents arranged for her.

**Dilek's Mother:** is a housewife in her mid-forties. She was born in a village in central Anatolia, participated in an arranged marriage, and then moved to Ankara with her husband. She is literate but does not have formal education. They live in the same shantytown area to which they first moved.

**Şeyda:** is a 25-year-old electrical engineer now completing her master's degree in the United States. She was born in Ankara and lived with her parents until she went to the States. She met her fiancé while she was studying there. The couple got married during the course of the research.

**Şeyda's Mother:** is a retired high school teacher in her early fifties. She and her husband, whom she married out of love, live in a townhouse located in a middle/upper-middle-class neighborhood of Ankara. She likes decorating her house and in her spare time attends to handcraft courses.

**Almila:** is a 25-year-old engineer currently looking for a job. She lives with her parents at a modern apartment complex. Her parents are both university graduates who have lived in big cities (Ankara and Istanbul) since they were born. Almila is engaged to her boyfriend.

**Almila's mother:** is in her mid-fifties. She was born in Istanbul and lived there until she got married. She married her husband out of love. She is a lawyer and speaks English.

**Elif:** is a 32-year-old dentist. She is single and lives alone in Kas. She used to live with her boyfriend, but moved to her own place after they broke up. She moved out of her parent's house when she was 19 years old and has not lived with them since that time. Her mother is widow in her mid-fifties. She is a retired governmental employee.

**Zeynep:** is in her early thirties. She is from a wealthy and popular family in Kas. She is divorced and lives alone. She is a university graduate and works as a dealer at a casino. Her father is a yacht captain and her brother is a tour guide. Her mother is in her late fifties and a housewife.

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Data analysis was guided by grounded theory, which is particularly appropriate when the goal of the analysis is the discovery of a theory from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Straus & Corbin, 1990). Generating a theory from data means that the concepts and constructs “not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6). With such an orientation, the authors worked independently to identify key patterns and relationships in data, and then to relate emerging patterns to relevant theoretical concepts. Each stage involved several iterations and negotiations among the researchers. The analysis continued until the authors arrived at agreed on meanings. The discussions of the identified themes are illustrated through relevant quotes from the interviews. In order to preserve anonymity, the names of the informants have been changed.

## FINDINGS

The analysis of the data suggests that dowry practice entails a multistaged process and each stage involves different artifacts, scripts, performances, and actors (Rook, 1985). The findings are discussed along three main stages that have been identified: negotiating, preparing, and selecting dowry. In each stage, the discussion highlights differences and similarities among different informant groups and various tensions that underlie their dowry practices. By examining variations across different socioeconomic groups and generations, this chapter aims to map out transformations in the meanings and experiences of dowry.

### Negotiating Dowry

One of the key findings that emerged from the data is that there are multiple and sometimes contradictory definitions of what dowry is (or what it should be) and the discursive construction of dowry is contingent on the convergent and divergent practices of individuals. The varieties observed in the informants’ experiences of dowry suggest that the process is negotiated differently among different social groups, and the way it actualizes largely depends on the individuals’ proximity to or distance from traditional lifestyles. In villages and shantytowns, a dowry is still, as has been historically, exclusively for the bride-to-be and is prepared jointly by the daughter and her mother. The girl and the mother are enthusiastic about preparing and having a dowry and take pride in it. These informants’ discourses and practices indicate that adherence to traditions enable them to assert their belonging to the community they live in and register their compliance to the expectations of the others. For these social groups, dowry not only valorizes marriage but more importantly operates as an indicator of the worth of the bride. If a girl has to marry without a dowry, then this shows the absence of her parents’ support and puts her in a vulnerable position against her mother- and father-in-law:

*Interviewer (I):* What do you think of people who get married without dowry?

*Mother of Dilek (M):* When there is no dowry, of course it is not good. A girl without dowry feels very strange, as if she has nobody, as if she is an orphan.

*I:* As if she is an orphan?

*M:* Of course, as if she is an orphan. When a girl has her mother, I mean Dilek doesn't know anything, she doesn't purchase anything. But I know what a girl needs, whatever I use I get one for her.

In patriarchal societies, because women are regarded as socially inferior, dowry constitutes an important strategy to advance status and prestige of the bride's family (Comaroff, 1980; Tambiah, 1973). In Turkey, arranged marriages are still very common in rural areas, and marriage represents more of the union of two families than the union of two individuals (Erkut, 1982; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1986). Given the higher status of men as the "breadwinners," the groom and his family assume more authority and power in the marriage transaction. The bride's family uses dowry as a symbolic tool to boost their self-esteem and prestige. When dowry is adequately provided, this indicates that the bride's family has the competency, commitment, and resources to build a more egalitarian relationship with the groom's parents. If, on the other hand, the parents do not provide enough dowries for their daughter, they face the risk of being blamed and put down by the groom's family. Dowry-related criticism received from the groom's family not only weakens the status of the bride and her family but also signals deviation from norms. In order to avoid potential conflicts, the bride's mother takes control of the dowry process. It is mainly her responsibility to decide what the dowry will include and when it will be ready. As in one informant's case, this may even lead to the postponement of the wedding if the mother believes that dowry preparation requires longer time:

