



Pedagogies of neopatriarchy: Critical reflections on occupational courses and women's economic mobility in Turkey



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to explore women's critical reflections on occupational courses and women's economic mobility in Turkey. Using qualitative data from twenty-four semi-structured interviews with education program coordinators located in women's organizations, I explore the limitations of increasing women's economic mobility vis-à-vis state-sponsored occupational courses by focusing on participants' reflections on the challenges of coordinating adult education programs. I argue that their experiences not only demonstrate the constraints surrounding non-formal educational initiatives, but also indicate that state-sponsored occupational and job-skills courses serve to further the political strategy of a neopatriarchal state in two distinct ways: 1) the potential effectiveness of these courses has largely been constrained by the exclusion of women from decision-making mechanisms; and 2) courses reinforce women's secondary status in the formal labor market.

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Introduction

Low levels of female labor force participation and gender differences in employment have been identified as obstacles to the achievement of gender equality in Turkey. According to a 2013 report published by the Women's Labor and Employment Initiative Platform (KEIG), the employment rate of men (64%) is nearly three times higher than employment rate of women (22%) (KEIG, 2013). While Turkey has been considered one of the fastest-growing economies and is currently the 18th largest in the world, women in Turkey remain "economically marginal" (World Bank, 2015; UNDP, 2011). Moreover, research indicates that opportunities for women do not seem to be improving: Although Turkey was ranked 105 out of 135 countries in the 2006 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, by 2012 its rank had fallen to 124 and by 2015 it ranked 130 out of 145 countries (World Economic Forum, 2015).

In recent years, policy makers have sought to implement mechanisms to both promote and increase women's employment in Turkey. For example, in its National Employment Strategy, the Turkish government identified its official female labor force participation target rate for 2023 as 38% (Aşık, 2013). Additionally, in 2008, the General Directorate of Women's Status and Issues (KGSM) published the Gender Equality National Action Plan (2008–2010). Two years later, the Prime Ministerial Circular 2010/14 entitled "Increasing Women's Employment

and Achieving Equal Opportunity," was published, outlining concrete steps to be taken in the implementation of the KGSM Action Plan. Chief among these steps is the provision of vocational, in-service and job skills trainings, as well as the provision of child care centers in both public and private workplaces in line with Labor Law 4875 (Prime Ministerial Circular, 2014).

Both in Turkey and elsewhere, non-formal, vocational and job skills training programs have been widely promoted as being instrumental to increasing women's economic opportunities in the labor force as well as the overall productivity of a nation's citizens (ILO, 2011). Since women have historically been excluded from institutions of both education and formal employment, the courses offered by these training programs are considered crucial to creating long-term, sustainable economic growth by increasing employability, encouraging income-earning opportunities and strengthening women's rights and gender equality (OECD, 2012; World Bank, 2014). While advocates have touted the potential of these programs to create positive, long-lasting improvements in both women's lives and a nation's economy, recent studies suggest that these programs should be promoted with caution, as their success is often largely determined by overlooked factors, such as the types of curricula and how they are implemented, or whether programs include recruitment and guidance components (King & Hill, 1993; Monkman & Webster, 2015). Furthermore, reports on women's education programs, including job-skills and occupational courses, continue to ignore the ways in which such programs "have actually served to perpetuate existing systems of social, economic and political stratification" for women and girls (Armove, 2009, 107). These considerations are important for effectively coordinating initiatives to increase women's labor

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force participation, yet they continue to receive limited attention and treatment in policy reports and program evaluations.

The purpose of this article is to present findings from a qualitative study of education program coordinators working in twenty-four women's organizations throughout Turkey. Findings were part of a larger study that explored the experiences of developing and promoting women's adult education programs in women's organizations.¹ All twenty-four women participating in this study discussed at length the limitations of occupational and job-skills courses for women in their interviews. The limitations discussed stemmed largely from participants' work with state-sponsored occupational courses, but also extended to the challenges they experienced developing courses within their organizations. The analysis and findings presented in this study seek to answer the research question: What are women's experiences coordinating or conducting job-skills and occupational courses?

To answer this question, I begin with a brief overview of the emergence of a 'neopatriarchal state' and its impact on political and economic opportunities for women in Turkey. Then, using data from interviews, I explore the limitations of increasing women's economic mobility vis-à-vis occupational courses by focusing on participants' reflections on the challenges of coordinating adult education programs within this context. Their experiences raise two important areas for analysis that both demonstrate the constraints surrounding non-formal educational initiatives and indicate that occupational and job-skills courses serve to further the political strategy of a neopatriarchal state: 1) women argued that the potential effectiveness of these courses has largely been constrained by the absence of women in decision-making mechanisms; and 2) courses reinforce women's secondary status in the formal labor market.

