

Exploring the Context of Women's Sexuality in Eastern Turkey

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Customary and religious laws and practices are often used as tools to control women's sexuality and to maintain the imbalance of power in sexual relations.. This paper describes customary and religious laws and beliefs and their impact on the situation of both rural and urban women in Eastern Turkey, based on a study among 599 women from the region, most of whom are or have been married. It shows that early marriage and polygyny are still prevalent, religious marriage still takes place earlier than civil marriage although the former is not legally binding, forced marriages still take place and arranged marriages are still the majority, though more younger women expected to be able to choose their partners. The study also finds that most women would feel unable to seek divorce if their husbands had an extra-marital relationship, but many women feared the custom of so-called honour killing if they are suspected of such an affair. Next to none of the women had ever sought legal recourse against domestic violence or marital rape, though these are commonly experienced. A human rights training programme for women, a public awareness campaign against honour killings of women accused of adultery, and a campaign to alter the Turkish Criminal Code have been set up to address some of these issues.

IN Turkey, which has been a secular state since 1923, the impact on women's sexuality of the imbalance of power in sexual relations is clearly visible in the Eastern region, where a high rate of female illiteracy, a desolate economic situation, a variety of customary and religious practices which are often in breach of the official laws, and specific forms of cultural violence and collective mechanisms aimed at controlling women's sexuality, produce a wide range of violations of women's human rights. This situation has worsened as a result of the ongoing armed conflict between the Turkish security forces and the separatist Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), which started in 1984. Turkey is unique in the Muslim world with respect to the extent of secular and progressive reforms of the family code affecting women's lives.¹ In 1926 the introduction of the Turkish Civil Code, based on the Swiss Civil Code, banned polygamy and granted women equal rights in matters of divorce, child custody and inheritance. However, even several decades after these reforms, customary and religious practices continue to be more influential in the daily lives of the majority of women living in Turkey than

the civil code; this is especially the case for women living in Eastern Turkey.

This article examines consent to marriage, marriage customs, polygyny and potential consequences of extra-marital relationships for women as important elements of the context of women's sexuality in Eastern Turkey. The analysis is based on data from interviews conducted with 599 women in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, within the framework of a broader research study on the impact of official, religious and customary laws on women's lives in Turkey.

Eastern Turkey can at best be characterised as a semi-feudal, traditional, agricultural economy. The region has a multi-ethnic character. Besides Kurds and Turks, which are the largest ethnic groups, the region also includes Zaza, Azerbaijanis, Arabs, Christians who speak Syriac language and others.² No precise figures on the Kurdish population in the region are available as the last population census, which collected data on population by mother-tongue, was conducted in 1965. In recent demographic research on the massive migration processes taking place within the region, Mutlu estimated the Kurdish

population in the Eastern region at 7.046 million in 1990, about 65 per cent of the total population of the region.³ Most of the Kurdish population living in the region are dominated by tribal structures, organised around 'big families', which have the characteristics of clans; the feeling of group solidarity involves a large number of members of the extended family and includes responsibilities towards the community.⁴ The *aşiret* (tribal system) is usually characterised by large land holdings held by a tribal leader, who is the landlord. The members of the *aşiret* usually do not own land, but work the landlord's holdings.

Women in Eastern and Western Turkey

Turkey is one of the countries most seriously affected by problems resulting from regional differences in socio-economic conditions, which are progressively worse as one moves from West to East. These have a negative impact on the overall standard of living, the effects of which are experienced more by women than men. The West of Turkey consumes most of the private and public sector resources and is also highly urbanised, while most of the population in the East lives in rural areas. Approximately three-fourths of the population in the West live in urban areas, compared with a rate of 46 per cent in the East. Although primary school education has been mandatory in Turkey since 1927, in 1990 half of the women in Eastern Turkey were illiterate compared to 21.6 per cent of men. The illiteracy rates are much lower in Western Turkey, 19.7 per cent and 7.4 per cent for women and men respectively.⁵ As a consequence of the armed conflict in the Eastern region, the number and quality of educational institutions is declining, reducing women's educational opportunities still further.

