

# **Conflicts and conundrums in a women's cooperative in western Turkey<sup>1</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In a Turkish village, Western expatriate intellectuals founded a carpet cooperative to promote natural dyeing and women's artistic heritage as weavers. In this cooperative, encounters between feminist ideals of female emancipation clashed with conservative Sunni Muslim villagers' understandings of gender roles. I discuss how the villagers selectively adopted the goals of the project and reinterpreted ideals of female emancipation according to their own needs and understandings of gender. Employment in the women's cooperative became a source of empowerment for married women, but unmarried daughters remained unpaid weavers in their natal households. By considering the different actors in this cooperative—male and female, unmarried and married—I consider the construction and limits of personhood, agency and empowerment, collective struggles for economic survival, and local interpretations of development.

## **Introduction**

In Örselli village in western Turkey, Harald Böhmer and Josephine Powell founded the Yuntdağ Carpet Weaving Cooperative in 1982 to promote plant dyeing and women's artistic heritage (Anderson, 1998; Hart, 2005). In this paper, I consider the encounter, in the foundation and management of the cooperative, between feminist, Western ideals of female emancipation from constrictive gendered constructions and those of Sunni Muslim villagers, whose understandings of gender require the performance of complementary social roles—two differing conceptualizations of personhood which affect the negotiation of power in the household among mothers and daughters. In addition to showing how village women interpreted and managed this difference, I reveal how women of differing ages and social positions found solutions to the problem of being rural, female and poor.

Kinship and gender are idioms through which systems of power and authority are created in development projects (Cohen, 1999; Joseph, 1996b:16; Katzir, 1983) and small businesses (White, 1994). "Women," as they are understood to be

married, adult females by the villagers, have gained some status and power as weaving members, because they conform to gendered roles as “mothers” of the cooperative, which is structured like an extended family. However, unmarried, non-adult females (daughters) and their elderly grandmothers (widowed spinners), who do not have the same social status as married women, have not gained these positions. Thus, the villagers’ notion of gender includes age and marital status, as well as sex, as numerous scholars demonstrate is a cultural feature of gendered identities (Ortner, 1996:132, 137; White, 1994). This more nuanced understanding of personhood was overlooked by Western feminists, especially those of the “first wave,” who lumped all females into one category of womanhood (Joseph, 1996b:14). These differences in gender roles and identities relate to how labor and power are organized within both households and cooperatives (Cohen, 1999; Milgram, 2000). The marginal role of daughters in the cooperative is reminiscent of findings in other works on the gendered role of weaving (Ghavamshahidi, 1995; Işık, 2007) and heritage enterprises, which attempt to commercialize traditional art products (Berik, 1987). These works describe women’s marginalization as a result of their conformity to patriarchal norms. The difference is that the Yuntdağ cooperative has benefited married women, while unmarried or widowed females are marginal. Thus, conforming to patriarchal expectations of marriage empowers women, because they can become members of the cooperative.

First, I discuss the founding of the cooperative as a collaboration between individuals with different motivations: Harald Böhmer wanted to revitalize natural dyeing; Josephine Powell wanted to empower women weavers, as well as revitalize local artistic traditions; Bilge Taner wanted to assist female weavers and was able to translate Western notions of gender emancipation into Anatolian understandings of gender roles; and the villagers wanted to earn income equitably. I then consider the problem of gender theoretically from Western feminist, Middle Eastern Muslim, and Turkish nationalist standpoints. I discuss how women in the village manage these gendered constructions. Gendered statuses and forms of power affect unmarried and married females differently in the cooperative. For this reason, the manner in which unmarried daughters who weave for their natal households strategize property transfer at marriage is important to the story of their struggle for empowerment. In conclusion, I show that the ideals of the founders, as well as the villagers, are at odds with the desires of young men and women who wish to gain status as citizens, which they feel can only be achieved through migration.

### **Harald Böhmer and Josephine Powell found DOBAG**

As is evident in the village homes of the elderly, which are furnished with hand-woven pieces used as furnishings, much as in nomadic tents (Böhmer, 2008), women in the Yuntdağ have a long history as weavers. In the twentieth century,

weavers struggled to find ways to sell their textiles, which they had made as furnishings for marital homes, but which they also understood as a ready source of cash. To transform weaving from a local practice to a commercial undertaking, they became involved in cooperatives, some administered by the Ministry of Culture and others by businessmen. Their experiences in these projects, and their attempts to sell to dealers in Bergama or itinerant traders, were not positive. They often were paid less than they needed to support the time and effort put into weaving the pieces.

