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## THE MEANING OF CITY LIVING FOR RURAL MIGRANT WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN MIGRATION: THE CASE OF TURKEY

TAHIRE ERMAN

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Bilkent University, Ankara 06533, Turkey

**Synopsis** — This article explores the meaning of city living for Turkish women and the role women play both in the migration process and in establishing their lives in the city. It brings out the voices of women and lets them speak about their own experiences. It challenges the stereotypical images of Islamic migrant women who are depicted as passive followers of their husbands to the city and as subordinate or passive in the city. It uncovers the importance of religious sects (i.e., Alevi and Sunnite) in determining the relative power of Muslim women. It demonstrates the initiative and hard work of migrant women, and hence evidences their struggles, which bring some positive changes to their lives in the city. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

Mainstream migration literature has been mainly male-oriented. While there are extensive studies of rural-to-urban migration and urbanization in Third World countries, migrant women have been largely ignored (Chant, 1992; Gilbert & Gugler, 1992). The literature does not acknowledge that "(migration) is often highly differentiated on the basis of gender" (Chant, 1992, p. 1). Women are assumed to be merely passive movers, following their husbands, fathers or sons to the city (Bunster & Chaney, 1985; Khoo, Bruce, Fawcett, & Smith, 1984). "They were supposed to have little to say in the migration decision, and little to do at the destination outside the household" (Bunster & Chaney, 1985, p. 6). Their experiences in the city are assumed to overlap with those of their husbands. Most of the sociological research on migrants has been carried out with "the heads of the household," which usually means husbands or fathers. On the other hand, as the result of the increase of single women in migration, as well as the growth of feminist consciousness in the world, there have been several studies, mainly since the 1980s, which investigate women and migration in developing countries (e.g., Chant, 1992; Fawcett, Khoo, & Smith,

1984; Youssef, Buvinic, & Kudat, 1979). It is beginning to be realized that women play a much more active role in migration than depicted in mainstream migration literature.

This increased research has mostly concentrated on Latin American women who are visible in the migration context because of their relative autonomy and the increase of their independent movement to cities (Dickenson, 1983). On the other hand, Muslim women in migration have not yet received the attention they deserve. The assumption that Muslim women are submissive to males under the tenets of Islam, and hence it is the husbands, fathers, or sons who make the migration decision has often prevented researchers from finding out the actual role Muslim women play in migration and the meaning of migration for them. Turkey, as a Muslim and a secular society which is undergoing rapid social change and where rural-to-urban migration has brought together Islamic traditionalism historically based on the rural areas and predominantly urban-based Western values and ways of living, is an interesting case through which to investigate the experiences of migrant women in the city.

## THE TURKISH CONTEXT

### *Turkish women in the village*

Turkey is primarily an agrarian society in which many women are involved. In fact, the majority of the women working outside the home work in the agricultural sector: 85% in 1985 (Ecevit, 1993). They are mostly unpaid family workers, and their labor does not receive social recognition: "(F)or peasant women farm work is compulsory through tradition, completely integrated within home and family life, and inevitable" (Mansur-Cosar, 1978, p. 29). The peasant woman has no control over her production: Marketing and financial transactions that require physical mobility are carried out by men.

Turkey is one of the countries in "the belt of classic patriarchy" (Kandiyoti, 1988). "The patriarchal belt is characterized by extremely restricted codes of behavior for women, rigid gender segregation, and a powerful ideology linking family honor to female virtue (Moghadam, 1993, p. 108) and "(p)atriarchal structures are stronger in rural areas" (p. 109). Under classic patriarchy, the young bride lives with her husband's family under the control of her in-laws and other senior members of the household. At home, she works under the order of her mother-in-law and the more senior females in the household. At the same time, she works in the fields and tends the domestic animals.

Turkey is also a Muslim society. The influence of Islam is stronger in the rural areas than in the cities. In the Muslim family, the mother-in-law has much control over the household (Mernissi, 1991).

