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## MONEY-EARNING ACTIVITIES AND EMPOWERMENT EXPERIENCES OF RURAL MIGRANT WOMEN IN THE CITY: THE CASE OF TURKEY

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**Synopsis** — This article investigates empowerment in relation to money-earning activities in the context of rural-to-urban migrant women in poor families in Turkey. Acknowledging the exploitative character of employment accessible to migrant women, it asks whether working migrant women gain something in their families in return for their economic contributions. The article points to the traditional role of men as the heads of the family and family honor (*namus*) as the cultural basis which acts against the empowerment of migrant women in Turkish society. It attempts to understand empowerment as articulated by the women themselves based upon their lived experiences. While doing so, it examines women's positions in the family with regard to their role in the intra-family decision making, their degree of control over their earned money, and male violence in the family. It further discusses whether or not the experiences of migrant women can be considered as empowerment, and in this way it aims to contribute to the theoretical development of the concept "empowerment." © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

### INTRODUCTION

The term empowerment is often used to refer to women's empowerment, although there are also other contexts in which the term is used, such as empowerment of employees in organizations (Menon, 1999). Empowerment of different groups of women (e.g., older women, Gaylord, 1999; battered women, Busch & Valentine, 2000; homeless women, Doyle, 1999), as well as empowerment in relation to different issues (e.g., participatory research, Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000; participatory planning, Lennie, 1999; access to credit programs, Nanda, 1999; and condom use, Gollub, 2000) has been the subject of many studies. Yet, these studies in general have pragmatic concerns and do not aim at contributing to the theoretical development of the concept. Since the mid 1980s, the term has been particularly attractive to Third World feminist scholars and practitioners (e.g., Afshar, 1998; Sen & Grown, 1987), who are concerned with integrating poor women in development projects in such a way that this would bring them greater self-reliance, and enable them to challenge their highly disadvantaged

positions in society and family, gaining control over their lives. The popularity of the concept and the tendency to use it at face value has led to criticisms as to what the concept refers to, and has made it necessary to clarify its meaning. One such attempt has come from Rowlands (1998) within the "Gender and Development" approach. Rowlands, after warning against the possible danger of defining empowerment in the context of "the 'dominant culture' of Western capitalism" (p.11), which, by emphasizing individualism, consumerism and personal achievement as cultural and economic goals, may help legitimize particular development policies that undermine the local context, has developed "a feminist approach to power which understands empowerment as a process which involves changes in gender relations in a plurality of domains—interpersonal, structural, psychological and discursive" (Molyneux, 1999, p. 868).

This definition requires that if we want to understand the empowerment of women in a particular society, we should look at both the structural conditions under which women live their lives and the

ideological/cultural constructions of women in society, as well as how women perceive themselves in their relations with other people, particularly with men in their families (husbands, fathers, fathers-in-law). It is also important to understand what empowerment means to individual women in the context of their lived experiences, and to contextualize women in the social and cultural realities of society in the attempt to investigate women's empowerment experiences and strategies. Thus, in order not to consider empowerment in western terms, women's own views should be considered.

Furthermore, agreeing Scheyvens (1998, p. 237) "subtle strategies," which "refer to any strategies that attempt to achieve profound, positive changes in women's lives without stirring up wide-scale dissent" (p. 237), may work better than "confrontational ones" in some contexts. Particularly in societies in which women derive their social identities primarily from family, they may experience empowerment in the process of "build(ing) up women's sense of self-esteem and dignity by proving to them the importance of their roles to their families and communities" (Scheyvens, 1998, p. 248). This should not, however, be interpreted as "empowerment through patriarchy" (Leck, 2000). Patriarchal empowerment is about exalting women's status as mothers and wives, and hence *bringing* women power. This type of "empowerment" is not the empowerment intended by the "Gender and Development" academics and practitioners who initially used the term (e.g., Moser, 1989), since it ignores gender asymmetry and fails to recognize the fact that women cannot become empowered when they are under the control and domination of men. In this article, empowerment means women starting to realize their own worth and contributions in their families, which has the potential to make women demand power and take action towards changing the structured gender inequality in society.

Economic participation has been regarded as a key factor in the process of empowerment of women. It has been argued that women's wage work will enhance their bargaining power in the family, and will "provide some financial independence from men, promote independence and self-esteem, give women more decision making power in the home, promote more sharing of household chores, and prepare the way for "class consciousness" and collective organizing among women" (Gordon, 1996, p. 72). However, empirical research in the Third World countries (e.g., Afshar, 1998; Das & Gupta, 1995; Gordon, 1996) has demonstrated that economic participation does not inevitably bring about women's

empowerment. The role of culture as a mediating factor becomes significant here. Patriarchal culture, by defining women's work as an extension of women's traditional responsibilities, may undervalue women's economic contributions and achievements (Erman, 2001; White, 1994), and women, through years of socialization into the patriarchal ideology, may not question gender inequality: "...especially in those societies where women's subordination is so deeply rooted in socio-cultural norms that men's control over women is taken for granted even by women themselves" (Osmani, 1998, p.68). This could be called "internalized oppression" as used by Rowlands (1998, p. 12). A research conducted with poor women in Bangladesh (Osmani, 1998, p. 72) shows the "power of culture and socialization." In this research, although women, through their access to bank credits, improved their "breakdown positions" and their perceived contributions to the family, they did not change their perceived self-interests, that is, they were as willing as before to sacrifice their own interests. For example, they felt that unequal access to food within the family between men and women was fair. Osmani (1998, p. 80) concluded her article, saying that "centuries of cultural conditioning cannot be undone by less than a decade's involvement in income-earning activities." Thus, we can additionally talk about psychological obstacles which need to be overcome (Gordon, 1996). It is not only the participation in the labor market but also how this participation is culturally constructed and how it is individually perceived by the women that matter in women's empowerment. Unless women perceive their work as a source of empowerment, their economic contributions would not make enough of a difference in challenging gender inequality. In brief, we can say that "entrenched patriarchal barriers are very difficult to overcome" (Gordon, 1996, p.157).

In this framework, it is interesting to consider the Turkish case. Turkish society is a patriarchal Muslim society (Kandiyoti, 1988) in which the family preserves its significance (Duben, 1982) on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is a rapidly transforming society through rural-to-urban migration and urbanization as a result of which women's traditional roles are open to challenges in the urban context (Erman, 1997). Thus, it would be informative to investigate the interplay between migrant women's economic participation and the traditional patriarchal culture which is built upon the theme of the husband's dominance and the wife's submission to see whether women's earnings challenge men's domination in the family and help their empowerment.

In Turkish cities, as is also true in other Third World societies (Gilbert, 1994), migrant women's labor force participation differs from the conventional use of the term employment, which has its roots in Western experience. These women's economic activities differ from conventional employment in full-time jobs with social security benefits; they are mainly concentrated in the informal sector and cover such diverse activities as doing piecework at home for subcontracting firms, knitting and doing needlework for sale, and cleaning offices and people's homes. Thus, when investigating migrant women's paid work, and stating more precisely, their "money-earning activities," jobs carried out inside and outside the home should be included.