My mother wanted my wedding to be on a later date. She said that my dowry was not complete yet and wanted to postpone the wedding to next year. That's why I also didn't want to get married immediately. My sisters-in-law said they would help us and provide whatever was missing. But they could blame me later. Because I didn't have full dowry they could put me down later. Even if they say they wouldn't I think they would do so. (Dilek)

First they don't say anything of course. But then they blame you. I know this happens quite frequently, I keep hearing that happening. (Mother of Dilek)

The middle- and upper-middle-class urban informants' perceptions of dowry differ significantly from those of the rural and shantytown respondents. The difference stems partly from a different understanding of the marriage institution and partly from different meanings given to material goods. Middle- and upper-middle-class urban females typically choose the person they wish to marry rather than taking part in an arranged marriage (Yazıcı, 2001). Because the motivation behind the marriage is the romantic love between two individuals rather than an agreement between parents, these families do not perceive the marriage as a transaction. The parents of both sides place more emphasis on the happiness and well-being of the couple, and feel responsible for helping their children to successfully embark on a new life together. As they jointly share responsibility, it is a common practice that the parents of the groom-to-be also provide dowry to their son. This more egalitarian division of responsibility indicates a different understanding of dowry. For the informants from the village and the shantytown, dowry items reflect the prestige and social status of the bride and her parents, and its absence causes embarrassment and blame. For urban informants, however, dowry signifies the parents' goodwill and wish for a happy, loving, and lasting marriage. Dowry, in this case, resembles more the gift-giving practices that seek to strengthen the emotional bond between the children and the parents (Belk & Coon, 1993; Cheal, 1996; Fischer & Arnould, 1990):

For me, material goods are not that important, it is important that they love each other. Other things happen over time, because it is impossible that some one can say "I have everything and I don't need anything else." You come across to something nice, and suddenly you change your mind. I mean goods can be acquired later, it is important that one finds a person to love.... I don't care what other people say. They might even say that Şeyda's dowry is not good enough. What we have done may not be important for them at all. But I have things that I'd like to give to my daughter, and those are important for me. If I am happy giving them and she is happy receiving them, that's what's important for me. (Mother of Şeyda)

When the our informants talk about dowry, they all refer to three different groups of items. However, the weight and significance given to each type of dowry differ among different social groups. First, there is *sandık çeyizi*, or chest dowry, which includes decorative textile products such as embroidery, needlecraft, and lacework (see Figs. 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3). According to the informants from the village, preparing a chest dowry is exclusively the responsibility of the daughter. No help is accepted from the mother, the sisters, or the friends. The girl consults her friends only to get ideas for patterns and designs. Overall, conformity rather than originality shapes the content of the chest dowry. The girls emulate each other and seek to produce similar types of dowry pieces. The more a girl's dowry is similar to

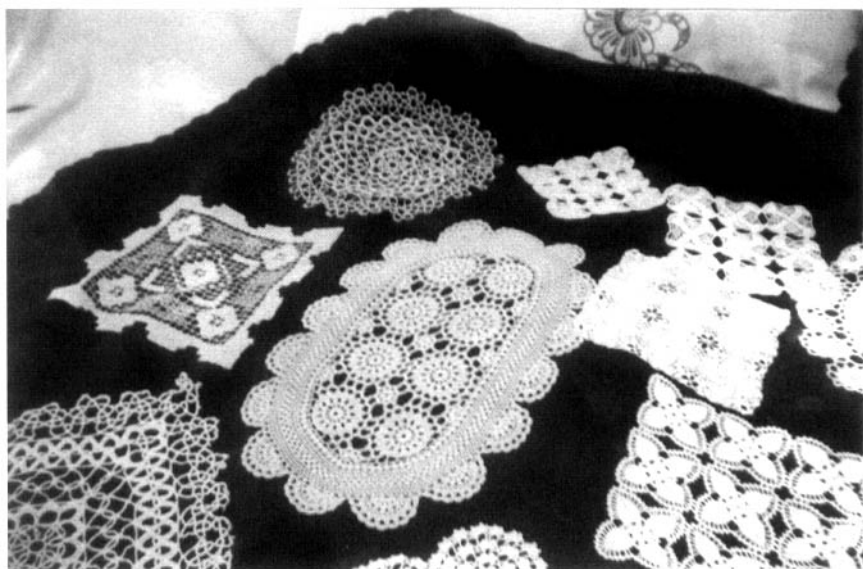


Fig. 8.1. Chest dowry: Example of manual needlework.

