We analyze the henna-night ceremony, now emerging as a "new urban" ritual in Turkey, to understand how modern consumer lifestyles are expressed through seemingly traditional cultural resources. The traditional henna-night has served as a rite-of-passage using religious symbolism to reproduce patriarchal relations. The meanings produced at the new henna-night are quite different, projecting a modern middle class urban sensibility. This new meaning production is accomplished by playfully negotiating some of the most potent cultural binaries in Turkish history: religious versus secular and urban versus rural. Contemporary consumer rituals, we argue, can be agents of change forging new social boundaries, rather than conservative gatekeepers of social continuity.

Ritual is a key construct necessary to understand the symbolic dimensions of consumption. Introduced into consumer research as a psychoanalytic concept (Rook 1985), subsequent work has pursued a socio-cultural approach, emphasizing the role that ritual action plays in producing and accessing the meanings of consumer goods (McCracken 1986; Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). In this study, we use an ethnographic study of a paradoxical contemporary Turkish ritual to push further our conceptual understanding of the intersections of ritual and consumption.

THE CASE STUDY: THE TURKISH HENNA NIGHT RITUAL

Henna-night is a ceremony, steeped in history and folklore, in which the family of the bride-to-be gives her away to the family of the groom. Henna night, as the most colorful part of a series of wedding rituals, was for centuries one of the central "rites of passage" for the peoples of Anatolia of the Ottoman Empire. But the ritual was abandoned by the urban middle class following the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1923. In this period of building a secular nation-state, urbanites became ideologically decoupled from their religious traditions. Because the henna-night was construed as such a prominent ritual of Ottoman society, it became labeled as a "traditional" ritual associated with the rural, "backward" peasantry. It is quite surprising, then, to witness in the last few years the rebirth of the henna-night amongst the urban middle class. Explaining this paradoxical resurgence is the subject of this essay.

This analysis is based upon a case study of a "new" urban henna-night ritual. The first author observed the ritual itself, and then interviewed most of the attendees. Documents include field notes, photographs and recorded interviews from a henna night that took place in March 1998, Ankara, Turkey. We will analyze this "new" henna night by contrasting it with the "old". The old ritual has received little documentation in the academic literature. So we rely on participant-observation and oral histories gathered with elderly from different socio-economic classes and geographical backgrounds to depict an old version of the henna night. Even though henna-night celebration were one of the wedding rituals in some other cultures, religions, and geographies (India, Israel, Middle East and North Africa), this paper discusses henna-night ritual in the Anatolian context. However, it should be noted that the old henna night in Turkey was never a uniform ritual. Rather it varied significantly across places and generations. But, in the construction of the new henna night, particular symbolically potent elements of various old versions have become reified as a collective representation of "traditional." It is this discursive form of the traditional ritual that we will incorporate into our analysis.

THE TRADITIONAL HENNA-NIGHT RITUAL

Henna-night is a very old ritual, with a history that some believe goes back to the time of prophet Muhammad. According to lore, in the era of the religious wars, Muhammad gathered his followers on the night before the attack. While praying together for victory in Jihad, he would put some henna—an organic dye, with a reddish color—into the palms of the soldiers. Henna's red color symbolized blood and coloring the palms suggested that the warriors were ready to sacrifice their blood and lives in the name of God. According to the myth, this war ritual eventually became a marriage ritual in which the bride symbolically leaves her identity as daughter, centered in her mother's house, and enters into a new life stage as adult wife whose life is centered around her husband's family.

In this traditional version, henna-night is a female ritual that takes place at the bride's parents' house, one or two nights before the wedding ceremony. The bride's mother drops by each guest's house and personally invites the neighbors, the extended female members of both the bride's and the groom's family, and the friends of the bride. The ritual begins with the prayers of either a female hodja (an elder in the religious community) or an elderly woman. Then the bride, usually dressed in red and veiled with a red headscarf, enters to the room where people are gathered. Unmarried friends of the bride follow her into the room holding lit candles. The bride sits on a chair and her friends, the "virgin giris," start walking in circles around her, as the hodja continues praying. After finishing her prayers, Hodja begins singing emotionally evocative songs about mothers losing their daughters, daughters becoming wives and then mothers. These songs generate a collective transcendental moment when many participants cry as they experience the personal and social significance of the ritual. At this peak moment one of the girls brings the henna cup to the mother-in-law. The mother-in-law takes some henna from the cup and tries to put it in the palms of the bride, but the bride refuses to open her hand. Then the mother-in-law puts a gold coin in the bride's palm. Only after receiving the gold coin does the bride accept the henna. Following the coloring of the bride's palm, the henna cup is passed from one guest to another, each putting some henna in their own palms. When the henna-putting ceremony is over, all in attendance dance to folk dance music performed and sung by some of the guests. Dancing, singing, talking, and eating continue through the night. Non-alcoholic beverages, dried fruits, nuts, and, in some cases, a meal are served.

