

## RURAL NEGLECT AND MODERNIZATION IN TÜRKİYE: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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### Abstract

The modernization process in Türkiye involved political, economic, and social changes, with urban transformation as a key element. However, neglect of rural areas hindered overall progress, influenced by historical and political factors. Early modernizers viewed rural areas as traditional and lacking progress, resulting in urban areas receiving the focus of urbanization, industrialization, and Western technologies. The dispersed structure of rural areas made it difficult for the government to provide essential services and disseminate new ideas. The article analyzes challenges in rural areas, including the land tenure system, social and economic circumstances of villagers, and the issue of education. It also evaluates the role of educational institutions in rural areas during the Ottoman Empire and the early Republic. The study concludes that neglecting rural areas hindered Türkiye's modernization and highlights the need to address the unique needs and potentials of rural communities.

**Keywords:** Türkiye, modernization, rural areas, historical context.

### INTRODUCTION

Despite the passage of a century since the establishment of the modern Turkish state, the country has yet to fully achieve its modernization goals. The modernization process in Türkiye is a complex and intricate one, involving a range of political, social, and economic factors that have contributed to the incomplete nature of this process. Therefore, this study aims to focus specifically on the factors responsible for the flawed nature of the modernization process in Türkiye. These factors are primarily linked to the rural areas of the country, which represent a significant portion of the population, and the perspective of early modernizers towards these regions. Early modernizers in Türkiye considered rural areas to be backward and traditional, with limited prospects for economic or social development. Consequently, the founders of the Turkish state directed their efforts exclusively towards urban areas, with the aim of modernizing, industrializing, and spreading Western values and technology. As a result, the state failed to provide basic services to the vast rural population, which hindered the modernization process and resulted in the empowerment of rural notables who resisted the country's modernization efforts. Although the actors who hindered the modernization process have changed throughout Turkish history, the issue of insufficient rural development and resistance to modernization remains a challenge for the country.

This paper aims to enhance the comprehensive understanding of the obstacles that hindered the modernization of Türkiye by providing relevant information and data. The paper is structured into four sections. Firstly, the article analyzes the significance of land order in rural areas and its impact on the villagers. Secondly, it examines the social, economic, and cultural circumstances of the rural population. Thirdly, the paper explores the role of education in rural areas during the Ottoman Empire and the early republic until 1930, and scrutinizes the extent to which educational institutions contributed to rural modernization and education levels. Lastly, the paper investigates the reasons behind the lack of reform initiatives in rural Türkiye until 1935, following the proclamation of the republican regime.

### METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods historical research approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The primary data source consists of approximately 50,000 pages of documents obtained from İsmail Hakkı Tonguç's personal archive, with only 15% of the relevant documents being carefully examined and utilized. The documents in Tonguç's archive are of significant scientific importance for investigating rural modernization. The study also conducts a critical review of existing research on the topic, evaluating the arguments presented by scholars in the literature.

This study employs historical research methods, specifically document analysis and content analysis, as per McDowell's definition of historical research as a systematic investigation of the past through meticulous examination of relevant source materials to distinguish factual narratives from fictionalized accounts (McDowell, 2002). Document analysis is a qualitative research technique used to evaluate both electronic and physical documents, interpreting their meaning and extracting relevant information. Content analysis, on the other hand, is employed to thoroughly scrutinize the data, identifying patterns, themes, biases, and meanings, following the approach outlined by Carley (1990).

## FINDINGS

### **Land Order in Rural Areas and the Rising Power of Landlords**

Within the context of the Ottoman Empire, the land ownership structure was classified into two categories: lands owned by individuals and lands owned by the Sultan (Uzunçarşılı, 1994). Individual lands were further divided into *Öşriyye* and *Harajiye*. *Öşriyye* denoted lands that were originally owned by local Muslims prior to conquest, lands acquired by those who converted to Islam after the conquest, or lands where Muslims were settled in conquered regions. An important feature of *Öşriyye* lands was that Muslim workers possessed complete ownership rights, including the ability to sell, divide based on Islamic inheritance law, and dispose of the land as desired. Furthermore, landowners were obliged to pay one-tenth of their crops as taxes to the empire on an annual basis (Cin, 2016).