The modernization of Turkey has been undertaken by the State since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. However, while Kemalist reforms helped improve the status of a selective group of women in cities ("the urban elite women") and granted them equality in employment, education, and legal and political systems, peasant women have not been successfully incorporated into these reforms: "Turkey provides an apposite example of the split between a highly patriarchal countryside and an urban context where gender and family relations are more egalitarian" (Moghadam, 1993, p. 109).

The disadvantaged position of women increases in Eastern regions of the country which have been least affected by Ataturk's family reforms: "In Turkey . . . poverty and tradition increase as one proceeds from west to east" (Mansur-Cosar, 1978, p. 125).

As the result of Turkey's incorporation into the world market in the 1950s, and hence the penetration of capitalism in rural areas, there have been changes in the village. "By modifying the economic base of traditional existence, rural change has greatly modified authority relations within the male domain, as the decline of respect to elders and the assumption of leadership roles by younger males suggests (Kandiyoti, 1977, p. 63). However, it has not challenged the disadvantageous position of women in Turkish peasant society.

In brief, we can say that women are under male control in rural society in Turkey, particularly in Eastern Turkey, where property and power are vested exclusively in men. They have very low status and power. They have traditionally been oppressed by the extended family structure. The fact that men are being principally responsible for a woman's honor in Islamic societies legitimizes the control and power which the husband or other males in the family exercise on the wife in rural Turkey where religion is a strong factor around which society is organized.

### *Gender and rural-to-urban migration*

The first migrants to cities were young men (Ozbay, 1985). Leaving their families behind in the village, they came to explore the city. Later the majority of migrants started moving to the city as families (Gokce, 1993; Ozbay, 1985). Today there is very limited independent female migration, although it is relatively increasing as cities become well-known locations. Some young women are sent to the city to live with their relatives or to take care of their brothers who are working or going to school in the city. During this time, parents hope to find an urban-based husband for their daughters. There are also those women who move to the city after they marry a migrant already established in the city.

*Turkish migrant women in the city*

The household type common among migrants in Turkish cities is the nuclear family (Alpar & Yener, 1991; Duben, 1982; Kandiyoti, 1982; Senyapili, 1981, 1982). The number of employed women in the city is low (Alpar & Yener, 1991; Ecevit, 1993; Gokce, 1993), and the majority of rural migrant women do not work outside the home (Alpar & Yener, 1991), although Turkish women, including those who are unemployed, generally approve of female employment (Papps, 1993). Migrant men, as a rule, do not want their wives to get a paid job (Alpar & Yener, 1991). They give, as their reasons, their young children to be taken care of, the work to be done at home, as well as the "evil" in the city (male strangers, liberal attitudes). The patriarchal ideology that considers woman's place as the home and the husband as the sole breadwinner helps husbands in this regard (Kandiyoti, 1982). In addition to the negative effects of the patriarchal ideology, the economic structure which provides limited employment opportunities to women (Ecevit, 1993) and the kind of jobs available to migrant women in the city due to their low educational levels (low status and low paid, usually without social security benefits) (Alpar & Yener, 1991; Kuyas, 1982; Senyapili, 1981, 1982) make paid work undesirable for them. Migrant women start working when economic conditions dictate it, usually as cleaning ladies in the homes of the better-off urbanites (Kandiyoti, 1982). Yet, they tend to stop working as the financial situation of their families improve (Kuyas, 1982).

Divorce rates are low in Turkey (Levine, 1982; Senyapili, 1982), and as a result, there are not many female-headed households. Family and kinship are significant in Turkish society in general and in the case of migrants in particular (Duben, 1982; Gokce, 1993).

**THE CASE STUDY***Research sites*

The *gecekondu*<sup>1</sup> site of the research, Cukurca, lies on the slopes of a hill in the south of Ankara, Turkey's capital. It faces the high-rise apartment blocks of an upper-class district, creating a marked contrast between the two. Cukurca, which was established in the 1960s, differs from older *gecekondu* settlements in Ankara

which were built on steep slopes next to the old city center and which are densely populated and decaying today (Drakakis-Smith, 1990). It also differs from recently established *gecekondu* settlements which lack electricity and water in the neighborhood and where services (transportation, education, health, etc.) are minimal. In Cukurca, all houses have electricity, and most have running water. There is no sewage system in the area. There are several stores, including grocery stores, a photo lab, a real estate office, an all-men coffee house, and a hairdresser; and there are some public institutions—an elementary school, two mosques, and a health clinic.