The dominant symbol in this traditional henna-night is the henna. It not only serves as a "means to the fulfillment of the avowed purposes" of the ritual, "but also more importantly refer values that are regarded as ends in themselves" (Turner 1967: 20).

1For example, some versions excluded the hodja or dancing, or included a male henna-night where the little finger of the groom-to-be was dyed with henna (Türk Ansiklopedisi 1975, Ekici 1997). The henna container could be a copper or silver cup or tray, the food could vary from simple snacks to sumptuous meals, and musicians and dancers could be the guests themselves or paid performers, depending on the economic status of the family.
Both the attendees of the traditional and the new henna-nights comment that the red henna stands for blood. Some provide a further interpretation that blood implies the transformation of the bride from girlhood to womanhood. This interpretation voices a very strict traditional and religious norm, which defines the woman’s body as an object belonging to the husband. It dictates that females can transform from girlhood to womanhood only through marriage and that premarital sexual intercourse is not only forbidden, but also unquestionable. With this rite-of-passage the adult women are symbolically re-establishing a religious and traditional norm, which is considered by the conservatives as one of the basic principles that holds the Turkish society together. Through the female social solidarity in this women-only ritual, the traditional henna-night reproduces patriarchal relations, reifying their collective acceptance of male domination.

Other than explaining henna as the blood of the virgin, we can also interpret it as the blood of the warrior. Blood of the warrior refers to struggle, resoluteness, and sacrifice. As mentioned above, after the bride’s palms are colored, the attendees of the ritual, like the soldiers of the prophet, also color their palms with henna, establishing the collective understanding of marriage as a struggle in which the woman is responsible for its survival and “success” (i.e., keeping the family together and raising honest, moral and respectful children). Many folk poems and sayings convey the sacredness of blood. Blood implies dedication, honor and pride, and indicates the presence of sacred values to which people can devote their lives. Within this framework, the use of henna grants sacred properties to the institution of marriage. Unlike modern conceptions of marriage, it does not imply sacredness in terms of an intimate bond between man and woman. Rather marriage becomes an entity for raising children and an institution in which the honor of women (but not of men) is constructed. The woman is assigned the responsibility to make the necessary compromises to ensure the continuity of the family. Through coloring only the woman’s palms, she (but not her husband) is symbolically accepting this responsibility to sacrifice for her family. However, via the symbol of the mother-in-law putting a gold coin into the palm of the bride, some kind of responsibility is assigned to the groom’s family, if not to the groom directly. When the bride initially rejects the mother-in-law’s offer of henna, she symbolically is asking for a commitment from the groom’s family. Putting a gold coin in her palm, the mother-in-law is symbolically communicating their acceptance of the responsibility to provide financial security for the new family. But, with the responsibility comes power. The bride belongs to the groom’s family. The henna night establishes the authority of the groom’s parents, as well as the groom himself, over the bride.

Traditional henna-night ritual, euphemistically described as a farewell to the mother and girlhood by attendees, was a central ritual transmitting the patriarchal order of the Turkish society through the social structuring of the family. The henna, as a dominant symbol (Turner 1967), not only implies the biological transformation of the bride from girlhood to womanhood, but also establishes the bride as a “social personality”, with a specific role defined by the moral community of adult women she is entering. Although the transcendental moment when hodja sings songs about a mother losing her daughter creates a temporary opposition between the bride’s mother and the community of the adult women since the mother is portrayed as losing her child to the mother-in-law, when the mother-in-law colors the palms of the bride, the mother recovers her daughter as a woman peer and realizes her new adult position.