The article is based upon field research<sup>1</sup> conducted in the squatter settlements<sup>2</sup> of four big cities in Turkey, namely, Ankara, the capital of Turkey, Istanbul and Izmir, the two major metropolitan cities in Western Anatolia, all of which have been receiving a large population of rural migrants since the 1950s, and Mersin, a city with a Free Trade Zone and a large agricultural hinterland, which has been increasingly receiving migration from Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia since the 1990s. During the research, in-depth interviews were carried out with 100 women, and their life stories were completed. The majority of the women in the research were married (84) with children (93). There were several women (11) whose husbands were deceased. Only two women were divorced. Thus, the majority of respondents were wives and/or mothers. The majority had very low levels of education: 56 women were primary school graduates or literate without formal schooling, and 30 were illiterate. The rest were middle and high school graduates who were born in the city. Thirty-two of the respondents were housewives<sup>3</sup> (24 of them had worked previously but were not employed at present), 31 were engaged in cleaning jobs, 17 in home working/piecework, and the rest worked as cooks (2), low-level civil servants (3), agricultural workers (2), or were employed temporarily in storage houses or factories, sorting and selecting vegetables or tobacco (9). Two were self-employed, and two worked in clothing workshops. Ninety-three of the women lived in nuclear families, and in the cases when the husband was deceased, the widow lived with her children. In the remaining seven families, either the husband's mother and/or father lived with the family. One-fifth of the respondents had Kurdish as their mother tongue,<sup>4</sup> 39 were Alevis<sup>5</sup> and 61 were Sunnis.

The interviews covered such issues as when and under what conditions the rural migrant women

started working outside (or inside) the home or what kept them from seeking employment, what types of jobs they had, their economic contribution to their families, and whether this contribution affected their positions in their families. Furthermore, the women were asked how they regarded themselves in their families and who made decisions in the family. Through these questions, the article aims to investigate the possible meaning(s) of empowerment of migrant women in Turkey in general, and the empowerment of migrant women in relation to money-earning activities in particular. Acknowledging the casual and unsteady nature of migrant women's jobs, this article, rather than comparing "housewives" to "working women," seeks to understand migrant women's relationship to money and to the decision making process in the family. It further asks whether what women are experiencing is "really" empowerment. While answering this question, we paid particular attention not to take ourselves, that is educated, professional, urban women pursuing academic careers ("liberated women") as the model to compare the empowerment experiences of respondents. We tried to understand their perspective, creating the opportunity for them to talk for long hours about their experiences and to communicate their opinions and feelings during the interviews, and expressed them in their own words in the article.

### MIGRANT WOMEN AND MONEY-EARNING ACTIVITIES IN THE TURKISH CONTEXT

In Turkey, although the main reason for migration to cities is economic, namely, to seek employment and economic opportunities, the move from village to city is perceived by many village women as an opportunity to escape the hard working and living conditions in the village, and to be "housewives" in the city, living "comfortable" lives (Erman, 1997; İncirlioğlu, 1993). In the village, women work both at home and in the fields, which they call "hard work," "filthy work," and the like (Erman, 1997). Yet, their labor largely remains invisible and unpaid. Thus, the attraction of the city for village women in Turkey seems to be more the opportunity of getting rid of the burden of working than of entering the urban labor market to earn money. Our research findings support this general tendency of village women to view the city as free of burdensome work and as "the place of good life." For example, when we asked Mahmure, a 35-year-old woman living in Mersin, she said, "I thought we would live a better life, eat better, dress better, like in Europe."<sup>6</sup> Only a few women who

were in their 60s and migrated to the city many years ago said they had not had any idea about city life before migration; they had just followed their husbands. And only a couple of women mentioned their desire to “to touch money” as their reason for migration to city, which may imply that the women themselves were willing to work to gain money.

When the issue of migrant women’s employment in the city is approached from the perspective of their families, and particularly their husbands, it is seen that husbands are generally opposed to their wives’ working outside the home. The men expressed two interrelated concerns regarding women’s employment. First, men tend to perceive women’s employment as a threat to family honor (*namus*). As in other Mediterranean (Gadant, 1986) and Middle Eastern countries (Bowen & Early, 1993), women’s sexual conduct in Turkey is related to the family’s honor, and the norm is that it should be controlled by men as heads of the family. A woman’s sexual “misconduct” is perceived as the family losing honor. This is truer in traditional Turkey where women are regarded merely as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers than in modern urban Turkey where women may pursue professional careers. Secondly, men tend to perceive women’s employment as a threat to male authority in the family and to their traditional role as the “head of the family,” and as preventing women from fulfilling their “major responsibilities” for their families. For example, Şenay’s husband, a Turkish Sunni man in his 30s who moved to Ankara with his family from a neighboring province 10 years ago, and who worked in construction on a daily basis, said, “If my wife gets a job, we will start fighting. She will say, ‘I also work, so I won’t do all the housework myself.’ Yet, I want a hot meal every day, I want my clothes ironed properly.” This man displayed signs of stress during the interview and complained about the difficulty of finding daily jobs for him and the severe economic problems his family was facing. Interestingly, in his brief absence during the interview, his wife mentioned that he had recently taken her to do office cleaning in return for money, which she might continue doing to support her family. In brief, we can conclude that husbands want to keep their wives at home in the cosmopolitan social environment of the city, yet this is becoming harder in the face of intensifying economic hardship.<sup>7</sup>

Our study has confirmed that the kind of employment available to migrant women, namely low-paying (even minimum wage may be a privilege) and highly supervised jobs without social security and retirement benefits, many in the informal sector, discourages them from getting a paid job. In addition,

migrant women may be offended by work as cleaning women in the houses of urban families, which is the type of work most available to them, and this may in turn make them reluctant to work outside the home. The low educational level of many migrant women and their lack of work experience other than working in the fields place them at a disadvantage in the urban labor market.

However, despite their initial reluctance and their husbands’ objections, there is a tendency among migrant women to start working when the family’s economic conditions dictate it. Especially since the 1980s, migrant families have been experiencing growing poverty and economic hardship due to the neo-liberal economic policies adopted by successive governments, and this is making the women in migrant families join the work force because of insufficient household income (Ecevit, 1998). In our research, several women said they started working outside the home because they could not make ends meet; the husbands earned very limited money, or did not have jobs. The women further said, “My husband did not approve of it in the beginning. But now he has to, he has no other choice. We have three teenage children. We could not manage if only my husband worked” (a 39-year-old Turkish Sunni woman living in Izmir and working for a cleaning firm); “My husband does not want me to work, yet when his money is not enough, he cannot object” (a 47-year-old Kurdish Sunni woman working in the store houses in Mersin, selecting beans, lentil, and the like). A young woman (28) whose husband was unemployed expressed the difficulty of finding a job for the husband in the following words, “People used to say that finding a job was in the lion’s mouth. Today, it is in the lion’s stomach.” She is a primary school graduate who is committed to educating her two children (a son and a daughter). She does not want to get a job because she wants to spend all her time helping her children with their school work and sitting on school committees. But she is concerned that this will not be possible any more.

