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# CHILD MARRIAGE IN TÜRKİYE: ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCED WOMEN'S NARRATIVES. Preface

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► **To cite this version:**

Patrick Bruneteaux. CHILD MARRIAGE IN TÜRKİYE: ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCED WOMEN'S NARRATIVES. Preface. CHILD MARRIAGE IN TÜRKİYE: ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCED WOMEN'S NARRATIVES, Routledge, 2024, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Society, 9781032574264. hal-04311905

**HAL Id: hal-04311905**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04311905>**

Submitted on 28 Nov 2023

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## **Préface**

# **CHILD MARRIAGE IN TÜRKİYE:**

**ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCED  
WOMEN'S NARRATIVES**

**Esra Bayhantopçu**

## 1

As a sociologist working on poverty issues in France, I admire Esra's work. For it wasn't just a question of meeting, for the most part (despite a few cases of households with cultural capital), poor women steeped in the traditional culture of a part of Turkey where this type of practice is still commonplace. We had to be able to discuss and "gather" informations from people who, for the most part, had been traumatized by the choices imposed by the family group and the patriarchal system.

Between the thesis and this book, a long road has been travelled, with a refinement of language and theoretical frameworks, with a renewed distance that brings the final touches to this work so important in feminist or gender.

Among your indisputable contributions, we must mention the breadth, vision and generalization that have enabled you to move from media analysis to a socio-historical analysis of the problem. By devoting yourself to analyzing the discourse on women in Turkey, and by delving into the country's various historical periods, you now offer us a comprehensive look at the issue. The survey was conducted between 2014 and 2015, offering recent first-hand data on the problem, as well as the most up-to-date statistics. This makes your work a reference work.

You underline the relationship between women's own representations of what happened in their lives as forced wives and the social constructions of the problem in dominant ideological discourses, now and in the past. And, of course, at the heart of social practices of domination based on religion, moral codes and reputations, so many "obligations" to be fulfilled, monitored, imposed and, if need be, punished.

Of course, the problem of forced marriages is not unique to Turkey, and the author is right to point out that it is a global problem affecting gender relations. But while "reports" abound, and social medical centers receive women calling for help, there are few researchers in the field who have been able to access the populations concerned in order to grasp their trajectory in the complexity of family relations on both sides of the scale.

## 2

While legal and political boundaries indicate that child marriage begins under the age of 18, social science looks more broadly at cultures, acceptance phenomena, resilience and resistance, and the tensions between macro-social norms and micro-social interpretations.

Indeed, the dominant discourse, so quick to disqualify the woman ready to leap into the arms of another man, wants from the outset, "at the start of life", to put forward the risk of early or unwanted pregnancy, the honor of the family or all the attributes of the prostitute or dangerous woman. The sooner the woman is married, the better the order will be preserved. As you can see, Esra clearly shows how the social system violates women who don't want these forced marriages, except for a very small part of her sample.

But perhaps the worst thing for families is to love their children and intrinsically want to keep them, while being unable to do so out of necessity. The cost of children is such that, as in many other countries around the world, including Nepal and Bangladesh, parents sell their daughters or, at the very least, arrange to place them on the marriage market as quickly as possible.

What's even more incredible is the circularity of male violence, with the threat of rape and sexual harassment of young girls triggering a spiral of control that ultimately serves the dominant males who are at the root of the problem! Instead of educating men to respect the integrity of women's bodies, patriarchal systems externalize responsibility onto women, in other words, onto fathers who assume the burden of transferring the burden.

The book takes a detailed look at all the "weights" weighing on the mental structures of these trapped women (like the young boys, incidentally) who are going to have to live with a man they didn't choose. Nothing beats the discourse of the actors, the feelings of the people, the representations bearing the values, like this father who petrifies social obligation by evoking his shoulder still used to carry his runaway daughter back into the fold. When routines break down, the crisis reveals "rectification" in the postures of sanction and reparation, a second layer that delivers all the intensity with which symbolic capital is exerted on women's bodies, through those muscular arms that bend the dominated, bent under the weight of muscular repression. The role of the repressive mother-in-law is often overlooked. Almost the owner of her son, she becomes jealous of her wife and torments her as much as possible. If the husband is difficult to bear, he's not the only one. It's the whole family of the "other" that imposes itself through violence and suffering.