The houses in Cukurca are scattered, with paths connecting them. They are generally free-standing one-storey houses, with the exception of a few two- or three- storey ones that were built in the last decade and a few shanties, which were the first houses built. The spaces between houses enable women to gather easily, spending time with their neighbors. Most of the houses have gardens, usually small, a few large enough to grow fruit trees and vegetables to sell.

There is an asphalt traffic road in the settlement that connects the settlement to the rest of the city. Buses and *dolmus* (a taxi or minibus operating as a bus) operate on it.

The newly-developing apartment site<sup>2</sup> of the research, which is in transition from a *gecekondu* to an apartment area (Bagcilar) is 20 minutes, on foot, from Cukurca. It has a mix of apartment blocks and *gecekondus*. Construction of more apartment blocks is under way. Construction quality is rather poor when compared to the buildings in the more established parts of the city.

The middle-class apartment site of the research (Esat) is one of the established districts of the city with services, infrastructure, and commercial and public facilities all available.

*Informants*

The informants were rural-to-urban migrants who lived in *gecekondus* or apartments in the two research sites, namely, Cukurca and Bagcilar. The relatives of informants who lived in Esat, the middle-class apartment district next to Bagcilar were also incorporated into the study. Among the informants, there were both tenants and owners, better-off and poor mi-

grants, long-term migrants, newcomers and second-generation migrants, older people and teenagers, and Alevis<sup>3</sup> and Sunnis. The socio-economic status of the informants ranged from lower- to middle-class, the latter group residing in the apartment districts.

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested, the number and characteristics of informants were not determined in advance other than defining prospective informants as male and female rural-to-urban migrants in *gecekondu*s and apartments. The research ended up with 144 informants: 105 women and 39 men, 108 in *gecekondu*s, 31 in apartments in the lower-middle class district, and 5 in the middle-class district. All but 9 informants who lived in apartments were owners, and of those who lived in *gecekondu*s, 35 were tenants and 73 were owners.

The husbands were employed, the long-term migrants working usually in the government sector as low-rank civil servants and "office errand boys," and the recent migrants in the private service sector as valets, waiters, car repair assistants and construction workers. There were also several who were self-employed taxi drivers or who ran their own businesses (mostly grocery store owners).

Many of the women, on the other hand, did not have paid jobs (67 out of 91; 5 of them were students in high school). Those who worked outside the home worked as cleaning women in offices or in the homes of the middle- and upper-class families. Some also worked in their grocery stores close to or part of their houses, or in their homes, producing machine-knitted garments or sewing. There were a few young, second-generation migrant women who were employed as civil servants.

The majority of the informants were from Eastern, South-Eastern, and Central Anatolia, all underdeveloped regions of the country. Despite the fact that Turkish society is predominantly Sunni Muslims,<sup>4</sup> there was a large number of Alevis (Anatolian Shiites) in the research, that is, 67 Alevis and 77 Sunnis.

### *Research process*

This article is based on data collected as part of a larger project that investigated the experiences of rural-to-urban migrants. It employed ethnographic research techniques, namely, par-

ticipant observation and formal and informal interviews. I rented a *gecekondu* in Cukurca and resided there for more than five months. I also paid frequent visits to Bagcilar and Esat.

