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**The status of rural women in Turkey: What is the  
role of regional differences**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, we study the regional differences in the impact of modernization on the position of rural women in settlements with population of 10,000 or less in Turkey on the basis of representative national data of all females aged 15 and 49 for the year 1998. Within the regions, we compare women living in the countryside with women living in towns. The focus of the research is on differences in socio-economic status, gender role attitudes, and freedom or "autonomy" among the women. Our results make clear that there are large differences in these respects among women from different regions and between women living in the countryside and women living in towns. Women living in towns are better off with regard to educational opportunities and household income, but at the same time they seem to be more dependent on their husband than countryside women, because very few of them are gainfully employed. The situation of the women in the East of the country is found to be much worse than in other regions with regard to almost all indicators of women's status that are used. In the countryside of that region, one third of the married women is not able to speak Turkish, the country's official and dominant language, and also one third has no official civil marriage, which puts them in a disadvantage position in terms of legal rights.

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## **Introduction**

There has been increasing awareness that the agricultural policies in the Turkish Republic had different impacts on women and men in the countryside. The available studies indicate that women in rural areas have been affected mainly in three ways by the governmental policies: (1) through modernization in farming technology and commercial marketing, (2) through migration, and (3) through the compulsory and free primary education reforms.

Most previous research has focused on the first and the second issues. Those studies, for example, indicate that the modernization of farming technology in agriculture and commercial marketing tended to reproduce and intensify the sexual division of labor to the disadvantage of rural women. The change from traditional to modern farming tended to enhanced men's prestige and power at the expense of women's by widening the gap in the level of knowledge and training. The influence of men thus increased both within their households and within the local centers of power (Tunaligil, 1980; Azmaz, 1984; Ertürk, 1987; Ilcan, 1994). The effect of migration, on the contrary, may have been a strengthening of the position of the women. Both the early national migration and the later international labor migration to Western Europe, which began in the 1960s, were movements of male labor. For example, 91 per cent of the workers placed in a position abroad by the Labor Placement Office between 1967 and 1992 were male. As many of these men were married (SIS, 1994), a large number of married women stayed behind in rural Turkey, who had to take care of themselves and their children, though they also gained some autonomy.

The small-scale case studies on which the above conclusions were based provide little insight in the way in which the impact varied among regions. Turkey exhibits large differences across regions in level of economic development, natural resources, history and culture. Comparing the effects of the modernization process among these regions, therefore, might provide new insights in the way in which economic and cultural factors influence the process of modernization in rural areas.

In this paper, we study the regional differences in the impact of modernization on the position of rural women in Turkey, using national representative data for the year 1998. We focus on the differences among five regions of Turkey: the West, South, Central,

North, and East (including Southeast) (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> We compare women in two basic stages of the modernization process: women living in the countryside (called from now on "country women") and women living in towns (called "town women"). We focus on differences in degree of freedom or autonomy between women, as measured by a number of socio-economic, demographic and cultural indicators. More specifically, we want to discern differences among rural women from the different regions from Turkey and within the regions between country women and town women in (1) their access to and use of education facilities, (2) their labor market positions and occupations, (3) the degree to which they reproduce patriarchal ideologies, (4) the degree to which they experience traditional norms, and (5) their attitudes towards family planning.

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Figure 1 about here  
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We begin with a description of the differences among the five regions of Turkey, the relevant historical developments pertaining to Turkish women, and the differences between rural women living in the countryside and rural women living in towns. To frame the paper conceptually, we also provide an overview of the most influential perspectives within the women/gender and development literature. The empirical part of the paper starts with a discussion of the data and variables, after which the results are presented. Finally, the results are summarized and discussed.

### **Regional Differences in Turkey**

The *West* is the most advanced region of Turkey. It is also the most densely populated and urbanized region, as it includes Izmir (the third largest city) and Istanbul (the country's largest city and one of the largest metropolitans of the world with around 13 million inhabitants). This region is the center of the industry, commerce and finance of Turkey. It has a dynamic economy, in which industrial activities, especially manufacturing industry, play a key role. The highly diversified and rapidly growing manufacturing industry attracts many people from the less developed parts of Turkey to

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<sup>1</sup> This map illustrates six regions, West, South, Central, North, Southeast and East. However, because the data for the East and the Southeast could not be separated in our data set, in our analyses these regions are combined and referred to as the "East".

the cities of the region. The driving force behind the local economy is capital investment, whether national or local private capital. In this region, the infrastructure necessary for regional development (such as roads and schooling) was build up earlier than in the other parts of Turkey. The Aegean area has a very important agrarian sector. Mechanization of agriculture and its connection to the market economy took already place here in the 1950s. Because of the favorable climate, this region produces and exports many valuable agricultural products, such as cotton, sunflower and citrus fruits. In the coastal areas, tourism is a booming business. Overall, the Western region contributes most to the gross domestic product of the country.