Women's participation in the labour force in Turkey has been steadily declining from about 70 per cent in the 1950s to about 30 per cent in 1996.⁶ Most of this decline is due to the high rate of rural-to-urban migration. When rural women actively working in agriculture migrate to urban areas, the fact that they are less educated than men virtually prevents them from finding paid employment in the official labour force. In rural areas, where labour-intensive technology is widespread, women together with their children work as unpaid family labour in agriculture. However, regional

differences are also striking in this instance. In the West of Turkey the proportion of women working for pay is 40 per cent, while in the East approximately 90 per cent of women still have the status of unpaid family labour.⁷

The Eastern region is characterised by the highest fertility rate in the country, 4.4 in 1992 as compared to 2.0 in the Western region and 2.7 in the country as a whole. Approximately 11 per cent of women living in the East have begun their childbearing between the ages of 15 and 19, compared to 8.3 per cent in the West. Regional differences in use of contraception are also substantial. The level of current use of contraception is only 42 per cent in the East, whereas it exceeds 70 per cent in the West and 60 per cent in other regions of Turkey.⁸ Some of the reasons behind the desire for a high number of children in the region are the desire for a powerful tribe, the expectation by family elders of a boy child and the belief that Allah will provide food for each person.⁹ Boy children are valued much more than girl children, which is reflected also in the fact that mothers, when asked about the total number of their children, often mention only the number of boys, as girls 'do not count'.

In recent decades, the increased dominance of market mechanisms and the modernisation efforts of the state, including the construction of large dams and irrigation projects in South-eastern Turkey, have had a profound impact on the region and a process of dissolution of traditional social and economic relations has begun. In this process, the political instruments used by the state are mainly local organisations of the central bureaucracy and cooperation with local tribes and political parties, all of which are male-dominated. Most of the projects for technical training and development are planned for men, leaving out women. As a result, modernisation projects are reinforcing the traditional distribution of labour and women's passive role in civil society.¹⁰ In addition, the ongoing armed conflict and the militaristic cooperation between the state and local landlords, sheiks and tribal leaders, has not only resulted in increased violence but also strengthened the male-dominated patriarchal structure of the society.

Study methodology and participants

The field research concentrated primarily on three subject areas: 'women in the family',

‘women as citizens’ and ‘women’s bodily rights’.

A weighted, multi-stage, stratified cluster sampling approach was used in the selection of the survey sample. The sample included 599 women, aged 14 through 75, living in 19 settlements in Southeastern and Eastern Turkey. (Table 1 gives background characteristics of respondents.) The sample was designed so that a variety of characteristics would be analysed for the region as a whole, urban and rural areas (each as a separate domain) and Eastern and Southeastern Anatolian regions (each as a separate region). The urban frame of the sample consisted of settlements with populations of more than 20,000 and the rural frame settlements with less than 20,000.

Three types of questionnaires were used: for women living in monogamous marriages, women living in polygynous marriages and women who were unmarried. All questionnaires included common questions on background characteristics, marriage customs, decision-making mechanisms in the family, inheritance, political, social and religious participation, mobility, migration experiences, violence against women and the Trait Anxiety Inventory (TAI). Women who were either currently or previously married were asked about their husbands’ background characteristics, perceived and experienced laws and customs of marriage, divorce and remarriage, as well as reproductive behaviour. All three questionnaires were tested and improved on the basis of a pilot study.

The questionnaires were filled out by the interviewers through face-to-face interviews. The interviewers were all from the region and had undergone lengthy, intensive training in all of the issues covered by the questionnaire, as well as interviewing and sampling techniques, to ensure they would use a sensitive approach towards the women participating in the research. Face-to-face interviews lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to almost three hours.

The fact that 19.1 per cent of the women could speak little or no Turkish at all meant they had little or no possibility of applying independently to legal institutions in case of violations of their rights within the family, as Turkish is the official language in all governmental institutions, including the judicial ones.

The majority of women were married and only a small percentage divorced, indicating the rarity

Table 1. Background characteristics of respondents (n = 599)

Age	%
14 – 19	21.1
20 – 29	28.6
30 – 39	18.6
40 – 49	12.6
50 – 59	9.6
60 +	5.1
Did not know her age	4.5
Education	
No education	45.8
Primary incomplete	4.3
Primary graduate	33.5
Secondary graduate/ vocational school	8.1
High school +	5.8
Other	2.6
Mother tongue	
Kurdish	55.3
Turkish	32.8
Zaza	5.6
Arabic	3.6
Azerbaijani Turkish	2.0
Other/Not known	0.7
Civil status	
Married	62.7
Widowed	7.0
Separated	3.9
Divorced	0.6
Single/unmarried	25.8
Residence	
Urban	42.3
Rural	57.7

of marital dissolution in the region. Seven per cent were widowed, more than the average in Turkey as a whole (4.3 per cent),¹¹ probably due

to the armed conflict in the region.¹² Only 11.2 per cent of the participants worked outside the home and earned an income. The majority were homemakers (48.9 per cent) or unpaid rural workers (32.8 per cent).