Conversely, *Harajiye* referred to lands in conquered territories that were not forcibly taken from non-Muslim owners. According to İsmail Cem, the designation of *Harajiye* lands aimed to mitigate potential uprisings that could arise from land seizure, and to garner the support of non-Muslim populations to maintain stability in these regions (Cem, 2017). Cultivators of *Harajiye* lands enjoyed similar rights to those in *Öşriyye* lands, with the ability to manage the land as they saw fit. On the other hand, lands owned by the Sultan were known as *miri* lands and encompassed the majority of the empire's territory. These lands were bestowed as *feoff* to individuals deemed valuable in warfare, known as *Timariots*. However, the land itself did not become the property of the *feoffee*, but rather they were granted the right to collect specific taxes from the cultivators. In exchange for this right, *Timariots* were obligated to participate in wars and provide a certain number of cavalry when expeditions were launched (Aysu, 2020). The entire system of land ownership in the Ottoman Empire was commonly referred to as the *timar* system.

Alaattin Aköz posited that the *timar* system had a positive impact on the growth and expansion of the Ottoman Empire until the 16th century. This was primarily due to its ability to establish a connection between villagers and the land, effectively addressing two major challenges faced by the empire. Firstly, the system ensured that villagers remained in their rural communities, thereby allowing for better control and governance. This was particularly significant considering that approximately 90% of the population lived in rural areas during the 16th century, as documented by available data. Secondly, the *timar* system also served as a means of recruitment for the empire's military, providing the necessary soldiers for its campaigns (Aköz, 2014). It was not until the mid-16th century that a feudal structure began to emerge in the Ottoman Empire, as highlighted by İsmail Cem, who identified 1550 as a pivotal year in this regard. According to Cem, the changing nature of land ownership led to the rise of landlords, resulting in the erosion of the *timar* system (Cem, 2017). The origins of this situation merit detailed elucidation.

The Ottoman Empire faced significant financial challenges, particularly during the later period of Suleiman the Magnificent's reign. The increasing deficit in the empire's treasury prompted the adoption of a new revenue source: land income. However, as previously mentioned, only a portion of this income was collected by the empire, with a significant portion being appropriated by the *Timariots*. Scholar Alan Palmer argues that the empire's financial difficulties were one of the contributing factors to its decline. In fact, during this period, the number of textiles produced in the city of Manchester alone surpassed that of the entire Ottoman Empire, underscoring the magnitude of the economic disparity (Palmer, 2011). This new situation led to a deviation from the established land ownership order and a change in its purpose.

Under the new order, the tax collectors (*mültezim*), who managed the land, first paid the rental fee (expected taxes from villagers) to the empire, and then collected taxes independently. Consequently, the empire sought to safeguard a critical resource by renting out the land income that was previously granted to the *Timariots*, while

the mültezim, acting as contractors, amassed wealth by often demanding exorbitant taxes from villagers. As a result, the Timariots were marginalized, and the villagers were left at the mercy of the mültezim, whose primary aim was to maximize profits (Cem, 2017). This situation led to the exploitation of villagers, as the empire itself inadvertently created a feudal structure and facilitated the rise of a new class of landlords and beys. The mültezim, who gained immense power during a period of weakness for the empire, wielded unchecked authority in rural areas. Villagers, who had previously enjoyed protections and freedoms under the timar system, found their rights and liberties eroded with the transformation of the system. Moreover, the demanding working conditions and high taxes imposed by the mültezim forced villagers to incur debts with agricultural usurers that often resulted in the loss of their land and property, ultimately leaving their villages (Barkan, 1964). Meanwhile, the landlords and beys swiftly accumulated wealth, establishing dominion over the villagers and appropriating the lands as their private property (Tonguç, 2020).

Contrary to İslamoğlu's claim of a fair economic order in the Ottoman Empire, historical evidence suggests the absence of effective mechanisms to protect the rights of villagers, particularly from the 16th century onwards when the mültezim gained power. İslamoğlu's proposition that villagers were expected to rebel and seek justice against injustice is refuted by events such as the Celali Rebellions, where villagers were often manipulated by dominant powers for their own interests, given the fragmented structure of rural communities (İslamoğlu, 2018). Hence, İslamoğlu's argument lacks validity in this regard. According to Kartekin, the condition and circumstances of villagers were dire even prior to the republican era, as the empire itself weakened their socio-economic status (Kartekin, 1973). Furthermore, I contend that the plight of villagers did not significantly improve even after the proclamation of the republic. It would be misleading to assume that the landlords and beys, who held authority over rural lands for almost four centuries, would relinquish their power with the establishment of the Republican regime in 1923. While 1923 marks a significant milestone signifying the commencement of modernization efforts in the newly formed Türkiye, these endeavors were primarily focused on urban areas, leaving rural regions, where the majority of the population resided, at the mercy of the landlords and beys.