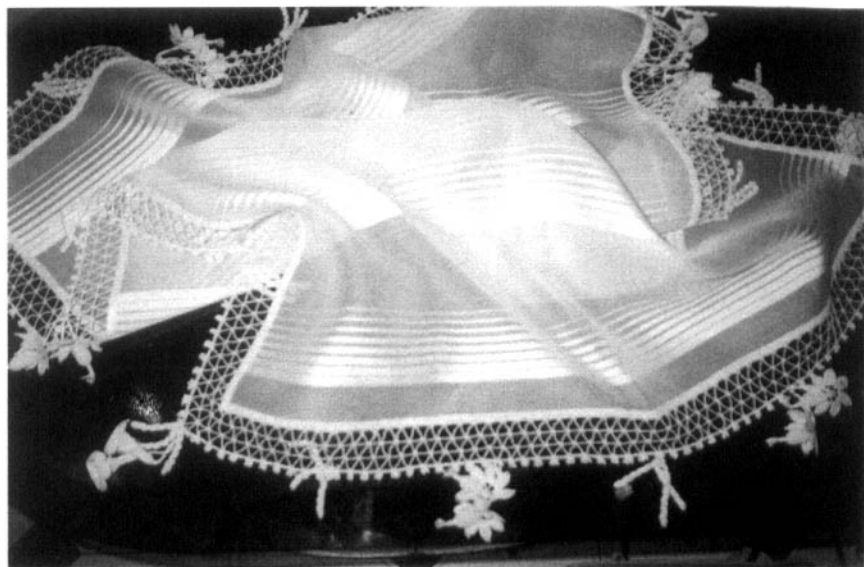


Fig. 8.2. Chest dowry: Tablecloth.

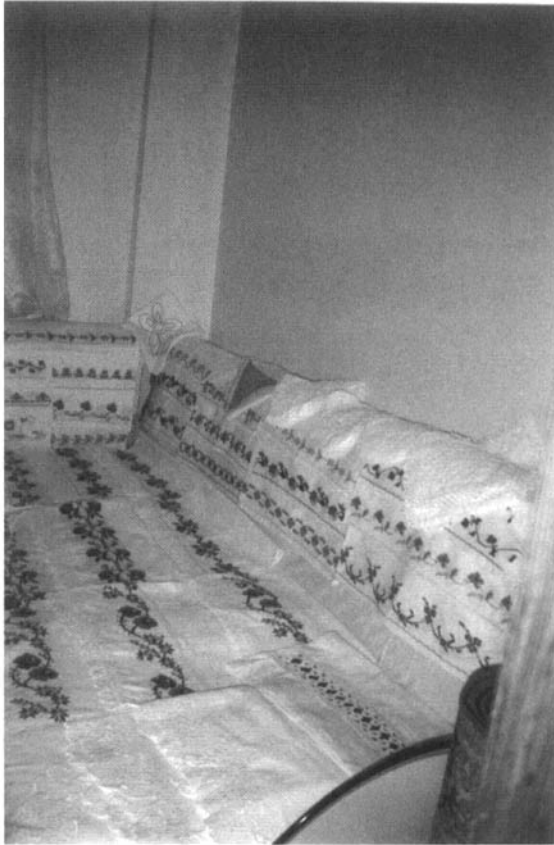


Fig. 8.3. Chest dowry: Examples of embroidered bed linen.

those of other girls in the village, the more obvious it is that she is as competent as her friends in needlework. Because a hand produced dowry is a measure of a bride-to-be's skills, no pieces from the mother's dowry is included in her dowry. The dowry of a bride-to-be has to be as new and fresh as she is herself.

In rural areas, parents generally do not wish their daughters to gain an education beyond the primary school level. This is due to both difficulties in accessing to higher education in villages and the prevailing perception that the primary role of woman is to take care of the household and the children, which are chores that do not require formal education (Duben, 1982). In the shantytowns, however, girls attend school at least until they are 15 or 16 years old, and once they complete their education, they usually start working (Erman, 1998). In cities, the state enforces schooling more strictly than in rural areas, and most shantytown families need

many members of the family to have paid employment outside the house in order to finance the higher cost of living in cities. Because these girls do not have too much free time at home, they do not learn how to do needlework. The modern lifestyle of the city enables them to acquire an education, and, to a certain extent, deviate from traditional female roles and responsibilities. However, their rural roots still dictate a traditional dowry. The tension between the old and the new gets resolved through a reallocation of roles and duties. The mother, in this case, assumes responsibility and becomes actively involved in preparing her daughter's dowry. She either hand produces dowry items herself or, to the extent she can afford, purchases mass produced pieces. Dilek's mother knows how to do needlework and prefers to hand produce dowry pieces herself, which she believes are much better than those that can be purchased:

*I:* Did you all hand produce your daughter's dowry?

*Dilek's Mother (M):* Of course, there is nothing that I purchased.

*I:* Don't you like machine-produced items?

*M:* Hand producing was common in the past. I like hand-produced pieces more. Because I only have one daughter I prepared everything myself.... Hand-produced dowry is far better than machined-produced dowry.