Marriage and sexuality

According to Article 88 of the Turkish Civil Code, the minimum age for a civil marriage, which is the only legally valid marriage ceremony in Turkey, is 17 for men and 15 for women. However, the age of majority for all other legal procedures except marriage is 18.¹³ Despite this law, 16.3 per cent of women living in the region are married under the age of 15 and in a religious ceremony, although it is against the law to hold a religious ceremony of marriage before a civil ceremony has taken place.¹⁴

Ninety-seven per cent of women who were over 24 years of age, and all of the women who were over 34 years of age were or had been married, indicating that marriage is almost compulsory for women living in the region. The tradition of bride price, the sum given by the man to the wife's family for the realisation of marriage, is very widespread in the region and plays an important role in the attitude of men, who assume that through this payment they have gained all rights over their wives' sexuality and fertility. In fact, this tradition can be considered as the sale of women for marriage by their families. Although 78.9 per cent of all married women have indicated that they are against this tradition, 61.2 per cent have indicated that their husbands had to pay bride price for them.

Table 2 shows the types of marriage and related indicators. The institutions of polygyny, early and forced/arranged marriages, kidnapping and the exchange of women for marriage are widespread in the region.

Polygyny

One out of ten marriages in the region is polygynous, although polygamy was banned in Turkey in 1926. As a result, in the case of polygynous marriages, only one wife can have a civil marriage whereas the others can only have religious marriages. A religious marriage ceremony confers no legally binding rights under the Civil Code, such as the rights related to divorce, maintenance or inheritance from the husband. More than half of the women (58.2 per cent) in a

Table 2. Type of marriage and marriage-related indicators

Monogamous vs. polygynous marriage		%	
Monogamous		89.4	
Polygynous		10.6	
Civil vs. religious marriage			
Only civil marriage		5.8	
Only religious marriage		19.6	
Both civil and religious marriage		74.4	
None		0.2	
Mean and median age at first marriage		Age	
Mean age at first civil marriage		20.4	
Mean age at first religious marriage		17.9	
Median age at first civil marriage		19.0	
Median age at first religious marriage		17.0	
Realisation of marriage	Monogamous marriages (%)	Polygynous marriages (%)	Total (%)
Arranged by the family	60.8	66.2	61.4
Arranged by the couple	25.6	16.6	24.7
Ran away with her husband	5.3	2.3	5.0
Berdel (extended exchange of wives)	4.5	6.5	4.7
Abduction	1.7	4.5	2.0
Betrothal while an infant	1.0	-	0.9
Other	1.0	4.0	1.3
Consent to marriage when not arranged by the couple			%
Her opinion was not asked			45.7
Married without her consent			50.8
Did not meet husband before marriage			51.6

polygynous marriage lived in the same house as their husband's other wives and a majority (65.3 per cent) said they had serious problems with the other wives. Despite all the disadvantages of a polygynous marriage, almost half of the women in such a marriage stated that either the marriage was arranged by themselves, or that they entered

into this arrangement of their own will, which indicates a widespread acceptance of polygyny by women. The Islamic injunction that a man may marry up to four wives if he so wishes, and the cultural atmosphere which regards polygyny as a man's natural right, play an important role in the acceptance of this practice by women.

Civil and religious marriages and age at marriage

Almost one fifth of the respondents (19.6 per cent) had had only a religious marriage and no civil marriage. This percentage is much higher than the average in Turkey (8.3 per cent).¹¹ According to the Civil Law, only civil marriages are legally valid in Turkey, religious marriages provide women with no legal rights and a religious ceremony can only be held after the civil ceremony. Otherwise, both the couple and the religious official conducting the marriage are deemed to have committed an offence, which is punishable under the terms of the Criminal Code.¹⁵ Despite these regulations, as *Table 2* shows, both the mean and median age at the time of the religious marriage ceremony was lower than the age at the time of the civil marriage ceremony, ie. the religious ceremony is often held before the civil ceremony. Early marriages are widespread in the region and holding a religious ceremony before the girl reaches the legal minimum marriage age of 15 is often a strategy applied by the families to bypass the civil law.