**HISTORICAL CULTURAL BACKGROUND**

The nature of the wedding ceremonies and the status of women have been changing since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Mustafa Kemal, the former Ottoman general who led the independence war and established the Republic, introduced a modernization project, which encompassed westernization, secularism, and the nation-state ideology. This project included various reforms such as the replacement of traditional dressing (fez) with Western dressing code (hati) (1925), of Arabic script with the Latin alphabet (1928), and of seriat (religious laws and rules) with a new Turkish civil code, based on the Swiss civil code (1926). Mustafa Kemal’s reforms served as the ideological tools in the construction of a new modern nation from the remains of the Ottoman Empire, which was used as the antithesis-the “traditional” and the backward- of the new Republic. The purpose of this project was to create a new single secular cultural identity and unravel the ties with the Ottoman Empire for which Islam served a unifying function (Göle 1996, Lewis 1968). The new Turkish Republic’s roots were to be based on the principles of westernization (adopting the western way of life, which is assumed to be superior to that of the east) and secular nationalism (building a society around the interests of the peoples of Anatolia as opposed to the elitist ruling Ottomans and reconstructing Turkishness through a historical revision giving it a pure form, distinguished from Ottomaness).

The inherent conflict of advocating both Westernization and Turkish nationalism (with a populist discourse idealizing the rural purity) planted the seeds of the ongoing East-West tension. However, a focus on the contradiction between Westernization/modernization and the local culture masks the local forces of modernization. Rather than being merely an imitation of the West, nationalist modernization, breaking relations with the past, was both a secular opposition to the religious and an urban opposition to the rural life—its crudeness and oppressive social and family order. The first tension (secular-religious) was due to the modernization project’s leaving no space for a syncretic incorporation of traditional Islam to the newly defined Turkish culture via positioning all types of public display of religion as “dangers” that threatened the order of the new Turkish Republic. The modernization project also ended up in another tension: a severe disengagement between the urban and rural culture. The discourses of the traditional and the modern came to define the backward rural folk (linked with Islam and tradition/localism) versus the educated urban elites (linked with secular nationalism and modernization/Westernization) rather than the Ottoman customs versus the West (Kadiyoti 1997). The “traditional” connoted the rural, embodied in the oppressed ignorant peasant woman victimized by local customs. The modernization project was to educate and civilize the crude peasants and emancipate the female.

As with modernization projects elsewhere, “modernizing” the dress and codes of conduct, and liberalizing women were among the initial steps. “With the secularization of marriage, education of women, and the inclusion of women into the electoral process, the Republican regime distanced itself from the Islamic heritage of the Ottoman Empire and reinforced the development of a secular ideology” (Arat 1994, 71). In Turkey, the “new woman,” equipped with equal legal rights, objectified the new “civilized nation”: she performed in national ceremonies in shorts, carried the flag in school uniforms, worked in government offices, sat on chairs rather than on the floor, and danced in fashionable Western evening gowns in ball rooms. However, the West was both the bearer of modernity and a moral threat. The “new woman” “was not supposed to overdo and imitate the promiscuity of the Western women, but maintain her modesty” (Arat 1994, 62). She faced the “difficult task of maintaining a balance between being too traditional or being unchaste–too modern and promiscuous like Western women” (Kadioglu 1994, 647). Modernity of her outlook highlighted, she became, in Kadioglu’s (1994) words, modernes de robe (alluding
Turkish modernity combines the necessity of loosening of religious outlook represented a negotiation of her aspirational association "Turkish folk" alive, the urge to adopt the Western ways of life, but the need to maintain strict moral codes. The way the urban elites adopted the modern urban living reflects these tensions. For example, abandoning traditional and religious clothes, the "new woman's" outlook represented a negotiation of her aspirational association with the modern West, her "Turkish" modesty, as well as her anti-Ottoman, anti-religious, and anti-rural identity. The urban elites' adoption of the modern life of the 1930s also necessitated abandonment of some of the traditional and religious rituals, as these were establishing and conveying meanings, some of which were the antithesis of the "modern" urban identity. Henna-night ritual was one of these rituals abandoned in the cities in that period.

So how is it that the Henna Night has once again become a popular ritual in the cities amongst the educated middle class? Henna night practitioners are proud Kemalists who wear pins in support of secularism, and are scared of the rise of religious fundamentalism. So this is not an easily readable move to re-establish religious or local traditions in the face of globalization. To answer this question we need to examine closely the specific objects, practices, and attitudes that constitute the new urban henna-night ritual, this time with an emphasis on the ways in which the meanings of the material symbols of henna-night (the place, the setting, the dress, video cameras, the music, the attendees, the henna-putting ceremony, and the hodja) are recast through a new frame that negotiates a Turkish modern sensibility that differentiates both from local fundamentalism and from Western modernity.