*I:* Why is that?

*M:* Because it reflects the labour, it is more beautiful. But now everybody prefers machine-produced pieces.

*I:* Why do you think people prefer machine-produced pieces now?

*M:* Not to be overburdened. They don't want to go through the trouble of producing them. It is very difficult to hand-produce things.

In contrast to the insistence on the uniformity of designs and pieces observed in the case of the village informants, there is more variety in the chest dowry of the shantytown informants. Trends rather than established norms influence the selection of the pieces to be included in the dowry. Dilek's mother revealed that she not only consulted her neighbors, relatives, and friends to find out which patterns were trendy, but also copied the designs and the pieces that she came across at the shops. Consequently, the dowry that the mother produces for her daughter differs significantly from the dowry that she had when she was a young woman.

The chest dowry of the village and shantytown informants is composed exclusively of white embroidery and lace. The color white symbolizes the innocence of the bride-to-be and the insistence on white pieces indicates the significance placed on her "purity." People living in villages and shantytowns tend to be highly conservative in moral values and especially when they take part in an arranged marriage, premarital sexual interaction between the parties is not permitted. The white embroidery that the bride-to-be takes with her, thus, symbolizes her virginity.

Chest dowry constitutes an important portion of the dowry of the urban informants as well. They value hand produced items; however, typically, neither the daughter nor the mother is interested in or able to do needlework. They do not wish to purchase machine produced pieces that they consider reflect a crass mass taste. Instead, they consult professionals who work as freelance laborers and hand produce dowry pieces in return of a fee. Depending on the complexity of the design and amount of labor, the fees can be quite substantial. Ordering pieces enables these families to choose the patterns, designs, and colors that best reflect their taste. The originality and authenticity of the pieces operate as a symbolic indicator of their aesthetic disposition and appreciation (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998). White, for instance, connotes a rural taste that they disdain, whereas the color beige symbolizes a more refined, elegant, and modern style. Irrespective of its color, however, chest dowry symbolizes, at least, the assumed purity and innocence of the bride-to-be for the urban informants as well.

A second type of dowry is the appliance dowry, which involves various kitchen items and household durables. In the villages, as the conventional female role in a marriage is structured around household chores, brides-to-be are expected to bring in articles that will be used in cooking and cleaning. Accordingly, the bride's family provides cutlery, plates, glasses, cooking pans, and even sponges, towels, and cleaning sets. The composition of the appliance dowry of the middle- and upper-middle-class urbanites, on the other hand, reflects their relative affluence and modern and professional lifestyles. Here, dowry items include timesaving household appliances (e.g., dishwashers, washing machines, and dryers) and leisure-oriented durables (e.g., big screen TVs, stereos, and DVD players). Given the egalitarian division of responsibility in helping out the new couple, the groom's and bride's families typically negotiate who is going to provide which appliance. For the informants from the shantytown, the appliance dowry, more than any other form, reflects the tension of living at the periphery of the city but not quite affording its material possibilities. Dilek, who was born in a shantytown, has been exposed to the lifestyle of the well-off urbanites, as have her friends. She desires to have a household full with appliances and goods that she sees in the shopping malls. Her notion of "ideal" dowry blends with the notions of "ideal" home (Öncü, 1997) filled with objects that she sees but cannot afford: "I mean, [if I had more money] I wish I had a beautiful home. I wish I could furnish it any way I like. I wish I could get everything I want. It [my house] is not going to be too bad but it could have been nicer."

Gift dowry is the third type of dowry and fulfills a different role than the other two types. Whereas chest and appliance dowries are for the use of the bride and the groom, gift dowry is given to relatives. Agonistic motives (Belk, 1988; Sherry, 1983) seem to underlie gift-giving practices of the informants from the village and the shantytown. These informants believe that it is required for the bride's family to give gift dowry to the groom's family, and use gifts to achieve some type of strategic personal gain. The gifts include hand-produced items such as headscarves, table clothes, and bed linen, and are given to the groom's parents, siblings, and relatives. Typically, the parents and the siblings receive more valuable items, whereas the relatives are given smaller gifts. By offering valuable gifts to the closest relatives, the bride's family symbolically reaffirms the relatively higher status of the groom's family, and hopes that the acknowledgment of power at the beginning will prevent any misbehavior in the future. In contrast to the unidirectional nature of gift giving in rural and shantytown informants, there is a reciprocal gift-giving behavior motivated by altruistic motives (Belk, 1988; Sherry, 1983) in urban middle- and upper-middle-class families. The gifts exchanged among these families typically include mass produced but high quality nightgowns, slippers, fabric, ties, and watches. Altruistic gift giving is inspired purely by the desire to give pleasure to the loved ones, and signifies a mutual expression of the goodwill of the families: "I think giving and receiving gift are very nice things. I mean it is an expression of love. Sometimes there can be some minor misunderstandings, conflicts during the weddings. Giving and receiving gifts remedy such misunderstanding. Besides, it is always a good thing to give a gift when you visit people" (Mother of Şeyda).