#### **Social, Economic and Cultural Condition of Villagers**

The purpose of this section is to provide an in-depth analysis of the lifestyles, family structures, traditions, beliefs, and economic conditions of the villagers. Despite certain minor differences in comparison to the imperial period, which were noted, these differences did not significantly alter the lives of rural communities in either positive or negative ways. Therefore, these two periods are examined in conjunction. This approach is employed to highlight the absence of noticeable changes or improvements in the lives of villagers, even during the initial 20-year period of the republic.

#### **Family Structure in the Village**

The existence of a rigid patriarchal social structure in rural villages can be traced back to the era of the Ottoman Empire and persists to this day. This notion is evident across various aspects of village life. For instance, historical data from the Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü reveals that the literacy rates of villagers, as documented in the 1935 census, were significantly low, with only 17.27% of males and a mere 4.21% of females reported as literate (Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1973). The limited education of women in rural areas can be attributed to the prevailing patriarchal norms that prioritize male education (Baykurt, 2019).

Another illustration of the patriarchal social structure is the fact that women were excluded from the Ottoman census, where only men and animals were counted to determine taxation (Cem, 2017). This exclusion of women from official records underscores their marginalized status in society. Nevertheless, despite their disadvantaged position, women in villages shoulder significant responsibilities within the family unit. They are expected to care for and raise children, provide for the family's food and clothing needs, manage household chores, tend to animals, and assist their husbands in agricultural work. Moreover, women are often expected to bear multiple children. In contrast, men, considered as the head of the family, primarily engage in agricultural tasks and may join the Ottoman army during times of war (Tonguç, 2020). Thus, despite the heavier burden of responsibilities on women, their societal role is not considered equal to that of men.

Scholars such as Tütengil have observed that the status of women differs in urban and rural contexts. Although the principles of gender equality in rights and duties were proclaimed during the establishment of the republic, these ideals were not effectively implemented in rural areas (Tütengil, 1966). Furthermore, children in villages are often expected to contribute to family livelihoods from a young age, foregoing formal education (Tonguç,

2020). Despite the introduction of compulsory primary education for children during the Ottoman Empire, as initiated by Mahmud II in 1869, many families in rural areas chose to prioritize household and agricultural work over education for their children (Kirby, 2018).

### Tradition and Religion in the Village

In rural areas, it is crucial to highlight the significance of indigenous traditions and laws, which are shaped and enforced by influential actors such as imams, landlords, and beys, who have long been instrumental in maintaining the existing social order. These actors have actively safeguarded the status quo in villages and have displayed strong resistance against any attempts or individuals seeking to challenge it (Tonguç, 2008). An example of this resistance to change can be seen in the destruction of the Taqi ad-Din Observatory, established in 1575 as the first significant and modern observatory in the Ottoman Empire. Under the management of esteemed scientist Takiyüddin, the observatory was deliberately destroyed in 1580 by a cannon shot from the sea (Ünver, 1969). This destruction was incited by a fatwa issued by Shaykh Al-Islam Kadızade Ahmet Şemsettin, which declared that attempting to make astronomical observations would bring misfortune and disaster. Similar instances have been documented in other regions, where attempts at progress were met with devastation, as prescribed by the fatwa (Gökdoğan, 1940). Furthermore, imams have been known to vehemently oppose innovation proposals in order to protect their own authority and resist change. Proponents of innovation have been accused of infidelity and subjected to various forms of punishment, as imams strive to maintain their established status against any challenges. For instance, a skilled artisan named Emin managed to bring water to a water-scarce village through his individual efforts. However, the local imam, Niyazi Hodja, prophesied in a dream that angels were displeased with Emin's work and that it would bring dire consequences to the village, claiming that water was malevolent. As a result, the villagers refrained from utilizing the much-needed water, swayed by the imam's words (Makal, 2019).

