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## **Different Forms of Coercion Used to Obtain Consent: Defining Forced Marriage**

*By Nisrin Abu Amara, Anouk Guiné and Christelle Hamel*

### **Introduction**

The question of “forced marriage” emerged in French public debate with the publication of the annual report of the High Council for Integration (HCI) in 2004, following the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (Rec2002-5), which considered “forced” and “early” marriage as an act of violence against women that called for a universal plan of action by all Member States. Nowadays, marriage in which one or both of the parties is married against his or her will has become very unusual in French society, although the generations who married in the 1950s and 1960s were exposed to this practice (Girard 1974; Hamel 2007, 2011). Young people today tend to form couples when they are older and marriage is no longer the predominant norm (Prioux 2006). For the immigrant population and, to a lesser extent, for their children born in France, marriage remains the dominant trend, however, precisely because it is the only form of legal union in certain countries of emigration (Hamel 2011). As a result, and although representing a small proportion in statistical terms, forced marriages still occur in these populations (Tribalat 1996; Hamel 2011).

The expression “forced marriage” appears to refer to a reality that is easy to identify, but recent research emphasizes that this is by no means the case. Edwige Rude-Antoine (2000, 2011) has drawn attention to the variety of terms encountered in law and in international texts (early marriage, child marriage, even marriage of convenience); while Béate Collet and Emmanuelle Santelli (2008) have shown, through the accounts of young women, that they often realize only retrospectively that they were forced into marriage, for example, when the marital relationship turns out to be unsatisfactory, or even violent. It would seem, in fact, that “lack of consent” is a very hard concept to define. Other studies focus on the support for, and history of, victims of non-consent (Razy 2006; Nevrand, Hammouche, and Mekboul 2008) rather than seeking to define it, since the research concerns women who report being the victims of forced marriage themselves. All in all, studies of non-consent are relatively scarce in the social sciences. By examining the effects of intimate partner violence and, more widely, sexism, on the “awareness of dominated women,” Nicole-Claude Mathieu has emphasized the fact that women are led “to a bogus form of consent” since they are subjected to numerous

pressures to which they “submit” rather than truly consenting (Mathieu 1985), creating paradoxical situations in which the dominated give the impression of willingness. Moreover, as Geneviève Fraisse has emphasized, consent to marriage is necessarily “bounded by constraints and values” (Fraisse 2007) that are embedded in a system of social norms wherein consent becomes an entirely relative notion.

We have decided to concentrate in this article on the numerous ways of extracting consent and the variety of processes leading a person to “submit” and outwardly “consent,” and even to express a “wish” to get married, in an environment of strong social coercion. We will focus on this coercion and on its effects upon the people concerned. We have adopted a gender perspective in our analysis to account for the existence of a continuum between sexism and the norms relative to sexuality, conjugality and violence against women (Kelly 1988; Anitha, and Gill 2009), since, even if violence is the most palpable and identifiable manifestation of the coercion behind consent, it is also far from being the only means of applying pressure. Social norms contribute to the creation of a hierarchy between the sexes and their internalization affects women’s ability to express their wishes and to make sure that they are respected. Our aim is thus to identify the boundaries between yielding to social pressure and adhering to these norms, and also to explore women’s awareness of subordination, their resistance to oppression, and their individual quest for autonomy. In order to do so, we carried out a series of semi-structured interviews [1] with 29 women who had taken part in the quantitative survey conducted by INED and INSEE in 2008 entitled *Trajectories and Origins, Population Diversity in France (Trajectoires et origines: la diversité des populations de France, TeO)*, which included two questions connected with consent to marriage. We propose a classification for these marriages that takes into account not only the different barriers to freely consented marriage, but also these women’s degree of resistance to marriage against their will.

