Dowry Patterns: Re-thinking the Collective Digital Craft-making as a Language

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ABSTRACT
Previous work in CSCW on digital forms of craft pointed to the importance of materialistic, social, collaborative and historical characteristics of the craft. We add to existing research of how digital forms of craft engage with the longstanding traditions and rituals of the craft by introducing a case about the craft patterns from central Anatolia, Turkey. We present a collective ritualistic practice, the dowry making, and the patterns used in dowry to understand the relationship between craft and the dowry pattern as a reflection of those practices. By imagining how the craft patterns and craft-making should transfer to a digital context, we aim to inform how technologies and craft can engage on a level that respects the cultural, traditional, and ritualistic components that comprise the context in which the craft practice is situated. We provide several reflection points on how to avoid being reductionist in applications of technology.

INTRODUCTION

Digital crafting [4]and hybrid crafting [10], craft created in digital [4], and integrated to digital tools [10], are emerging areas of research with a particular focus on the qualities of craft as a unique form of making. Previous works in CSCW and HCI investigated the potentials of technology concerning traditional craft practices. Examples show the diversity such as how to enhance expression via integrating technologies to craft [7], increasing participation through digital craft-making [6][16], the preservation of intangible aspects of individual craft practices like gestures [1], or craft-making as a feminist way of storytelling [15]. We add to the existing work of craft by further investigating a regional language of patterns through a collaborative ritualistic craft-making practice.

For specific communities, *crafting* is not only a cultural activity that finishes once the craftwork is created. Craft as a learnt experience enables people to establish control over a technology based on their terms [10], and preparation of the craftworks can be a good example for an empowering relationship for the future of collective rituals. Handing over the craftwork, sharing the craft skills with others, and discussions around the meaning of the piece can be all parts of the cultural ritual [8]. These self-expressions become collective expressions and patterns, or techniques change depending on the cultural histories of the families, the neighbourhood of the region [8].

Considering the patterns of craft as a language to express the collective histories can help CSCW and HCI scholars to reflect on the informed use of patterns in hybrid and digital crafting. The semantics and its documentation can help scholars to place patterns as communication units that embody the flow of historical information. In this work-in-progress, we introduce a collective practice, dowry making; the patterns used in a dowry from central Anatolia region (2 patterns), and we pose critical questions around the value of the pattern in the craft.

RELATED WORK

In this section, we will introduce the emerging related work on craft practices concerning materialistic, social, collaborative and historical concepts in CSCW and HCI.

Collective Craftwork and its Tools

The collective craftwork has always been essential to the craft research within CSCW and HCI. Material arrangements and social relations around the practices of making [15], repurposing technology as an expression tool in knitters' life [6] or introducing quilt blocks with capacity sensors as a part of collaborative practice, quilting, with stigmatized groups [16] are a few diverse examples. Sharing an experience or information also constituted involvement with patterns. Meissner and Fitzpatrick in their project about urban knitting as a form of citizen participation [6], used technology to make attributed meanings to the knitted patterns become visible in public. Frankjauer et al. pointed out that traditional patterns can be used as a tool for digital engagement, and knowledge generation is part of the making process [2].

Figure 1: In central Anatolia, craftworks are displayed to relatives, part of the dowry preparation process, before craft works put inside a chest.
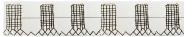

Figure 2: *The hairy worm pattern,* drawn by Emine Kal [9]. Above visual is re-created by the first author. The worm and caterpillar type of animals inspired this pattern. It is established with a surrealist approach and shaped like a figure. It is used in the central Anatolia, Turkey and represents a sneaky enemy. It also represents engaged or married women's resentment to their mother in law [9].

Figure 3: *The Meadow pattern* drawn by Ayşe Ceyhan is inspired by nature [9]. Above visual is re-created by the first author. In the Konya city, central Anatolia, houses are inside the garden and women prefer to describe the grass, plants that they see. This pattern is used on a type of headscarf and is created to be given from the bride's family to future mother in law as a gift. This pattern represents peace, happiness between the bride and the mother in law [9].