In summary, the imams, landlords, and beys, as influential actors in rural areas, actively safeguard the existing traditions and laws, and exhibit strong resistance to change and innovation. Their opposition to anything that challenges the status quo often results in hindering progress and development in rural communities, as proponents of change are branded as heretics and subjected to punishment. This resistance to change in rural areas is a notable aspect highlighted by Gedikoglu (1949).

### Economic Situation of Villages and Villagers

In his research conducted in March 1946, Veli Demiröz examined the economic conditions of the inhabitants of Hasanoğlan village. The findings were subsequently published in the Journal of Village Institutes in its V-VI issues, providing insights into the internal socioeconomic structure of the village, with a specific focus on households and families.

*"Hasanoğlan village, located 35 km east of Ankara, was found to have 271 households, which could be classified into five distinct economic categories:*

- 1. 61 households had no property and relied on physical labor for their livelihood.*
- 2. 25 households owned land but were unable to fully cultivate it or had small plots. Due to limited resources and insufficient agricultural productivity, they earned a living through manual labor.*
- 3. 101 households cultivated their own land and were considered part of the middle class in terms of economic status.*
- 4. 54 households were slightly better off than the middle class, with comparatively higher land ownership, labor force, and equipment.*
- 5. Finally, 30 households in the village were classified as wealthy. Among them, 7 households operated grocery stores or engaged in business, while others possessed larger land holdings compared to other households." (Köy Enstitüleri ve Çağdaş Eğitim Vakfı, 2005).*

Makal (2019) notes that in situations where villagers do not have animals for plowing, they themselves engage in manual labor to carry out the agricultural tasks on their land, essentially serving as the "working animals" to cultivate the fields. Furthermore, according to a document obtained from Tonguç's archive and later published

in his book *Education in Village*, Tonguç visited a village market in 1937 and recorded the prices of products bought and sold in that market. Notably, locally produced goods by the villagers were sold at lower prices in the market, while products sourced from outside the village were sold at inflated prices. The following are examples of prices recorded in a market established in one of the sub-district centers in Central Anatolia, comprising solely of products and goods traded by villagers (Table 1).

**Table 1:** The Prices in the Village Market in 1937

| Prices of some items sold by villagers |              | Prices of some important items that villagers bought from the same market |              |
|--|--------------|---|--------------|
| <b>Item</b>                            | <b>Kurus</b> | <b>Kilogram</b>   | <b>Kurus</b> |
| 1 Chicken                              | 20-30        | 1 Salt  | 6-7          |
| 1 Pullets                              | 12-15        | 1 Gas oil   | 30-40        |
| 4 Eggs                                 | 5-6          | 1 Soap  | 35-40        |
| 1 Lamb                                 | 150-200      | 1 Sugar   | 33           |
| 1 Sheep                                | 400-500      | 1 Meat  | 20-30        |
| 1 Goat                                 | 800-900      |   |              |
| 1 Cow                                  | 1200-1500    |   |              |
| 1 Ox                                   | 3000-4000    |   |              |
| <b>Kilo</b>                            |              | <b>Pair</b>   |              |
| Honey                                  | 45-50        | 1 Flat-heeled shoe for children   | 50-60        |
| Molasses                               | 12-20        | 1 Big Shoes   | 250-500      |
| Oil                                    | 70-100       |   |              |
| Cheese                                 | 15-20        |   |              |
| Wheat                                  | 4-5          |   |              |
| <b>Load</b>                            |              | <b>Meter</b>  |              |
| 1 Straw                                | 30-40        | 1 Chintz  | 15-40        |
| 1 Wood                                 | 12-30        | 1 Cadis   | 80-100       |
| 1 Coal                                 | 80-90        | 1 Canvas  | 20-30        |

Source: Tonguç, 2008.

Based on the price data presented, it can be inferred that the villagers were forced to sell their products at prices below their actual value in order to afford the goods they needed. This unfavorable situation arose due to the villagers' limited access to the local market near their village, which was exploited by intermediaries who reaped substantial profits. The fact that villagers had to part with a valuable asset, such as a sheep or a goat, in order to purchase basic necessities like shoes, serves as a poignant indicator of this exploitative trend. The observed sales prices in the market failed to adequately protect the economic interests of the villagers, thus underscoring one of the major challenges faced in the economic livelihood of the village.