Like the West, the *South* of Turkey includes highly fertile agricultural areas as well as industrial centers, like Adana, and a growing tourist industry along the coastline, like around Antalya. Although there is some internal variation, the South is a densely populated and urbanized region, characterized by relatively high levels of per capita income. It includes a highly diversified, dynamic and rapidly growing manufacturing industry and, because of this, has experienced in-migration from the less developed parts of Turkey to its cities. In its market-oriented agriculture, a wide variety of products are cultivated, of which the cotton and citrus fruit production provide high export earnings for the region. Other distinctive features of agriculture in this region are its high level of mechanization (probably among the highest of Turkey), of tenancy (land leased out for cultivation), and of seasonal migration. The agricultural holdings in the region are relatively large. There are signs of a mild polarization of land ownership between, on the one hand, a few big landowners and on the other hand, a majority of small landholders.

In the *Central* region of Turkey, we find Ankara, the capital and the second largest city in Turkey. The local economy includes government activities and related expenditures. Another contribution of Ankara is in the area of cultural capital, as the city includes many educational institutions and Universities. With the exception of some minor industries located around Ankara, the industrial production of this region is low. The agricultural production is less diversified than in the West of the South, because the climate and geography of Central Turkey are more restrictive. The Central region includes arid grazing areas where mostly cereal (wheat and barley) is produced by mechanized agricultural techniques. Given the dry climate, husbandry is a common

economic activity in the countryside of the region. Although close to the capital, the countryside of Central Turkey has no well-developed infrastructure. Within the region, there is much migration from the countryside to the larger city centers.

The *North* of Turkey has a fertile coastal area and receives much rain, although its width in some parts is only a few kilometers. The coastal area is isolated from the rest of the country by high mountains and forests. Therefore, the North was connected relatively late to the market economy and lacked infrastructural development. Within the region, substantial differences can be observed. For example, the western provinces have extensive coal reserves and were a center for mining and steel industry (like the city of Zonguldak). In the northern parts, on the other hand, the mechanization of agriculture was hindered by the geographic circumstances and there was much out-migration of males. The women who were left behind in the region had to carry out intensive agricultural work (such as hazelnuts and tea production). The village structure in the Northern region differs much from the countryside villages in other parts of Turkey; the houses are apart from each other (especially in the northern part of the region there is no close community structure) and, because of this, the main social community is not the village itself, but rather the extended family and other relatives.

The *East* of Turkey is the least developed region of the country. It can be divided broadly into an eastern and a southeastern part. In the eastern part, the terrain is highly mountainous, and, because of this, the most important economic activity is husbandry. The winters are long and snowy and the summers are short and mild. Generally, crops are produced only for household consumption not for marketing. Wheat and maize, the most important items of a subsistence economy, are the dominant agricultural products. The average size of the agricultural holdings is small compared to other regions and the lands are mainly cultivated by the landowners. Another important feature of its agriculture is the low level of mechanization, as is evidenced by the low rate of tractor usage. In the East, the number of people living in urban areas is very low. Also the rate of population growth is low. In some parts it is even below zero, because of out-migration. Per capita income is the lowest of all regions of Turkey. The few industrial activities are mostly geared to local needs and do not play a role of significance in the local economy.

The southeastern part shows similarities with the eastern part in terms of lack of industrialization and infrastructure. In the Southeast, the villagers live either in the high mountains or at plains. The climate is rather unfavorable (very hot summers and very cold winters). In the mountains, the majority of the villagers own the land on which they work, whereas on the plains the tribal leaders or “Aghas” own the land. Until recently, an important characteristic of the villages in this region was their tribal structure and most people lived under the authority of their religious leaders (Sheiks). Because of economic insufficiency, the region experienced high levels of internal migration to the larger cities. In some regions (especially in Diyarbakir) this migration process was strengthened in the last decades as a result of the conflict between the Kurdish Worker Party (PKK) and the State’s security forces. The Southeastern Anatolian Development Project has begun to improve the economy of the region and there are plans to stimulate the agricultural development further through irrigation and hydroelectric power. In this way, it is also hoped to reverse (or at least to bring to a halt) the migration flow from this region to the rest of the country. However, at the moment the region is still very poor in terms of agricultural production.

### **The position of women in Turkey**

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the state has been concerned with the economic and social development of the country. To that end, the Kemalist regime implemented a number of legal and social reforms in the first two decades of the Republic. In 1924, the Caliphate was abolished and by 1926, the Sheria, the religious law, was replaced by the secular Civil Code, which was adopted from the Swiss Civil Code. The laws in the new Civil Code established women’s rights in the areas of marriage, divorce, inheritance and property ownership. Family law made polygamy and marriage without the agreement of the partners illegal and civil marriage was made the only legally valid form of marriage, while religious marriage remained as an additional option to those who are married by civil authorities; the minimum marriage age was raised to the legal age of majority (18) for both sexes; "consent of both parties" was made a requirement for a valid marriage; divorce by repudiation was prohibited; equal inheritance rights to men and women as well as the women's right to freely own and



dispose of property were granted as fundamental consequences of the secular civil legislation that was adopted. In addition, the principle of "equal pay for equal work regardless of sex" was recognized and women were actively encouraged to have higher education and careers. Women received the right to vote in municipal elections in 1930 and to vote and stand for election in municipal and national elections in 1934 (Browning, 1985).

