

Fahriye, a Kurdish mother:**I. Story of her marriage**

I was forced to be married when I was twelve. I especially mention it because this is the state of affairs in Kurdistan. When I was fourteen I was married and when I was sixteen I knew no Turkish because I was Kurdish and didn't learn Turkish before. I had many difficulties and lived like a slave for two years, and couldn't do any shopping, but I was very determined and began to learn Turkish when I was eighteen. I didn't work when I came to Istanbul, I didn't go to school again, but my older daughter helped me by bringing me novels. I can't write now, but I can read newspapers etc.

My husband was my uncle's son and before the marriage I didn't know I would be married. I was a child and I was playing, and I had no intention to marry. I had given no consent, but this is the problem of Kurdish women. I was very upset and when he came home I was trembling, and I could not even eat next to him.

I was living in the village of Karacocha and my uncle was living in the town center, and one day my uncle and his wife came and they brought something to eat and also a veil, a kind of Kurdish veil and they covered me as a symbol of betrothal and I put it away and I wanted to play games on the street. Since they were my relatives I didn't know what to feel and didn't feel surprised. I didn't feel anything. Somewhat later as a symbol I was painted but I washed it away. I didn't know what it was for.

This early marriage is quite widespread in Kurdistan, but compared to other areas of Turkey I don't know. I was the most free "slave" amongst girls in my area. This early marriage is like rape and is an ugly act and as long as I live I will support woman's rights acts.

I came here [Istanbul] with my husband. Because I had so many relatives I wasn't oppressed, but because I didn't know anything I was treated like a child. But I learned. And when I was nineteen I learned some human rights issues.

Fahriye, a Kurdish mother:

II. Story of her arrest

There were many massacres in Kurdistan. In 1996 my daughter entered Izmir University, and in 1996 she was lost or arrested, and we couldn't get any news of her for a while. So many are lost--there is no difference between Kurds and Turks. I was a mother. I had pain for all the children.

In 1996, policemen knocked on the door of my house in Bostanci. They told me that my daughter was arrested. Then they put me into a white car -- the color I don't forget -- one policeman said to the other (promise me that you will write this) "I killed more than you did. You kill this one." Already in the car, they blindfolded my eyes. We went to the police headquarters. They first took the blindfold away, then covered my eyes again and took me upstairs.

This is when I got deaf. One man hit my ear, saying that I am the mother of the terrorist. I fell unconscious. I don't remember how much they hit me. The doctor later told me that I had internal bleeding in my veins. They tortured me 24 hours and threw me into the street. I had no attorney.

I came home, but could not really walk. That night I went to bed, and thought all night. That's when I was watching Musa Anter's peace train on television. I thought: "They tortured me so much as an old woman; what do they do to the youth?"

Ten days later I could still not walk and went to the hospital in Hayrarpasa. I was old; I was tortured. Thinking this, I went to say farewell to Musa Anter's train. Then, twelve mothers from different cities we all sat down and made a decision. We said that we cannot live with pain. So we started the peace initiative in 1996. There were many disappearances at that time. In 1999, with Ocal's arrival, we formalized the initiative, and continued managing this office.

Even, a human rights lawyer

There are two taboos in Turkey and Kurdistan which cannot be spoken and they bring their own risk with them. One of them is militarism. The other one is sexuality issues or gender. Militarism means that even though there is a parliament, the military is strong and has power over all the other institutions, and secondly, men always see women as if they have to defend their sexual identity, women belong to men and women shouldn't be sexually free. In Turkey and Kurdistan, the woman is the honor of the family.

Here is an example: four years ago, an old man contacted our bureau and said that his daughter whom he has been searching and who has been with the guerillas for five years was found in jail. We immediately started the investigation and found her at the jail in Diyarbakir. I went to the jail to meet up with her, and she told me all she has lived. She was there for 66 days, and every day she was raped by the local forces. Psychologically, she was very disturbed. And I wanted to tell this to the public, to inform the media about this, but she said she wanted to wait. I agreed because she had to be ready for it herself.

I went back to Istanbul. She was released right after she was sued. She called me a bit later and said that she was not ready to make a public announcement because she did not want her own father to be unhappy. She was a strong woman, yet unwilling to talk about this because she thought of her father's pride and what he would think.

First thing that many, actually all, women who are subjected to sexual violence, especially state based sexual violence, think immediately is about their father, interestingly not their mothers. I never saw any woman who would talk of their mother. There is violence within the family too: the husbands, the fathers, the brothers, they exert violence on women too, but they can't tell about it because these are the people closest to them and it will be like a shame to tell about them, to give their names.