And nothing is more dramatically a validation of symbolic capital than to see these young girls validate the power of the other through their own consent. It's not a common occurrence, but then again, parents can have qualms about dictating their choices. The question is: to what extent can the daughter, with all the weight of paternal authority asserting itself in the father's precedence with regard to the plot already defined, the husband found, the contacts established, refuse, oppose herself to the choice of the necessary and the honor of all?

### 3

The wealth extracted from these lives is that of the 34 women we met, from whom social science can infer representations, experiences and objective analyses of living conditions. This passage from the subjective to the objective presupposed a great deal of know-how, which is clearly accomplished in this research, which readers will be able to verify for themselves.

Like all scientific work, it was necessary to define the terms of the survey and the most global concepts (gender, identity, sexual violence, economic necessity, forced marriage, etc.). But it goes without saying that the heart of the demonstration rests on the reconstruction of "pieces" of the lives of these placed women, who showed common reactions but also diverse tactics of resistance.

The theoretical framework clearly indicates that what's at stake is the deconstruction of patriarchy in this specific dimension of the social construction of women as objects to be controlled, as a kind of cultural product whose value is proportional to the hold that power can

exert in order to normalize, smooth and conform as closely as possible to men's expectations. The important thing is to go from father to husband.

In working with the women, we were always concerned to give them the opportunity to feel at ease, to confide in us in complete confidence, and thus to be able to relate their experiences. The methodological approach was not just profoundly ethical: while the interviews conducted are underpinned by respect for the ethical standards laid down by Macnamara, there are many other scientific qualities to report in your work; including critical discourse analysis, the snowball tool, the empathic approach to gaining trust, tree interviews - all epistemological framings that enabled you to report your data.

It should be added that these interviews were mostly carried out in the homes of the interviewees, offering a quasi-ethnographic depth of view on their lifestyles and the organization of their days.

You can't help but admire the methodological order proposed, with all its tables, curves and data classifications. Research ethics is all about respecting people by respecting their information, in other words, by respecting formal transcription. It's one thing to quote what people say, it's quite another to link them into logical chains, categorizations that are knotted together and articulated.

#### 4

And yet, in spite of this "infernal" mesh, since domination is accompanied by orders, vexations and humiliations ("you can't do anything", "you're good for nothing"), wives and daughters-in-law still manage to create their own spaces, large or small.

The incorporation of traditional symbolic frameworks is not complete, since some of these women run away from the marital home, either in the first few weeks of marriage, or later, after several years and having had children.

The sociologist describes the battles fought to gain freedom, to be able to go out alone, to have her own money, to go shopping. The limits of clinical work are undoubtedly reached here, as the women do not expose their resistance "in bed", the tactics used to escape marital rape, the obligation to do one's duty.

While the book shows how difficult it is to make the decision to escape, both materially and psychologically, it also reveals how symbolic escape, through children or even by trying to tame the partner, makes the imposed marital and family situation livable. And yet, in the end, what this remarkable demonstration clearly shows is the majority's rejection of this condition, and the new frustrations and suffering experienced by women on the run, most often to the capital.

The proportion of divorced women reveals these capacities for dissidence and escape.

La proportion de femmes divorcées révèle ces capacités de dissidence, de fuite

Perhaps it's a pity that the "traps" of conservatism couldn't be put into perspective with the modernity present in big cities, even if codes of honor aren't totally erased in middle- and upper-

class families. But it was important to grasp in minute detail what makes up the cultural world of this patriacalism on the women's side. And it is this view of the vanquished, though resistant in many aspects of their lives, that is delivered to us thanks to the perseverance and quality of Esra Bayhantopçu's analyses.