The introduction of the new legal framework was intended to transform the nation into a secular, "modern", and industrial state. Women were considered central to the success of the new secular and modernizing ideology. For this purpose, they had to be freed from the traditional Islamic values, because Islam and women's rights were considered to be incompatible. "State feminism", therefore, supported women's rights and encouraged education and employment of women (Moghadam, 1993).

To increase the schooling opportunities for women, several measures were taken. Early on, co-education was established at the primary and university levels (Tan, 1981). Families were obliged to send their daughters to primary schools, and compliance was monitored by the Ministry of National Education. Although these Kemalist measures opened up new doors for women, the system provided limited opportunities for rural women, and especially for the women who were living in the East and South-East, where the modernization attempts were blocked by the religious and ethnic tribal leaders. Those women also had (and many still have) another disadvantage: they were speaking their local languages at home and this meant that the ones who did not attend school missed the opportunity to learn the principal language of the country, which is Turkish. To this day, about a quarter of the Kurdish and Arabic women of Turkey are not able to speak Turkish and are dependent on their male household members (who almost all speak Turkish) for information about Turkish society and their legal rights (Smits & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2003).

### **Theories on women and development**

Research has shown that the impact of development -- or lack of development -- differs between men and women. In their attempts to answer the question whether development improves the relative status of women in "Third World" countries, social scientists have

focused on economic, social and cultural transformations. Two major theoretical perspectives have emerged: the modernization approach, called “Women in Development” (WID) and the Marxist-inspired perspectives known as “Woman and Development” (WAD) and “Gender and Development” (GAD) (Rathgeber, 1990).

The WID approach is closely related to Western liberal feminism and modernization theory and does not necessarily address the existing gender structures. It assumes that development leads to female liberation by involving women more in social and economic life. According to Giele (1992:5) the factors that the WID approach considers as most crucial for gender equality are: (1) a technologically advanced or industrial economy; (2) a kinship system based on a nuclear rather than the extended family; (3) a democratic state and an egalitarian class structure; (4) a secularized religious tradition or world view. The classic WID approach views women's relative "backwardness" as a function of traditional attitudes and simple technology. As industrialization (along with urbanization) leads to more educational facilities, job opportunities, and social services, it is considered to be a major factor leading to the improvement of the status of women. In other words, economic development brings female liberation by integrating them more into economic life through education.

The more recent evidence indicates that *values* are part of what needs to change in order for the society to become modern. Instead of arguing that cultural values derived from developed nations bring modern ideas conducive to development, the recent "culturalist" modernization perspective argues that modernization involves both modern and traditional values. This acknowledgement of the importance of cultural factors is an important strength of the WID approach (Kandiyoti, 1977, 1984, 1988; Berik, 1987; Afshar, 1985; Moghadam, 1992). These studies indicate that the expansion of paid employment has bypassed rural women in, for example, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, and denied them the opportunity to take control over their lives (as the earlier WID approach would predict). Both “classic patriarchal” and “Islamic-patriarchal” control persist.

A major weakness of the WID approach is its lack of focus on structural variables and relations of production. The importance of these "material" factors is much more acknowledged by the Marxist-oriented approaches to the position of women in the

developing world, which point that development may affect men and women of the same class in different ways (Boserup, 1970, 1977; Saffioti, 1978; Safa, 1983; Ward, 1984; Joekes, 1987; Finlay, 1989; Taplin, 1989; Moghadam, 1992). Within this group, the WAD approach focuses on the economic roles of women. However, this approach focuses mostly on class divisions and tends to ignore the domestic roles of the women at home. These roles are better addressed by the GAD approach, which involves a detailed review of the intersection of household and public structures to discover "why women have systematically been assigned to inferior and/or secondary roles" (Rathgeber, 1990: 494). According to this socialist-feminist approach, the oppression of women will only stop if women participate in non-home economic production -- under conditions of equality between the sexes -- and men are more involved in household activities (Rathgeber, 1990).

According to both Marxist approaches, gender inequalities emerge from and reinforce the relations of production. During the transitional (early) stages of development, the economic and social marginality of women increases, partly because they reproduce the labor force and consequently are less involved in earning wages themselves. In later stages, women contribute to the economic development as cheap laborers. Both WAD and GAD see the disadvantaged position of women as being to a large extent caused by their lack of access to critical resources. Both approaches also acknowledge the importance of patriarchal ideologies and structures for placing the women in a subservient position at home and in the work place. To enhance the status of women in development, therefore, they consider it necessary that those women get better access to critical resources and that patriarchal ideas be undermined.

Both the WID approach and the Marxian approaches start with economic factors and the work that women do. They examine the work of women, both at home and in the labor force, and also the needs of families and employers. Both perspectives come to the conclusion that the domestic mode of production in which women exchange their unpaid domestic services for their upkeep is the origin of patriarchy, which within feminist literature is generally defined as a dual system in which men oppress women and men oppress each other (Mackie, 1991). However they differ in their view on the basis of

patriarchy: according to WID it is culturally based whereas according to WAD and GAD it is materially based (Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2001).