#### General Characteristics of Education in the Ottoman and Early Republican Period

Education accessibility in the Ottoman Empire was starkly unequal, with limited opportunities for various social classes. Notably, rural areas, villages close to cities, and even some cities and towns suffered from a lack of school education (Başgöz and Wilson, 1968). Merely a small fraction of the empire's population had the chance to attend school and complete their education. During the 1913-1914 academic year, it is estimated that approximately 600 thousand children were enrolled in schools, accounting for only a quarter of the school-age population in an empire with a total population of 20 million (Refet, 1925).

A closer examination of the educational institutions in the Ottoman period reveals that only two types of schools were widely prevalent across the empire: Madrasahs and Ottoman Elementary-Primary Schools. Ottoman Elementary-Primary Schools, also known as neighborhood schools, provided primary-level education, while Madrasahs offered an education at the secondary and higher education levels. Graduates of Madrasahs, known as the ulema, were considered the intellectual elite of Ottoman society. Both types of schools were supervised and managed by religious authorities in terms of curriculum and training (Başgöz and Wilson, 1968). Until the mid-19th century, these schools primarily focused on imparting religious education, aimed at shaping a generation that adhered to religious piety and obedience. The Qur'an was the main subject of instruction in these

schools, with limited emphasis on its meaning, and the schools were often situated in close proximity to mosques.

In rural areas, education was largely neglected during the Ottoman Empire, reflecting the empire's perception of villagers as primary sources of soldiers and taxes (Aydın, 2018). While primary schools were established in nearly all villages through imams who oversaw mosques, these schools predominantly provided religious education, with minimal emphasis on literacy. Lessons were commonly conducted in rudimentary spaces, such as barns or rooms adjacent to mosques (Akyüz, 2019), and teachers trained in urban-based teacher schools were often reluctant to serve in rural areas. This perspective was even mirrored in contemporary literature, such as the novel "The Green Night" by Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1998), which depicted teachers accepting assignments in rural areas as courageous individuals. Consequently, aspiring teachers for rural areas were often accepted without stringent conditions. Data from Akyüz for the year 1900 further substantiates this reality, indicating that there were only 15 active teacher schools in 15 provinces in rural areas, with a mere 32 teachers and 496 students enrolled (Akyüz, 2019).

#### **İptidai Schools (School of new methods)**

The advent of modernization efforts in the Ottoman Empire led to the establishment of a new kind of educational institution known as iptidai schools, in contrast to the traditional madrasahs and Ottoman Elementary-Primary Schools that were entrenched in religious influence and subject to the pressures of powerful madrasahs intent on preserving the status quo (Başgöz and Wilson, 1968). As the ruling elite sought to avoid direct confrontation with the entrenched madrasahs, a decision was made to create modern schools that would offer contemporary education. These new schools were affiliated with the Ministry of Education, while the primary schools remained under the purview of the Ministry of Pious Foundations.

Scholars have proposed various reasons for the establishment of these new schools. Başaran (1994) attributes it to the inadequacy of administration and lack of qualified teaching in the existing primary schools. Ergün (2000) suggests that reforming the traditional Ottoman elementary-primary schools was challenging due to their foundation ownership and resulting autonomy. On the other hand, Demirtaş (2007) argues that resistance from imams and conservative elements against any changes in the traditional schools necessitated the establishment of new schools. Contrary to previous researchers who suggested a single factor, it is possible to say that all these factors collectively contributed to the establishment of these institutions.

The coexistence of these new schools alongside traditional schools resulted in a dualistic education system, where institutions pursued contrasting approaches and ideologies. This dualism had profound and lasting effects on society, as it led to the upbringing of individuals with disparate mindsets who were disconnected from each other, as noted by Binbaşıoğlu (2006). Çelenk (2009) further contends that this duality in education not only hindered the planned modernization and societal progress, but also perpetuated the decline of madrasahs. This assessment is valid, and despite attempts to unify all educational institutions under a single system during the republican era to eliminate dualism, the influence of traditional educational institutions persisted in rural areas, impeding the complete realization of modernization in education.

