

The name of the family

There is strong competition between families, but also between large families and clans. Ultimately, it is a question of who is stronger when the going gets tough. As already shown, it is important for a family to have numerous men who are respected as warriors. But there are other criteria that are important for the esteem of a family. First of all, there is the material possession. This can be decisive in a dispute with another family. It is better not to mess with a much richer family. They can bribe officials and use their connections to influential people. If necessary, they can use the services of assassins. Poor people must take up arms themselves. A richer family shows what it has. This increases their prestige and deters opponents.

This display of economic power is particularly obvious at weddings. After the expulsion of the Taliban, the first new buildings to rise among the rubble and dilapidated dwellings of Kabul were marriage palaces. These are huge buildings with at least two halls where hundreds of people can sit at tables. These palaces are rented for weddings. Then hundreds of women with small children sit in one hall, and a similar number of men in another. Loud music blares. At an advanced hour, there is a sumptuous meal. Waiters run to the tables, each balancing a huge round tray of food above them. Depending on the palace, a place setting costs between six and nine euros. At least 800 guests are invited to most weddings.

The celebration in the palace is only one of the cost factors at a wedding. The celebration lasts for days, with the bride's family, with the groom's family and finally in the wedding palace. The costs are borne by the groom or his family. However, the groom must also pay the bride price, formally a reserve in case of divorce. During the engagement period, the groom must regularly give gifts to the future father-in-law. At the wedding, he must give expensive jewelry not only to the bride, but also to her sisters. All this is arranged before the wedding. The bride's father insists that the bride price, the costs for the gifts and for the organization of the celebration are high. The poker game is fierce. The more prestigious the bride's family is, the more valuable the girl this family gives away. Certainly, Turkmens have to pay a premium for the bride if she is good at weaving carpets. On the other hand, an education that qualifies a girl to pursue a professional activity outside the home may be an undesirable dowry.

Most brides and grooms enter marriage with enormous debts. It often takes over a decade to pay off the debt. The father of the bride is not bothered by his daughter's meager life after marriage. After all, she will no longer be part of his family. She has the right to visit her parents regularly. But this does not help her and her husband out of their economic difficulties.

There have been repeated attempts to limit the insane waste on weddings. Even the government has tried to cap costs at wedding palaces. This quickly failed because of the palaces' lobby, which whined about the threat of unemployment for their staff. In fact, the palaces are an economic power. New marriage temples are still being built. Their outward appearance is now on a par with casinos in Las Vegas.

The elders of the Pundjeer Valley have tried to stop Pundjeeri marriages in Kabul wedding palaces. They have also placed limits on the amount of bride prices and the value of gifts. Violators must pay a fine. But the fine is paid gladly. The prestige of an expensive wedding plus the penalty is even greater.

The Tani tribe in Khost province has been the most radical, also limiting the amount of bride prices and the cost of gifts. Family heads who act contrary have to pay a hefty fine. In case of recurrence, they are expelled from the tribe. Given the strong tribal structures in Khost, this penalty is effective.



The Tani justify their drastic measures by saying that marriage is unaffordable for many young men and that many girls therefore remain unmarried.

Marriages are a particularly conspicuous indication of the need to present oneself as economically potent. It is also incomprehensible that construction activity in the high-end housing segment is currently continuing. Many foreigners have left, laying off armies of previously well-paid employees. The market is stagnating. Prices in the upscale residential segment are falling. Nevertheless, people are building. The important thing is that the newly built house towers above the existing houses in the area.

Economic reason can hardly be behind it. It is only a matter of prestige.

It is very important for prestige that the family's life conforms to the official norms of living together – at least outwardly. This seems to be a question of credibility, which originates in the tribal assemblies. Only those who can demonstrate impeccable family relationships there can make energetic and self-confident demands. On the other hand, someone who can be accused – possibly even publicly – of offenses against good morals will not only hold back in meetings.

It is an insult to accuse someone of smoking cigarettes or even hashish. Many smoke and very many know about it. But officially it is not said. Appearances must be kept up. Drug-addicted family members are hidden from their fellow human beings as much as possible.

The daughter is taken out of school after she has attended the ninth grade. She has grown into an attractive young girl, and her way to school is long. She always went to school accompanied by two other girls from the neighborhood, so mutual protection and supervision were guaranteed. But it

could still be that someone would accuse the daughter of having contacts with a young boy on the way. The family is safe from such allegations if they no longer let the daughter out of the house. It is very bad when something actually "happens" to women, even when they are raped by enemies during a raid. They are not forgiven for this, even if they have fought back desperately. They are dishonored. Many women then commit suicide. Then the family is rid of its shame and its name is saved.