Forced and arranged marriages

Although under the Turkish Civil Code the consent of both the woman and the man is a precondition for marriage, women often have no influence over the choice of their prospective partner and frequently marry against their will. In fact, even in cases where women are consulted about the choice of husband, a high degree of social control over women's sexuality is



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maintained through a taboo on pre-marital sex, certain forms of religious and cultural practices related to marriage and severe violence, all of which limit the space for women to exercise their right to consent fully.

A majority of the marriages (61.2 per cent) were arranged by the families; only every fourth marriage was arranged by the couple themselves. However, even when the marriage is arranged by the couple, the agreement of their families is very often a precondition for the marriage. One in 20 marriages was a *berdel* case, a tradition where a woman is offered as compensation to the family of her father's or brother's wife. These marriages are based on the exchange of brides who have 'equal value', which means that if one marriage fails, the other has to fail too. Therefore, in this kind of marriage the women are more or less hostages and the families are not likely to allow the women to run away or divorce.¹⁶ One woman was offered as a wife to a family as compensation for an offence committed against them by her male relatives, and another was forced to marry the younger brother of her deceased husband. The tradition of betrothing girls while they are still infants seems to be disappearing, although it continues to be practiced (0.9 per cent).

About five per cent of the women stated that they had asked their husbands to kidnap them or that they eloped with their husbands of their own free will. This is a strategy applied by women

Table 3. Expectations about marriage of unmarried women (%)

Realisation of marriage	Education			Total
	None/primary incomplete	Primary complete	Secondary +	
Most probably will be arranged by herself	39.9	52.1	88.7	58.0
Most probably will be arranged by her family	57.4	46.6	9.3	40.2
Other	2.6	1.4	2.0	1.8

when their families do not allow them to marry the partner of their choice, or when he is not able to pay the bride money requested by her family. Although this might seem to be an effective strategy that allows women to select their own partners, there may be high costs involved for the women. Yalçin-Heckmann, in her research about women's strategies in tribal cultures of Eastern Turkey, concludes that women who have

ceremony has taken place. Nonetheless, the percentage of unmarried women who thought that they could arrange their marriages themselves was much higher than the percentage of married women who had done so, indicating a perception of increasing autonomy over the choice of partner. This view is also supported by the mothers. When asked about who would decide on who their daughters' prospective husband would be, 52.5 per cent answered that their daughters would make the decision themselves. However, those who stated that their sons would themselves choose their partners independently was much higher at 75.5 per cent.

Table 4. Consent to marriage when arranged by the family (%)

Most probably her opinion will be not be asked	28.7
Most probably will not meet husband before marriage	72.4

Of the women who thought that their marriages would be arranged by their families, 28.7 per cent believed that they would not be consulted about the marriage and 72.4 per cent that they would not be able to meet their husbands before marriage.

been 'kidnapped by their husbands by their own will' are almost always considered to have eloped by their husband's families, which often leads to loss of prestige and status on her side and even to violence against her.¹⁷

Extra-marital relationships

More than half of the women (50.8 per cent) were married without their consent and 45.7 per cent were not even consulted about their partner and the marriage. Those who had not met their husbands before the marriage constituted 51.6 per cent of the participants.

At the present time, there are no official laws in Turkey restricting the right of a woman to engage in a relationship with any man or woman of her choice before, during or after marriage. However, extra-marital relationships are an absolute taboo for women in the region, whereas men's extra-marital affairs are widely accepted and even socially 'legalised' in many cases through the institution of polygyny. The customary penalty for women suspected of such a crime in the region is usually death, the so-called honour killings. 'Honour killing' is a term used for the murder of a woman suspected of having transgressed the limits on sexual behaviour as imposed by tradition, specifically engaging in a pre-marital relationship with a man or suspected extra-marital affairs.

Tables 3 and 4 show the expectations of unmarried women about their future marriages. The percentage of unmarried women who believed that they would be able to decide on their partner themselves was only 58.0 per cent. Of these, only 46.4 per cent responded positively to the question of whether they thought they could decide to have a boyfriend or not.