For those families who engage in the dowry practice, irrespective of the differences in their perceptions and underlying motivations, dowry is the symbolic expression of a new beginning. Its preparation and eventual transfer represent the transition from childhood to adulthood and from being a daughter/son to a wife/husband. Many of the informants liken dowry—and, in extension, marriage—to the rebirth of nature during spring. Like spring, dowry embodies all the excitement, joy, and sweetness of a new life.

But not all perceive dowry in such positive terms. Elif is a 33-year-old single woman who has never been married and has been living on her own for the past 17 years. As an independent woman living in a flat that she herself furnished, dowry is a thing of the past and reminds her "all the unused, unnecessary items" given to a daughter. She reveals that her mother had dowry but she has never seen her using any of those items. Elif acknowledges that many women in Turkey live with their parents until they get married. These women do not live in their own place, so for them dowry serves the very practical purpose of setting up a new household. She explains that she and her like-minded friends have a different attitude toward marriage and the customs associated with it:

Now how we perceive marriage is different. I mean, for example, many couples do not even have wedding ceremony; they just have the legal



service. In the past, for example, there were engagements, weddings, and many preparations for all these ceremonies; they used to prepare lots of things in addition to dowry.... Now because the lifestyles are different, people really do not spend that much time at home. They set up more practical homes. I mean in the past people used to purchase big dining tables, chairs, furniture for the guest room and cupboards to put china. Now people want to live with less furniture, they have different lifestyles and they want to live more practically. For example, now, when we are together with friends we can dine over this coffee table. Those things used to be much more important in the past. People used to invite guests to dinner and they would have china sets for ten, twenty people and matching tablecloths, napkins, and things like that. And they would have these kinds of things in their dowry. Now we don't live like that any more.

Elif does not demand dowry from her mother, nor is her mother interested in preparing her dowry. However, she indicated us that she may consider having some of her mother's dowry one day, not to use but to keep as a memory: "The things that my mother or her mother did for her dowry, those belong to her. But they are important for her because she lost her mother. And I would like to keep a couple of things from her dowry as a memory of my mother." Select dowry items, such as hand produced embroidery and needlework, take the form of cherished objects to be transferred from the mother to the daughter, and, thus, represent metaphorical extensions of the mother into her daughter's future life (Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000).

Price et al. (2000) stated that ritual occasions and rites of passage can stimulate older people to dispose of their cherished objects. Zeynep's relationship with her mother suggests a similar pattern. Similar to Elif, Zeynep believes that dowry is already a thing of the past, and practiced only among more traditional segments of the Turkish society:

Z: I think, today, there is no more dowry practice in some groups of the society. It has disappeared in the five percent of the population.

I: Which five percent is that?

Z: Five percent that has a very modern life. I never hear my friends talking about dowry when they are getting married. I don't even hear the term dowry any more.

However, although Zeynep did not need or want any dowry, she admits that her mother decided to transfer some of her own dowry items to her when she got married. She keeps these transferred items of embroidery and lacework "in a bag at the corner of the cupboard" but, nonetheless, appreciates them for their aesthetic and

historical value and potential as family heirlooms: "They are mostly things that are not produced any more. They are all hand-produced. Things that require lots of labor and effort are not produced now. Or, they are machine-made. Old dowries are more valuable because of the labor put into them."

### Preparing Dowry

Traditionally preparation of dowry starts at the birth of a daughter and the mother plays the key role in its preparation. In the villages, there exist clearly defined norms about how a girl's dowry should be. Following these norms, when the girl is old enough, the mother teaches her daughter how to hand produce dowry pieces. The informants related that each girl in the village has a very clear picture of dowry and wants her dowry to be similar to that of her friends. However, a different pattern was observed in the case of shantytown and urban informants. Although the mothers start preparing dowry early on, the daughters are not typically highly involved in its preparation until there is a prospective groom. They even despise their mother's interest in dowry as untimely and economically excessive. Yet, as soon as getting married becomes an immanent event, both their involvement level in its completion and appreciation of their mother's labor increases:

My mother started to prepare dowry when I was just a kid. I used to say "mother, why are you preparing these, I'll never use them." Now, I am getting married and she says "see, how useful they are," and I agree. (Dilek)

I started preparing Şeyda's dowry when she was two and a half year old. Şeyda used to tell me "mom, don't prepare these, who is going to use them?" When we displayed her dowry, she liked it. She said "mom when did you prepare all these things?" She wasn't involved at the beginning now she likes them and says she will use them in the future. (Mother of Şeyda)

Two factors can explain this attitude. First, as most of the dowry pieces can be purchased, the preparation can be postponed to a later stage. Second, although the composition of dowry is relatively fixed in villages, fashion and social trends are powerful influences in the case of shantytown and urban informants. The girls living in the urban environment do not want to have outdated items in their "modern" homes and prefer to wait until the very end to acquire what is most trendy—of course subject to their financial means: "Now there is fashion. Everybody can follow fashion more or less. So there is no need to prepare lots of things beforehand. Because when there are new things on the market, you want to have them as well" (Mother of Almila).