Petra, University teacher/filmmaker

Sometimes what I don't like is to be a kind of a servant, because that is what they expect of a daughter in law. Daughter-in-law [in Turkish] is *gaylen*. It means "Coming," so the girls are given away to the families of their grooms, so the brides are the ones who are coming and taking a kind of servant role. This is somehow in traditional family, they like that, so that "this is my daughter in law look how nicely she can deal with and cope with this serving issue." Maybe sometimes Turkish women are not dealing with this so much but sometimes it disturbs me. Well, they have tea, you probably realize that the tea is served in small glasses and the coffee is served in small portions so to refill for visitors you have to run around...

It's just that when it's homogeneous it's more the traditional Islamic idea of what a good girl or good women would do and she would not be out at night...it's just uncomfortable psychologically --they wouldn't touch me or do anything but just comment. It's uncomfortable to deal with that, deal with why do I have to talk with you being out at night? Why do I have to deal with something like that? I want to be out at night, so this is my space, so don't intrude. That's what I feel uncomfortable about. I have never been in situations where I have felt threatened, of not being pressed into giving--how can I say this in English--how do you say? You have to give an account yeah why you are there at that time and you're not any more a person since you're there being forced by a social pressure not to go out.

Many of these people today would say that the modernist movement enlightenment project in Turkey has brought bad things, constructed things, but one of the things it's gotten is women a position in society. I would say it's accepted and it's expected of women to be in certain positions and contribute to life business-wise or politically.

I guess it's disagreed on in provincial areas and more uneducated families, where one is expected "I am the man, I can provide for the family, I don't need my wife to work," but with the economical situation Turkey is dealing with, women have to support the family. They have economically sustained the families with their man because of the economical rises and falls.

Yildiz, a hunger striker

Naturally you are breaking a role. Your family and your environment do not accept this easily. I lived it two-fold. I was taking care of my family until I got into the prison. My initial role was to take care of my family because I was making money and had a good job. I rejected this role. I think the struggling always wins at the end. They finally saw that I have never done anything that would be a disgrace. A daughter in the prison was naturally stressful for them. They eventually accepted this. They started saying, "Our children work for humanity." A woman in political struggle has a harder time, the chains she breaks are significant in the history of struggle.

I was coming home late. Ethically my family considered this a wrong thing. In society, usually those who come home late or never come home are first degree prostitutes. This may sound raw, but these are the people who go out irresponsibly against the will of their families, fool around with men at bars and coffeehouses, who have not much to do.

I was put into jail because of my political thoughts. When you are a bit against the system, and when you argue that things need to be changed, you are put into jail. It was really interesting how I was put into jail. They were aware of my identity. I was sitting somewhere and they simply arrested me and put me in jail. Challenging the system and sharing this with others, they got disturbed and they put me into jail.

I was accused of being a member of an organization, but then during the judicial process I was accused of being a sympathizer or assistant to an organization, not a member. I was in prison between 1995 and 1997, at Bayrampasa Sagmacilar Prison. They were no cells, no solitary confinement.

When in prison, we and people who think alike never really get isolated from the outside. And when we are outside, we always live inside. Our world is always unified. Even though they have built walls around us, or our maneuver space has been limited, they could never limit our thoughts and imagination. During the prison period we had a very ordered and disciplined life. We had regular meal hours and exercise, and silence hours when we were studying, reading or working. I was there during a quite active time.

In 1996, the hunger strikes [death fasts] were happening. I was put into jail in this

period just before or on the day of an operation. I do not want to give an impression of a happy life there with my previous words. My time though was full of events, a very active time. We were expecting operations at any given moment. The most defining moment for my prison experience were the death fasts.

Gultan, A rare Istanbul female industrial business owner

When I was a child I didn't see my father because he was dead in Amasia, so it was my mother who worked. We were alone, my mother and four sisters, and we didn't have money, and when I experienced this loneliness was at school because I had no one to support me. You were supposed to have someone to do your hair in braids, so I had my sister do it and she didn't do it well and I was ashamed in front of others, and she didn't learn until it was too late.

There was a steep hill in Cibali, and I would always slide on my schoolbag down this hill. Each time I'd arrive home, I would have nothing left on me, no pencils, no erasers, no pants. And there was a field we would play in, and there were also homeless people or drunkards, but it was so good then that they wouldn't bother us. It was not like today. And now when I see one I give them money so they can drink one for me. I always have good memories.