In the 1980s, Harald Böhmer—who had investigated natural dyes in Anatolia, recreating forgotten recipes and teaching these to weavers throughout Turkey—founded the DOBAG project to assist weavers in locating foreign markets without difficulties with dealers and middlemen, who paid little or traded modern consumer goods, such as plastic buckets and machine-woven carpets for village pieces. For this reason, literature on DOBAG describes Harald Böhmer's research on natural dyes and wholly attributes the success (or failure) of the project to him (Anderson, 1998; Böhmer, 1983; Glassie, 1993; Mason, 1985). Less discussed is Harald's collaborative work with Josephine Powell.

Josephine, an American, left the United States following World War II to help resettle displaced persons, followed by a move to Rome, where she established herself as a photographer. After years of travel and exploration in Central Asia, Iran, Turkey, India and the Balkans, she moved to Istanbul in the mid-1970s, where she lived until her death in 2007. I met her in 1987 and formed a close relationship through my interest in her travels and work with the DOBAG project. In the 1970s, she was commissioned to produce a book on Anatolian flat weaves (Hart, 2007a). This project became an obsession, as demonstrated by her photographic archive of images of Anatolian nomadic and village weavers and of flat weaves, at the Center for Anatolian Civilizations in Istanbul and the Harvard Fine Arts Library. Her book never materialized, but her work expanded from exploration and photographic documentation to sustainability for contemporary weavers, when she became involved with Harald Böhmer. Thus, her work became applied as well as scholarly.

Josephine and Harald were part of a vibrant community of expatriates and Turkish intellectuals, feminists and political activists in Istanbul, many of whom became involved in cultural projects after the 1980 coup d'état, which illegalized leftist political parties (Ahmad, 1981; Mephram, 1987). Josephine, while not active in party politics, was a feminist and friends with many leftist women who were experiencing an awakening after 1980, when they realized that the socialist revolution they had been working towards was crushed (Arat, 1998). Now that this political movement was defeated by the state, a space for cultural projects, such as traditional arts and feminisms, took their place. Around this time, Josephine and Harald traveled in Anatolia searching for remaining nomadic groups and working with DOBAG (Böhmer, 2008). Once Josephine became involved in DOBAG, she asked Bilge Taner, a doctoral student in economics and fellow feminist to help keep the cooperative books.

After Harald founded the first cooperative in Ayvacık, Josephine learned about its social effects from Şerife Atlıhan, a professor in Fine Arts at Marmara University and quality control expert for DOBAG, who conducted sociological research on the project. She found that women weavers who worked under their husbands' membership had little understanding of the relationship between their labor and pay. For this reason, Josephine wanted to establish a new cooperative with a different membership structure, which she hoped would help weavers gain confidence in the value and importance of their work, as well as have a say in the running of the cooperative through their membership. Armed with this interest, Bilge and Josephine read the cooperative law written by the Ministry of Tourism, which said the "producer must be the member," with excitement. There was no question that the weavers were the producers. They realized that establishing the cooperative according to this law would make it a women's cooperative.

### **Bilge Taner's cultural translation**

Implementing this structure, however, required translating one set of ideas about gender to another. Harald Böhmer and Ahmet Çınar, the director of the new cooperative in Örselli (a poor shepherd but soon-to-be brilliant businessman, who learned to become a master dyer), were not enthusiastic about making the Yuntdağ project a women's cooperative. Josephine insisted and, because she had given Ahmet money, she was able to "buy" the power to create a women's cooperative. The weavers and their husbands, however, had to be convinced. In Örselli, Harald Böhmer, Bilge Taner and the weavers and their husbands had a meeting to discuss the new cooperative. Josephine was ill and could not attend. There were misgivings and fear about making women the members of the new cooperative. Bilge explained that the problem with the first cooperative was administrative and structural. In this cooperative, the male heads of household were the members and the project was administered by a banker in Manisa. The banker siphoned profits and used them to enrich himself. The weavers and their husbands agreed that the old cooperative had squandered their hard-earned profits. By arguing that "weaving is women's work and women should control the profits from that work, since they care for the cooperative as they do their children," Bilge connected weaving and membership to women's roles as mothers. Bilge's explanation touched not upon gender emancipation from the Western feminist standpoint, which she otherwise supported as a leftist, secularist and Westernized woman, but on women's motherly roles, as she understood them from the cultural perspective of rural Anatolia.