A shared understanding among almost all the informants is that every mother prepares a dowry for her daughter. The mother is influential in preparing as well as

organizing the rituals associated with dowry. The active involvement of the mother in her daughter's dowry, first of all, is a sign of her ongoing and unconditional love for her daughter. Similar to gifts, dowry is a form of communication (Belk, 1979) that conveys messages of affection, support, and love, and is seen as part of the giver's—mother's—extended self (Belk, 1988). Mothers love their daughters and they show this through the efforts and sacrifices they put into the preparation of dowry. Because their love is endless, they want their daughters to have everything and live a life more comfortable than theirs:

I used to save from our food money and buy things for her dowry.  
(Mother of Dilek)

Even if dowry is not the most important thing in the life, you, as a mother, still want to give your best. I want her to have more than what I had.... The things that I didn't have, or the things that I see, let's say a simple tea drainer or a spoon holder, I mean these may not exactly constitute dowry but they look so original and when I purchase them for my self or even if I don't purchase them for myself, I always thinking of purchasing one for Şeyda. (Mother of Dilek)

I want her to have everything, nothing should be missing. Only when she has everything you feel happy as a mother. (Mother of Almilla)

Dowry represents not only the embodiment of the mother's love, but is also an indication of the competency of the mother in preparing her daughter to the role of a wife. Because women mostly live with their parents until they get married, mothers feel that their daughters are neither experienced in taking care of a household, nor knowledgeable about the requirements of a running a good home. Thus, it is the mother's responsibility to foresee and provide whatever her daughter will need in effectively performing the roles of a wife and, later, a mother: "A mother knows better what her daughter will need. Because she has never run a household she doesn't know what she needs" (Mother of Almilla).

In contrast to the dominant role of the mother, the father remains generally inactive in the process. Because dowry is perceived as a female ritual, the father's role is typically limited to providing financial support. Like in many other rituals, females take more responsibility in maintaining and performing the ritual (Fischer & Gainer, 1993; McGrath & Englis, 1996; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). In all social groups, the father's duty only involves paying for the dowry items. Whereas the fathers desire their daughters to have dowry, they influence the extent of dowry by pressuring their wives not to overspend. The mothers typically negotiate between the daughter and the father, and come up with a solution that will satisfy both sides. Often, the mothers resort to their own savings to acquire the missing items. Even if there may be many arguments and conflicts over how much to spend

between the mother and the father during the preparation process, the fathers, at the end, are generally proud of their wives and appreciate their efforts once they see the results:

He [the father] told me that I was such a good mother. He asked "when did you prepare all these?" He said that he was not aware of all these beautiful things that I prepared. He, of course, saw individual items at the beginning. Then, when we displayed them, he saw all of it, and examined them at length. He even joked if she [daughter] is not going to use all of it, we could take some and use! He really really liked them.  
(Mother of Şeyda)

The role of the groom-to-be and his parents differ in the villages, the shantytowns, and the cities. In the villages, the groom-to-be does not interfere with the dowry preparation. If there is something additional required of which to the bride-to-be's family must be reminded, then it is his mother's responsibility to negotiate this issue with the mother of the bride-to-be. Because what is expected from each family is clearly defined and strictly followed in the villages, the two families conform to the expectations. There is little hesitation about what is to be done and the way it is to be done. The groom-to-be's family therefore assumes a rather passive role in the process. The family of the bride-to-be remains as the key actor in the case of the shantytown dwellers; however, negotiation between the two families is generally more complicated and potentially conflicting. Shantytowns involve people who have emigrated from different parts of Turkey. When two families are to be connected through marriage, this often means union of families from different rural backgrounds who have different local customs. If the expectations are not clearly laid out and agreed on, then arguments and conflicts may arise. The conflicts arising as a result of regional differences in values suggest cultural ambivalence (Otnes, Lowrey, & Shrum, 1997), which may force the parties involved to readjust, often unwillingly, their behavior: "In my village, the girl's family buys the chest and brings it to the new house. Here, groom's family takes the dowry to the house. Groom should bring the chest with him. But, I cannot tell, I cannot tell them to bring a chest to put dowry" (Mother of Dilek).

Traditionally, parents have strong authority and power over their children, and expect them to be submissive (Tekeli, 1991). In the villages, this family structure prevails and the parents strictly monitor and control marriage decisions and preparation. In the shantytowns, the authority of the parents remains strong, but the couple is given some freedom to negotiate various marriage related practices. In urban families, there is a more egalitarian relationship between the children and the parents that allows the children to better assert their individuality and take more responsibility in planning of the marriage. These families feel themselves responsible for supporting their children financially to reach at their dream without dictating how the dream should unfold.

