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The status of women in southern Europe

Whether we define southern Europe in a broad sense as the totality of Mediterranean people or in a more restrictive way as countries belonging to the northern shores of the Mediterranean, a number of characteristics differentiate the area from northern Europe. This applies as much to general features such as industrialisation, urbanisation and advanced technology as to specific ones like the situation of women.

The socio-economic structure of many southern European countries is still strongly dominated by agriculture. Domestic migration toward industrial centres has not come to an end, and disparities between village and city life in terms of education, health care, working conditions, and leisure activities are still quite sharp. These structural imbalances exercise a notable impact upon the life style and general situation of women. Thus with respect to many

issues and problems, it seems erroneous to treat European women in a standard way.

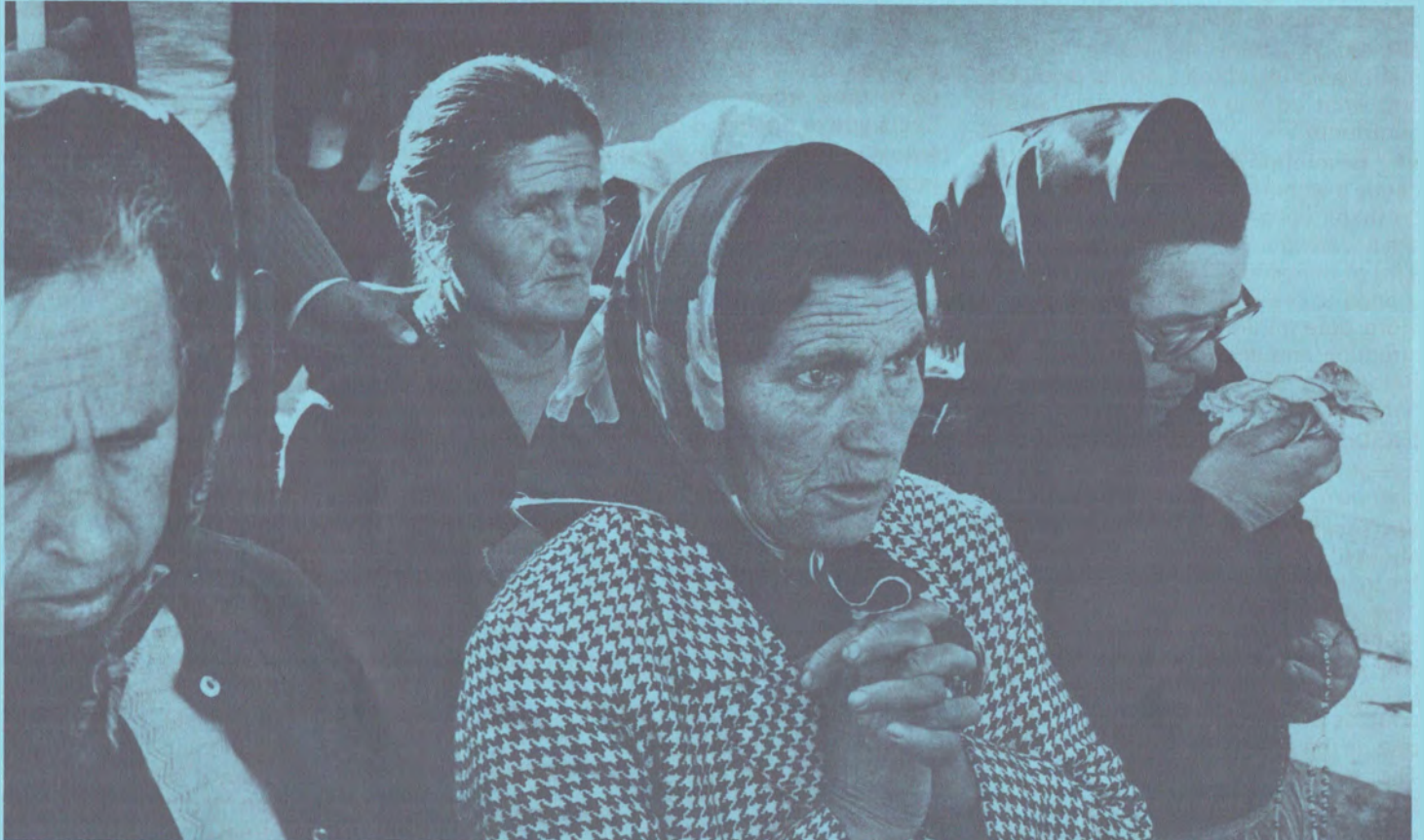
Right from the beginning of the socialisation process, girls are predestined by their education. Their orientation toward manual or intellectual work, their preparation for marriage (trousseau making, dowry, etc.), the attitude of parents and relatives as to partner choice, their expectations in regard to sex roles in society and egalitarian treatment within

the family and work place, finally, opportunities for employment: all these crucial questions seem to be handled differently in northern and southern Europe.