To this day, members repeat Bilge's formula when they justify the cooperative's administrative structure. The weaving members also remark, based on their experience with the first cooperative, that men "eat the profits" and therefore should not be entrusted with the role of membership. Thus, while they value

mothers' protective and nurturing roles and wives' careful economy, they also consider that men are not reliable managers of finances, especially as related to their earnings as weavers. Although this was not Josephine's ideal of gender emancipation, in which women would run the business single-handedly, the weavers' arguments demonstrate a degree of empowered consciousness through their membership. This is not connected to a notion of female emancipation generally, in the way that Western feminists, such as Josephine, would have imagined. Thus, the villagers never shared the goal that all female weavers' work be promoted regardless of their social and marital status, an idea for which they would have had little support, as women's work is contingent upon their husbands' permission. Instead, they consider "women" to be—from their perspective and language—married or once-married women: wives and widows.

By making the members married women, who often are also mothers, the cooperative became a wives' or mothers cooperative rather than a women's cooperative (Joseph, 1996b:18). Members act under the direction of one male director and two male dyers, just as wives obey their husbands. Unmarried daughters, who are not "women" from the villagers' perspective, are barred from membership. Yet, as is the case with daughters in their natal households, they weave diligently and work towards becoming wives themselves, who can join the cooperative. At the time of my research in 2000–2001, daughters produced the highest quality carpets and therefore were the most well-paid in the cooperative. However, because they were unmarried, they were not members, meaning they did not collect earnings. Their earnings were paid to their mothers, who typically handed them over to their husbands, who in turn amassed these in a collective household income pool. Thus, from the villagers' perspective, becoming a recognized weaver requires marriage, which empowers women in a number of ways. However, whether married or not, it is the husbands and fathers who are given the earnings. Consequently, the patriarchal household is not challenged by the cooperative.

The differing understandings of gender clearly affected the instrumental position of females in the cooperative, from both Western and Anatolian perspectives. The villagers' notions and implementations of gendered ideologies were unrecognized by dealers in Norway, the United States, Canada and Ireland, who promoted DOBAG and its carpets as products of progressive ideals in gendered and age-sensitive labor policies, as displayed in their web pages, and as revealed in conversations with them and "rug tourists"—Norwegians, Canadians and Americans who visited the village in 2000–2001.

Unlike Joseph's exhortation to development project organizers to work against patriarchy (1996b:19), Harald and Josephine accepted these differences in gender when they turned over the reins of the project, helping and guiding when needed. Because both understood Anatolian social norms, they did not impose requirements on the management of daily business matters or the roles of members and non-members. They were more committed to the survival of weaving than gender emancipation. Thus, there is a disconnect between what customers think they are



buying and what villagers are doing in their management of the project. This is not to say that the villagers' interpretation of gendered roles has not benefited the enterprise.

## **Gender, empowerment and agency**

I consider Western feminist analyses of gender because Josephine Powell conceptualized membership in the cooperative for "women" through this model of personhood. This idea was translated by Bilge into her understanding of Anatolian gendered ideals, which the villagers implemented through their notions of personhood. These layers of perception of gender underscore Butler's argument that gender is a performative category, not an objective or essential fact. "Woman" exists only insofar as it is a category created or performed within historical, cultural, legal and political contexts (Butler, 1999:33). As Joseph says for the Middle Eastern context, "femaleness...is not a uniquely bounded and self-referential category, nor is gender a simple dichotomy" (1996a:5). The villagers' understanding of gender roles as performances and social positions, which are filled upon successful performance, is close to Butler's and Joseph's conceptualizations of gender as performances of personhood. In rural Turkey, becoming married and consummating that marriage with one's husband makes one into a woman. A man, on the other hand, exists before and after sex, even marriage. He achieves manhood by circumcision (*sünnet*); his identity as a man is not predicated on a relationship with women. Women are made into adults through their socially sanctioned new status, which is recognized through their civil marriage, village wedding rituals, the Islamic marriage contract and physical transformation.