In fact, even if the marriage is arranged by the couple themselves, it is often the case that they can meet each other only after the marriage

Until 1996, the Turkish Criminal Code made

fornication a criminal offence and differentiated between men and women in the definition of fornication. In December 1996, the article which defined fornication by men and in June 1998, the article which defined fornication by women, were both annulled by the Turkish Constitutional Court on the grounds that the differences violated Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution, which states that men and women must be equal before the law.¹⁸ The annulled articles stated that for a woman, one complete sexual act with a man other than her husband was sufficient for conviction of fornication. A married man could not be convicted of fornication unless it was proved that he was living together with a woman other than his wife. Since the annulment of these articles, fornication is not considered to be a crime in the official legislation.

Table 5 summarises the perceptions of women in the region as to the consequences of adultery, which are strikingly different from what is now decreed in the official legislation.

A majority of the women (66.6 per cent) believed that, contrary to the law, they could not divorce their husbands if they committed adultery, even if they would have liked to. Since religious marriages are legally invalid in Turkey they ensure no right of legal divorce. Thus, more women who had had only a religious marriage (75.7 per cent) thought they could not divorce their husbands on the grounds of adultery than those who had had both civil and religious marriages (66.2 per cent), but the difference was not that great. Although the increase in women's educational levels increased women's perception of the possibility of getting a divorce, 31.5 per cent of women who had secondary or higher education still believed they could not divorce their husbands for adultery. Interestingly, there was no difference in the perceptions of women living in urban and rural areas on this issue.

On the other hand, the percentage of women who thought that they would be killed by their husbands and/or their families if they committed adultery was very high, 66.6 per cent. This perception was even more common among those who had little or no education, those who had only a religious marriage and those who lived in rural areas. Most of those who thought that their husbands would do something else other than divorcing or killing them, expected that they would be beaten up very badly by their husbands

Table 5. Adultery if committed by the husband or wife and whether divorce would be possible (%)

Characteristics of the woman	If the husband commits adultery	
	I could divorce him	I could not divorce him
Education		
None/Primary incomplete	25.1	74.9
Primary complete	41.4	58.6
Secondary +	68.5	31.5
Marriage type		
Only civil	63.5	36.5
Both civil and religious	33.8	66.2
Only religious	24.3	75.7
Residence		
Urban	32.3	67.7
Rural	35.4	64.6
Total	34.0	66.0

Characteristics of the woman	If the wife commits adultery		
	Husband would divorce me	Husband would kill me	Other
Education			
None/primary incomplete	19.4	75.3	5.3
Primary complete	39.0	54.5	6.5
Secondary +	45.3	46.9	7.8
Marriage type			
Only civil	53.3	26.8	19.9
Both civil and religious	28.4	66.1	5.5
Only religious	17.1	79.4	3.5
Residence			
Urban	38.5	56.5	5.1
Rural	19.2	74.3	6.5
Total	27.5	66.6	5.9

if they were suspected of an extra-marital affair.

The removal of fornication as a criminal offence in law is very recent, and although there are no provisions explicitly referring to 'crimes of honour' in the Turkish Criminal Code, this

tradition is still supported in law. An extra-marital affair of a husband or wife is considered to be a 'provocation' and the sentence can be reduced by one eighth if such provocation is deemed to have taken place.¹⁹

Violence against women

Violence against women is one of the main tools used to oppress women socially and sexually. More than half of all married women living in the region are subjected to domestic violence by their husbands (Table 6). Those who are subjected to sexual violence (marital rape) constitute 51.9 per cent of the participants. As the educational level of women and their husbands increases, the extent of domestic violence decreases. However, one third of the women who have had a secondary or higher education are subjected to emotional and physical violence by their husbands and one fourth have experienced marital rape.

The Turkish Criminal Code does not contain special provisions relating to the use of violence against women in marriage. The husband is usually charged under the general provisions of the Criminal Code, including Article 478, which provides for imprisonment up to 30 months for the maltreatment of a family member in a manner which contravenes the accepted understanding of affection or mercy.²⁰ In order to make use of this law, a woman who is subjected to violence must file a complaint. However, only 1.2 per cent of those who have experienced domestic violence have notified the police that it has occurred, and those who have actually filed a complaint are even less, 0.2 per cent.

The most common strategies used by women against the violence of their husbands is to leave

home temporarily (22.1 per cent) or to ask for help from their families, friends or neighbours (14.7 per cent). There are no shelters or institutions offering help to victims of domestic violence in the region. This contributes to the helplessness of women who experience domestic violence. One of the reasons hindering women living in the region from filing a complaint is the mistrust towards security forces as a result of the armed conflict. This mistrust is not only due to the atmosphere of political and social suppression by the security forces, but also to the violence carried out by them. Those who have experienced physical or emotional violence on the part of the security forces constitute 1.3 per cent and 3.4 per cent of the participants respectively. Two per cent have indicated that they have experienced sexual harassment by members of the security forces.