### **A Qualitative Follow-up Survey after the TeO Quantitative Survey**

Most of the work on forced marriage has focused on women who have appealed to organisations for help. Here, survey respondents were contacted in a very different manner, not based on the self-identification of women as victims of a forced marriage. We interviewed 29 women, immigrants or immigrants’ daughters, who had taken part in the TeO survey. This survey, which was representative of the population living in France, examined the lifestyle of immigrants and their descendants. Two questions enabled us to identify coercion to obtain consent; the first identified the person who initiated the marriage (the respondent or her spouse, her parents, or even her parents-in-law), while the second was centred on identifying the desire to marry or, on the contrary, to oppose marriage. 361 women out of the 11,480 interviewed replied that they did not initiate their marriage, reporting that they “wanted to get married, but later” or that they “did not want

to get married, but were obliged to do so because of family pressure.” Some of them agreed to be re-interviewed and INSEE sent us the contact details of 99 of them. [2] After sending out a letter of notification describing the research, we contacted them by telephone and 29 agreed to meet us, of whom 19 were immigrants and 10 the daughters of immigrants; there were no representatives of the mainstream population. Seven interviews were conducted over the telephone because of the distances involved, since the interviewees came from all over France. Among the immigrants, five found it difficult to express themselves in French, although that did not prevent them from recounting their past. Some interviews could not be carried out, in most cases because the respondent had moved to a new address in the year following the quantitative survey. Note that the women who had lived through the most difficult situations are currently divorced and this probably motivated their participation in the study. The interviewees had been subjected to pressure, indicating coercion, although they did not necessarily define themselves as victims of forced marriage. During the interviews, we did not use the expression “forced marriage” except in certain cases at the end of the interview to ask if the respondents had considered to file a complaint; none had done so. Only a few respondents used this expression spontaneously to refer to their situations.

An analysis of the data from the quantitative survey on female respondents aged 26-50, shows that those who would have preferred to marry later represent 9% of the immigrants, 3% of the daughters of immigrants born in France, and 3% of the women from the mainstream population, while those who were married against their will represent 4%, 1.6%, and 1.7%, respectively (Hamel 2011). It is worth noting that there was a very strong disparity in terms of origin and social class and that among the youngest (ages 26-30), those who were married against their will represent 2% of immigrants, 1% of daughters of immigrants, and 0% of the mainstream population, indicating that these unions are becoming increasingly rare and are declining sharply in migrant populations. The classification based on the analysis of the interviews thus sheds light on the results of the quantitative survey by clarifying the respondents’ statements.

Five types of marital configurations were identified for our classification. They are based on a systematic examination of intergenerational relationships in the respondents’ families (degree of conflict between parents and children; evolving gender norms in educational practices; parental control of sexuality), but also the circumstances of the unions (arranged or not; reasons for marriage stated by parents and respondents), the social and economic climate of the country of residence (social class, standard of living, level of education, political context), forms of coercion (physical, psychological, financial), the women’s reaction (resistance or resignation) and, lastly, the consequences for life and health (trajectories in terms of education, career, marriage, sexual and mental health).

We have also taken into consideration the way in which these marriages were experienced and described by the women concerned. After the open question “Can you tell me about your marriage?” and a number of follow-up questions, two questions were intended to examine the degree of consent and the possible disquiet felt by the respondents, namely, “Were you in a position to refuse this marriage?” and “What did you feel when you got married?” Questions concerning blackmail and violence were only broached at the end of the interview if they had not already been mentioned spontaneously. Although the first three configurations concern marriages arranged by the families, the last two concern cases in which the meeting with the spouse occurred independently of the family, but where the decision to get married was the result of coercion on the part of the family, the spouse, or society. We made the following distinctions: 1) Early marriage with a combination of psychological pressure, sequestration, and the threat of physical violence; 2) Marriage believed to be the only possible response to a lack of personal freedom within the family; 3) Marriage in which powerful social norms forced the respondent to agree to a marriage arranged by the families; 4) Marriage in which only the decision to get married (and not the choice of the spouse) was imposed by the family; 5) Other forms of constraint relating to the decision to get married.

### **1 – Early Marriages or a Combination of Different Pressures**

This first category includes cases where the matrimonial choices are made by the family and imposed upon the young people at an early age, and where no negotiation is possible between the parents and the future bride, even though she has explicitly expressed her opposition. In the quantitative survey, all the women stated that their marriage was initiated by their parents or parents-in-law and that they themselves did not want to get married. They referred to their marriage as being a forced marriage without any prompting, although those in the other categories did not. Out of the five women in question, four were immigrants and one was born in France to immigrant parents. Originally from Algeria, Morocco, Mali, the Ivory Coast, and Turkey, they came from working class or rural backgrounds and their parents were not educated. They grew up in families where there were strongly differentiated gender roles and a gender hierarchy. Their education was very brief or non-existent and was cut short by marriage in the cases of two of the women. Pinar (born in France to Turkish parents) was taken out of school at the age of 16, as was Noura (born in Algeria), at the age of 17. Aged between 28 and 53 at the time of the interview, they worked as domestic employees for private individuals or were employed by cleaning or sales sub-contractors.