## Displaying Dowry

Once the dowry is prepared and the wedding date is finalized, there remains one last step in the ritual: displaying dowry. Dowry display is essentially the showing-off of the dowry prepared for/by the bride to the relatives and friends. Time and place of the display varies; it might take place in the home of the bride's parents, the groom's parents, or the new couples, and it might happen before or after the marriage. Dowry displays, like baby showers, are rites of passage signifying one of the major role transitions that most women undergo during their lives (Fischer & Gainer, 1993). Similar to traditional baby showers, dowry displays are attended exclusively by female guests. The absence of men suggest that the display, like other forms of female-only rituals, such as baby showers or home shopping parties, aims to foster female solidarity and facilitate the transition from girlhood to womanhood.

In the villages, dowry display typically happens a few days before the wedding. The groom's family, the relatives, and the neighbors visit the house and examine the individually displayed items. The display allows the guests, and especially the groom's family, to assess the amount of dowry the bride is bringing with her and the extent of her abilities in hand producing dowry pieces. In extreme cases, if the groom's family is not satisfied with the dowry, then they may decide to cancel the wedding. When everyone sees the dowry and if there are no disagreements between the two parties, then the single girls of the village take the dowry from the bride's parent's house, bring them into the couple's new house, and ceremonially place them. The ceremonial transfer and replacement of dowry functions as an encouragement for the unmarried girls who are expected to be inspired by the effort the bride has put into her dowry. The display reproduces the expectations, reaffirms the significant role dowry plays in reaching the happy ending (e.g., the wedding), and motivates the single girls to emulate the behavior of the bride.

The tradition of displaying dowry continues in the shantytowns but it has to be modified due to economic and physical limitations faced by these families. Dilek's mother wanted to display her daughter's dowry. However, she was hesitant to invite her neighbors and distant relatives. When a guest comes to see the dowry, it is customary that she brings along a gift for the bride-to-be. Well aware of the financial difficulties that the families living in shantytowns endure, Dilek does not want to be perceived as someone asking for gifts, and thus limits the number of people she invites:

*Mother of Dilek (M):* I didn't invite many people; it would be like asking for gifts.

*I:* Do they usually bring gifts?

*M:* Yes. When you invite everybody it is like you have to bring gifts.

*I:* What kind of gifts do they typically bring along?

*M:* Things like glasses, plates, bowls.

*I:* Do they bring hand-produced items?

*M:* No, sometimes things like socks, things that are not very expensive.

*I:* What kind of gifts do you bring along when you go to a dowry display?

*M:* Sometimes small gifts, sometimes, when you visit someone that you don't want feel embarrassed you have to bring something more valuable.

Furthermore, reciprocity principle requires that when a guest brings a gift to the dowry display, she and her family are invited to the wedding ceremony in return (Yan, 1996). This, of course, means additional financial burden for the groom's family, who covers the cost of the wedding ceremony. In the cities, weddings are typically performed in rented parlors where cost is calculated on a per-person basis, so that the more people invited, the more the total cost. Because the families cannot afford to invite too many people to the wedding, they do not want to heavily publicize the wedding and, hence perform only a small-scale dowry display. In addition to the economic difficulties, the constraints of the physical space affect the scope of the display (see Figs. 8.4 and 8.5). Shantytown dwellers typically do not live in spacious houses where they can devote rooms or part of the garden to display dowry. They can display whatever they can place in a small room:

*Dilek (D):* You display dowry a couple weeks before the wedding. In the past people would empty a room and hang the dowry pieces on the wall.

*I:* Did you do that?

*D:* No. We used one of the rooms, and there was bed and other furniture there. So it was really jammed. My mother didn't want to hang them on the wall. So we placed the pieces on top of each other on the bed.... Actually, they had to be displayed for week and you had to have a big room where you can display everything individually. But my dowry remained in boxes; because we didn't have enough space we could not display them. We couldn't have used the living room either; it is already small and we had relatives staying with us.



Fig. 8.4. Dowry display: Examples of bed linen and Kitchen Utensils.

In urban middle- and upper-middle-class families, display of dowry continues, but in a substantially modified form. The informants indicate that, because they regard such ceremonies as “rural” practices, they do not organize a special day for the display. Instead, after the wedding, when the couple is established in their new house, they invite their friends and relatives. Every guest visiting the couple for the first time is given a tour of the house. The guests, both male and female, walk through the rooms (including the bed- and bathroom), examining the furniture, the decoration, and various objects on display. Although the mixed-gender nature of urban dowry displays suggests more egalitarian gender role attitudes (Fischer & Gainer, 1993), the extension of the display from dowry items to the house of the newly wed couple indicates a higher emphasis given to the conjugal bond.



Fig. 8.5. Dowry display: Examples of gifts to groom's relatives.