None of the approaches provides a complete analysis of the relationships between women-gender and development. Following Portes (1980) who suggests that in the development literature there are convergences between the modernization and Marxist theories, we combine "structuralist" concepts from WAD and GAD with "cultural" concepts from the WID approach to derive hypotheses about the evolving status of women in different regions of Turkey.

### **Differences between town and countryside**

There are marked differences in the lives of rural women and the degree of mobility and autonomy they experience. Women living in the small villages of the countryside generally have more freedom of movement and greater access to public space, as long as they stay within the borders of their own villages. As the WAD and GAD approaches suggest, this is related to their mode of production. Women in villages work in the fields and/or in the barns from spring to the end of autumn. In some regions, they do outside domestic activities together, like washing clothes, baking bread or preparing food for winter. They also may get together in front of their houses as leisure time activity.

In the towns, the freedom of women is more restricted. Town women are generally marginalized from economic activity – as many of them are housewives -- and their access to the public space is much more limited. For example, the daily shopping activities are carried out mostly by men. Patriarchal control is stronger over town women than over village women, which may be related to the strength of the social norms within the issue of migration from countryside to the towns. Because women represent the honor of their families, their interaction with outsiders tends to be limited when they migrate to an unfamiliar environment. This argument also applies to young women. However, in contrast with the older women, living in a town may have a major advantage to the younger ones: the educational facilities and hence the opportunities to become economically independent generally are much better in the towns.

## Data and methods

We use data from the 1998 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS). This survey is part of the demographic and Health Surveys (DHS+) program which provides data and analyses on the population, health, and nutrition of women and children in developing countries (DHS+, 2003). The DHS+ surveys use nationally representative samples of households and consist of at least a household survey and a women's survey. In the current paper, we use the data from the TDHS women's survey. The females in the data set are a representative sample of all females aged 15 to 49 in Turkey. The males for which information is available are the husbands of married females. The total number of married women in the data set is 6,152.

### *Variables*

In this paper, rural women are defined as women living in settlements of 10,000 or less inhabitants. On the basis of the TDHS definition they are divided into “town-women” and “countryside-women”. The five regions we distinguish include the following provinces: (1) *WEST*: Edirne, Istanbul, Kirklareli, Tekirdag, Balikesir, Kocaeli, Sakarya, Canakkale, Bursa Yalova Izmir, Denizli, Manisa, Aydin; (2) *SOUTH*: Mugla, Burdur, Isparta, Antalya, Hatay, Adana, Icel, Gaziantep, Kilis, Osmaniye; (3) *CENTRAL*: Cankiri, Corum, Yozgat, Tokat, Amasya, Bilecik, Eskisehir, Usak, Kutahya, Afyon, Ankara, Kirsehir, Nevsehir, Bolu, Konya, Kayseri, Nigde, Aksaray, Karaman, Kirikkale; (4) *NORTH*: Trabzon, Rize, Giresun, Ordu, Artvin, Samsun, Kastamonu, Zonguldak, Sinop, Bartin, Karabuk; and (5) *EAST*: Mardin, Diyarbakir, Siirt, Hakkari, Bitlis, Van, Batman, Sirnak, Kars, Bingol, Agri, Mus, Erzurum, Ardahan, Igridir, Sanliurfa, Malatya, Adiyaman, K.Maras, Sivas, Tunceli, Elazig, Erzincan, Gumushane, Bayburt (TDHS, 1999).

Besides "urbanization and "region", a number of other variables are used. *Socio-economic characteristics* are educational level and literacy of the woman, whether she is employed, her occupation, her husband's education and occupation, and the household income. *Socio-cultural factors* are whether or not the woman speaks Turkish, reads a newspaper at least once a week, or has always lived in the same place.

*Gender role attitudes* of the women are measured with dummy variables indicating whether (1) or not (0) she agrees with the following pronouncements: "Important

decisions should be made by men", "Men are wiser than women", "Women should not argue with men", and "It is better for a male than for a female child to have education." As *traditionality of marriage variables*, dummies are used which indicate whether (1) or not (0): the woman married before age 16; there is a blood relationship with the husband; the marriage was arranged by the family; there was a bride price paid for the marriage; and there was only a religious marriage ceremony.

*Family planning* issues are measured with dummy variables indicating whether (1) or not (0) the women approve of family planning, consider family planning to be against religion, use no family planning, have five or more children, would be unhappy if they would become pregnant, want more children than their husband, find family planning info in high schools acceptable, have husbands who approve of family planning, and have husbands who want more children than they want themselves.

Part of the marriage and gender role variables is used to indicate whether the women grew up in traditional/patriarchal families. We expect women who were under age 16 when they married or when they had their first child, women with five or more children, women who have a blood relationship with their husband, women whose marriage was not arranged by themselves, women for whom bride price was paid at their marriage, women who had only a religious marriage ceremony, and women who agreed with the traditional gender role pronouncements to have a higher probability of being raised in a traditional/patriarchal family than other women.