Furthermore, in the city, where consumerism dominates,<sup>8</sup> respondents expressed their desire to own consumer products, such as color TVs, videos and fully automatic washing machines, as well as furniture sets and kitchen appliances. Almost all the families in our research owned television sets, telephones and refrigerators. The majority also owned vacuum cleaners. These items were considered as basic domestic durable goods by the families. Respondents further displayed a strong interest in owning more durable goods in the future, and buying fully automatic washing machines was given the

highest priority, followed by dishwashers, computers, and cars. The social expectation that they should own recent consumer products, lest they be seen as failures in the city, increases their need for higher family income. In our research, in addition to husbands' unemployment and poverty given as reasons for migrant women's entering the labor market, women mentioned their increasing expenses and needs, such as buying domestic goods and furniture, paying for their children's education, building a squatter house, and marrying their children.<sup>9</sup> Under these conditions, the "male breadwinner" model in which only the husband is employed becomes more an ideal than reality. Here, it is interesting to note that we found out that the violation of the male breadwinner model was more easily tolerated by the husband's natal family than the wife's. Since it was their son who failed to fulfil his responsibilities as the "breadwinner" of the family, his natal family tended to support their daughter-in-law's paid employment, whereas the wife's natal family blamed the husband for their daughter working outside the home. In some cases, this made the woman keep her employment a secret from her natal family when she started working.

Our research further points to the tendency of men (truer in the case of Sunni men than Alevi men) to have their children (first sons, then daughters) work outside the home rather than their wives when the family needs the economic contributions of members other than the "breadwinner." The concern to protect the family honor may even make women, albeit rarely, send their children to work rather than going out to work themselves, especially if the husband has passed away. Widows may be more reluctant to work outside the home because of cultural values that define it inappropriate. This is the case of Şükran (29), a Shafi widow (Shafi—a conservative Sunni sect, Kurdish) living in Istanbul who has three sons, aged 7, 9 and 11. She took them out of school (despite the fact that this is against the law; eight years of primary schooling is obligatory in Turkey) and placed them as apprentices. Women may become more conservative after they lose their husbands, since they have now become the "head of the family." For example, Şefika, another Sunni widow (38) living in Ankara, despite the family's desperate need for money, does not send her daughters to work, nor is she employed. They try to live on the husband's very small pension. She is very keen to protect the family honor, and seems to have internalized the husband's role. In the social environment where a widow is seen as a potential sexual deviant, she has become preoccupied with her family's honor.

When children's gainful employment is not possible, or desirable, especially if the children are too young and/or in school, women start participating in the labor force. In this socio-cultural and economic picture, working migrant women are bound to pay some costs. The concerns of migrant families to protect the family honor and the status of men as the family heads when women enter the workforce act against women's empowerment. On the other hand, migrant women may experience some "unexpected" gains (these gains are "unexpected" in the sense that women do not start working in order to obtain them) which open the door to empowerment. The following sections elaborate on these issues.

### THE CULTURAL BASIS ACTING AGAINST MIGRANT WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

As seen in the previous section, migrant women's work outside the home is not culturally supported. And when women start working outside the home, they face a dilemma of women's "inevitable" participation in the labor market on the one hand, and on the other hand, becoming a potential threat to the "honor" of their families, as well as to the husband's status as family head. Coping with this dilemma is largely up to the women, and this involves much social pressure. Furthermore, the general belief that through paid work women become liberated and assertive acts against these women's empowerment, as they have to prove to their families that they are not becoming liberated. This section elaborates on how employed women and their families cope with this dilemma.

"Gossiping" about women is commonly used to control their behavior in squatter/migrant communities; gossip is usually carried out by other women who spend most of their time inside the neighborhood, socializing with each other (Erman, 1996). In our research, many women expressed their concerns about gossip, and the women working outside the home said they had to be conscious of their behavior more than ever in order not to create any suspicion regarding their chastity. Gossiping may intensify when the husband is passive and fails to qualify as the family head (e.g., if he is disabled), and the wife is very active in supporting the family. The case of Zöhre, a Turkish Alevi woman in her early 30s, is an example in which gossip takes the upper hand. This woman takes care of her family and her disabled husband. She has been hired by various cleaning firms to clean offices and has developed strategies to survive on her very limited money. She has

established good relations with the civil servants in the offices she cleans, and they occasionally collect money to help her; for example, they have assisted her to add two more rooms to her one room squatter house. She also has good relations with the employees in the municipality through whom she received free sand for the construction of her house. Her ability to form networks is crucial for the survival of her family, yet Zöhre complains that her social relations are misinterpreted by her relatives and neighbors as sexual misconduct. She experiences much gossiping in her neighborhood, and is highly criticized by her in-laws:

They always question where I go. They gossip about my trip to work. My brother-in-law tells everybody that I sit in the laps of men on the bus. This is not true. What can I do? The buses are very crowded. . . . My in-laws say I am not faithful to my husband because he is almost blind. This is unfair.

In addition to gossiping, migrant families use other tactics to cope with the perceived threat to family honor. For instance, women from the same neighborhood working in the same factory or workshop tend to travel in groups between work and home. They may be collected by an intermediate from their homes and taken to the workplace. Or women may work in small workshops located in or on the edges of the squatter neighborhood where they live, thus remaining inside the neighborhood despite their employment. Women may also work in workshops run by a relative or where a relative works, or they may work as unpaid family laborers in stores run by their husbands or fathers. In this way, family honor is protected by their families, and women are saved from potential gossip.

Husbands and relatives play an important role in placing women in jobs, and choosing work places that they perceive as safe for women. For example, husbands may find families who seek cleaning women through their social networks, and they may take their wives to these families to make sure that working for them is not a threat to the family honor.

In order not to pay this cultural cost, women may prefer to work inside the home, doing piecework or home working.<sup>10</sup> In this way, they not only try to avert the gossiping incurred by working outside the home, but they also carry out their traditional housewifely (unpaid) duties without creating conflicts with their paid duties. This also preserves their image as good wives and caring mothers. Employment inside the home is especially preferred by women with

young children and/or whose husbands are very strict on not allowing them to work outside the home. They are usually young women: husbands are more jealous and more concerned about the family honor when the wives are young, regardless of whether they are Alevi or Sunni, or Turkish or Kurdish.

All these tactics developed to cope with the threat to family honor and to the traditional image of a "good housewife" in the cases where women are employed act against migrant women's personal empowerment. When women work in family stores or in the workshops inside the neighborhood in the company of their relatives and neighbors, their jobs are usually given little social value. The unsteady and temporary nature of migrant women's employment, as well as the lack of social security and retirement benefits in most migrant women's jobs contribute to this low image of migrant women's employment. In our research, many women were found to move often in and out of work. They worked, for example, only in the summers selecting and sorting vegetables, and "became housewives" in the winters, or they were hired to work in clothing workshops only for the high season. "Housewives" started working as cleaning women when the family needed money (or when they had such an offer), and they stopped working when the need was over.