The weight of tradition

While north European women have set out to conquer the former bastions of male domination, south European women — even where rapid modernisation and legal reforms have substantially altered their status — are still ob-

A passivity reinforced by the weight of tradition



liged to fight for the enforcement of these rights. Furthermore, in some of these countries the traditional upbringing has produced a generation of young women who are still unable completely to grasp the meaning of the progressive legislation. An example is resistance to the divorce law in Italy.

Not only pre-industrial structures but also traditions, mores and religious practices contribute significantly to a difference in the behaviour of the average southern European woman. In this respect there is a striking resemblance between Catholic countries such as Portugal, Spain, Italy and Orthodox Greece on one hand and Islamic countries such as Turkey on the other.

Religious belief systems do form a barrier reinforcing the passivity of women. Even such a progressive church leader as Pope John XXIII was "saddened that woman's fundamental rights as a person are still not respected everywhere, but adjured woman never to forget that the end to which the Creator has ordained her whole being is maternity" (Encyclical *Gaudium et Spes*, 1962). In Islam the status of women, compared to other monotheistic religions, is one of almost complete subjugation to the authority of men. Although Turkey adopted the principle of secularism fifty years ago, thus separating religion from public life, nevertheless the Civil Code borrowed from Switzerland in 1926 (very similar to the



Turkey family planning methods have been disseminated only in metropolitan areas owing to lack of political support.

The penal codes of Turkey and Italy strongly emphasise female passivity and proprietary rights. Male infidelity as ground for legal separation was granted in Italy until 1968 only if the husband installed a mistress under the marital roof. All these examples and many others, admirably described in Kazantzakis's novel *Zorba the Greek*, indicate that on subjects such as adultery, seduction and crimes of honour, the mores of Sicily, in other words of a continuing feudal order, still co-exist with the social order of highly industrialised societies or societies in rapid transition.

The impact of these remnants of the past are reflected in many instances of daily life. In rural Turkey parents still arrange a large majority of marriages. These inter-family alliances have two important consequences: compensation paid to the bride's family for the loss of the unpaid worker, and a high rate of marriage among relatives.

Token levels

These manifold discrepancies bring us finally to the important topic of education and employment. Women in southern Europe, although in principle beneficiary of constitutionally guaranteed equal rights of education, are encouraged "de facto" to limit the horizon

of their expectations and to embrace rather "feminine" occupations. Their environment pushes them strongly to adopt the values making woman an accomplished housewife and a devoted wife/mother rather than a successful career woman. Indeed in almost all Mediterranean countries, a large number of women and girls are heavily engaged in unpaid agricultural work. In the statistics they appear as "unpaid family members". The educational level of a great majority of these women does not exceed primary school. This is why a disproportionate number of women workers are to be found in the peripheral labour market (temporary work, part-time work, clandestine work and a kind of return to cottage industries) with its legal and social disadvantages.

These characteristics also explain why, in spite of their strong interest in political and public issues, as reflected by the mass media (especially television), and their high electoral participation, women's membership in political and elective bodies remains at token levels.

Thus as Mübeccel B. Kiray rightly remarks, the women and mothers of Eregli — an Anatolian small town typical of southern European settlements — are not like Nora in Ibsen's *Doll's House*, but play an important part in changing the resistant sex roles of a traditional society with the least possible friction.

The Social Charter

The eleven member states of the Council of Europe who are bound by the European Social Charter, in force since 1965, undertake in Article 4 "to recognise the right of men and women workers to equal pay for work of equal value". Article 17 guarantees the right of mothers and children to social and economic protection, while Article 8 sets out standards for the protection of employed women, making it unlawful, for example, for an employer to dismiss a woman during absence on maternity leave.

one in force in Italy) is still based on the relative superiority of the husband. Furthermore, the penal codes in many Mediterranean countries strongly underline these inequalities. Issues such as legitimisation of abortion under certain circumstances, as introduced in Italy on 18 February 1975 and in Turkey in 1965 by amendment of the Penal Code, have not received sufficient public support. While in both Italy and Turkey officials report alarming numbers of illegally performed abortions, endangering the life of thousands of mothers (more than 25,000 a year are killed in Turkey), "pro-birth" elements have attacked family planning clinics in Florence. Similarly in