### **Marriage: Reputation, Family Issues, and the Control of Female Sexuality**

In the case of the immigrant women, these marriages were arranged between 1973 and 1998 in their countries of origin long before they migrated. All were first marriages, except one, which was a second marriage after the death of the first husband. Their marriages were not only early (four out of five brides were aged 15 or 16), but also hurried, since the women were married as soon as they had met their spouse. The absence of a period of engagement prevented them from getting to know their future husbands. Beyond these particular examples, all the migrant women who stated in the quantitative survey that they were married as a result of family pressure were married at an early age, mostly within three months of meeting their future husband (ibid.). In their families, relationships were characterized by a gulf between parents and children, who were expected to show respect for their elders, making communication between the generations difficult. Although these young women considered marriage as a personal matter, for their parents, a “good marriage» was one in which the family interests were safeguarded and in which the spouse was known to the family. Their families desired above all to reinforce pre-existing interfamily connections by a marriage between cousins or between families linked by close neighbourly relations and mutual material support (see also Santelli, and Collet 2008).

The age difference between spouses was considerable, ranging from nine to forty years, placing these young women in a situation of age domination on two fronts, both parental and marital. These marriages also flouted the generational hierarchy, with the wives being considered as no more than “young girls” by their husbands. Large age gaps are, moreover, characteristic of unions in which intimate partner violence occurs, whatever the cultural origins, as was demonstrated by the national study conducted on violence against women in France (Jaspard et al. 2003).

Concern for reputation, where virginity is associated with the family’s public image, is a key factor in these marriages. Pinar’s marriage took place as soon as she was suspected of having a boyfriend at her high school and Kadiatou’s when her mother discovered that she had been raped by her cousin and was no longer a virgin. Her marriage in France to a man she did not know was a strategy thought up by her mother to contain the rumours. Karima, whose first husband had just died, was forced to remarry at age 25 to prevent her from going out with other men. In addition to family “solidarity”, the fear of “unbridled” female sexuality is another motivating factor for early or forced marriage, while the young age of these women, their lack of financial independence and extra-familial support means that they are prevented from finding an alternative to marriage.

## **The Use of Violence and Control over Young Women**

The forms of coercion mentioned by the respondents consisted primarily of emotional blackmail and psychological pressure in the form of intimidation and the creation of guilt feelings. Sara's father threatened to divorce if she refused to get married. The moral pressure exerted was enough to obtain her consent. Sometimes the threat of physical violence or recourse to sequestration produce the desired effect. Kadiatou's sister's forced marriage was enough to convince her that any opposition was pointless. After an attempt to escape, organized with the help of their brother, her older sister then aged 14, was beaten by her uncles then married off. She was hospitalized for severe bleeding on the day of the wedding ceremony after being raped by her new husband. The desire to escape can also be quashed through the complicity of the family circle, as recounted by Sara, who was married at 15: "I tried to run away but they caught me... Someone told on me. They were watching." The inescapability of marriage also stems from the difficulty of standing up to one's parents at this young age and the lack of material resources. There is also a feeling of guilt when parents have sacrificed a lot to bring up their children. Noura felt indebted to her mother, who had brought up her five daughters single-handed, and therefore resigned herself to marrying a man she did not know. On the day her future husband asked for her hand in marriage, her mother, who had herself experienced family pressure because she was divorced, threatened to disown her if she refused, arguing that she would be held to account for her "failure" to bring her up properly. She said to her daughter: "(if you refuse to get married), you can just pack your bags and out you go. Like that, I will simply say: 'She did a moonlight flit and went goodness knows where.'"

## **From Spousal Violence to Divorce**

What, then, was the fate of these women? Three were forced to emigrate, leading to an increased sense of isolation. Two endured intimate partner violence. For her part, Sara was forced to put up with ill-treatment from her co-wife as her husband was polygamous. Since they were unaware of the structures in place to help them, the violence continued for many years. All the women reported forced sexual relations, but in the majority of cases did not classify them as "rape." For instance, Karima told us that when she made it clear that she did not want sexual relations, her husband gave her pills to prevent her from refusing. A number of pregnancies ensued, which might also be described as forced since they occurred at a young age.