## **Results**

Table 1 shows that, overall in Turkey, almost 35 per cent of the women in the countryside has not completed primary education. This figure drops to 25 per cent for the towns. This indicates that women in towns have more chance to go to school than women in the countryside. The proportion of countryside women who did not complete primary education is highest in the East (64 percent) and lowest in the West (16 percent). Thus, the women in the East seem to be the most disadvantaged group in terms of access to formal education.

There are also substantial differences among the regions in terms of reading easily. Again the women in the Eastern countryside are the most disadvantaged group, followed

by the women from the Eastern towns. In fact, there are considerable differences between this region and the rest of the country. With regard to education, the most surprising figures are those of the countryside women in the North. Even though the settlements of the houses in some parts of this region are not only apart from each other but also from the schools, the female literacy rate is even higher than in the South and the Center of Turkey. Identifying the factors behind this requires further analysis, which is not the focus of this study.

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Table 1 about here

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Regarding participating in the labor force, Table 1 makes clear that women in the towns are economically more marginalized than women in the countryside. In the countryside, 47 percent of all women are housewives, against 70 percent in the towns. Only in the East, the percentage of countryside women who are housewives is not much lower than in the towns.

Of the country women with a job, only 16 percent are engaged in nonfarm activities. In the towns, this percentage is 53 percent. If we take into account that in the towns only 30 percent of the women are employed, this means that no more than 15 percent of the town women have a nonfarm job. This result makes clear that in the rural areas of Turkey there are very little non-agricultural employment opportunities for women. Only in the more industrialized Western and Southern regions of Turkey, the situation seems to be better, with about 70 percent of the employed town women engaged in non-farm employment.

In all regions, the educational level of married men is considerably higher than that of their wives. The difference is lowest in the West, where 16 percent of the countryside women have less than primary education against 11 percent for the countryside males. In the East, however, the respective figures are 64 percent for the women and 28 percent for the males. This educational difference between husbands and wives may result in more dependency of women on their husbands.

A similar difference pattern between men and the women also exist in terms of occupations. Especially in the towns, husbands are occupied much more in non-farm

economic activities, whereas a large part of the employed women continues to be engaged in agriculture, where their work often is considered as unpaid family work. In the towns the proportion of men employed in nonfarm occupations is 90 percent for Turkey as a whole whereas the proportion of women is 53 percent (of the 30 percent of women which is gainfully employed). Comparable differences are found in all regions.

These figures indicate that in the early stages of social development, men enter non-farming economic activities much easier than the women, who are either marginalized (become housewives) or continue to exchange their labor as use value in the sector of agriculture. This might be partly related to the low educational level of women, or even to the non-ability of speaking Turkish for ethnic women. But, generally speaking, these figures are in line with the WAD and GAD argument that women are marginalized during the early stages of social development.

The figures on household income make clear that in all regions the proportion of households with an income below 50 million Turkish Liras is substantially higher in the countryside than in the towns. Surprisingly, the proportion of countryside households with a low income is in the North lower than in the countryside of any other region of Turkey and the towns of the North rank second in this respect after the towns in the Western region.

In the East of Turkey, still a substantial number of women are not able to speak the dominant Turkish language. In the countryside this proportion is almost 33 percent. Very few women in this region read newspapers, but this seems not in the first place a language problem, because in the rural areas of the other parts of Turkey there are also very few women who read a newspaper once a week. With regard to geographic mobility, almost half of the respondents in the countryside of all regions declared that they always had lived in their villages. Women in the towns are much more mobile than women in the countryside. The highest geographic mobility is observed among the town women of the North.

### *Gender Role Attitudes of Women*

The results for the questions on the gender role attitudes of the women are striking. In all of the regions about half of the countryside women agrees with the statements that



“important decisions should be made by men” and “men are wiser than women” (Table 2). In terms of the argument “women should not argue with men”, the percentage is even higher (63 percent). Only with regard to the statement that “it is better for a male child to have education” the proportion of women who agree is much lower (37 percent).

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Table 2 about here  
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Among town women, the proportions of women who agree with the statements are clearly lower than in the countryside. Still, about 30 to 50 percent of the women in the towns agree with the first three statements. These figures make clear that the women themselves play a central role in the reproduction of the patriarchal ideology to the next generations. The fact that substantially fewer women agree with the statement about the education of female children might be interpreted as a relative success of the Kemalist educational reforms.

*Traditionally in Marriage*

In Table 3, we observe that getting married below age 16 is mostly experienced by countryside women in the Eastern region. Similarly, among those women there is much more often a family relationship with the husband, bride money payment, or only a religious marriage than in the other regions. The last point, “only having a religious marriage ceremony” almost lost its importance in the countryside of the West and North (2 percent and 4 percent, respectively) and was reduced to about 10 percent in the countryside of the Center and South. This can be interpreted as a considerable improvement, because women who have no civil marriage have no legal inheritance rights. Unfortunately, the figures make clear that in the countryside of the East this unfavorable situation is still a daily truth for one third of all married women. For all indicators and regions, traditional relations within marriage are stronger in the countryside than in the towns.