I made the first contact with a migrant woman (Zeynep, my key informant) through an acquaintance of mine whose child Zeynep had looked after. Zeynep had moved to an apartment in Bagcilar from her *gecekondu* in Cukurca, which she was renting out. When her tenant renting the ground floor moved out, I rented it. My key informant was popular among her relatives and neighbors. She introduced me as her tenant who was doing research on *gecekondu* housing. Being introduced to the community by a former resident who was both loved and respected greatly increased my chance of being accepted into the community. I was a young woman living by herself, and hence, my neighbors became concerned about me. They brought me food, lent me utensils, invited me to gatherings and dinner, or to watch TV. Since I was interested in their experiences and sympathetic to them, ready to listen, women in general felt free to come to me to talk about their problems, sharing their intimate emotions and concerns with me. During my stay in Cukurca, I spent a great deal of my time with my women neighbors, participating in their neighborly gatherings in their houses or joining them while they were sitting outside. I was invited to special occasions, such as weddings, circumcision, and engagement ceremonies, a birthday party, and to a national day's celebration at school.

Towards the end of the research, one of Zeynep's nieces (Suna) moved in with me when she had problems with her father and stepmother. Suna shared her "insider's" view of her family and other migrants with me. We spent many evenings discussing Suna's problems or my research project. During one of these discussions, Suna disclosed the fact that her family was Alevi. This answered the questions I had in mind regarding the more liberated behavior of some women. Following it, I became aware of more Alevis in the research. Because of my liberal approach, many felt comfortable revealing their Alevi identities.

I kept a journal during the research, taking daily notes of my feelings, thoughts, and observations, usually ending up with questions to investigate. This journal-keeping guided my decisions about whom to talk to next and what issues to pursue.

I also took photographs of participants and their homes. I treated the attitudes of informants towards having their photographs taken as piece of data. Throughout the research, my taking photographs became a major means to approach people and a main reason for their invitations.

I visited the research sites in the following years, and I was again warmly welcomed.

### **WHAT DOES THIS RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT TURKISH MIGRANT WOMEN?**

#### *The city or the village?: Preferences of Turkish migrant women*

This study reveals that Turkish migrant women have a strong preference for the city. Except for several elderly women who moved in with their married children living in the city when they got too old to live by themselves in the village, and one middle-aged woman whose family decided to migrate back to the village because of their poverty in the city, none of the migrant women wanted to live in the village on a permanent basis. Even some of the elderly women who preferred the village said they would have liked to live in the city if they had moved there when they were younger.

None of the second-generation migrants, both women and men, regarded living in the village as a possibility for themselves.

The hard work in the village made the city desirable for the women because they enjoyed some comfort there. To many migrant women in this study, village life meant "hard work," "a lot of work," "filthy work":

Village life is very tiring for a woman. She has to work both at home and in the fields. Then she gives birth to a baby and life gets even harder.

To them, village life also meant oppression, especially in the case of daughters-in-law who are expected to live with their husbands' families. Young women were much concerned about this issue. A young woman described a daughter-in-law's life in the village as follows:

In my village, young married women are expected to conform to strict rules. They cannot talk in the presence of their in-laws. If they have to, they whisper. They cannot ad-

dress their husbands by their names or talk to them in the presence of other people. They cannot play with their children or show their affection to them. Daughters-in-law go to bed later than everyone and wake up earlier than everyone.

They also complained about the social control outside the family. Another young woman who recently moved to the city said in a disapproving manner:

In the village, you can easily get a bad name if you fail to conform to its strict rules. You have to dress conservatively, covering your hair and wearing long sleeves and stockings. You have to show unconditional respect to the elderly and obey them. Otherwise, you are in trouble.

On the other hand, city life "is comfortable and clean," "there is not a lot of work to be done in the city," "you are free in the city." Better infrastructure and means of transportation, richer facilities and resources, as well as greater availability of consumer products in the city were among the reasons stated by migrant women for their city preferences:

In the village, you cannot find many things you need even if you have the money. You cannot even buy a bottle of milk, since villagers prefer to save milk to make cheese and butter to sell in the market. Here in the city, you can buy anything you want anytime, if you are financially well-off, that is. All the time new things appear in the market. You buy them or make similar ones yourself. So your life becomes richer in the city.

The availability of educational opportunities in the city also played a role in this preference. They wanted to live in the city to educate their children.