The Impact of a neopatriarchal state on women's economic, political, social and educational opportunities

Previous research indicates that one of the largest challenges to increasing women's economic opportunities in Turkey has been the persistence of a 'neopatriarchal' state (Buğra, 2014; Toksöz, 2012). According to Moghadam (2006) neopatriarchy is a political strategy based on "the product of the encounter between modernity and tradition in the context of dependent capitalism," (129). Neopatriarchal states emerge when policies reflect both modern and traditional institutions and where the state upholds a "patriarchal gender contract," that prioritizes male dominance both within the household and at the level of the state (Moghadam, 2006). This "modernized patriarchy" not only serves to control women by reinforcing normative views of women and the family but also, through the reproduction and persistence of the patriarchal unit- including the family, the community and the state- "relieves the state of the responsibility to provide welfare to its citizens," (Moghadam, 2006, 130).

Scholars, such as Dedeoğlu (2013) and Özar and Yakut-Çakar (2013) argue that in Turkey, a "surge" in the conservative nature of social relationships is reflected in the move toward family-centered policies, which continue to prioritize motherhood and marriage with the goal of keeping women at home to maintain 'traditional' roles. Furthermore, Acar and Altunok (2013) argue that since 2007, patriarchal values have become more dominant and have increasingly become manifest in the policies of the government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). According to Dedeoğlu (2013), while on the surface, legislative structures appear to have moved toward 'Europeanization,' active policy is "directed toward keeping women's traditional roles intact," (p. 8).

A prime example is a set of recent political changes made within the National Women's Ministry in Turkey. Originally, when the National

Women's Ministry was established in 1990, it was comprised of two separate organizations: the Directorate for Women's Status and Problems and the Family Research Organization (Kardam, 2006). While efforts were made in 1993 and 1994 to strengthen the National Women's Ministry by giving it permanent legal status, this status was not achieved until 2004 when an organizational law was passed as part of the AKP's commitment to the Copenhagen Criteria and EU harmonization process (Kardam, 2006).

The creation of the National Women's Ministry was originally seen by Turkey as an important step in taking the necessary steps to promote gender equality within the country. However, Ertürk (2006) reports that although the ministry enjoys legitimate legal status, the organization has become increasingly detached from women. On June 8, 2011, the Directorate for Women's Status and Problems was restructured to be absorbed under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, omitting the term "women" from its name (Müftüler-Baç, 2012, 6). Women's organizations saw the move as political, since it mirrored the place of women within the family structure. As Nazan Moroğlu, coordinator for the Istanbul Women's Associations said of the move, "Gender equality is the main criterion for democracy in any country. The closure of the State Ministry for Women and Family Affairs and its replacement with a Ministry of Family and Social Policies are steps back regarding the goal of gender equality," (Belge, 2011).

Moreover, an increasing focus on family-centered policies in lieu of policies that promote gender-equality has also limited the scope of opportunities for women in formal labor market and influenced the ways in which 'women's labor' has been marginalized in labor policies. While research has highlighted the negative impacts of neoliberal economic policies and globalization on the Turkish economy for both men and women alike, numerous scholars have highlighted the particularly devastating effects of neoliberalism, globalization and the shift of the welfare state on women in Turkey (Dedeoğlu & Elveren, 2012; Dedeoğlu, 2013; Toksöz, 2012). Over the past decade, Turkey has been recognized for its achievements as an emerging market, with a per capita income that has nearly tripled, exceeding \$10,500. However, more recently, concerns have been raised regarding current economic growth as well as the relative strength of Turkey's legal and financial institutions. A World Bank (2014) report has noted that despite improvements in trade, finance and basic public services, Turkey remains a country of "unequal opportunities." In particular, with a large gender gap and declining female participation rates, Turkey is one of the few countries departing from the trend of increasing female participation in the labor force (Toksöz, 2012, 52).

Toksöz (2012) argues that women's low rates of participation in the labor force can be explained by the limited nature of industrialization as well as the influence of both public and private patriarchy in Turkey. She explains that rapid economic growth has not been accompanied by growth in the labor market. The low demand for labor and the growth in the working age population is further complicated by gender segregation in the labor markets. These factors have created a scenario where women experience high rates of unemployment in the formal labor market or, due to the difficulty they face in securing employment in positions that have traditionally been considered 'male,' are only able to secure work in informal sectors. Toksöz summarizes the implications of the nature of labor supply in Turkey both on women's participation in the labor force as well as on the struggle to achieve gender equality:

In countries where the labor market is tight, that is, where labor supply is limited, women's participation in the labor force is encouraged and supported. The attitude of the State as the representative of the public patriarchy loosens due to the employers' demand for female labor and women's struggle for gender equality. Given that the State has developed public policies for care services and demand for labor is high enough to push wages up, patriarchal structures that keep women at home tend to dissolve and women become essential

¹ For the full project, see Ryan J. Donaghy, *Envisioning an-Other Education Space: Opportunities and Challenges in Adult Education Programs for Women in Turkey*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2016.

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