As the years went by and they came to realize the harm that was being done to them and their children who witnessed this violence, the women's resistance became more active as well as more effective. With maturity on their side, they decided to sever the ties imposed on them and to break the cycle of violence. They all ended their first marriages, although obtaining a divorce was a long, wearying process that took from several

months to five years. During the process, they had to contend with their families as well as obstruction and harassment on the part of their spouses. Pinar's divorce led to violence from her brother and was accompanied by death threats culminating in a family rift. For some, this dual severing of marriage and family ties led to considerable financial hardship. Finding accommodation presented a particular problem, as is also noted by all the associations involved in helping victims. Four of those interviewed escaped the marital home, living for a time in accommodation provided by friends before they were able to achieve financial independence. They received none of the alimony payments owed by their ex-husbands.

The respondents spoke in great detail about the effects of their marriages on their health, using terms like "take their toll" or "trauma," but only two of them sought psychological help. After escaping her husband's violence, Noura experienced aggression from the young people living in her area, for the very reason, in her view, that she was a single mother living alone with her children. Past violence and the need to support her children financially on her own, compounded by the constant fear of violence in her neighborhood, caused physical as well as mental exhaustion.

*« I am very tired and morally exhausted... I am here talking to you, but inside I am just so tired... I am tired, but I am struggling to live up to my responsibilities. But there are times when I really wish I was on my own, there are times when I really want... (tears) to live, to feel like a woman. »*

After their divorce, three of the respondents entered a second union chosen freely, believing that they would find material and emotional security, both for themselves and their children. These new relationships also led to divorce, either because of infidelity, or a refusal on the part of the husband to share in the family expenses, suggesting that the women now had new expectations concerning their marriages. With the aim of making a fresh start, they were seeking to exercise their legal and welfare rights, and focusing on educational and leisure activities with their children.

In conclusion, their lack of qualifications, their isolation owing to emigration, and their youth all contributed to these women's financial hardship, along with the fact that they had to single-handedly bear financial responsibility for their children by working in poorly paid jobs. During the period in which they were rebuilding their lives, two of them found stable accommodation with the help of associations or municipal employees. At the time of the interview, the other three were living in temporary accommodation or in insecure housing and had been waiting several years for their social housing applications to be processed. They were struggling to overcome their difficulties by carrying out the necessary administrative procedures, by keeping active, and by attempting to build solid relationships with other women.

## **2 – Marriage as the Only Possible Answer to the Lack of Personal Freedom within the Family**

The marriages in this group were not all initiated by the family. Coercion, here, is no longer a matter of violence or intimidation, but the strength of marriage as a norm is such that it cannot be contested. This normative pressure went hand in hand with a very controlling attitude on the part of the parents (some women had difficult relationships with their parents), and it was for this reason that they wanted to escape from their families as soon as possible. The women saw marriage as a way out that would give them freedom even though they would have preferred to marry later, as was stated in both the TeO survey and the interviews. Unlike the women in the first category, the four women in question were unable or unwilling to voice their opposition to marriage, but neither did they accept family intervention in their emotional lives.

Three were immigrants, two coming from Algeria as adults (Nacira and Linda) and the third from Mali as a child (Myriam). The fourth was born in France to Algerian parents (Malika). At the time of the interview, they were aged between 28 and 45. Their fathers were uneducated laborers and their mothers were housewives, with the exception of one who worked as a secretary. The two immigrants who had arrived as adults, had had a relatively brief education, with Linda leaving school at 16 to follow an apprenticeship in embroidery and Nacira interrupting her studies to get married. Those who were educated in France had a longer education, but one that was also cut short. Myriam, for instance, had to leave school to go back to Mali and Malika stopped her BA law studies on her husband's orders. Owing to their lack of education, Nacira and Linda were employed in the domestic services sector and Malika worked in administrative support; Myriam, for her part, was looking for a job.