All these factors made the city highly desirable for peasant women. Now, they had an alternative that did not exist when rural-to-urban migration was not a common phenomenon. They could move to the city and establish a new life there. A man talked about the desire of women to move to the city as follows:

Women are the ones who want to move to the city the most. They have this strong de-

sire, and at that point, there is nothing men can do but to migrate. Women say, "Let's move to the city. Once we move there, I don't care what happens to us. I don't mind suffering."

This man was an Alevi. The fact that the Alevi sect confers higher status and power to women than other Islamic sects may explain the strong will of these women which will be more evident in the following section.

The possibility of getting a paid job in the city, the presence of relatives already established in the city, the hard existence and the difficulty of earning one's livelihood in the village, all justified in the eyes of their families the women's desire to move to the city.

Preferring to live in the city did not mean that some of these women did not miss the village. Closeness to nature and being in a familiar social environment were the two major points in favor of the village. But, since living close to nature brought with it working hard in the fields to make a living, now and then struggling against nature, and living in a familiar social environment brought with it social control and submission, the women who missed the village preferred to visit the village rather than to live there on a permanent basis.

*Turkish migrant women on the move: active agents or passive followers?*

In contrast to the common view of Muslim women as passive in the migration process, following their husbands to the city, this study demonstrates that Turkish peasant women can be quite active, both in the decisionmaking process and the actual move to the city. In fact, in several cases, it was women who motivated or even forced their husbands to move to the city:

My sisters lived in Ankara. When I received a letter from one of them, asking us to move to the city, I sent my husband to explore the situation. He stayed in Ankara for ten days, didn't like it, and returned to the village. Then, a second letter arrived from my sister. This time I wanted it very much to move to Ankara, but my husband was reluctant. It was not easy to persuade him, but finally we left for the city.

A few even moved to the city despite their husbands' will, risking their marriages:

Let me speak frankly. I got angry and left for the city when my husband was too timid to do so. I wanted to move to the city, thinking that my life would be better. But my husband was reluctant. So I took my oldest son with me and left the village. After a while, my husband came to take us back. I said, "No, it is out of the question. I am not going back." So he ended up staying with us.

It was again these women who were determined to stay in the city when their husbands wanted to return to the village in the face of hardship in the city:

In the beginning we suffered a great deal here. My husband couldn't find a job. He collected waste paper in the garbage; he shone shoes. He was very unhappy and started fighting with me. Everyday was full of fights. He wanted to move back to the village. But I was determined not to go back. I said, "Now that I am in the city, I am not going back to the village." So we stayed in Ankara.

The women mentioned above were Alevis. This again points to the relatively strong position of women in Alevi families and their less submissive approach to their husbands when compared to Sunnis.

*Turkish migrant women in the city: Initiators of action or submissive followers of orders?*

Turkish migrant women, both Alevis and Sunnis, can also be active in establishing their lives in the city. And this happens because practical reality dictates it. In this study, some migrant women started working, occasionally despite the husband's initial disapproval. Those who worked as domestic servants for middle-class families found jobs for their husbands through these families. Several women opened grocery stores in their neighborhoods, and a few had initiative enough to establish their own small-scale businesses. For example, a woman first rented a store to sell yarns. When she made substantial money by taking advantage of the inflationary tendencies in the society, she was

able to buy a knitting machine to produce garments at home. She worked hard to learn how to operate the machine, even hiring a woman for it.

Those who owned *gecekondu* worked in their construction, carrying water or bricks on their backs, building walls, and the like. In order to afford to build their homes, they sold their golden accessories given to them on their wedding as a means of insurance, they started working outside the home and walked for miles between home and work to save transportation costs. A woman of 58 who built a *gecekondu* in 1963 with her husband described the difficulties she shouldered as follows:

While building our *gecekondu*, I slept very little. When I came back from work, I drew water from the well in the moonlight. I carried bricks and sand bags all night. My shoulders got hurt. We (she and her husband) had to walk to the places we worked after a hard night's work. When we returned home, it was almost midnight. We would work in the construction, sleep briefly and then rush to work early in the morning, walking all the way. We didn't have money to take a bus (laughs).