Discussion – and some initial steps

The internalisation of gender roles by women in a particular culture is often directly related to the impact of specific mechanisms controlling women's sexuality, which are often of a 'collective' nature.²¹ The findings in this research are all reflective of a number of mechanisms of control on women's sexuality in Eastern Turkey. The social pressure on women to marry, early and forced or arranged marriages, the tradition of bride money, extended exchange of wives between families, and the extent of the threat of violence against women who transgress the limits on sexual behaviour as imposed by traditions constitute some of these control mechanisms. These are supported by customary and religious practices. Most of these practices, which represent or lead to serious violations of women's human rights, still exist despite reforms banning them as long as 70 years ago, as with child marriage, polygyny or crimes of honour. The extent of domestic violence experienced by women, including marital rape, and the constant threat of violence, are bound to affect not only their sexual health and perceptions of sexuality negatively, but also decrease their chances of creating and applying strategies against the violation of their rights.

As in many other countries, most women in the region are not aware of their existing rights and there are no services they can make use of in order to be informed about their rights. The expansion of such services for

Table 6. Violence against women by their husbands (%)

Type of violence	Frequency of experienced violence		
	Often	Sometimes	Never
Verbal violence (shouted, insulted, swore, denigrated)	25.9	50.8	23.3
Emotional violence	17.5	39.1	43.4
Physical violence (beaten, kicked, slapped, punched)	15.4	42.5	42.1
Sexual violence (rape)	16.3	35.6	48.1

women in the region is one of the ways of supporting them to develop strategies to defend their rights. Since 1997, Women for Women's Human Rights, an NGO based in Istanbul, has begun to carry out women's human rights training programmes in the region in order to respond to this need. We are now cooperating with existing Community Centres in the region in order to establish such programmes for women on a long-term basis.²²

In order to raise public awareness of and to create preventive strategies against these practices, it is essential to name and integrate them into a women's human rights agenda on the national and international level as well. For example, since 1996, an ongoing campaign carried out by women's organisations in Western Turkey has been trying to raise public awareness to put an end to the so-called honour killings. One demand, considered to be a necessary and immediate step towards addressing this issue, has taken the form of a proposed amendment to the Turkish Criminal Code, to allow concerned women's organisations and individual women to be present at and participate in

any court cases as interested parties. It is also proposed that the amendment would eliminate articles which serve as grounds for reduced punishment in the case of honour killings (eg. if the murderer is a minor). This proposal has also been submitted to the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination Against Women, at the meeting for the periodic review of Turkey in January 1997 by Women for Women's Human Rights, in collaboration with the Purple Roof Foundation and Equality Watch.

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References and Notes

1. The reform of the Civil Code, based on the Swiss Civil Code, was a major success of the reformists against the conservative forces defending the religious family code in 1926.
2. At the time of the Islamic conquests, the term 'Kurd' meant nomad. By the mid-19th century 'Kurd' was also used to mean tribespeople who spoke the Kurdish language. At present, insiders' and outsiders' views concur on the definition of Kurds as those who speak Kurdish as their mother tongue.
3. In this research, Kurds are defined as those who declared their mother tongue as Kurdish, including Zaza in the 1965 population census. Mutlu S, 1995. Population of Turkey by ethnic groups and provinces. *New Perspectives on Turkey*. 12 (Spring): 33-60.
4. For more information on the Kurdish tribal culture, see McDowall D, 1997. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. IB Tauris, London/New York; and Ünsal A, 1995. *Kan Davasi (Original Title: La Vendetta)*. Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, Istanbul.
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10. See also: Ertürk Y, 1993. Doğu Anadolu'da Modernleşme ve Kirsal Kadın. *1980'ler Türkiye'sinde Kadın Bakış Açısından Kadınlar*. Tekeli Ş(ed). İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 199-210.
11. *Main Women Indicators Turkey, 1978-1993*. State Institute of Statistics, Prime Ministry, Republic of Turkey, Ankara 1994.
12. The conflict had taken an estimated 13,000 lives by 1994 according to: Turkey: forced displacement of ethnic Kurds from Southeastern Turkey. *Human Rights Watch/Helsinki Reports*. 6 (12), 1994.
13. Arin C, 1996. *The Legal Status of*

Women in Turkey. Women for Women's Human Rights and WLUML, Istanbul.