Furthermore, home-based work is not generally considered "work." When women knit or sew at home for money, they are seen as doing their "housewifely" duties, and in this patriarchal environment, the economic and social contributions of "housewifely" (unpaid) duties, remain unrecognized. All this helps reproduce traditional patriarchy in the urban context, and prevents migrant women's empowerment. The traditional conservative culture works hand in hand with the economic system to prevent migrant women from standing on their own feet as women and workers. Under this social construction of migrant women's employment as insignificant, temporary and of low value, some migrant women in our research tend to undervalue their contributions to their families. They continue to see their husbands as the "heads of the family," and accept their own subordinate positions in their families. For example, Hanife, a middle-aged woman who works as a cleaning woman in Izmir and whose husband works casually in constructions, says, "We are women. Even if the wife works and brings home money, it is the husband's money that is important and visible." She is a Sunni Turk who has been living in the city for 16 years. Aliye, a 36-year-old Kurdish Sunni woman living in Mersin who works in storage houses says, "Husband is the male one; everything he

brings home is important. It is his money that counts.” Some women bring home twice as much money as their husbands, for example by working as cleaning women, yet their economic contribution is not valued in the family. This demonstrates the personal cost migrant women working outside the home pay in their attempt to accommodate the gender-biased expectations of the patriarchal traditional culture.

Against this broad picture of migrant women’s paid work in the context of Turkish society, it is necessary to consider the social dynamics within migrant families in order to understand the effects, if any, of money-earning activities on women’s empowerment. The following section provides information on the social position of migrant women in the family since we would argue that it is a good indicator of the degree of empowerment women experience.

### **THE SOCIAL POSITION OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN THE FAMILY: DO MONEY-EARNING ACTIVITIES MATTER?**

In this section, the focus is on the relationship between the husband and the wife, and the fact that the majority of the families in the research turned out to be nuclear families justifies it. However, it is still important to mention briefly the dynamics in other family arrangements. In cases in which the husband’s elderly parent(s) live with the family, they intervene with the decisions, making the picture more complicated. Daughters-in-law, since as a rule it is the husband’s parents who live with the family, may be disadvantaged in this situation.<sup>11</sup> The in-law(s) may be in an authoritarian position if the couple is young and economically dependent on the in-law(s), reproducing the model of the very submissive women in the village. In addition, in families in which the husband is deceased, the older son usually takes over the husband’s authority (and responsibility), and may become “like our father,” as a young woman in such a family puts it.

When the social position of migrant women in their families is considered in terms of who makes decisions in the family, who controls the money, who does the housework, as well as in terms of domestic violence, it is seen that women’s bringing home money does not significantly alter their family positions. Domestic duties remain the women’s major responsibility. When women are overburdened by their paid and unpaid duties, daughters or elderly female relatives (mostly mothers and grandmothers) turn out to fill in for housekeeping. In rare cases,

husbands may start helping their wives. Yet, they tend to keep it a secret from their relatives and neighbors in order to protect their “male” image. Thus, the traditional perception of women as responsible for housekeeping does not change, which in turn perpetuates the perception of the husband as the “head of the family.”

The traditional practice in many migrant families is for wives to hand in their earnings to their husbands, and for husbands to give them daily allowances for housekeeping. But in practice things may be different when women earn money, especially when they work without a contract and are paid daily, for example, working as cleaning women. They may misinform their husbands about exactly how much they get each time they clean a house, keeping some of the money, which they almost always spend on their children and families. In this picture in which the husband is socially defined as the one who controls the family income, women have to use various strategies to be able to keep some of the money they earn, while men have the power to keep some money for their individual expenses (such as cigarettes) and to expect their wives to make ends meet by using the remaining money. This becomes a burden on women in the face of the limited economic resources of the family. On the other hand, if the husband is too conservative or jealous, he may do the daily shopping himself, not allowing his wife to leave the immediate neighborhood, and sometimes even the house. In this case, women are saved from the responsibility of shopping at the expense of trying to manage on the items provided by the husband, not to mention their isolation from the social world. Children, especially sons, may be of help to women in daily shopping. In this way, while women comply with the conservative norm of staying at home, they can buy what they want through their children, remaining of course within the limits of the money provided by their husbands. Thus, we can talk about a mix of behavioral and financial control of women by men, and strategies developed by women to act counter to them.

There are some families in which the husband hands in his wages to his wife, and this has nothing to do with whether she works or not. In these families, the wife is known for being economical and for her ability to manage the family budget and make ends meet. Makbule, a 47-year-old Turkish Alevi woman living in Mersin says, “My husband does not know how to deal with money. You could give him billions in the morning, and in the evening there would be nothing left. So, I control the money in our family.” She got married to her aunt’s son when she was 15,

and today she has five grown-up children. She married two of her daughters, and she is sending money to her two sons doing their military services. She is also spending money on the education of her youngest child, a girl in the last year of a vocational high school who is already the most educated member of the family. Makbule works as a cleaning woman, and her husband is employed by the Municipality as a street sweeper. Another woman, Rukiye, a 47-year-old Turkish Sunni woman living in Izmir who migrated to city 27 years ago says, "The money comes to my hands. Otherwise we cannot make ends meet." She cleans offices in a bank once a week, and works in a small factory in the summer season, pushing tobacco leaves onto a conveyor belt. Managing a very limited budget under the conditions of high inflation and increasing expenses is a very difficult task, yet controlling the money seems to give women some feelings of power and initiative in the family.

There is even a grown-up daughter, Nurcan, living in Izmir who is the "financial manager" of the family since she is very good at handling money matters. She is not working outside the home, and does embroidery at home to sell to her neighbors.

There are a few families in which the husband and the wife keep their own earnings. In their case, daily expenses are usually paid for with the wife's money, whereas durable goods are bought by the husband. This makes men's money more visible through the purchased items, and hence more valuable.

The major decisions in the family are usually taken by the husband, including decisions regarding children's education, changing/buying homes, buying furniture, and forming and maintaining relations with relatives and neighbors. Joint decisions usually take place when women have agreed with their husbands from the very beginning. Women's working outside the home and bringing home money affects the situation only in limited ways, giving some bargaining power to the women but not as much as to challenge the husbands' decisions openly. Despite this, when questions about who made the decisions in the family were asked, there was the tendency among one group of women, and they were younger women who spent more time in the city, to say first that the decisions were made jointly, with which they later conflicted when they described how decisions were actually made. This interestingly points to these women's "desired" relations between spouses rather than "real" ones. Some respondents displayed their discontent after stating that the husbands were the major decision makers in the family. For example, Hatice, a Turkish Sunni woman of 27 who moved to Istanbul 17 years ago says, "In fact, I should also

have a say in the family. Men should not put so much pressure on women." She used to work in clothing workshops but quit working when she got married since her husband objected to it. In the case of Selma, a young woman of 27, a Turkish Alevi living in Ankara who is a junior-high drop-out, there is a continuous struggle to make joint decisions. Selma loves the city; she is a housewife and says she would never clean other people's houses for money, and is receiving financial support from her parents which gives her some power to bargain with her husband.