### **Marriage as an Imperative**

The interviewees in this category were married at between 19 and 29 years of age, a little later than the women in the first category, so it is not a question of early marriages here. In addition, their marriages were preceded by a period of engagement testifying to a completely different attitude on the part of their parents. With the exception of Malika, who was born and married in France to a descendant of Algerian immigrants, the other immigrants were married in their country of origin before they emigrated. The age gap between spouses (between one and ten years) is smaller than in the preceding category.

The respondents described a restrictive upbringing with profound gender inequalities. They were, for instance, forbidden to meet the opposite sex and their movement was restricted through the "protection" afforded by their brothers. In addition, Myriam underwent female genital mutilation (FGM) as a young child. A chance encounter with a potential spouse was almost impossible. For the parents, marriage was an imperative:

“Over there, when you reach adulthood, you have to get married. You can’t stay ‘like that’” (Nacira). The women were under pressure to get married at a “suitable” age. For the parents of both women, arranging a marriage was part of their parental duties. This view seems so “self-evident” that it would be unthinkable to contest it. So Linda’s and Nacira’s marriages were arranged by their families. Malika and Myriam were able to choose their husbands, but from a very narrow circle of young men from the same background or from their families. Malika sometimes met hers in secret, and Myriam married her cousin chosen with her father’s consent, but against her mother’s wishes. In both these cases, the parents quickly took charge of the wedding plans and imposed their traditions, involving a formal request for marriage, an engagement, and the organization of the wedding ceremony by the parents.

The parents who had either initiated or masterminded the marriage still attached strong importance to preserving their daughter’s virginity and the “reputation” of the family. According to Malika, “it was immoral [to go out with a man]. It was a pious culture... the idea of a young girl’s life is that she should be a virgin, get married, and that’s it!” When she wanted to break off her engagement, her parents refused: “It’s just not possible! What’s to become of our family honour?” In the case of the two marriages initiated by the family, information on the future husband was withheld, as has sometimes been observed in other studies (Hamouche 2010). It was only in France that Linda discovered that her husband had psychological problems, was dependent on his family and ill. She was therefore subjected to a highly dysfunctional marriage as well as the domineering control of her mother-in-law. Myriam experienced a similar situation, compounded by her husband’s violence.

### **Desiring Freedom but not Marriage: The Ambivalence of Consent**

In the TeO survey questionnaire, three of these respondents reported that they did not want to get married, but were obliged to do so owing to family pressure, although Linda wanted to get married but, preferably, at a later date. All the women reported that the initiative had been taken by their parents, including the two respondents who mentioned in the interview that they had not met their spouses at the instigation of their families (Myriam and Malika). They felt that they had had no control over the situation:

*« I got married at 19, much too young! I think now that I flew the nest too soon because I no longer wanted to be under my parents’ control. But I made a bad marriage... I said ‘yes’ when in fact I really didn’t want to. I got married to leave home. It was an escape.”*

*(Malika, 38)*

Nacira also lived in an environment where she was constantly dominated by her father. She wanted to “discover another world,” which was why she immediately accepted a proposal of marriage conveyed through her uncle. Aware of the lack of alternatives, she

emphasized the lack of equality between her and her husband: “Men have the right to do exactly what they want.” Linda, married at the age of 29 to an Algerian living in France, also saw no other alternative because of her lack of qualifications and her relatively advanced age. She was in tears before the wedding and, although her father suggested that she should “back out,” she said during the interview that she “half” wanted the marriage since her departure for France offered her the opportunity to “rebuild her life”, and this was why she agreed to it. She wanted to acquire more freedom, but found that she was dominated even more than she had been in Algeria, being isolated and constantly watched over by her in-laws who forbade her to work or to undertake any sort of training.

The women’s experiences highlight the complex nature of defining consent, the paradoxes created by financial constraints, and the sexism prevalent in social and family norms since, here, a verbal acceptance of marriage implies neither informed consent, nor a genuine acceptance of the situation. It represents a desire to escape the stranglehold of the family and the power relations behind it, as well as an aspiration to a life that is socially accepted. For women with no financial resources, marriage represents the hope of emancipation, but ultimately leads them into a new situation of dominance on the part of the husband and in-laws.

### **From Parental to Marital Control**

The desire to escape family control is, in this category, the principal incentive behind the wish to get married, since marriage appears to be the only possible way out of the parental home. The women imagine that, once they are married, they will have the freedom to move and to make decisions concerning their way of life that was denied them while they lived with their parents. Thus, the choice of spouse is made in a context where having a boyfriend is not tolerated and where “choice” is restricted to the immediate entourage (a cousin) or is made on the initiative of the parents. In short, they live in an environment where they have no control over their life choices.