14. Article 110, Turkish Civil Code.
15. Article 237, Criminal Code.
16. Extended exchange of wives is not a Muslim or Middle Eastern tradition. The practice exists also in other parts of the world, for example in China. See Wijers M and Lap-Chew L, 1997. *Trafficking in Women, Forced Labour and Slavery-like Practices in Marriage, Domestic Labour and Prostitution.* Foundation against Trafficking in Women (STV), Utrecht.
17. Yalçın-Heckmann L, 1993. *Aşiretli Kadyn: Göçer ve Yari-göçer Toplumlarda Cinsiyet Roller ve Kadın Stratejileri.* In TekeliŞ (ed), [10] above.
18. Articles 440 and 441, Turkish Criminal Code.
19. Article 462, Turkish Criminal Code.
20. Ilkkaracan P, Gülçur L, Arin C, 1996. *Sıcak Yuva Masali: Aile İçi Şiddet ve Cinsel Taciz.* Metis, Istanbul.
21. See also Kandiyoti D, 1987. *Emancipated but unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish case. Feminist Studies.* Summer: 317-38.
22. Community Centres are established by the Directorate of Social Services and Child Protection.

Résumé

Les lois et coutumes religieuses et autres sont souvent utilisées pour contrôler la sexualité des femmes et maintenir le déséquilibre des pouvoirs dans les relations entre les sexes. A partir d'une enquête menée sur 599 femmes, pour la plupart mariées ou l'ayant été, l'article dévoile l'impact de coutumes, de croyances et de lois religieuses sur la situation de femmes rurales ou citadines dans l'Est de la Turquie. Il montre que la polygamie et les mariages précoces sont encore fréquents, que le mariage religieux – bien qu'il n'ait pas force légale – continue à précéder le mariage civil, qu'il y a encore des mariages forcés, et que les mariages arrangés sont encore la majorité, même s'il semble qu'il y ait davantage de jeunes femmes en mesure de choisir leur partenaire. Il ressort aussi de l'étude que la plupart des femmes se sentiraient incapables de demander le divorce si leur mari avait des relations extraconjugales, et que beaucoup de femmes redoutaient d'être victimes d'un « crime d'honneur » si elles étaient soupçonnées de tromper leur mari. Même si les violences familiales ou le viol conjugal étaient choses courantes, pratiquement aucune des femmes interrogées n'avait eu recours à la loi en pareil cas. Pour tenter de remédier à certains de ces problèmes, des programmes de formation des femmes en matière de droits de la personne humaine, une campagne de sensibilisation du public contre les crimes d'honneur commis contre les femmes accusées d'adultère ainsi qu'une campagne pour la révision du Code pénal turc ont été lancées.

Resumen

Las costumbres y las leyes religiosas se utilizan a menudo como armas para controlar la sexualidad de las mujeres y para mantener el desequilibrio de poder en las relaciones sexuales. Este ensayo describe las costumbres, creencias y leyes religiosas y su impacto en la situación de las mujeres, tanto rurales como urbanas, en Turquía Oriental. 599 mujeres de la región, en su mayoría casadas en la actualidad o en el pasado, participaron en el estudio. Los resultados muestran que continúan siendo prevalentes los matrimonios en edades muy tempranas y la poligamia. El matrimonio religioso se lleva a cabo antes que el civil a pesar de no ser legalmente válido; sigue habiendo matrimonios forzados y los matrimonios concertados siguen siendo la mayoría, a pesar de que las mujeres más jóvenes tienen la expectativa de poder elegir a sus parejas. El estudio también mostró que la mayoría de las mujeres no se sentían capaces de pedir el divorcio si sus maridos mantenían relaciones extra-maritales pero muchas se sentían atemorizadas de la así denominada matanza por honor, si era de ellas de quien se sospechaba este tipo de comportamiento. Casi ninguna mujer había acudido nunca en busca de ayuda legal contra la violencia doméstica o la violación dentro del matrimonio, a pesar de que ambas situaciones son comunes. Un programa de capacitación de la mujer sobre los derechos humanos y una campaña de concienciación contra las matanzas por honor de aquellas mujeres acusadas de adulterio, así como una campaña para cambiar el Código Criminal Turco han empezado sobre los temas expuestos.