This situational and performative understanding of gender is very different from one in which a configuration of physical facts (i.e., sex) and social roles (i.e., gender) constitute one's being as a female. This womanhood as a sexed and gendered being, who seeks release from socially proscribed roles and statuses to become an unmarked individual, is the Western feminist understanding of liberation (hooks, 2000). In other words, (first wave) American feminists ideally and idealistically sought to promote all females, regardless of their social, class and racial statuses and histories. However, in the struggle to gain freedom from biological sex, women found that there were significant social, historical, ethnic, religious and existential differences among them, which, if they were individuated, would be lost. The ineffectiveness of this category of womanhood as an undifferentiated collection of female individuals has split off many different feminist movements in accordance with women who feel themselves different through sexual, class, racial and other markers, reflecting variations in social roles and experiences, not merely the physical configuration of their sex/gender. Thus, Western feminists have been disturbed by the blandness of categorizations of

womanhood and have been inspired to undercut the fixedness of the category (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; hooks, 2000; Ortner, 1996). Through practice theory, Western feminist notions of gender have begun to resemble those which are performative. However, Josephine began to read feminist literature with her Turkish friends in the 1970s. Together, they began to explore the meaning and potential of womanhood as an undifferentiated category and how they might emancipate themselves from patriarchy. Thus, at the time they worked to found the Yuntdağ cooperative as a women's cooperative, they had not experienced the revisionist understanding of gender, as Butler, Ortner and other feminists have more recently argued.

Gender, as it is complexly ordered and understood in the Middle East, has a different cultural history. As social theorists have argued, Muslim women have experienced the Western feminist movement as an outgrowth of colonial impulses, in which women are framed as victims of patriarchal states, Islam or brutal husbands and are thereby in need of salvation by Western liberators, who seek to overturn their oppressed position (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Ahmed, 1992; Ortner, 2006). From this standpoint, feminism, which is liberating in the U.S., is a colonial tool abroad—one which makes it politically volatile for Muslim women to express either submission or resistance to westernization and/or Islam. Both have oppressive implications (Ortner, 2006:55). As anthropologists argue, Muslim women are expressing their social and intellectual position and configuration of power and personhood through non-liberal traditions, in which submission and disciplined piety are gendered performances, not signs that they are oppressed by Islamic practice and tradition (Işık, 2008; Mahmood, 2001; Torab, 1996). In Turkey, where the laic state confines and controls Sunni Islam and also has sought to westernize society, it is questionable if one can argue that women are living in and through non-liberal traditions. Rather, as a result of contemporary Turkish history, Western, liberal traditions are intertwined with Islamic ones, each viewing the other with suspicion because both vie for power in the same state context (Göle, 1997; Silverstein, 2003). State power and Islam are confronted with the effects of Western feminist theorizing on Muslim women in cultural understandings of gendered power and in social policies, such as human rights and development, in which women are empowered when class, regional, geographic, age-related or other differences among them are eliminated.

In Turkey, the gendered constructions of power and state ideology are laid on top of class-based and regional configurations of identity. The paternalistic, westernized, urban, secularist Kemalists (those who follow the principles and philosophy of the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) look down upon the rural, Eastern, Muslim devout (Ilcan, 1999; Navaro-Yashin, 2002). Historically, the state implemented the emancipation of women from above (White, 2003), while, as Kandiyoti (1987) argues, it left women unliberated on the ground. The self-colonizing project of the Turkish state is gendered. Women's roles, social statuses and progress in emancipation from tradition were used as a measuring stick of

westernization, the downside of which was their confinement in asexual, Western roles encouraged by the state (Özyürek, 2006; White, 2003). These state goals of gendered emancipation put all women in a bind, trapped between state policy and Islamic and cultural tradition, as well as their own desires for individual lives. Though Turkish feminists have been, broadly speaking, westernized, have leftist leanings and sympathies for minorities and female victims of male domestic violence (Arat, 1998), it has been possible for many to acknowledge and admire urban Islamist women's work for empowerment (Göle, 1997; Navaro-Yashin, 2002). However, rural women are usually overlooked as a vestige of traditionalism (Göle, 1997), much as are rural men (Ewing, 2008; Shankland, 1999). These social categories and hierarchies do not help understand processes, negotiations and relationships, as both Ortner (1996) and Sirman (1995) argue, with which all men and women struggle. Instead, they confine individuals in layers of constricting categories, as Muslim, rural, traditional, patriarchal and so forth.