THE NEW URBAN HENNA-NIGHT: PERFORMING TURKISH MODERNITY

Although most of the traditional material symbols are present and most of the rules guiding participation are followed, the new urban Henna night ritual has many subtle differences that together constitute it as an entirely different ritual than the earlier version. To understand these differences we borrow from Gregory Bateson (1973) to examine the metacommunicative signs that frame the ritual. Metacommunicative signs are situational devices which align, for a particular time and place, participants' understandings of how to act and how to interpret the signs and actions of that which is framed. Frames, according to Goffman (1974, 345), are a means of bestowing "a sense of what is going on" and at the same time setting "expectations of a normative kind as to how deeply and fully the individual is to be carried into the activity organized by the frame." Rituals make use of metacommunicative signs that serve to organize the mode in which people are to be involved, to act, to interpret. Metacommunicative signs are not equivalent to signs or codes that provide the cultural resources of the ritual. Rather, they provide an orienting framework through which the signs and rules invoked in the ritual are interpreted and acted upon. Frames, and the metacommunicative signs of which they are composed, are not static universal structures. Rather, they are dynamic, negotiated social constructions that are constantly worked upon by participants. While most of the time they are enacted as if an objective durable reality (and thus reproduced as such), they occasionally become sites of struggle, where conflicting world-views converge, where power struggles are waged.

The henna night invitations and location gave participants an initial hint that the framing of the ritual was being shifted from the traditional version. Guests were invited to the urban henna-night via invitation cards, which indicated that the ceremony was to take place at a supper club. Although the host was aware of the tradition of brides' mother inviting the guests personally, she preferred to send invitation cards. The invitation card functions as the initial metacommunicative sign distancing the ensuing ritual from the traditional. However, this initial sign was open for further interpretation and negotiation. It became solidified as guests oriented their participation around what they imagined from these cues. For example, prior to the ritual, when asked what the most appropriate outfit for a henna-night would be, one of the invitees replied that as this henna-night will be held at a supper-club, it would be nice to dress up neatly. When asked for more clarification on "dressing up neatly" she responded that one should dress up as if going to a dinner party. She and others had made the same inference: at the henna night, guests were wearing either a two-piece-suit or chic dresses and had their hair made up. Thus, the form of invitation and the place of the ritual set the stage for the new framing by conveying a flavor of contemporary celebration rather than traditional ceremony.

The new framing became more determined upon entering the supper-club. The club, decorated with nationalistic (Mustafa Kemal's picture, a Turkish flag), folkloric (decorative oil lamp and the copper plate on the wall), and Western (Christmas lights around the fireplace) objects, was arranged for a dinner party. All tables were set with china and fine silverware and two glasses for each guest (one glass for water and one for wine). Male waiters, dressed in white collared shirts, accompanied guests to their tables while a smooth Western popular melody played in the background. These signs evoking a contemporary celebration created some uneasiness particularly amongst older guests. In particular they were disturbed that alcohol would be served. Not only is alcohol foreign to a traditional henna-night ritual milieu, but also against Muslim rules. These older guests were not disturbed that the ritual was taking place at a supper-club or by the card invitation. They too arrived dressed for a "modern" event. Rather they were unhappy with just one aspect of their hosts' interpretation of "modern": the alcoholic beverage service. This seemingly minor irritation suggests that the new henna night is a ritual still "in formation". Its framing has not yet become institutionalized so all of its components are subject to intensive interpretation and negotiation. The new framing of a "modern" henna night, in contrast with what is understood as "traditional," is constructed in interaction between all the attendees to arrive at collective agreement on interpretation of the new metacommunicative signs that the host has organized (what Goffman describes as "keying").