Although the women were eager for freedom, they were subjected to form of control in their marriages that was as strong as, or even stronger than, that of their original families. It was only after their marriage that they discovered strong differences of opinion with their husband with regard to their life as a couple and the constraints that would be imposed upon them (see also Collet, and Santelli 2008). Malika describes the contrast between the happiness she felt when she got married and her life afterwards:

*I was happy, in a beautiful dress... When you are a young girl, marriage is seen as something wonderful. But afterwards, the constraints soon became apparent. I was obliged to leave school, stay at home, and not work. It wasn't the life I wanted.*

After their marriages, three of the four women experienced intimate partner violence. With four children and no family support, Nacira (Algeria) remained trapped in her marriage for a long time. Malika put up with spousal violence for 11 years and refused to talk to her family about it out of shame and guilt. Forced to live with her in-laws and coming up against disagreements in her marriage, Myriam experienced increasing violence from her husband when she refused to comply with his demands. For Linda, marriage was followed by an emigration that she did not want and a sense of isolation which was exacerbated by her mother-in-law. All these marriages ended in divorce, except in the case of Nacira who became a widow after four requests for divorce with unsuccessful outcomes in Algeria. Linda later entered a second marriage with a man of her choice. Malika is cohabiting with a Frenchman in spite of her family's disapproval and Myriam is living alone with her child.

To conclude, in addition to the physical blows received, the marriages themselves were experienced by the women as a form of violence, particularly as they were initially unaware that they would be made to abandon their education, live with their in-laws, and give up their hopes for the future. Their "consent" was, therefore, not "informed" and exposed them to situations of intimate partner violence when they were seen as too rebellious by their spouses. Like the women in the previous category, they showed a spirit of resistance, but this manifested itself, above all, after their marriages rather than before, although the initial desire to leave the parental home already reflected their desire to escape oppressive social control. Malika, whose husband was violent, fled to another town and, with no resources of her own, lived in her car for several weeks before finding work and accommodation. Nacira, who did not manage to escape with her four children, nevertheless asked for a divorce on four occasions, and it was only after her husband's death that she came to live in France. Emigration was, for her, a form of emancipation.

### **3 – Accepted Arranged Marriages: From Trust in the Parental Decision to an Expression of Regret**

This category includes four women who married between 1970 and 1995 and is characterized by financial hardship which, in contexts of war, inadequate education and material resources, and rural poverty, is seen to provide justification for arranged marriage on social grounds, and for a reinforcement of gender norms. These women thus went along with a family decision perceived as being beneficial to them, even though it did not correspond to their personal aspirations. These women have always

shown absolute trust in their parents, both now and in the past, and this differentiates them from the respondents in the previous categories.

They differ in terms of country of origin and religion: Chad, Senegal, the Maghreb, and Sri Lanka; Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. They were aged between 37 and 57 and came from more diverse social backgrounds than the women in the previous categories. Cindy (37, Sri Lanka) and Mina (43, Sri Lanka) came from a more well-to-do background, but had experienced war. Like their parents, they were the only ones who started university, unlike Tina (57, Chad) and Thérèse (48, Senegal), who were unable to finish their schooling owing to difficult financial circumstances and gender inequality within their social and family communities in a rural environment. One never went to school at all and the other, who was put in charge of various domestic tasks, left school at an early age.

### **Intergenerational Trust and Adherence to Norms: The Driving Force behind the Acceptance of Family-Instigated Marriage**