## CONCLUSIONS

The social rules of marriage in Turkish society developed in the context of an Islamic peasant society characterized by high levels of social and economic dependency on the family. In the traditional peasant family, the family head has control over economic resources and this control augments the social basis of patriarchal authority. The household unit, through the distribution of domestic labor and domestic financial organization, operates as the key site in which patriarchy is reproduced. Turkish society remains highly patriarchal (Kandiyoti, 1991; Erman, 1998). In villages and shantytowns, parents exert control over spouse selection, and arranged marriage remains a widely accepted behavior. The mother and the father strictly control marriage-related practices, and comply with established



norms and customs. This analysis indicates that dowry is still perceived as a requirement for a successful marriage in villages, and its absence causes personal and social embarrassment and disadvantages. The fact that dowry is prepared only for the bride and is required as a condition of marriage can be read as an expression of patriarchal authority. As Kandiyoti (1988) argued, in classic patriarchy, "dowries do not qualify as a form of premortem inheritance since they are transferred directly to the bridegroom's kin and do not take the form of productive property" (p. 279). The bride enters her husband's household as a dispossessed individual without any bargaining power.

However, the results also indicate that, in the villages and the shantytowns, the mother of the bride plays a key role in the preparation of dowry. She assumes full responsibility in guiding the behaviors of her daughter, and in selecting, organizing, and transferring dowry items. The authority of the mother suggests the existence of matriarchal power as well, at least within the context of dowry practices. Dowry practices of the urban informants present a more egalitarian perception of gender roles. Even though these families provide dowries, they reframe dowries as symbols of support rather than necessity. More importantly, the groom's family provides dowry for their son, a behavior observed in neither India nor China.

Although ritual behaviors are regarded as "extremely resistant to innovation or deviation" (Rook, 1985, p. 253), this study indicates that they do transform, albeit gradually. As individuals adopt more modern lifestyles, traditional dowry practices become recontextualized and are renegotiated. However, the transformations observed in the context of the Turkish society differ from the transformations reported for India and China. This suggests a culture-specific process through which the tensions between traditions and modernity are played out. Although effects of urbanization, commercialization, and female employment enable changes in dowry practices, the way responsibilities and gender role definitions are negotiated depends on the context of situational constraints and opportunities. The experiences of the informants from the shantytown suggest a transitional stage in which the tensions between the traditions of the rural past and the norms of urban life are most severely felt. The practices of the urban informants, on the other hand, represent more flexible experiences of dowry, which are guided by less binding and more spontaneous scripts.

The permanence of dowry, albeit in transformed forms, suggests that it continues to serve important functions in the Turkish society. Apart from the symbolic and ideological reasons underlying the continuity of dowry practice, socially accepted norms about parent-child relationship are influential in perseverance of dowry. Children of both genders typically live with their parents until they get married. Expressive enough, the term getting married in Turkish, *evlenmek*, literally means "acquiring a house," reflecting the expectation that individuals can move into their new house only when they get married. From this perspective, dowry serves a very practical purpose, helping children to set up a new household. The fact that only the single and divorced informants perceive dowry as an old-fash-

ioned and redundant practice supports this view. These women, who are experienced in living alone and define their identities as "modern," distance themselves from dowry and its "traditional" connotations. However, this distancing does not necessarily lead to rejection. Rather, these informants strategically reconstruct dowry as an heirloom or an aesthetic object. Such recontextualizations resonate with the modern reinterpretations of the henna night ritual (Üstüner et al., 2000).

Several factors might trigger transformations in traditional dowry practices. Women's increasing participation into the labor force (DIE, 2002) weakens the material basis of patriarchal authority, enabling renegotiation of gender roles. Women's education and employment outside the home practically eliminates the expectation that she has to hand produce her dowry pieces, which necessitates a redefinition of dowry and reallocation of responsibilities. The emphasis on nuclear family and the discouragement of arranged marriages in urban modernist discourse accentuates the importance of romantic love and the conjugal bond, permitting the bride and the groom to play more active roles in marriage arrangements. Consumerism and proliferation of consumer goods transform the composition of dowry by enabling families to purchase pieces and legitimating new items—appliances—as dowry. As Goldstein-Gidoni's (2000) study of contemporary Japanese weddings indicates, traditions can be and are often commodified, and the reciprocal and complex relationship between the producers of tradition and the consumers of their products requires careful analysis. The analysis of the production side—the role of dowry shops, branded dowry products, and the marketing discourse behind them—to future studies.

Marriage traditions and rituals are expressive of the historical, social, and cultural norms and assumptions about gender identities and roles, family dynamics, and consumption practices. Given the lack of academic interest on the topic, it is impossible to state if there are similar transformations in other wedding-related rituals in Turkey (for an exception, see Üstüner et al., 2000). However, the case of dowry demonstrates that new meanings attached to old traditions indicate a dynamic negotiation process whereby traditions and rituals do not merely reproduce a culture but are used as cultural resources to define new social boundaries and identities. The confrontation between tradition and modernity can be a source of tension, but it is also a source of cultural creativity and dynamism.

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