### Gendered material strategies and the cooperative

By looking at what happens, not merely how identity differences are assessed, as I did in the previous section, one aspect of the management of the household is how earnings are used. Most wives, as I mentioned, turn over their earnings to their husbands to the common household income pool. This implies that women live in a patriarchal context in which they can negotiate and strategize, and command power and respect, as wives, as Kandiyoti argues (1988). But I learned through interviews with husbands and wives that most couples made household decisions collectively, whether on major purchases, timing their children's marriages or having another baby. It was not clear if this collective partnership was in any way influenced by the cooperative, or if villagers had conceived of marriage in these cooperative terms long ago. Their complementary or "companionate" marriage was dependent on the type of relationship the couple had, which was further related to their personalities, backgrounds and expectations (Hart, 2007b). Thus, marriage is generally empowering but not unqualifiedly so. Some couples were reticent and formal with each other, but others impressed me with descriptions of their marriages as *ortak*, a partnership. And because I lived in a household as a "daughter," I observed the president of the cooperative, Cennet, and her husband, one of the dyers, close up. They fought openly and passionately, often debating and thrashing out their differences, but settling upon compromised solutions. As Cennet told me, they arrived at this close partnership and "love," as she called it, after many years of struggle, which at times pushed them to the brink of divorce. Yet, as she said, "*sonra, sonra, sonra* [later, later, later], we came to love each other."

Of all the women in the cooperative, Cennet, who has been elected president every two years since the cooperative was founded, has gained the most power and



authority of any woman, especially before the death of the director, Ahmet Çınar, in 2003. Before Ahmet died, he and Cennet worked together strategizing the management of the business. They traveled to the cooperative villages, distributing profits and yarn, guiding the weavers in setting up looms, meeting with the dealers, organizing tourist trips and so on. Cennet lost power and authority when Ahmet, her first cousin, died, and now she is diminished, as is the cooperative as a whole. However, it is important to acknowledge that she has been able to develop her skills as a leader—unlike many other Anatolian women, indeed villagers of any gender—traveling abroad to give demonstrations of her weaving artisanship, communicating through her outgoing charm and intelligence with customers and dealers, strenuously and powerfully arguing her position, and defending the cooperative from the potential that members might whittle away the profits for their own benefit at annual meetings. Thus, it is not true that no woman has gained emancipation on a scale that Josephine Powell would have envisioned. Yet, Cennet is rigorous in her Islamic devotion and practice, and therefore, never like the Kemalist, feminist stereotype of a liberated woman who is secular and who would want to overturn patriarchal authority. Cennet has achieved a form of Anatolian feminism, though she is widely criticized for this among her fellow villagers, who remark that she is “bad” because, from their perspective, she acts individualistically. Cennet’s difficult position reflects Joseph’s remarks on women who are expected to “[p]rioritize their subordinate familial roles even when they achieve public status as individuals” (1996a:7).

Perhaps, given the widespread critiques, Cennet works to conform to cultural understandings of gender and patriarchy. I found myself puzzling over how she could be so eager to conform to some of what I thought to be frustrating details of village life, at the same time that she was commanding and eager to travel. In the early years of research, I thought Cennet treated her daughter unfairly, commanding her, watching her, asking questions about whom she saw and with whom she spoke. In many ways their struggle was similar to those between mothers and teenage daughters everywhere. They fought over clothing, makeup and boys. I challenged her once, as these ideas were limiting my movements (I could not leave the house alone after dark), and she responded, “women are not free.” Her remark cut to the heart of the question. Village women accept that women are not in a position to claim freedom. She said, “You see why we do these things, protect our daughters, because it’s their lives!” The observation that women are active participants in the patriarchal system, that they monitor themselves and are careful to remain within the boundaries of the expected and ideal parameters of female behavior, shows that the only imaginable alternative is death. From their standpoint, this system helps them achieve a meaningful life, as a wife and mother. This is a “connective” construction of the self, of one who is empowered but also constrained by social roles, which are defined through statuses based on age, gender and marital status (Joseph, 1993a:11). Therefore, being a woman, in the sense of fulfilling an existential category of personhood, means conforming to gendered roles, but not eliminating individual

differences of personality among members of similar groups. Cennet rose as a leader once women as a group were given an improved status as cooperative members. Thus, I would agree with Kandiyoti's (1988) argument that women strategize and bargain with patriarchy. They are empowered, though also constrained, by conforming to gendered roles and relationships.