A second group of metacommunicative signs constructed a playful transformation of gender roles. At the entrance of the supper-club, in contrast with the traditional henna night at which the mother of the bride welcomes the guests, both pairs of parents greeted the mostly female guests. The few male guests were seated at a table in the club's garden separately from the female guests who were seated inside the club. The invitation of male guests—although their total number were less than one-tenth of that of females—violated the traditional gender role reproduction function of the henna-night ritual. In addition, the more direct participation by male waiters who served the female guests was a potent sign signaling that new gender meanings were in play. The collective acceptance of this reframing was demonstrated when some of the male guests were invited inside the club after the henna-coloring ceremony. This upset none of the female guests; both older and younger women danced with the men.
This reframing allows participants (and us, as analysts) to reinterpret the ritual actions that once configured patriarchal relations as conveying something other than patriarchy. Consider, for example, that the bride accepts the henna from the mother-in-law immediately, rather than first rejecting the henna and only accepting it when the gold coin was offered. As it turns out, this was not a conscious inversion of the traditional henna procedures. Later interviews revealed that the bride had forgotten to refuse and so the mother-in-law had to put on the henna first. Though not intentional, this benign neglect of one of the most important moments in the ceremony communicates clearly that the rites-of-passage meanings celebrated in the traditional ritual are of negligible importance. Something other than the symbolic reconstitution of the daughter as wife is being staged.

The clothes of the heroine embodied the transformations of the reframing. She wore an antique outfit, a red headscarf over a red fed, decorated with jewelry, and red gloves. Although these are not necessarily "original" pieces of an old henna-night outfit, the ensemble paints an aesthetic picture (of the imagined authentic) for the performance. These items were hunted in an auction and antique shops in the old town, where tourists shop. Right after the henna-coloring ceremony she changed into a modern costume—a respectable, decent two-piece suit expressing the "new woman." Body image and social relations interact: body images are culturally defined by relationships and body decoration represents social relationships (Sauti 1994). The clash of her henna-colored hands and the red costume with modern/Western body images is temporary. This clash expresses a fleeting remembrance of things past and a bucolic relationship with the elders, an imagined traditional Turkishness. Her slipping out of that momentary identity that differentiated her from the Western/modern into a "normal" dress announces her enduring modernity. Her changing from a "traditional" to a modern costume communicates playfulness, as if a fashionable costume party is being staged for fun rather than sacredness—female modesty and honor or anything religious.

The hodja offers additional evidence for interpreting the reframing. Since she orchestrates the ceremony, her performance is of great import in establishing collective understanding. Traditionally, the hodja would be dressed in a long dark skirt with a long-sleeved shirt or a dark dress. Her hair would be covered tightly with a dark colored headscarf. As age implies experience, knowledge and respectability, hodjas are expected to be at least middle-aged if not older. However, the hodja in the urban henna-night ritual was a young woman, dressed up in a light colored suit composed of a pair of loose trousers and a light colored shirt. Only her loosely tied headscarf distinguished her from other guests. Her appearance signaled a moderate Islamic stance, conciliatory to her secular modern audience. Her outlook was so anomalous that when she entered the supper club, everyone, especially the older guests, asked each other whether she was the hodja. The initial meta-communicative signs cued the guests to expect the unexpected, so they were eagerly interpreting her presence as part of the emerging new frame rather than rejecting it out-of-hand.

After the hodja started praying, it was clear that it was not only her outfit that was unorthodox but also her attitude towards praying. In the middle of one prayer, she forgot the following line and stopped praying, turned to the audience and asked "What was I going to say?" Her question and attitude were received as "disrespectful" and "unbearable" by some of the older audience. They were annoyed by hodja's outfit, youth, and way of praying. Some by their gestures, some by murmuring and others by openly criticizing, communicated their disturbance to each other and the younger invitees around them. However, most of the guests, who absorbed the new framing of the henna-night ritual, were comfortable with the hodja's way of praying and managing the ritual. Some of them even laughed at her question, taking it as a joke. For them, in this new frame hodja is another decontextualized symbol that has been sapped of sacredness. And when hodja communicates her new position reflexively, a moment of collective understanding among the younger guests emerges. This moment revealed the fault lines between youth and old in the modern Kemalist struggle between religiosity and secularism. Younger guests communicated through their supportive attitudes their appreciation for the reframed ritual, which treats sacred meanings as part of an aesthetized performance. For the older and more traditional guests, hodja was descending religious symbols. It did not matter to them that they were offered in public spaces that was nominally declared secular by Mustafa Kemal. Religiosity in public or private were signifying the same degree of sacredness. The younger modern-secular-urban guests had no problem decoupling religious practices belonging to private spaces (mosques, homes) and this public invocation. Playing with a traditional ritual in this seemingly disrespectful manner conveys powerful meanings for the younger generation participants. As third generation urbanites, they are more secure in their claims to modern middle class life so comfortable engaging in traditional Turkish life (whereas the first generations avoided anything connoting traditional, rural, peasantry, Ottoman as if taboo). They are able to flaunt their middle class modernity by showing a properly secular and ironic attitude toward religious tradition.