In the case of children's education, there is usually not much disagreement between the spouses. Migrant families in general want to educate their children. However, children may be taken out of school because of poverty.<sup>12</sup> Despite this general consensus between the spouses regarding children's education, conflicts may emerge, for example, when the mother wants her son to continue his education despite the family's poverty and is willing to make sacrifices for it, yet the father disagrees (a Turkish Sunni family living in Izmir); or when the mother wants her daughter to stay at home to help her with the housework, yet the father wants her to pursue higher education (a Kurdish Sunni family living in Mersin). In such cases, it is the husband who makes the final decision, which may create resentment in women. What makes the difference between employed and unemployed women regarding the education of their children is that the former group of women have some initiative to save money and spend it on their children, giving them pocket money or buying them school equipment (sometimes concealing from the husband), whereas the latter group does not.

Purchasing or renting a house and moving out is often the husband's decision. When the husband has no time or desire to look for a new house, the wife takes the responsibility to find a place for her family, using her own initiative, although the husband has the final say. Decisions about where to live are very important for women since they spend more time and shoulder more responsibilities in the home and neighborhood compared to their husbands. However, in many cases, they do not show much initiative. The house may be too small; it may be too close to the husband's relatives who may try to exercise social control over the woman, or it may be too far away from the wife's natal family who may be willing to help with housekeeping and child rearing, especially her mother. Yet, the wife, in many cases, often has no choice but to accept the husband's decision. A young respondent who was married to a distant relative had to live in the same two-storey house with her in-laws and in the same neighborhood as other relatives. She



complained bitterly about this, yet she could not do anything about it, since the husband was a gambler and the family was economically dependent on the in-laws. In other cases, for example when the husband is economically dependent on his wife's family, or when the family relies for childcare help on the wife's family, the couple may live close to the wife's natal family. Especially when the wife works outside the home and there is nobody else to take care of the children except her mother, the woman's bargaining power increases: she may insist on living next to her natal family. And as expected, this has the potential to create conflicts, the husband viewing the wife working outside the home as the cause of problems.

It is usually the husband who decides with whom to socialize, and it is the woman's responsibility to build good social relations within the boundaries defined by the husband. This is a critical issue since new social relations in the city are seen by migrants as potential threats to family honor. Migrant families often tend to settle in neighborhoods where their fellow villagers and relatives live (usually in squatter settlements on the peripheries of cities) and this takes care of the problem of "strangers" (those who are not from their own village or region) in the neighborhood. In "mixed neighborhoods," when the wife starts forming her own social relations, the husband may feel threatened, and may even get aggressive, as in the case of Fatma. She is a young woman who moved to Izmir with her husband two years prior to the research. Socializing with "modern" women in her neighborhood despite the husband's objections has caused her much anxiety. She has recently been facing the threat of being taken back to the village to live with her in-laws.

Some husbands may not be interested in socializing with relatives and/or neighbors, or they may be too tired or busy to do so. This gives some autonomy to the wife in establishing social relations. Yet, the husband has the power to intervene. The cases of Ayse is a good example. Ayse, a Turkish Sunni woman, faced her husband's strong objections when her husband, a supporter of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP; an ultra-nationalist political party, historically known for its anti-Alevi position), found out that his wife was socializing with Alevites. In brief, maintaining good relations with neighbors and relatives remains the woman's responsibility, whereas the husband has the authority to decide on his wife's social network. On this issue, Ulviye, a 41-year-old Turkish Sunni housewife living in Istanbul says, "I cannot visit my neighbors before I get my husband's permission. Usually he doesn't object. But he gets angry if I go out without first asking him."

When women work outside the home, they usually do not have much time to socialize with their neighbors and relatives. Working outside the home may be a good reason for the wife not to see her in-laws very often, which may help to build the family's autonomy, yet cause the in-laws' resentment.

Purchasing durable goods and furniture<sup>13</sup> occupies an important place in the lives of many migrant women. Usually, women suggest what to buy, but the timing of the purchase, or whether it will be bought at all, is the husband's decision. Women have to persuade their husbands in order to materialize their preferences and needs. Much bargaining takes place around this issue. Women's earnings make a difference here, increasing their bargaining power. Furthermore, working women may secretly save money to spend on some domestic items, keeping them outside of the husband's attention or waiting for the "right time" to tell him.

Domestic violence is quite common in Turkey in general, and in rural migrant families in particular (Arkan, 1993). Issues related to family honor, such as "improper" dressing, "wrong" friends or neighbors, going out without permission, or coming home late, are all used to legitimize of violence against women (Rittersberger-Tilç & Kalaycıoğlu, 1999). The potential for violence increases when women work outside the home due to the perceived threats to family honor. For example, when one young respondent living in Istanbul started working in a clothing workshop, and upon her brother's finding out about the job, there was gossip that she was going out with men. Her brother beat her despite her attempts to persuade him that it was not true at all.

Money issues may also lead to domestic violence. When the husband fails to bring home enough money, his wife may complain, and may be suppressed by the husband's violent acts; or the husband himself may be frustrated by his failure to earn enough money for his family, and this frustration may lead him to behave aggressively towards his wife and children; or the husband may hold the wife responsible for not managing the family budget successfully, and "punish" her by beating. In any case, economic difficulties in the family create a fertile ground for male aggression against women and children. Migrant women often face violence by the male members of their families, and tend to accept it as part of their lives, sometimes resentfully. Especially if the husband fails to bring home money while the wife supports the family, she may easily become the target of the husband's violent acts. Yet, women often excuse their husbands' behavior. One respondent says, "When my husband lost his job

and could not get a new job, he often beat me. I guess, it was humiliating for him to live on my money." Even when there is extreme violence in the family and the wife is beaten frequently by the husband (for example, one woman lost her teeth and started to develop ear problems), migrant women usually do not stand up to their husbands. The fact that women's shelters are a very recent phenomenon in Turkey and that domestic violence is still seen, to a large extent, as a family matter, prevents women from taking active measures against violence by the male members of the family (*Foundation for Women's Solidarity, 1995*).

In many cases, men continue to dominate in migrant families despite women's economic contributions. Migrant women have limited participation in the decision making process in the family. They tend not to challenge the status of the husband as the family head who makes the decisions and controls the family income. Asymmetric family power relations favoring men, and the physical violence used against women, as well as state discourse, legislation and traditional culture which legitimize and support male authority in the family, tend to keep women in "their place." However, women are not totally submissive or passive in dealing with their husbands' traditionally granted authority. "Money touching their hands," as one young respondent who grew up in the city puts it, makes a difference. They may do or buy things without the husband's consent, keeping it a secret from him. Women tend to develop "subtle strategies" in their attempts to cope with the authority of the male members in the family. A few women may even challenge their husbands' authority, and some may feel important as a result of their work-related experiences or their experiences in managing the family. The following section elaborates on these subtle strategies, as articulated by the women themselves. The final section asks whether these strategies can be regarded as empowerment.