As I have described it, DOBAG is not revolutionary. The villagers, both male and female, support and uphold patriarchal norms in both the household and the cooperative. Powell hoped that by making it a women's cooperative, and by having an elected female president and team of managers, women weavers would become more empowered. To some extent, this seems to be the case; however, the interpretation of these structures was left open to the villagers, who took on social roles of wives/mothers, husbands/fathers and daughters in running the business. This light hand has enabled the cooperative to flourish. Nonetheless, Powell worked to emancipate women from these roles. For instance, she asked Bilge to teach the women how to keep the books. Bilge learned that women could not do bookkeeping or organize production, since very few were literate. Women's illiteracy is the fault of the state, which provided the first elementary school in the village in the late 1960s and made no accommodations for advanced schooling until 2005 (men were taught during their mandatory military service). Thus, the state's lack of interest and concern for rural, female citizens put a constraint on their power. For this reason, men are the administrators, dyers and director, thereby reinforcing the patriarchal gendered roles of individual workers in the cooperative. The cooperative has problematized and in many ways intensified the politics of gender, by writing it large in the structures of labor and authority in the cooperative. Although the cooperative does well, it introduces the logic of market relations to the household, making daughters into unpaid employees, managed by their mothers. The villagers resist these oppositional constructions of personhood and gender, which requires autonomous and independent individuals, especially free-acting women who might challenge male direction in the business and daughters who might challenge their parents. Most, even Cennet, demonstrate how they would prefer to assuage conflicts and lead lives expressed through situational and complementary roles. By running the cooperative like a family with complementary male and female roles, and with power distributed according to age and marital status, conflicts are avoided. People tend to conform to social roles and express conflicts, jealousies and fears by spreading rumors, not instigating a revolution, which would transform social roles and lead to gendered emancipation. However, even those individuals who strive to avoid trouble find that the cooperative intensifies contradictions in the politics of gender and social position.

## Gendered constraints of power

The gendered constraints of power for women in patriarchal households has been studied in detail by anthropologists and historians in varying geographic contexts, demonstrating flexibility in the relationship between economy and collectively understood gender norms of male and female behavior (Collier, 1997; Delaney, 1991; Rebhun, 1999; Yan, 2003). Considering this literature, patriarchal norms of gender are not totalizing; there is space for bargaining (Kandiyoti, 1988), negotiation (Hoodfar, 1997) and resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1993). Many authors point to women's power within contexts that build social connections in negotiating marriage (Katzir, 1983; Sirman, 1995), in creating and sustaining informal economic networks among women across households (Hoodfar, 1997), in utilizing idioms of kinship to construct labor relationships with non-relatives (White, 1994) and in employing spiritual and ritual positions to establish power (Hegland, 1998; Torab, 1996). As Abu-Lughod (1990) cautions, romanticizing women's negotiations and acts of resistance distorts the reality of the cultural world they live in and desire to be part of. Rogers (1975) claims that when the public role of authority is taken as an uncontested demonstration of dominance, women's networks, summoned to achieve power via private, secret or unofficial channels, go unrecognized. Nelson (1974) points out how ethnographic discourse on the segregation of women in Islamic societies fails to notice how men are excluded from female settings and networks, effectively pushing them out of these channels of influence. It is the ethnographer's framework of analysis which leads to the construction of rigid spheres of gendered action. Most important to this discussion is Mahmood's (2001) groundbreaking analysis of Muslim women's acts of disciplined piety as demonstrations of agency and therefore power in non-liberal cultural contexts. Işık (2008) expands upon Mahmood's insight in the Turkish context and among female carpet weavers, arguing that patience is a form of disciplined piety women employ in their efforts to earn wages. They do this for the well-being of the family, not on the basis of individual desire.

In Örselli, women uphold men's authority inside and outside households by granting men more power in the cooperative as director and dyers, allowing husbands to collect household income, and granting that men give permission to sons and daughters to marry and wives to travel and work. While some women have been able to achieve status and authority among women and foreigners within the cooperative, which has empowered them in a way that reflects a Western feminist position, this does not mean that other women have no sources of power. On the contrary, women employ networks of kin, neighbors and friends—which they summon through collective labor projects including weaving, in demonstrations of friendship and solidarity, in connections they make for future marriages (Hart, 2007b) and in spiritual practice—that help them achieve power, if not authority, in a limited definition of the public sphere. More importantly, in a reconfiguration of

gender as complementary (or, as Joseph, 1993b, argues, “connectivity” in kinship roles) and not diametrically opposed (as in Western models), husbands and wives work together and achieve power through linked roles, which raise the household as a unit, rather than individual members in it. From this standpoint, power is understood as a collectively achieved social good, a form of social capital, which can be used to help raise the standing, as well as material survival, of the family. The “public sphere,” then, cannot be understood without the so-called “private,” each supporting the other in the construction of gendered networks of power.

