Essays on gender relations in rural Turkey end up all too often in the pitfall of fixed assumptions that portray women mainly as victims of their own society. The following is an attempt to challenge this discourse of victimization and fixity by drawing on female bodily expressions. Women in rural Turkey counteract social expectations and male dominance through bodily crises. This case study shows the potential for change that is inherent in spirit possession, which is commonly considered backward or traditional. Socially constructed gender roles are consequently not only seen as an expression of weakness, but also as a female counter-hegemonic potential to express the unspeakable.

Hatice: a woman abroad

Hatice had been married to a relative living in Vienna, Austria, where she was staying in order to turn to her own family either, because she knew that her father’s support and control only meant suffering from the loss and economic dependency of Trabzon. Since that time Gülden’s body has remained quiet. She ventured after the treatment. However, she also insisted on a medical examination, which her family could not afford. Several years later she was married and all, even Dilek, have children. The women mentioned in this contribution are outstanding capacity of the hoca, who are consulted. Their services are demanded in the case of infertility, impotence, fainting and other bodily expressed crises.

Dilek: a woman from the town

Dilek did not feel welcome in her husband’s house, because she had been brought up in a nearby town, where she was considered cincilik (restless) and treated as a stranger. Bodily crises in this sense are conceptualized as distinct from male bodily expressions. Women in rural Turkey counteract social expectations and male dominance through bodily crises. This case study shows the potential for change that is inherent in spirit possession, which is commonly considered backward or traditional. Socially constructed gender roles are consequently not only seen as an expression of weakness, but also as a female counter-hegemonic potential to express the unspeakable.

Hoca designates several social functions but always indicates (masters of demons) are consulted. Their services are demanded in the case of infertility, impotence, fainting and other bodily expressed crises.

Notes
1 In this context ‘rural’ or ‘local’ does not mean timeless and tradition-bound, but a constantly changing place.