In this study, as a rule, women were more willing and ready to take risks than their husbands.<sup>5</sup> In some families, and they were Alevis, it was the wife who was determined to build a *gecekondu*: She found the land and encouraged, and even forced, her husband to build a *gecekondu* on it when the husband was concerned about the outcome of such an illegal action and did not dare. There were also some women who encouraged their husbands to buy an apartment and move there from their *gecekondu* when the husbands were timid about the loan and/or unwilling to leave their familiar environment in the *gecekondu* settlement.

The desire and determination to improve their lives made some of these women become enterprising and very interested in the city. For example, my key informant, Zeynep, noticed every change in her neighborhood, such as a recently opened sewing class or a new construction. She went into buildings, pretending that she was a potential buyer, looking around and asking about payment arrangements. She used the information she obtained by exploring her environment to do something with her life. Once she came up with the idea of establishing

a small business in carpets when she found out about the high prices of carpets sold in an upper-class carpet store. Her other project was a small-scale daycare center for the working women in her neighborhood. She liked children, noticed the increasing demand for affordable daycare services by lower-middle income families and thought of it as a good idea to rent the ground floor of her building as a daycare facility.

*Is it worth moving to the city?: The outcome of city living for Turkish migrant women*

The nuclear family was the dominant household type among the informants. In several cases, there were elderly parents living with them. Except for only a few cases in which they were too old to travel, the elderly parents spent summers in their villages, coming back to the city in the winter to stay with their children, mostly with their sons' families.

This became a stressful situation for some young women who moved to the city to get rid of the oppression of their in-laws. Yet, the elderly in-laws in the city were not as dominating in the nuclear migrant family as they might be in the village, although they occasionally attempted to intervene. Migrant women usually ignored the demands of their in-laws and continued to act the ordinary way.

Furthermore, the norm that expected young migrant women to work on the land of their in-laws in the summer prevented some of them from leaving behind the burdensome rural activities and oppression of the village. Some women declared to their families that they would not definitely go to the village to work in the fields. And those who did not object were usually treated differently in the village as someone living in the city. A young woman who moved to the city in 1983 was happy about this special behavior of the villagers towards her:

My father-in-law does not want me to go to the barn. He is concerned that I may get fleas. He says, "You are a lady from Ankara now."

The different living conditions in the city challenged the peasant patricentrism kept intact in the village:

Men are macho in the village. Women have to do everything for them. Men sit down and wait for women to serve them when women have so many other things to do. After they move to the city, men are bound to change, since the life in the city is very different.

When the highly oppressive conditions and inferior status of peasant women are considered, even the urban families in which the husband enjoys status and power over his wife and is mostly sheltered from housework (Kandiyoti, 1977, 1982) could set a "liberating" example for the migrant couple:

In the city, when your husband sees other husbands helping their wives, he starts helping you. Here, there is not such a thing as, "Men should be men, women should be women; men should do this and women should do that." Your husband learns from urbanites. Now my husband lights the stove. When he sees me setting the table, he says, "Let me help you." In the village, even when you had 30 men at dinner, not one of them would help you. They would all wait for you to serve them. There, women prepare the meal and men eat it. When they are finished, women eat leftovers.

Furthermore, the wife's getting a paid job has the potential to bring some equality to the migrant couple's relations, particularly if that means long hours spent at the workplace. Two Alevi women talked about the subject as follows:

My husband irons his clothes. We clean the house together. I cannot do all these things by myself. I work at two different places.

What do you mean? He sure helps me with the housework. If I don't have a meal ready to serve, he helps me prepare it. Or if I say, "Let's have a breakfast type of dinner tonight," he doesn't object to it. When we lived in the village, he would get mad if I failed to serve a hot meal.

Despite the fact that some women, as we have seen above, talked about the participation of their husbands in housekeeping, women as a

rule, displayed sign of surprise when one of them mentioned her husband's contributions to housework.