In conclusion, the establishment of iptidai schools during the modernization efforts in the Ottoman Empire, alongside the traditional schools, resulted in dualism in education and had significant and enduring impacts on society. Multiple factors, including the need for reform in existing schools, the autonomy of foundation-owned schools, and resistance from conservative elements, contributed to the establishment of these new schools. Although efforts were made to eliminate this dualism during the republican era, the legacy of traditional educational institutions persisted in rural areas, hindering the full realization of modernization in education.

#### **Law on Unification of all Educational institutions**

Following the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, a significant change took place in the educational system as madrasahs were closed in 1924 and all educational institutions were consolidated under the Ministry of Culture, thereby bringing all religious, educational and training institutions under state control (Gök, 2007). The most prominent characteristic of the educational system during the Republican period was its strict centralization, as the government aimed to sever ties with the past and adopt a western-inspired model, thereby ending dual-education. However, despite the theoretical necessity of this policy, its practical implementation, particularly in rural areas, posed challenges. The dual-education system that had been in place for over 50 years had led to the

emergence of two distinct groups with different mentalities and lifestyles in society, which was also reflected in the newly established single-party regime. This resulted in the formation of two factions within the party: reformists, who advocated for continued reform efforts, and traditionalists, who sought to maintain the status quo and resist change (Baydar, 1976).

According to Uzunboylu and Küçükamer (2015), the 1924 Law on the Unification of Education facilitated the removal of traditional elements from the educational system. This view is supported by Çelenk (2009), who argues that in the Ottoman period, the ministries of these two different worlds were always at odds with each other, and this contentious situation was resolved with the enactment of this law. The hostility between these two opposing institutions, from the ministries to the teachers and students affiliated with them, deepened the polarization within society. Vexliard and Aytaç (1964) assert that Atatürk legalized this law because he believed that dual-education would lead Turkish society towards servitude and misery. Kapluhan (2012) further claims that this law was a significant step towards the secularization and democratization of education. However, Dewey (1960) criticized the centralization of education, warning that it could pose a threat to democratic education.

Moreover, existing literature mainly focuses on the intra-party struggle between traditionalist and progressive forces and its negative impact on Turkish modernization. Scholars such as Lewis (1968) and Göksel (2015) argue that the infighting within the single-party system disrupted modernization efforts. Oya Baydar, Engin Tonguç, and Fay Kirby also assert that reform efforts failed to extend to rural areas due to the constant factional struggle within the party (Baydar, 1976). However, these accounts do not fully address the existence of societal groupings and polarization. In this study, it is argued that there were also distinct groupings within society, and the majority of rural residents aligned with traditionalists, which hindered the expansion of reform initiatives to rural areas. This is because reformists consistently encountered resistance in rural regions.

## DISCUSSION

This section elucidates the reasons behind the neglect of rural areas by the new regime, taking into account the complex interplay of various factors. It should be noted that this decision is not attributable to a singular cause, but rather a confluence of multiple factors. Thus, this section thoroughly examines and analyzes the salient factors that have contributed to this decision.

These factors include the perpetuation of the previous order in rural areas, the dispersed and heterogeneous nature of rural areas, the economic challenges encountered by the new regime, and the unfavorable stance of rural notables in rural areas towards modernization efforts. Each of these factors will be meticulously scrutinized to gain a comprehensive understanding of their intricate effects.

### **The Perpetuation of the Previous Order in Rural Areas**

Similar to many other states that underwent a transition from an imperial to a republican regime, Türkiye persisted in its pursuit of modernization without abating its efforts following the regime change. However, it is crucial to underscore that the architects of this change and transformation were individuals who had been socialized within the imperial order. This fact is noteworthy as these individuals encountered challenges in providing innovative solutions to the problems they faced, often relying on a "copy-paste" approach from the Western world, mirroring the practices of the imperial era. In terms of policies pertaining to rural regions, the new regime's approach between 1923 and 1935 exhibited similarities to the policies inherited from the Ottoman Empire. The rural regions were largely neglected by both the new regime and the Ottoman Empire, viewed primarily as sources of tax revenue and military conscripts (Aydın, 2018). This perception of villagers as individuals responsible for supporting the military formed the foundation for the new regime's approach towards rural areas, akin to the policy adopted during the imperial era.