### **EMPOWERMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MIGRANT WOMEN**

Work-related experiences may be "empowering" for some migrant women. Some respondents felt important and competent as a result of their work experiences. Sedef, a married migrant woman with six children, has received recognition in her job as a cook. She is a Turkish Alevi living in Mersin. She began to work in 1978. Her family was poor and they were living in a rented house. She started working for a family as a cook and cleaning woman. At first,

Sedef's husband was suspicious about the family since he did not know them, and he went with his wife to the house "to see the family with his own eyes" before she started the job. Sedef worked for that family for five years, and through that family, she found other families for whom she worked as a cook and cleaning woman. Today, she is still cooking for other people two or three times a week. She has established herself as a good cook, and is well known in the upper social circles for her special cooking. She has future plans for her job, for example, she wants to have her own cooking program on television. She even received a job offer from the Hilton hotel, which she turned down because it involved night work. Sedef is aware of her talent and says that she cannot think of herself doing any other work. She defines herself as more resourceful and responsible than her husband, and underlines the fact that her husband did not go to school while she did. And her husband, who works in a job Sedef found for him (apartment caretaker), seems to accept her strong position. Yet, she continues to regard her husband as the family head, saying that he is the one who makes decisions in the family. Interestingly, she completes our conversation by saying proudly that if it was not for her, her family could have never achieved success both financially and in terms of the children's education.

Another example is Narin, a 42-year-old married woman with four children, a Turkish Sunni. Her work history started in 1977 in Izmir when she found a job with the help of her relatives in a small factory, cleaning and packaging poultry. She was paid a very low weekly salary, and she found the job extremely disagreeable. Yet, she worked there for four years, and when she met the owner of a restaurant she was having lunch at, she began to work in that restaurant, washing dishes. After three years, when she heard that women were getting more money as house cleaners, she left her job, and started cleaning houses three or four days a week. She also worked in a grape factory for three months, and quit it when her insurance was held back. She now plans to sell patchwork in the streets: she has heard from a friend that there is good money in this business, and she has done her own "market research" which confirmed it. She complains she had to change jobs often in order to get higher salaries although it would have been more comfortable to stay in one job. All these diverse jobs and the experiences have made Narin feel powerful, as did the fact that she has always earned more than her husband. The fact that she brought home more money than her husband made him very jealous, and he beat her. This lasted for nine years.

Today, the husband recognizes Narin's contribution to their family, acknowledging that they were able to build their house because of her. During the interview, when Narin mentioned that her husband used to beat her, he responded as follows, "It was because of my ignorance." Narin appears to have proved herself in her family. She thinks of herself as holding a higher position in the family than her husband. She says her husband does not know anything about saving money, shopping, and the like. However, while she holds the responsibility for the house, she does not challenge her husband's authority. She appreciates his contribution, saying that it would not have been possible to raise their children if the husband had not had a job.

Their family needs made these two middle-aged women work outside the home and their experience made them realize their strengths and responsibility, and feel powerful and resourceful. Although their jobs enabled them to convert their potential into concrete actions, they do not stand against their husbands' authority. They are using "subtle strategies" rather than direct resistance to improve their positions in their families. On the other hand, Filiz, a 39-year-old divorcee, was able to challenge her husband's authority. Filiz has been selling trousseau items, such as bed covers and table cloths, through a network of women's reception days.<sup>14</sup> She was divorced six years ago. When she was married, she saved some money during her participation in the women's reception days. While the women in the group spent the money they received at the meetings on consumer goods, Filiz saved it, and later used it as her capital when she started selling trousseau items from door to door. Yet, it became difficult for her to continue this job when her husband insisted that she should stay at home. He kept saying that she should quit her job, and his objections and criticisms prevented her from feeling good about herself. Finally, they broke up. Today she feels powerful because she has achieved something in life. She is making relatively good money and is planning to spend her savings on the education of her four children, whom she regards as her old-age security. In our view, Filiz is an entrepreneur who takes initiative to save and invest money.

In addition to this small group of women who feel important and competent because of their work-related experiences, there are other working women who feel important due to family-related reasons. To know that they are contributing (or have contributed) to their families' better lives, and more importantly, to their children's education, is another source of self-worth for migrant women. For many women, a

major reason for working outside the home is to be able to send their children to school and to provide them with better futures. A 35-year-old woman who works as a cleaning woman expresses her feelings on this issue as follows, "I am working for my children. . . . Every night I pray to *Allah* that I will not fall ill so that I can look after my children. Everything I do is for my children."

The money they earn is very important to these women who enjoy "personal feelings of empowerment," despite the tendency to underestimate migrant women's financial contributions. Hayriye, a 36-year-old Kurdish-speaking Sunni woman living in Mersin says, "My family could not survive without me." She is illiterate and earns money by looking after an elderly couple while her husband does various casual jobs, such as selling vegetables and fruits as a street pedlar and doing construction work. Nebiha, a 43-year-old Turkish Alevi woman, who supported her family for many years when her husband was in jail for political reasons, says, "I feel useless when I cannot contribute to my family. Even five millions (Turkish liras) make me feel good." The two women in their 50s are also aware of their contributions to their families, saying, "When I work and earn money, I pay the debts to the grocer, I buy clothes for my children, and I even paid for the bride wealth when my son got married last year" (a Turkish Alevi woman living in Ankara); and "A woman's economic contributions to her family is very important. If I do not work, then all we have now would not be possible. We married our sons with the money I earned. We were able to build our house (a squatter house) because I was working (yet, the title of the house is in the husband's name)" (a Turkish Alevi woman living in Mersin). And Saniye (25), a Turkish Sunni woman living in Istanbul, who earns money by cleaning the staircases of the apartment buildings in her neighborhood, says, "I feel secure about the coming days when I work. I can buy tea when we run out of tea. I can buy salt when we run out of salt. But if I do not have a job, then I cannot do all this. This makes me feel self-confident."

In some cases, not only their direct contribution to the family budget, but also their role in managing the budget and running the family make the women feel important. Ayse, a young Turkish Sunni woman (26) who works as a tailor, says, "I cut on some expenses, while I spend the money I earn on some other expenses. In this way, I manage our budget. . . . Everything between the wife and the husband should be shared fifty-fifty. I guess I now sound like a feminist" (she says the last sentence in a joking and apologetic manner).