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Table 3 about here  
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### *Family Planning*

In terms of some of the family planning indicators, we observe similar differences as we found for the other indicators between the regions East and West (Table 4). A striking difference is related with the number of the children. In the countryside of the West, only 12 percent of the women have five or more children, whereas in the countryside of the East this is the case with 41 percent of the women. In the towns of these regions these percentages are 5 and 29 respectively. We also observe that in the West more families are using a family planning method. In spite of these contrasts, the large majority of the respondents in both regions approves of family planning and finds teaching family planning at the high schools acceptable.

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Table 4 about here

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A final interesting finding is that in the countryside of the North only 17 percent of the women considers the use of family planning as being against religion, which is even a little less than in the West.

### **Multivariate Analysis**

The results presented so far show that there are important differences among regions and between countryside and towns for almost all of the variables studied. However, because many of these variables may be related to each other, the presented percentages do not show us which of the factors are more important and which are less important in explaining the regional differences in, for example, the adherence to traditional values among women. The fact that in the East more women agree with the traditional gender role statements may for example be related to their lower educational level, their more traditional family background, to poverty, or to the fact that they are more controlled by their family. It is, therefore, possible that when these characteristics are controlled for the differences in traditionality of gender role attitudes among regions and between towns and countryside disappear.

To gain more insight into this, we conducted a multivariate logistic regression analysis in which the simultaneous effects of all relevant factors were studied for two

indicators of traditional gender role attitudes: whether or not the women agree with the statements “Important decisions should be made by men” and “It is better for a male than for a female child to have education”.

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Table 5 about here  
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The results of these analyses are presented in Table 5. For both dependent variables, two models were estimated, Model I with only the region and urbanization variables and Model II with all the relevant variables. To keep things simple, we interpret the logistic regression coefficients in Table 5 only in terms of their sign, their size, and whether they are significant or not. For both statements, Model I shows that women living in towns agree significantly less than women living in the countryside. For the statement on "important decisions", women in the West agree significantly more than women in South, East and Central Turkey. For the statement on "female education" women in the West agree more than women in the East and North. Thus, as expected, women in the countryside and women in the East tend to accept the traditional gender role attitudes more often than women in the towns and women in the West.

When the other characteristics are included (Models II), the effect of urbanization becomes smaller but remains significantly negative. However, for region the change is a much more substantial. For "important decisions" only the difference between Central Turkey and the West remains significant. For "female education" the change is even stronger, with women in South and East Turkey agreeing significantly less with this statement than women the West. These results indicate that the regional differences in traditionality of the women found in the Models I were to a large extent caused by the differences in the distribution of other relevant characteristics of the women among the regions. Women with less education or household income and women who did not arrange their marriage themselves, at whose marriage bride money was paid, and who had only a religious marriage agree significantly more with the gender role statements than other women.

These results make clear that the reproduction of traditional gender roles goes together with women’s lower education, a traditional family background and poverty.

The fact that, after control for all other factors, women in the East are least traditional with regard to girl's education suggests that in regions where women are disadvantaged in many respects, there might be more awareness of the importance of education for the improvement of the situation of women than in other regions.

Interestingly, for the statement about “important decisions” , women where husbands were away from home agreed less than other women. This finding is in line with the idea that women whose husbands are often away (as in the North) have more say in their nuclear family than women whose husbands live in the same household.

A final important conclusion we can draw from Table 5 is that the answers of the women were probably little influenced by the presence of others during the interview. At least, the answers of women where other adults were present during the interview are not significantly different from the answers of others with similar characteristics.

## **Conclusions**

Using national representative data for the year 1998, our study has examined differences across five regions in Turkey in terms of the impact of modernization on the position of rural women. We found important differences between women living in the countryside and women living in towns. In terms of completing primary education, for example, our results make clear that women in towns have more opportunity to go to school than women in the countryside. The countryside women in the East of Turkey are the most disadvantaged group. Almost 64 percent of them has not completed primary education, while this is only the case with 15 percent of the countryside women in the West. There are also very striking differences between these two regions in terms of household income and number of children. In the West, families earn more and have fewer children than in the East.

Women living in towns are better off with regard to educational opportunities and household income, but at the same time they seem to be more dependent on their husbands than are countryside women, because fewer of them are gainfully employed. Of the countryside women more than half is gainfully employed whereas this is only the case for 30 percent of the town women. Of course, it should not be forgotten that women in the countryside are mostly engaged in (unpaid) farming activities. Nevertheless,

regarding participating in the labor force, a clear finding of this study is that women in the towns are marginalized compared to women living in the countryside; that is, the majority of them have dropped out of the labor force and became “housewives”. Generally speaking, these results confirm the WAD and GAD argument that women are marginalized during the early stages of the social development. In terms of the socio-economic differences, the gap between men and the women may temporarily widen to the disadvantage of women.