**TURKISH MODERNITY AND CONSUMER CULTURE: CONSUMING THE RITUAL**

The emergence of various forms of reframed henna-nights can be seen as an example of the recent urban interest in the forgotten old and the authentic in Turkey. According to Öncü, in the last fifteen years, areas of cities are being restored recreating "historical sites and scenes to view" (1997, 57). While the wealthy buy Ottoman history in international antique auction houses, others buy reproductions of antiques, picture books of "old Ankara", or decorative religious kitsch. A newspaper article titled "the best wedding is the authentic one" described ironically a wedding crafted by journalists and held for a "culture and arts" festival in an Eastern town. A photo shows the bride on horseback, with her trendy high-heeled platform shoes under "authentic" clothes. This was a fast wedding, a one-hour (including the henna ceremony) reconstruction of what used to be a four-day event, as remembered in various ways by various people.

This new urban interest in the authentic or old can be theorized to manifest itself in various forms. Consumers trying to negotiate modern identities, the "old" becomes a source they draw from. Forms and objects construed to be traditional are incorporated in consumption. For example, a young urban Turk, sitting on big pillows made from old Anatolian carpet fragments, may zap from MTV to a Turkish pop music channel, put on her black DKNY top and jeans and a trendy necklace made from evil eye beads and go surfing in an internet café, and checkout the Restoguide web site to choose among Italian, Japanese, and the new "traditional" Turkish restaurants for dinner. Ger and Belk (1996) find that consumptionscapes of less affluent societies, including Turkey, manifest creolization, more predominantly than other alternatives—emulation of the West, return to roots, resistance to the West, and recontextualization. They argue that creolization, offering a new synthesis, can incorporate these other alternatives. Creolization involves creative mingling of meanings and meaningful forms from disparate sources, old and new, foreign/global and local, serving individuals to differentiate themselves in the local social hierarchies and has been observed in consumption patterns widely (Ger and Belk 1996, Hannerz 1992, Howes 1996).
However, the explanation of the emergence of the new urban henna-night needs more elaboration. We should first of all make it clear that, this emergence is not a resistance, an assertion of local distinctiveness against the center/West/global. Because, even though some of the “modern” Turkish consumers celebrate the new henna-night, they abandon neither the Christian Saint Valentine’s Day and Christmas (transformed into New Year’s) celebrations nor buying foreign goods. Second, we should not view this emergence as a return to traditions. The new urban henna night is not a rite-of-passage using religious symbolism to reproduce patriarchal relations. Rather it informs a new articulation of so-called modern identity in Turkey. Choice of a wedding with a new henna-night, among other fashionable types of weddings, and its reframing give expression to the identity of a subgroup of modern urban middle class. Their practice is a performative performance and negotiation of the two major cultural tensions in the modern urban scene: urban-rural and secular-religious.

The first tension is between the purist-urbanities (third or fourth generation urbanities) who despise the signs of the traditional/rural intruding the city and the rural-urbanities (first or second generation urbanities, poor as well as the new rich). The purist-urbanities find the rural-urbanities, “their” music, conduct, and dress polluting and rurallyfying the city. Feeling a threat to “their” modern Western way of life, they ridicule the emerged mixed forms, such as having “çig köfte (a Southeastern traditional rural dish) with whisky.” Such mockery and disgust surfaced when one woman was asked what she thought of the new henna nights: she said “It would be a nightmare if I had a daughter-in-law who wanted a henna night. But, I am sure my son is not so distasteful as to choose such a woman. I like old traditions, but not a henna night.” What she would like is a conventional “modern” wedding, involving a big party of 300 people in a hotel ballroom or garden or on a leisure boat, with fashionable attractions, such as a live band and fireworks. Whereas, the reframed henna night breaks away from the traditions/conventions of modernity (of the purist moderns) and incorporates an aestheticised authentic into contemporary lives. Rather than a return to what it really was, the urban henna-night is a new “old.”