Those women who did not have a paid job were also able to have some money of their own in the city:

In the village, women do not touch money. Here the husband is bound to give money to his wife so that she can buy bread and things like that. She buys bread and keeps the change. She saves that money and spends it on something she wants.

## CONCLUSION

The Turkish peasant women in this study have a strong preference for city living. This should be interpreted within the framework of the life options open to them both in the village and in the city. These women are still disadvantaged and vulnerable in the city. They are highly dependent on their husbands both economically and socially (divorces are not easily recognized by the migrant community); those who work outside the home are exploited in the labor market of the city. They usually work as domestic servants without fixed wage and job security. Many spend their time within the boundaries of their immediate housing environment. This disadvantaged position of migrant women in the city is often stressed in the literature. Migrant women are "more restricted, housebound, segregated and socially isolated when they move to town than they were in the village" (Stirling, 1974, p. 213); "(t)hey have become to be regarded as consumers of the men's production" (Engelbrektsson, 1988, p. 230).

On the other hand, when compared to the hard, unacknowledged labor of women for their husbands and the husbands' families in the village and the control extended families and the village community have over women, especially over daughters-in-law, city living is preferable for Turkish peasant women. Living in the city, usually in independent nuclear units, increases women's autonomy by making them responsible for organizing domestic life. They are given (out of necessity) greater responsibility in administering the urban household. This is true even when in-laws live with them, which is rare. Mothers-in-law have much less power and control over domestic affairs than they had in



the village where they had "a monopoly over knowledge and skills that were once associated with age" (Bauer, 1984, p. 277). Migrant men approve their wives' authority and control over domestic matters (Gokce, 1993). Traditional gender roles in the migrant family may continue on the ideological basis. But practical reality produces some changes in the family that may benefit women. For example, women start shopping for the family and participating in their children's school meetings, despite the fact that they are activities in the public realm (Gokce, 1993). As a result, male domination and control, which is kept intact in the village, begins to open up to bargaining in the more flexible atmosphere of the city (Bolak, 1993).

In addition, wives begin to assume the role of companion to their husbands in their nuclear families (Bolak, 1993). Living in the city brings the husband closer to his wife (Bolak, 1993; Gokce, 1993). Husbands become more dependent on their wives in the competitive environment of the city (Bolak, 1993). The wife and the husband depend more on each other and need each other's cooperation and support more than when they lived in the village; they spend more time together (Ilbars, 1990), and men ask for the opinion of their wives more in the city (Gokce, 1993; Ilbars, 1990).

Working outside the home brings changes that favor women (although quite limited) to the gender relations in the household. For example, the cases in which joint decisions are made and the husband participates in housework increase (Alpar & Yener, 1991; Bolak, 1993; Ecevit, 1991; Gokce, 1993; Ilbars, 1990; Kuyas, 1982). At this point, we have to note that no radical changes in gender roles on an ideological basis take place. Rather, husbands help their wives when conditions require it, and they do not want to publicize their help in order to protect their male image ("invisible helping men") (Gokce, 1993).

Even women who do not work outside the home, but are nonetheless organizers of domestic life in the city, gain some access to cash money which was denied in traditional peasant societies.

To the observer, these changes in the lives of migrant women may appear trivial or not all positive. Working both inside and outside the home, assuming both the role of a traditional wife and a companion to the husband may place a "double burden" on women. But nevertheless

they are perceived as significant improvements by the migrant women themselves. This contrasts with the literature on women and development which speaks of the loss of power and status of peasant women in the city. Kandiyoti (1977) explains this by the extremely powerless situation of Turkish peasant women:

The connection between female productivity and relative status does not apply to women who never controlled the products of their own labor (p. 63).

The strong desire of Turkish peasant women to move to the city is acknowledged by other research. In an extensive study on village women in Turkey, it was found that "almost all of the women wanted to move to the city and to live there" (Yildirak, 1993, p. 51). Karpat (1976) writes:

Women, though generally concurring with men's opinion about the reasons for leaving the village, had a much more concrete view of the living difficulties in a rural area where they did most of the work in the fields and homes . . . They were attracted to the city by the desire to escape the hardship of field work and to find better opportunities for their children (Karpat, 1976, p. 75).