Mahmure, an Alevi from Mersin, sees herself as the head of the family because, “My husband does not know anything about where to pay for the electricity bills; he does not know where to take the children when they are sick. I know all this. So, naturally I am the head of my family.” Her husband is a construction worker who spends much of his time out of town, visiting other cities in search of work. His long-term absence has given Mahmure a sense of power and initiative. Ayse (47), a Turkish Alevi from Mersin, says she controls her family. Although her husband used to be the one who made the decisions, today in his long-term absence when he goes out of town to work in the fields, Ayse becomes the dominant figure in the family: “If it wasn’t for me, everybody would do whatever they liked to. I control their behavior.”

Arzu, a Sunni from Izmir, also regards herself as the family head because, “All the responsibility rests on me.” Her husband, who used to work as a freelance welder, has been unemployed recently, spending his time at the neighborhood coffee house. The husband’s failure to carry out his traditional role as the breadwinner has given Arzu some authority in the family. Birgül, a Turkish Alevi woman living in Istanbul who is not employed, defines herself as the pillar of her family because, she says, she is the one who solves every problem her family faces. Her husband is out at work all day long, and he recently started working at nights also.

However, these women do not openly and directly challenge their husbands’ authority and try to get along with them. In their own mind, they are the real heads of their families, and they often share this feeling with other women. Yet, they, along with other women, continue to accept their husbands’ socially defined role as the heads of the family since their marriage contract is about accepting publicly the husband’s superiority. The “unexpected” gains of paid work are not usually enough to change or radically challenge this social contract.

### IS IT EMPOWERMENT?

In the case of rural migrants in Third World societies in general, and in Turkey in particular, the family, the neighborhood and the larger migrant community are crucial to their survival and social mobility in the city (Gilbert & Gugler, 1992; Gökçe, 1993; Karpat, 1976). Migrant women, whether they work or not, tend to define themselves merely in terms of their families, as mothers and wives. In the words of Ayse (41), a Turkish Sunni woman living in Istanbul and working at home, placing screws in electrical devices, “My

duty is to raise my children and to prepare a good future for them, and to support my husband.” They tend to value their children over their individual selves, according to societal norms. Menekse, a young mother of 30 with two children says, “I don’t live for myself. I live for my children” (a Turkish Alevi woman in Istanbul who earns money cleaning houses and whose husband is unemployed). Furthermore, the limited and unsteady, hence unreliable money that paid work brings to migrant women, and the lack of social security and retirement benefits, challenge their economic independence. As observed by Bolak (1997), women’s economic independence and their identity as “working women” may be true in the case of factory workers in the formal sector, which may bring women some assertiveness and lead to “open power struggle” within the family. However, in our research, the majority of working women was employed in the informal sector, which is increasingly the case for many migrant women in poor families.

Moreover, women’s public participation and their use of public spaces in the city do not necessarily lessen their families’ social control. As we have seen, migrant families use various ways to control women’s behavior when they are at work away from home. Thus, for the majority of migrant women, empowerment as autonomous individuals, expected as a result of women’s participation in the labor market, cannot be observed. The fact that the family acts as the major welfare agency, and the source of social identity and security in return for the right to control “women’s honor,” and hence their behavior, challenges the possibility of rural migrant women achieving empowerment through paid work. But what about the women who, despite the structural and cultural barriers that tend to prevent migrant women’s empowerment, talk about their feelings of self-worth and competence? Can we define their experiences as empowerment?

As seen in the previous sections, some of these women feel important when their talents are recognized by others, and when they are socially and/or financially rewarded for their work, which is very rare in the case of migrant women. In addition, what makes many migrant women feel important is their belief that they are contributing through their money-earning activities to the betterment of their families in general, and to their children’s education in particular. They feel important when they think of their economic contribution to the well being of their families. When the money they earn buys a house, new furniture or kitchen items for the family, when children are provided with furnishings upon their

marriage, or sons sent money while they are doing their military services, the women feel that they are “somebody.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, they feel “somebody” when they take on important roles in managing their families, regardless of whether they are engaged in paid work or not.

On the other hand, women continue to regard their husbands as the family heads, and they behave submissively to their husbands and treat them with deference. Radical challenges to men’s authority may end in divorce, which is rare and socially undesirable among rural migrants. One respondent who openly questioned her husband’s power and the gender division of labor in the family was Filiz, the “entrepreneur” woman who was divorced because of her husband’s objection to her commitment to her job. Thus, women’s subordinate positions under their husbands’ authority mean that the term “empowerment” must be used with reservations. Empowerment refers to “having the capacity to have an impact or produce an effect” (Radtke & Stam, 1994, p. 8). Empowerment as generative or productive power (“power-to”) “creates new possibilities and actions without domination” (Rowlands, 1998, p. 14). It is an enabling process (Afshar, 1998, p. 4) in which women’s perceptions change, and this makes them see the world and their positions in it from a different perspective. This does not hold much truth in the case of migrant women. They have very limited power in decision making. Although bringing home money tends to increase their bargaining power to some extent, they are still subordinates under their husbands’ control.

Despite these caveats, something is changing for these women under the influence of the city. They are proud of themselves for what they have been doing for their families. Some respondents who have been living in the city for many years imply in their responses their desire to make joint decisions in their families, although this is not (yet) the case, and one young woman (Selma) is struggling with her husband to this end. Thus, concluding this article by positing a lack of empowerment of migrant women in the case of Turkey would be unfair. Agreeing with [Osmani \(1998\)](#), when the family occupies such a central place in the lives of women and the husband is defined socially (and institutionally until very recently) as the head of the family, migrant women’s radically challenging this patriarchal structure, which has dominated Turkish society for years, upon their entrance into the labor market, would be quite unexpected. Taking into account the vulnerable position of migrant women in the labor market further supports this expectation.

Furthermore, in order for academics and practitioners not to force their views upon the realities of the people whose lives they investigate and influence, and in order not to fall into the trap of western ethnocentricism (emphasizing individualism against family and community) against which [Rowlands \(1998\)](#) cautions, it is important to look at the issue from the perspectives of the women themselves and to place the analysis within the respondents’ material conditions, such as poverty and traditional culture in the case of migrant women in Turkey. This article has attempted to do it by presenting the women’s own words. Thus, acknowledging women’s “subtle strategies” ([Scheyvens, 1998](#)), through which women derive power by attaching importance to their roles and contribution within their families, the article recognizes the significance of family and children in the lives of women in the Turkish context and stresses the positive role that contributing to the family plays in the women’s self-worth. The article further interprets migrant women’s recognition of their own potential and self-worth emerging from their experiences of working and bringing home money as the seeds of their empowerment. At this point, it is worth emphasizing that changes in women’s self-perceptions are the prerequisite for demanding and making structural and cultural changes in society, and women’s organized action is necessary to achieve this. Empowerment needs to go beyond the experiences of individual women and must be transformed into collective action.