The situation of the women in the East of the country is much worse than in other regions with regard to almost all indicators of women’s status used. The situation of women in this region may be particularly unfavorable because a substantial part of them is not able to speak the official and dominant Turkish language and one-third of them has not had a civil marriage, which makes them dependent on their family members and puts them in a disadvantage position in terms of legal inheritance rights.

The North of Turkey, on the one hand shows similarities with other regions, on the other hand it is different . Although this region is on the priority list for development of the Turkish State Planning Organization, the proportion of the household with a low income in the countryside is lower than in any other part of Turkey and the towns of this region rank second in this respect. This may have to do with the fact that in the North much more than elsewhere the husbands are working in non-farm occupations. Many of the husbands in the North also work away from home. This may explain the high level of labor force participation of women in the countryside of this region and the fact that almost all of these women are working in agriculture: While the husbands are away, the women are running the farm and the market activities. Another explanation may be related to the crop diversification and the natural settings of those villages. Women in the North are usually out of the house for most of the year and carry out their forestry related economic activities mostly alone. Also cultural and religious differences may play a role. For example, our study indicates that in the North “only having a religious marriage ceremony” almost lost its importance and that few women consider “the use of family planning as being against religion”. Depending on a field research in the Northwest of Turkey, as Chris Hann suggests that maybe in the past “Islam did not play a major part in the daily lives of most of inhabitants in this region” (cited in Ildiko Beller-Hann, 1991:

260). Also, besides Turks other ethnic groups are living in this region (e.g. Lazis, Hemsins, Georgians, Circassians) and each of these groups has its own local language. However, according to the results of our research, unlike the Eastern Turkey (where besides Turks mostly Kurds and Arabic ethnic groups live), not speaking Turkish is not a major concern of the women in the North.

Our findings also indicate that women themselves play a central role in the reproduction of the patriarchal ideology to the next generations. About half of the countryside women and some 40 percent of the town women agrees with the statements that “important decisions should be made by men”, “men are wiser than women”, and “Women should not argue with men”. The fact that at the same time the majority of those women disagree with the statement that “it is better for a male child to have education” might be interpreted as a “success” of the Kemalist educational reforms. Regarding women’s rights, another success of these reforms is related with the prevalence of civil marriage. With the exception of the East, “only having a religious marriage ceremony” to a large extent lost its importance. This can be interpreted as a considerable improvement, because without civil marriage women have no legal inheritance rights. On the other hand, our figures make it clear that in the countryside of the East of Turkey, about one-third of the married women remain in a disadvantaged position.

Taken together, our results make clear that there are substantial differences among the regions of Turkey in many aspects of rural women’s “status” and that the country still has a long way to go in the area of rural women’s emancipation and empowerment.

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Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of married country women and town women in Turkey in 1998 (figures are percentages of women with the respective characteristic)

		South	East	Center	North	West	All	N
Education less than primary	Country	36.9	63.5	24.4	39.0	15.4	34.6	2016
	Town	29.8	51.1	22.9	24.0	13.6	25.4	885
Reads easily	Country	59.3	31.6	66.1	60.1	78.7	59.7	2013
	Town	69.2	48.2	69.5	72.8	85.0	71.5	882
Housewife	Country	49.2	73.2	43.5	30.3	34.8	47.0	2012
	Town	80.8	76.6	66.2	61.0	69.5	70.4	882
Employed in nonfarm occupations	Country	17.2	13.8	14.1	7.9	24.1	16.1	1066
	Town	68.0	56.3	33.8	43.9	70.1	53.4	262
Education husbands less than primary	Country	10.9	27.5	5.2	11.8	11.0	13.0	2005
	Town	8.4	16.9	8.9	5.8	3.5	7.9	882
Husband employed in farming	Country	43.8	44.4	46.6	24.7	42.3	41.8	2009
	Town	12.6	9.0	17.8	2.9	5.7	10.0	871
Households Income < 50 Million TL	Country	46.3	51.4	41.9	25.8	30.6	39.9	1991
	Town	29.2	33.6	31.4	16.3	6.9	21.9	873
Speaks no Turkish	Country	4.1	33.0	0.0	0.4	0.4	7.8	2014
	Town	3.8	16.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	882
Reads a newspaper at least once a week	Country	8.1	4.6	11.0	14.7	22.0	12.1	2011
	Town	27.5	11.7	14.6	29.8	42.5	26.8	883
Always lived in this place	Country	49.8	48.2	50.5	51.7	43.7	48.6	1837
	Town	32.2	33.3	23.9	19.4	21.4	25.2	825

Table 2. Gender role attitudes of married country women and town women in Turkey in 1998 (figures are percentages of women who agree with the statement)

		South	East	Center	North	West	All	N
Important decisions should be made by men	Country	53.6	57.9	58.0	49.8	46.9	53.8	1965
	Town	41.1	45.8	50.9	36.6	28.9	39.8	869
Men are wiser than women	Country	46.8	59.2	48.3	46.7	43.1	49.1	1914
	Town	29.5	37.1	51.6	26.0	22.6	33.7	852
Women should not argue with men	Country	65.5	61.1	68.1	69.4	51.8	62.7	1953
	Town	51.6	50.4	59.9	49.0	37.1	48.5	854
It is better for a male child to have education	Country	32.8	41.1	34.3	40.5	34.8	36.5	1983
	Town	17.8	26.1	25.6	19.6	14.6	20.3	868