These notions of power and authority play a role in the cooperative. While some gender ideals, such as the status of married women, are reinforced by the villagers’ interpretation of the labor structure of the enterprise, in other ways, the cooperative disrupts gender ideals. Married women, who are supposed to be under the authority of their husbands, have suddenly gained a position which formerly had been held by men: membership in the cooperative. The idea of female membership, which came from the outside, helped push this reversal of power and position. Today, women members have thoroughly appropriated the notion that they should be members, though they do not take this as a form of activism, but as a natural outcome of female nurturing social roles. Giving women weavers outside support for female membership has helped them gain power in the administration of the cooperative, because they act as responsible women, not because they want to be like men. Married women relied on Bilge’s lead in claiming that social and economic skills are special to them, just as motherhood is special to women. Women members thereby benefit from the conceptualization of gender, translated by Bilge into a cultural practice, which came from the outside. Women were not empowered in the sense of controlling public authority, to claim that they should be members in the cooperative, but they were able to assert their leadership once these positions became possible, that is, after their husbands agreed.

Men, faced with the power and influence of founders, who were also foreigners, were not powerful enough to prevent female membership and thereby enjoy the positions they once held as members in a previous cooperative, making decisions about profits. However, men were not equally humbled. The combination of demoting all men from membership, but raising a few as director and dyers, led to anger and discord among men who did not benefit from these statuses and salaries. Additionally, men were humbled by foreigners, who pressed home their lesser status as rural Turkish men in an international, post-colonial setting. A few, embittered by this experience, forbade their wives, daughters and daughters-in-law from working with the cooperative. Most, however, due to financial necessity and social pressure, as well as the collective desire to improve the household’s well-being, accepted the new system. Thus, while married women gained some status and power through their membership, their husbands were forced into the position of wife vis-à-vis foreigners.

In this way, the dynamic between East and West, Muslim and Christian, local and global, is conceptually gendered in the intellectual space of the cooperative

(Ewing, 2008). The cooperative reinforces local gender ideologies, which determine power and agency within households, and those relating to the hierarchies of power in the public political sphere in the village, in the cooperative and, globally, through the relationship cooperative members have with dealers, customers, journalists and researchers. Men, however, retain power in the household, even when they work in a partnership with their wives. One important domain of their power is being able to grant permission to the women in the household to work or travel. Daughters need permission from their fathers for work, travel, school and marriage.

### **New consumption practices and the commodification of weaving**

The cooperative has increased women's earning power and made their labor more prestigious. It empowers women members, but they can only obtain this status if they conform to gendered norms and marry. Thus, "women" are differently conceptualized through age and marital status, as well as gender, and the cooperative benefits "women" differently, enabling mothers to be members, but putting daughters' labor under their mother's membership and authority. By intensifying the connection between gender and labor, and creating the structural conditions that enable daughters to work through idioms of filial piety and the strength of kinship (Salaff, 1995; White, 1994), the stakes of marriage have risen. As anthropologists have demonstrated for other parts of the world undergoing similar economic and social transformations, which can be called modernization, young people in Örselli assert their "right" to consumption at marriage (Collier, 1997; Yan, 2003). Young women expect their parents to fund their trousseaux because they have devoted years of weaving labor to the household. For young men and women, their future marital homes, funded by the groom's side, are larger and more well-appointed than were those of their parents, who often had limited furniture and no appliances. These homes are more comfortable than those of their grandparents, who lived in a single room furnished with handwoven textiles. Displaying these high social statuses through consumption practices would be impossible without monetary income, which they earn in part through participation in commercialized weaving.

The groom's family is responsible for the new house and furnishings, which are often paid in part with their sisters' labor. Daughters accumulate a trousseau or *çeyiz*. While a young woman creates and collects goods for her trousseau, she does not "own" them until she marries with her father's permission. In other words, her parents tie the ownership of goods to her "correct" moral behavior. Girls who elope lose these goods, as they lose their reputations. The problem is that girls' income-producing activities are needed by families, which have become more involved in consumption practices, especially at the time of their children's marriage. Many fathers are reluctant to allow their daughters to marry until their elder siblings have contracted marriages first. Putting off marriage increases the likelihood that



daughters will elope. Thus, young women's labor as weavers helps fund their and their siblings' marriages, but simultaneously causes their fathers to put off the date of their weddings. They benefit (in goods) and lose (in timing their marriages) because they have become productive and profitable weavers. If they choose to elope (in itself a complex issue involving questions of their agency given the pressurized circumstances within which they live), their fathers withhold the trousseau. He uses it to buy her obedience.