### **The Dispersed and Heterogeneous Nature of Rural Areas**

Another factor contributing to the neglect of rural areas in Türkiye is the significant diversity among the approximately 40,000 villages in terms of population size, structures, and needs. The absence of institutions specifically tailored to the realities of rural regions in areas such as education, health, and agriculture further exacerbated the issue (Tonguç, 1976). Teacher training institutes were established to prepare educators for densely populated areas, but they were ill-equipped to address the unique challenges of villages with populations of less than 400 inhabitants. Such villages accounted for around 7 million of the total population, and assuming

approximately 10% of the general population consisted of compulsory school-age children, the number of students in these villages would range from 5 to 40. Building schools in such villages and providing education to such a small number of students in separate classrooms would be logistically difficult and impractical, rendering the efficiency and cost-saving measures ineffective (Tonguç, 1938). Moreover, the villages in rural areas of Türkiye exhibited significant variations from one another, making it feasible to categorize them into distinct groups. The first group could encompass villages with more than 400 residents, which were predominantly located near busy roads and easily accessible to markets and towns. The second group could include villages with less than 400 residents, situated far from busy roads and marketplaces. The scattered nature of villages with fewer than 400 inhabitants and the differences in social and economic conditions further complicated the situation (Tonguç, ca.1938).

### **Insufficient Infrastructure and Economic Challenges**

The deficiency in infrastructure in rural areas and the economic obstacles faced by the new regime were instrumental in prompting the regime to undertake a radical decision. The legacy of inherited debts from the Ottoman Empire era remained as the sole remnant for the new regime, compelling it to strive for a new era through the enactment of reforms. However, the economic circumstances surrounding the establishment of the new regime impeded the potential diffusion of these reforms throughout the country. In view of the more favorable conditions prevailing in urban areas, the new regime, faced with the imperative to choose between rural and urban regions in the pursuit of modernization, prioritized investment in urban development. Engin Tonguç's memoirs further shed light on the absence of adequate infrastructure in rural areas, recounting instances of impassable roads and swamps that hindered transportation (Tonguç, 2021). The lack of government institutions and basic services, such as education, healthcare, electricity, roads, and clean water, in the vast majority of the 31 thousand villages highlighted the dire situation in rural areas. The historical neglect of rural areas and the entrenched challenges therein posed significant barriers for the new regime to prioritize rural development.

### **Rural Notables**

Rural notables, namely landlords and imams, posed another significant obstacle to rural development. Exploiting the lack of authority in rural areas, these individuals gained strength and wielded considerable influence. Serving as intermediaries in resolving various matters for villagers while also exploiting them for their own benefit, rural notables established themselves as authoritative figures in rural regions for generations (Gönder, 2021a). Regarded as the sole authority in their domains, they vehemently opposed any initiatives that did not align with their vested interests. Karaömerlioğlu (1998) argues that the lack of progress in rural areas can be ascribed to the perceived incompetence of peasants in adapting to the rural environment, rather than social factors such as exploitation by rural notables. Similarly, Tütengil (1966) posited in 1948 that peasant backwardness was a result of both their lack of education and the utilization of outdated production techniques. While these claims may hold some validity, both scholars overlooked the entrenched control exerted by rural notables in these regions, as well as the challenges faced by graduates of VIs due to communist propaganda disseminated by rural notables (Gönder, 2021b). It is imperative to acknowledge that rural notables have maintained a position of power in these regions for centuries, perpetuating a power dynamic that has impeded progress and development. Furthermore, the initiation and dissemination of communist propaganda by these notables posed significant challenges for VIs graduates seeking to improve rural conditions. Thus, while peasant incompetence and primitive production techniques may contribute to rural backwardness, they should not be considered in isolation from the larger social and political forces at play in rural areas, including the enduring influence of rural notables and the impact of communist propaganda on local dynamics.

## **CONCLUSION**

The modernization process in Türkiye was a complex and multifaceted endeavor involving political, economic, and social changes. While urbanization played a critical role, the neglect of rural areas emerged as a significant obstacle to the country's overall development. This neglect can be attributed to several factors, including the perception of rural areas as traditional and backward, the prioritization of urban lifestyles in creating a unified national identity, and the dispersed nature of rural settlements. This article aims to uncover the root causes of this neglect by examining aspects such as land order, social, economic, and cultural conditions of villagers, the role of education in rural areas, and the absence of reform efforts until 1935. It is hoped that this article provides



a deeper understanding of the challenges faced during Türkiye's modernization process and lay the groundwork for future research to address these challenges comprehensively.

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