The traditional oppression of women in the extended family structure and "a seed of liberation" for women in the nuclear urban household is also true for other Middle Eastern and North African countries (Bauer, 1984; Brydon & Chant, 1989).

The attractiveness of the city for Turkish peasant women creates a strong desire in them, now and then resulting in forcing their husbands to move to the city. The failure of the husbands to make the minimum wage for a decent life in the village, and the promise of a better life in the city weaken men's bargaining power in their families, and when wives insist that they move to the city, they have no choice but to agree. This challenges the myth of the submissive Muslim women who are mere followers of their husbands in the migration process. This is, as we have seen, more true in the case of Alevites than Sunnis. Islam provides a general framework in which appropriate gender roles are prescribed, and different sects may interpret it differently based on their historical development.

It is interesting to note that in 1950 the village women in Central Anatolia were sure that they could not live in town: "(T)hey said life in town, with unknown cooking techniques, no store of home-grown food, and no close kin and neighbors, would be impossible" (Stirling, 1974, p. 213). Stirling, when he revisited the villages in 1971, was surprised by the increasing demand of village women to move to the city: "In 1950, a wife shackled a man to the village; wives may soon be driving their husbands out of it" (Stirling, 1974, p. 222). He explained this change by the increasing town experiences, knowledge and values as the result of growing contacts with towns as more people from the village became established there, and the village women's growing awareness of the advantages of city living:

(M)any are only too keen to be shot of the grinding village chores and long for the amenities of a town house (p. 213) . . . . Women are already less submissive and actively demand more comfort, more consumer goods and more personal freedom (p. 222).

Turkish migrant women may also play an active role in establishing their lives in the new environment, now and then acting against their husbands' will. They may encourage and even force their husbands to stay when the husbands are overwhelmed by the difficulties they face in the city.

We can conclude that Muslim women (like other women) can be active agents, seeking a better position for themselves in their families and in society. Islamic ideology may demand female submission to men as it defines women as the inferior sex (Walther, 1993). However, when women find the opportunity to improve their situations, they do it, taking risks to this end. They may not openly challenge the patriarchal ideology which confers power to men in the family. Yet, they may occasionally act against their husbands, especially when they believe that it will provide better life chances for their families. And rural-to-urban migration seems to provide this opportunity to women by changing the material conditions in which they live.

## ENDNOTES

1. Gecekondu (ge-che-kon-du) is the name given to squatter houses in Turkey. Its literal translation means "landed

overnight." Renting a squatter house may be a foreign idea for a westerner. Yet, in many Third World cities, squatter housing has been appropriated into the system by the governments as a result of their populist policies and their inability to provide "legal housing" for the rapidly growing number of migrants in cities. Today in Turkey, many gecekondu owners have secured titles to their lots, although many lack building permits, which places them in a vulnerable relationship to the government.

2. Apartment districts refer to planned neighborhoods (with master plans) where individual ownership of each unit in buildings is the prevalent norm. As cities expand towards their peripheries, the gecekondu settlements are transformed into apartment districts after their master plans are completed.
3. Alevism (Anatolian Shiites) is a sect in Islam that prescribes more egalitarian relations than the mainstream Sunni population. Recent sociological research in Turkey in which the data have been analyzed in terms of different religious sects demonstrates that Sunni gecekondu residents are more conservative and support more traditional gender roles than Alevism (Gokce, 1993). Karpaz (1976) found out that Alevism were an egalitarian society who were open to new ideas while preserving their sense of village solidarity and community. In various studies done in Turkey (Aksit, 1985; Sewell, 1964), Alevism was found to be a primary identity group variable.
4. There is controversial data on the number of Alevism in Turkey. In a recent study conducted by an Alevi (Sener, Cemal, (1991). *Alevilik*. Istanbul: Ant), it is claimed that 18–20 millions of the 60 million Turkish population are Alevism.
5. This is also true in the case of Peru (Blondet, 1990).

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