Daughters have found an alternative solution to weaving, but one which does not challenge patriarchal structures of womanhood. They demonstrate agency, counter-intuitively (from the perspective of dealers) expressed through an abandonment of carpet weaving, by marrying men who migrate to cities, so that they can gain the rights of citizenship through their husbands' access to health and retirement insurance, public education for their children, easy access to health care and more prestigious identities as urban people. As Arat mentions in relation to the troubles of female cotton weavers in Turkey, "The state might be considered responsible for the unfair deals these women are getting, or for their lack of social security" (1996:30). These women mentioned by Arat, who conform to a patriarchal order in which they find social networks of support through kinship and by striking patriarchal bargains (Kandiyoti, 1988), rather than seeking rights as individual citizens, are similar to those from Örselli who marry to gain access to state services. Women should have equal access to the rights and benefits of citizenship, even if they do not conform to cultural ideals of womanhood. While women are empowered through marriage from a cultural standpoint, they are constrained by the unequal distribution of the rights and benefits of citizenship because the state does not recognize women's piecework labor (White, 1994) or involvement in small cooperative or workshop enterprises (Işık, 2007). The paternalistic state, in this way, reinforces the necessity of conforming to culturally accepted gendered roles (Joseph, 1996a:7). The cooperative has had unintended effects then, leading to its collapse, as young women seek benefits of modern citizenship instead of those of rural village women who have improved their financial circumstances by weaving carpets. If the state paid attention to villages and provided them with services and benefits, readily available in cities, they may not choose to leave. It would seem therefore that gendered emancipation is a less desirable goal for men and women than class liberation, because the benefits of class mobility are greater and do not interfere with cultural practices relating to gender.

## Conclusion

The DOBAG cooperative in Örselli village was established as a women's cooperative. As such, it was intended to promote and sustain women's knowledge and skills as weavers. It was structured to emancipate women or, at the very least, to

enable them to recognize the value of their work. In many ways, the cooperative has achieved these aims. The caveat is that the villagers have taken the notion of a *kadin kooperatifi* (women's cooperative) literally, and for this reason only married women are members. The villagers' conceptualization of gender includes age and social position. This means that "women" are not understood to be an undifferentiated collection of female individuals with similar needs and goals, as many Western feminists, such as the co-founder of the cooperative, Josephine Powell, imagined. Rather, they are a more complex group, marked by successful attainment of adulthood (i.e., marriage). The marginal role of daughters improves when they marry; marriage empowers them. Thus, daughters who are "girls" become women, and with this new status, they can also become members.

Although weavers' husbands approve of the cooperative structure, they never conceded patriarchal power. One aspect of this power is granting permission to their children to marry. Marriage, due to an intensified engagement in commodities, requires significant investments. Daughters are put under greater pressure to earn, at the same time that they want to improve their status by marrying. There arises a conflict of interest, and many choose to defy norms and elope. While their parents now fund their trousseaux, they are not guaranteed to receive this. Given the fact that daughters' labor brings in income, and households are dependent on money to survive, fathers often delay their daughters' marriages.

Unknowingly, dealers, tourists and others praise the cooperative for its achievements in emancipating women. Given their conceptualization of gender and their narrow notions of agency, they fail to recognize the position of unmarried and underage weavers. They also fail to recognize the position of Turkish village men, who find themselves below the position of their wives in relation to wealthy urban, secularist Turks, foreign expatriate textile experts, foreign dealers, customers, tourists and researchers. Situations of labor in capitalist enterprises, such as development projects, which attempt to revitalize indigenous arts and local cultural heritage, actually reproduce and exacerbate the dynamics of inequality and exploitation that they attempt to mediate, as the articles in Grimes and Milgram (2000) demonstrate. In this case, the differing conceptualizations of gender, agency and personhood require that we consider the limitations, as well as the potentially empowering opportunities, from all angles. However, the limitations of class and prejudices against rural people make daughters consider quitting altogether by marrying men who live in a city. In this way, they improve their circumstances, bypassing the need to weave or engage in a rural development project, which has tried to emancipate them from patriarchal gender roles.

## NOTES

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