The respondents' relationships with their families, based on respect and understanding, were positive, which was not the case in the interviews with the women in the other categories. Trust in parental choice, perceived as being well-intentioned, carefully thought-out, and concerned for the woman's future, is put forward as the reason for accepting the marriages. Knowing the family of the future spouse constituted a necessary prerequisite to a "good marriage," but the parents also consulted their daughters and sought their agreement. Norms controlling feminine sexuality were also present, however. Thérèse underwent FGM and in Tina's case, the blood-stained sheet was exhibited on the morning after her wedding. Today, as mothers, they feel responsible for conveying the importance of virginity to their daughters, while at the same time being well-disposed to a personal choice of husband and giving priority to education over marriage. Even so, the "normalcy" of an arranged marriage did not prevent the women from expressing regrets; they admitted that they still would have preferred another life, to have got married at another time and in another context. Their marriages took place in the country of origin when they were between 17 and 23 years old and the age gap between them and their husbands ranged between five and nine years. They were financially dependent on their families with the exception of Mina who worked as a secretary. The two Sri Lankan women (married at 20 and 23) were studying at university at the time. After their marriages, which were precipitated by the political upheavals in their country, they emigrated to France. Their parents saw their marriage and exile as a means of protection. In France, it was impossible for them to resume their studies or to find employment corresponding to their level of qualification (one works as a cashier and the other in a fast food restaurant) owing to language difficulties. Adapting

to life in France took a long time for the four women because of their financial hardship, but they learnt French while at work, earning a living from low-paid jobs.

### **Marriages of Reason despite Dreams of Another Life**

According to the respondents' answers in the TeO survey, the marriage was instigated by the parents (in Mina and Cindy's case), by the spouse (in Thérèse's case), and by another family member (in Tina's case). Two of the women reported that they did not want to get married and were subjected to family pressure obliging them to do so; the other two stated that they would have preferred to marry at a later date. Their accounts are ambivalent since they mention family pressure at the same time as maintaining that they had "the right to choose." The women seem to be aware that there was no choice in the matter, but are unwilling to acknowledge or verbalize this feeling. This is because the absence of choice is not attributed to their parents, but to circumstance. Their financial dependence on their families, their lack of education in Thérèse's and Tina's case, or a troubled political environment, meant that they had no choice, but the affection and trust that they felt for their parents prevented them from assigning any blame.

The transition to married life occurred without conflict. The marriage proposal was followed by an engagement in which the husband and wife-to-be could get to know one another. The women saw in marriage the hope of a better life; namely, an escape from a climate of war, the guarantee of financial security provided by a husband, and the status of wife and mother that comes with marriage but not with consensual union. In this respect, they shared their parents' opinion, but mentioned feeling anxiety and fear, especially with regard to sexuality – magnified, in Tina's case (Chad), by the need to prove her virginity and in Thérèse's (Senegal) by her FGM. All of the interviewees were sad about leaving their families when they emigrated.

### **Values in Transition**

Unlike the preceding categories, these marriages were not dissolved, as the marital relationships were positive in terms of respect and mutual support. The women's lives differed from what they had imagined because they were forced to abandon their studies and emigrate against their wishes. Unlike in the preceding categories, these marriages did not result in violence, and neither did they affect the women's health, but the women regretted that emigration had taken them away from their families and brought problems of integration in its wake. The women pointed out the need to change the norms associated with marriage for the sake of their children. Even though they support the decisions made by their parents, they advocate a free choice of spouse for their own daughters, one without parental intervention. They are encouraging their

daughters in terms of their education and careers and believe that their daughters should receive the independence that was denied to them.

#### **4 – The Imposition of Marriage but not the Spouse**

In this category, there are 13 women, who chose their spouses personally, but who stated that they had been forced to get married because of pressure either from their families or their spouses, although they themselves did not want to. These women were aged between 31 and 60 at the time of the interview, with the majority being over 40. Eight arrived in France between 1962 and 1996: three from Southern Europe (Portugal and Italy), two from Asia (Vietnam and Taiwan), two from Africa (South Africa and Algeria), and one from Chile. Their marriages took place after their arrival in France. Five had emigrated as adults for the purposes of study, work, or because of the political situation, and three came with their parents as children. The other five were born in France to parents who had emigrated from Portugal, Italy, Algeria, and Morocco. Their mothers were housewives or white-collar workers and their fathers, industrial or agricultural workers. Only two of them reported growing up in a discordant family environment with “very strict” fathers who had no respect for their mothers. From more comfortably-off backgrounds than the women in the previous categories, they had had a slightly longer education. Out of the migrants who had arrived as adults, three had a primary school leaving certificate, two had completed their secondary education, while out of those who had come to France as young children or had been born there, five had received occupational training beyond the Baccalaureate, two had been in higher education, and one had no qualifications. At the time of the survey, one was a mother and housewife, three had unskilled jobs in the domestic services sector, and the remaining six had intermediate level or management jobs.