The second tension manifests itself mostly in the cultural clash between the modern-secular urban women who wear short skirts and carry Mustafa Kemal badges and the modern-religious urban women who are turbaned by choice, has emerged with the rise of political Islam. Urban turbaned women are called modern-religious or modern-traditionalist because they differentiate themselves from both Western-looking modern-secular women and traditional Islamic women who wear a headscarf out of habit (Kadioglu 1994). Where the modern-religious urban women view secular laws as restrictive and undemocratic, the modern-secular urban women view Islam as antithesis of freedom and modernity and try to erase it from their history and visible signs of it from their public space. The reframed henna night ritual articulates these two groups of urban moderns. A light and playful embrace of “our” (Muslim) past and idealized rural folk, expresses a specific modern, secular, urban middle class identity in the making. Involving a negotiation of various pasts and presents, it is a way to construct an identity different from other moderns. Contesting for social position and claiming distinctiveness, various moderns use different types of cultural resources. Contrary to the previous work on creolization, where there has been an overemphasis on the foreign (Westen/center)-local tension masking other tensions, where creolization has been defined as “the process of recontextualization whereby foreign goods are assigned meanings and uses by the culture of reception” (Howes 1996, 5) or as “the confluence of ... separate historical currents which interact in ... a center/periphery relationship” (Hannerz 1992, 264), we try to show that, the contradiction between the West/center (the external Other) and the local is but only one of the tensions of modernity. There are tensions within the local involving various internal Others: old-new (imagined, remembered, and constructed in multiple ways), urban-rural, secular-religious within the urban, etc., can be named as some of the dominant contradictions in daily lives. The foreign can be a forgotten old (“our” past) or a threatening present. That is, the study of the reframed henna-night ritual indicates the need to emphasize the multiplicity of tensions rather than focus solely on the West/center/global-local tensions in notions of creolization.

CONCLUSION

The emerging “new urban” henna night reframes the traditional rite-of-passage that used religious symbolism to reproduce patriarchal relations into a playful consumption activity that is more about negotiation of a new modern Turkish identity and conveying style, rather than transferring traditional meanings. Previous studies of ritual have taken a “clinical” perspective (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989), detailing the particular social practices in which ritual is inscribed in consumption. These studies tend to take the meanings conveyed for granted, and, instead, focus on the processes of meaning transfer and singulairization. In this study, we demonstrate that rituals are not only social phenomena through which culture is enacted and reproduced (as Wallendorf and Arnold 1991 demonstrate is true of American Thanksgivings), but also they can be used as cultural resources to define new social boundaries.

Metacommunicative signs play a crucial role in this reconstruction of the henna night ritual. The reframing enables the performance of the ritual to be playful enough to unknot the linkages of the traditional and the religious in a way that results not only shifting of the religious symbols from sacred to aesthetic, but also demolishing the patriarchy-establishment function of the traditional henna-night through transforming the gender roles in the ritual. In other words, in this urban henna-night ritual, it was not the prayers, but the hodja’s forgetting the words of prayers; it was not the henna, but forgetting the rejection of henna; it was not the female solidarity but the middle class solidarity that was affixing the feelings of communitas of the group. It was not the symbols and the meanings attached to them, but the new playful frame that was establishing the solidarity. With the new framing, urban henna-night has been the place where the tensions of religiosity versus secularism, urban versus rural life styles, modernity versus traditional patriarchy were revealed in a playful manner. The ritual was prepared as an anti-religious and anti-patriarchal gathering. All the symbols (from henna to the hodja) were unravelled from their meanings, by the means of this new frame. The henna night remained a ritual—that is, a place where the social solidarity is established. However, ritualization occurred through the creative retooling of old meanings rather than their simple reenactment.

The re-emergence of the henna night ritual cannot be explained with notions of rituals as reproductive of culture, an East-West (local/periphery-global/center) or a traditional-modern opposition, or pastiches of mixed forms. The new ritual can better be understood as an experimentation scene (see Turner 1986) reframed by metacommunicative signs; it is a power field where multiple tensions of modernity are negotiated and meanings are transformed. The new henna-night is a perfect example to demonstrate how rituals reveal change, how they inform of emergent shifts in cultural forms and boundaries while societies maintain continuity. Exploring the intersection between ritual and consumption enhances the understanding of how outwardly paradoxical new consumption patterns make sense and how consumers craft new identities as they cope with fluid and fragmented settings.
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