While exploring the ways of re-thinking craft with technology, scholars investigated the ways of preserving traditional practices and building hybrid tools and components [1][11][13]. Posch et al. experimented replicating digital electronics with unconventional materials and skill sets [11][12][14]. Craft tools, shapes of tools and skill sets are also inspired and introduced to correspond to electrical engineering needs [13]. The emerging work in CSCW and HCI considered the importance of building tools, concerning the need for preserving existing craft knowledge.

These works reflected on how craftwork in general and patterns specifically create space for the individual, and collective expression [6] [16] and how the historical knowledge can be used as an inspirational tool [1] proving a potential for an alternative digital narrative. Rosner in the inspirational key work Critical Fabulations, pointed to the use of weaving patterns as information conveyers and weaving as a skill to merge the software through the history as well as considering that craft making is a form of storytelling that can inspire designers perception on making [15]. However, previous work has not touched upon the particulars of the historical meaning to the ritualistic practices, approaching the patterns systematically as repetitive elements for valuing those practices. Our current exploration of dowry preparation and dowry patterns is a first step towards documenting those relationships. We see great value in understanding the meanings of the ritualistic craft practices, concerning the cultures, people relationships, and tools. Recognizing craftworks' collective histories, the language of the patterns and people's motivations can open further discussions for the integration of digital technologies to craftwork, and help to avoid a particular, reductionist representation of craft as a part of digitally enhanced experiences.

Dowry Preparation: A ritual with a collective visual language

Dowry is a collection of materials, properties and money given by the bride's family to support the newlywed bride and groom. The handcrafted products consist of laceworks, canvas, point lace and knitted fabrics [8]. The handcrafted textiles inside the dowry constitute similar patterns and a shared vocabulary in different regions of Turkey [9]. The preparation of dowry constitutes not only material artefacts but also intangible concepts [9]. In some cultures, the patterns used on craftworks represent meanings that are attributed by people, and multiple communities use those patterns with similar meanings. Within the patrimonial family culture in Anatolia, women used these patterns to express their thoughts, observations and what they hear when verbal reflection is not preferred [8]. These patterns, such as figure 2 and figure 3, can be seen on clothes, socks and craftworks inside the dowry [9]. Two described patterns on the sidebar set an example of a flow of information, and representation of relationships. They are used as collective embroidery patterns in specific regions that can be found in dowries and are considered as part of a verbal language in the central Anatolia region, Turkey. Relatives also join and make their contributions by giving lacework and canvas work during the preparation of a dowry, and consequently passing the dowry to another person circulates the regional language [9]. They add clothes and people recognize the patterns,

and the patterns act as 'communication initiators' within a region. The collective practices of dowry preparation and the values that are converted into craftwork can be good examples to re-think the value of the emerging craftwork practices as visual representatives of shared values, and histories.

DISCUSSION

The dowry preparation example illustrated the importance of the visual components of craft and its social, historical and regional value. Consideration of the thinking and attributing while making craftwork can inspire the production of hybrid craft tool on how to integrate ritualistic practices, and embedded patterns to digital. The visual language of craftwork has not yet been considered as a possible area of expertise that can contribute to the design of technologies. According to the brief historical perspective on craft described above, we ask the following questions.

- ∞ How shall digital technologies' and emerging craft practices integrate with our existing rituals and routines around craft-making?
- ∞ What role can the collective histories of craft play in developing digital and hybrid craft practices in material forms?
- ∞ What can computer-supported systems offer for the creation process of social rituals?
- ∞ Could the expertise around the language of patterns or semantics around craft offer an alternative analysis process for the craftwork in HCI and CSCW?
- ∞ How can the role of the pattern as a communicative or linguistic element contribute to our engagement with collective making, hybrid crafting and design of technologies?
- ∞ What are the overlooked communicative and linguistic aspects around the craftwork in HCI?

The exploration of historical and technological changes a practice goes through can make us understand how digital materiality is situated. The collaborative creation of people who know each other consequently creates a unique language among communities. By briefly introducing the established language of dowry patterns, we discussed why there should be more research around the culture of craftworks and language of patterns. In imagining how the craft patterns and craft-making should transfer to a digital context, scholars need to engage with craft on a level that respects the cultural, traditional, and ritualistic components to avoid being reductionist in applications of technology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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