When it comes to the question of whether belonging to different ethnic groups or religious sects makes a difference in women’s empowerment experiences in the Turkish case, although this article is not a comparative study of Alevi and Sunni women,<sup>16</sup> or Turkish- and Kurdish-speaking women,<sup>17</sup> it would be safe to state that no significant differences between these groups of women regarding their positioning vis-a-vis male authority and patriarchal ideology were found, although Alevi women had easier access to the public realm compared to Sunni women in religious families which paved the way to important roles in their families.<sup>18</sup> In both Alevi and Sunni families, and in both Turkish and Kurdish families,<sup>19</sup> migrant men resist strongly any threat to their authority in the family, and migrant women tend to challenge this authority only indirectly, within the patriarchal ideology.<sup>20</sup>

To conclude, this article, based on the words of migrant women in the Turkish context, attests to the need to broaden the definition of empowerment and intersect it with the experiences of women from diverse ethnicities, classes, ages and backgrounds.

## ENDNOTES

1. The field research was conducted as part of the project "Migrant Women's Participation in the Labor Force in Urban Turkey" financed by the World Bank.
2. In Turkey, the people living in squatter settlements constitute almost 50% of the total urban population in the largest five cities (Keleş, 1993).
3. Their defining themselves as housewives in the research does not rule out the fact that many of them knit or do needlework for a living.
4. The official and majority language is Turkish, while there is a significant number of Turkish citizens who have Kurdish as their mother tongue. The estimates of the size of the Kurds, the second largest ethnic group in Turkey, vary between 3 and 20 million (Mutlu, 1995). They are concentrated in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia and have been increasingly moving to large cities to escape poverty and terrorism in the region, many ending up residing in squatter settlements.
5. The Sunni and the Alevi are two major religious sects of Islam in Turkey, the former being the orthodox sect and the latter the more liberal heterodox sect. The Sunni population constitutes the largest religious group. Their religious practices include fasting at Ramadan, five-times praying a day, Friday prayer, and visiting mosques on religious days. Unlike the Sunni version of Islam, Alevi have different times in which they fast; they do not have the rule of praying five times a day, and they do not attend mosques. And more importantly for this article, their religious ceremonies are attended by both men and women.
6. This general desire of village women to move to the city to live comfortable lives does not mean that their dreams come true in the city. In the research, some women talked about their frustration. A woman expressed this as follows, "Istanbul looked beautiful when we were living in the village."
7. At this point, it is necessary to mention the differences between Alevi and Sunni migrant families regarding men's attitudes towards women's employment. Although in this research Sunni and Alevi migrants were not particularly compared to one another, other research demonstrated their differences with regard to gender relations. Alevi women were found to be more active in the public realm compared to Sunni women in religious migrant families, and gender mixing was usually practiced by Alevi (Erman, 1998, 2001; Gökçe, 1993). Alevi women also started their working life in the city earlier than Sunni women (Kalaycıoğlu & Rittersberger-Tılıç, 1998). The fact that Alevi have generally been the supporters of social democratic parties which emphasize secularism, democracy and equality, and that they have had a longer history in the city, hence are more urbanized and modernized today than their Sunni counterparts as a rule, as well as the tolerant attitudes in the Alevi sect towards women (for example, both women and men participate in religious activities in the Alevi sect, whereas in the Sunni sect men and women pray separately) explain the more relaxed attitudes of Alevi men towards their wives' participation in the public realm. Our experience in field research on rural migrant families suggests that although both in Alevi and Sunni families men would object to their women starting to work outside the home upon their migration to the city, Alevi men would come to accept the situation more easily than Sunni men since they are used to women's participation in the public realm and their mixing with men. Also, it should be recognized that some Alevi, through their interactions with the believers of the Sunni sect, may have changed, for example, doing daily prayers in the mosque, and even practicing gender segregation. The rising political Islam in the 1990s has contributed to it.
8. The tendency to own consumer products is shared by all social classes in Turkish society. In the case of migrants, consumption takes on special meaning, acting as a major means of integration into urban society (Şenyapılı, 1982).
9. In Turkish societies, there is a norm that parents would provide home furniture and appliances for their children upon their marriage.
10. See Çınar (1994) for a detailed study of home-working women in Istanbul.
11. For example, in one family, the woman persuaded her husband to buy a washing machine yet her mother-in-law got very angry afterwards, objecting to it.
12. Sons are often placed as apprentices in car repair shops, barber shops, and the like, in order to gain vocational skills. In the case of daughters, the general tendency in Alevi families is to educate them as much as possible, and in religious Sunni families to end their education after the obligatory formal schooling period is over.
13. It should be acknowledged that some respondents had purchased no new furniture for many years because of financial problems.
14. Women's reception days are monthly meetings held in the houses of the women in the group for which the guest women hand in a predetermined amount of money to the hostess. This enables women to save money while they meet their neighbors and/or friends. There are "golden" and "silver," and even "dollar" reception days, as well as "sugar" "cooking oil" and "detergent" reception days. While the former is common among the middle classes, the latter is practiced by the poor.
15. There is also a practical concern involved. The attempts of migrant women to build a better future for their children can be partly seen as investing for their old age. In Turkish society, children and parents are socially defined as dependent on one another throughout their life span. Parents are responsible for their children even after they get married, and in return expect their children's support (economic and emotional) until they pass away (Kalaycıoğlu & Rittersberger-Tılıç, 2000).
16. The vast differences among the Sunni population should be acknowledged, for example our research suggests that the experiences of a Sunni migrant woman from a village of Western Anatolia ("modern," "secular") would be very much different from a woman's experiences who migrated from a village in the Southeast ("traditional," "religious"). It should yet be remembered that most of the migrants come from the undeveloped East to the developed West (State Institute of Statistics, 1996).
17. Detailed comparisons may reveal some differences between the groups regarding various aspects of women's experiences.
18. A study demonstrated that young generation of Alevi women could challenge patriarchy when they had strong mothers as emancipatory role models (Erman, 2001).
19. Most of the Kurdish women in our research are long-term migrants in the city. In the case of Mersin, a city in

the South which has been receiving migration from Southeastern Anatolia where military confrontation between the Turkish armed forces and the Kurdish nationalist PKK (the Kurdistan Workers Party) has been going on since the mid-1980s, there are several women who migrated to the city five to nine years ago, and who live in neighborhoods where Kurdish-speaking people cluster. A stronger focus on Kurdish families which are displaced from their villages due to "terrorism" ("forced migration") is expected to reveal significant differences in terms of women's experiences in the city. Furthermore, Kurdish-speaking people are not a homogeneous group: there are Alevi Kurds, Shafi Kurds and Hanefi Kurds who differ from each other in important ways in terms of their political affiliations, religious orientations and cultural values. See, for example, Seufert (1997) for the interaction between religion and ethnicity in the case of Kurdish Alevi.

20. It would be informative to mention the case of Ummühan, a Kurdish woman whose family belonged to a tribe. Her family migrated from Adiyaman, a city in the Southeast, to Mersin. She was one of the few women in the research who did not speak Turkish, and her daughter, who acted as translator, said that in their tribe women were powerful and hence her mother had much say in the family. It seems that belonging to a tribe brings protection and power to women as long as they remain within the boundaries of tribal rules and do not challenge traditional gender roles.

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