My mother could not take care of us because of work. It was a disadvantage, but this was also why we have become so independent. And when I think of my father's absence, I say we were lucky it was my father not my mother who was dead. And lucky we didn't have a brother, so us four sisters we were confident.

My mother believed that people should be free. She was from the village. She was a peasant with a strict family and had to have a wrong marriage. Therefore she never pressured us and always let us do whatever we want.

For instance, we had flirtations in our early years and we were bad for such things and also I remember going to the cinema with our boyfriends. I remember us going without tickets and the owner of the cinema would be very angry at these times. I feel very free. Whatever I want to, I do. I can go wherever I want whenever I want and I am very free compared to my peers, and my family structure compared to people in the same [situation].

Pinar, political activist, accused of terrorism and imprisoned for an extended period

On the streets, there is a serious masculine culture, especially in Istanbul...and I tried to exist there without becoming a man...

The interrogator asked me the people I had seen [members of the Kurdish Independence organization, PKK], that I had seen in Holland, Germany, I had written their names down as x, y, z, so when I rejected giving out the names, I went through a heavy torture. They lost my research papers. That research was a search for peace. They took all the diskettes I had, and said that they found a bomb in my atelier. Later it was understood that they had already had those bombs. They made me a bomber. I was in the newspapers: the daughter of the famous lawyer, she comes from a such and such a family, she went to such and such a school.

There was a place called the Misir Bazaar. In the Misir Bazaar case, they claimed that it was me who bombed the Place. I stayed in the Prison for two years. Everybody recognized me as a terrorist and as a bomber. In the meantime they destroyed my atelier. They destroyed all the work we have put together there. All the work we did on that street was destroyed. It was impossible for them to find a bomb there because it was an open space, everybody was going in there and I was an anti militarist person. And I couldn't have anything to do with bombs or anything. Therefore everybody was shocked. I was in the front pages. They called me the terrorist bomber, the angel-faced devil.

Sadiye, a journalist and former prostitute

I did not have time to go to school. I got sick at the age of 14 and was hospitalized. It is hard to go to school because I had no id - my older sister wanted to give me to her “friend” and I did not accept that. I attempted suicide. After the suicide attempt—there are many stories--I got married at the age of 15. At the age of 16, I went to Europe to work in a factory in Germany. I stayed there for a year. I went there to get my man over there who had heart rheumatism. I returned after a year; my marriage lasted for 6 months. He died after we got divorced. Then this life of nightclubs started...

If you are a pretty woman in Turkey, you cannot work as a maid because either the man or the son of the house would hit on you; either you resist them and they fire you or you accept this silently. Instead, I decided to work in a brothel. I don't regret it because I knew it. Nobody knew until I was twenty but when I was twenty they were aware of it.

I have always supported myself. Nobody has ever supported me. And I don't want any support from anyone. I am not sure if I told you this, I had an operation. I had six months left when an Arab doctor operated on me. I had to work because I didn't have any pension or insurance and all my money poured into medical expenses.

Not much has happened to me. I am a calm person. God must have been with me. But at the job, danger started when I sued. My employer prevented me from getting insurance; he did not want that. The Mafia was around me, but I was not scared neither of the employer nor the Mafia. I had no fear. Finally, I won my legal case, and proved to the state that I worked for 28 years. The state though has been unfair to me and counted only 17 years. They argued that there is no law to execute. I am going to look for my rights for 11 years and apply to the court of human rights. People go for nothing in Turkey. The state had to do better. I received a compensation, but all my work hours, my holiday hours were never counted. But I'm a very stubborn woman. I will fight at any cost.

In the office where I worked there were some dangers like Mafia but I never cared about them. It's very dangerous to be a prostitute and I strive against the law. I worked for

28 years and I sued the state and I got my rights, my pension, but I worked for twenty eight years the hardest, hideous work. But here people are cheap and they gave me some extra because I sued them and I got money for this life. They didn't give me all, they didn't give me for my daily, they didn't count them and they didn't give me my [cost of living raises] but I am very stubborn and I will get these.

The state has licensed a place and we operated there under the Ministry of Health. We would go twice a week to check ups, checking AIDS, getting x-rayed etc. Thank God there are no problems with my health. When the state gave away the ID cards, it should have given me my rights, too: that I shouldn't have to work if I got sick.