Table 3. Traditionality in marriage of married country women and town women in Turkey in 1998 (figures are percentages of women with the respective characteristic)

		South	East	Center	North	West	All	N
Married below age 16	Country	20.2	32.9	19.8	17.3	16.3	21.6	2013
	Town	14.6	26.3	17.2	12.5	9.1	15.1	883
Family relationship with husband	Country	33.7	40.2	31.4	27.9	13.2	29.1	2015
	Town	22.1	36.5	27.0	18.3	11.2	21.6	884
Couple arranged marriage themselves	Country	23.2	29.6	26.8	27.6	34.9	28.8	2015
	Town	38.5	33.6	25.2	35.6	42.5	35.3	882
Brides money paid	Country	19.0	67.1	32.7	33.3	16.9	34.6	1998
	Town	18.5	45.9	26.6	15.5	9.6	21.6	872
Only religious marriage ceremony	Country	11.1	34.6	9.9	4.1	2.0	12.8	2016
	Town	4.6	21.9	2.6	1.9	2.8	5.9	884

Table 4. Attitudes towards family planning of married country women and town women in Turkey in 1998 (figures are percentages of women with the respective characteristic or who agree with the statement)

		South	East	Center	North	West	All	N
Respondent approves of family planning	Country	92.3	79.1	95.0	91.6	96.0	91.2	1876
	Town	94.1	83.2	97.2	95.9	96.8	94.5	832
Husband approves of family planning	Country	84.9	70.5	89.0	82.5	90.3	84.1	1726
	Town	86.6	73.9	90.5	89.8	92.7	88.1	773
Use of family planning is against religion	Country	23.6	46.9	20.3	17.4	17.9	25.7	1773
	Town	13.9	38.3	20.3	12.9	5.9	16.8	788
No family planning method used	Country	47.1	69.9	37.4	39.3	28.0	44.0	2015
	Town	41.2	57.7	36.3	32.0	30.4	37.9	883
Has five or more children	Country	25.6	41.1	18.2	29.2	12.1	24.3	2014
	Town	16.8	29.0	13.2	13.5	5.3	13.7	885
Unhappy if would become pregnant	Country	69.1	79.0	74.7	79.7	73.9	75.2	1598
	Town	72.7	73.8	85.6	76.3	68.1	75.1	695
Husbands wants more children than wife	Country	17.6	29.6	18.5	17.9	13.7	19.6	1837
	Town	21.7	36.3	14.3	18.2	15.1	19.5	806
Wife wants more children than husband	Country	16.4	13.7	12.9	13.1	13.0	13.6	1837
	Town	17.4	12.9	13.8	14.1	17.4	15.4	806
Finds family planning info in high schools acceptable	Country	89.4	70.7	89.5	88.1	90.0	85.7	1781
	Town	91.5	78.0	92.4	90.7	93.5	90.4	819

Table 5: Logistic regression coefficients of selected independent variables on agreement of Turkish women with two gender role statements

	Important decisions should be made by men		Better for male than for female child to have education	
	Model I	Model II	Model I	Model II
Intercept	-0.22**	0.71**	-0.73**	0.19
Age	-	0.00	-	0.00
Education				
<i>None</i>		Reference	-	Reference
<i>Incomplete primary</i>	-	-0.41*	-	-0.04
<i>Completed primary</i>	-	-0.66**	-	-0.72**
<i>More than primary</i>	-	-1.95**	-	-1.97**
Household income				
<50 million TL		Reference	-	Reference
50-100 million TL	-	-0.18	-	-0.38**
>50 million TL	-	-0.47**	-	-0.57**
Woman employed in nonfarm occupation	-	-0.11	-	-0.19
Others present during interview	-	0.17	-	-0.07
Husband away from home	-	-0.31*	-	0.16
Wife related to husband	-	0.15	-	0.08
Couple arranged marriage themselves	-	-0.23**	-	-0.30**
Brides money paid at marriage	-	0.20*	-	0.37**
Married below age 16	-	0.13	-	0.11
Only religious marriage	-	0.40**	-	0.33*
Living in town instead of countryside	-0.51**	-0.26**	-0.78**	-0.51**
Region				
<i>West</i>	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
<i>South</i>	0.36**	0.15	-0.01	-0.35*
<i>East</i>	0.54**	-0.10	0.39**	-0.44**
<i>Central</i>	0.61**	0.45**	0.16	-0.19
<i>North</i>	0.20	0.02	0.30*	0.04
N-Total	3000	2804	3028	2804
N-Agrees with statement	1404	1319	901	833
Model Chi-Square (DF)	87.2 (5)	354.0 (19)	90.7 (5)	325.6 (19)

\* p<0.05    \*\* p<0.01

Figure 1. Regional division of Turkey