#### **Parental Refusal to Accept Cohabitation and Premarital Pregnancy**

Parents imposed marriage on their daughters for one of two reasons, and sometimes both, namely, a rejection of cohabitation, i.e. ostensible proof of premarital sexuality, and a wish to “legitimate” an accidental pregnancy. Nine women were affected by the first reason, with most of them being immigrants rather than the daughters of immigrants. The second affected four women: two born in France and two immigrants, even though the quantitative survey showed that the latter situation occurs mainly among daughters of immigrants (Hamel 2011). The majority of these marriages took place in France during the 1980s and 1990s when the women were aged between 18 and 23, with the exception of one woman who married at age 30. The age gap between spouses was, in the majority of cases, between two and four years, with nine years in a

single instance. These couples were geographically, culturally and religiously homogeneous.

### **Between Limited Freedom and Resignation: Keeping Constraint at Bay**

In the quantitative survey, nine of the women stated that their marriages had been instigated by their parents and two by their spouses, but four married the man of their choice. Eight would have preferred to marry later on, while three did not want to get married and were obliged to do so owing to family pressure (one reply is missing). At the time of the interview, all 13 reported meeting their spouses independently, but were subsequently made to get married although they had not initially intended to do so. When the parents or parents-in-law refused cohabitation even if the woman was not pregnant, pressure, mainly of a religious nature, was applied by the parents or parents-in-law, particularly the mothers or mothers-in-law, with blackmail sometimes taking the form of an ultimatum: “If you don’t get married, you can’t move in together;” “If you get married, I’ll help you financially. Otherwise, just get on with it!” The women who became pregnant were afraid of announcing the fact, and when they did, blackmail sometimes took the form of an order to choose between two unwanted alternatives: “Either you get married or you have an abortion.”

Lia’s case (age 42, with a French mother and Slovenian father) was more complicated. At age 18, realizing that she had to stop taking the pill for medical reasons, she told herself that a pregnancy would provide a legitimate reason for leaving her family and getting away from her verbally aggressive father. When she became pregnant, her father made her wear pink (the colour of “disgrace”) under her white wedding dress. She would have preferred to get married without being pregnant and would have liked to have worn “a beautiful white gown.” In the quantitative survey, more than half the daughters of immigrants who reported being forced to get married against their will already had a child or were pregnant at the time of their wedding (ibid.). Although the marriages were not arranged by their parents, they insisted that their daughters choose a spouse of the same origin. This was the case with Leila (age 39, who was born in Algeria and came to France as a child), whose parents did not want to arrange her marriage, but told her to: “Find someone of the same nationality! Stay within your culture.” Offers of marriage were sometimes passed on by the parents, but met with a negative response. Hong-Dao’s (55, Vietnam) mother introduced her daughter to a number of suitors when she was a teenager, all of whom she systematically refused. Parental intervention thus remains strong in this category, with the women feeling coerced into marriage in spite of everything.

These women enjoyed a certain amount of freedom and, unlike the women in the previous categories, were able to choose and date their future spouses before making a commitment, or even allowed themselves premarital sexual relations, although once the relationship became known, marriage was inevitable. The idea of a casual sexual relationship was unthinkable. While some of them wanted to live with their boyfriends without getting married, others did not envisage living with a partner. They were unable to resist the pressure of guilt exerted by their mothers, mothers-in-law, and sometimes their fathers. These non-arranged marriages were still forced marriages because they resulted from a situation in which the decision to marry was imposed by forceful collective pressure, from the family in this case, to the extent that free will was «compromised» (ibid.). The “free choice” of spouse turned out to be entirely relative insofar as the respondents were unable to prevent the marriage even though the partner had not been perceived as a potential husband.

### **From Coercion to Independence**

Out of the 13 women, only four were divorced and one remarried. Four were victims of intimate partner violence, which led to depression, suicidal ideation, psychiatric hospitalization for one and departure from the marital home for two others. Three pressed charges against their husbands. They put up with this violence for a long time in isolation, shame, silence, and a belief that the situation would change: “I kept everything to myself because I loved him and I believed it would pass” (Elena, 60, Portugal). It was the same for Hong-Dao (Vietnam) for whom the violence started when she arrived in France, but she responded to the blows with more blows, consulted a lawyer and obtained a restraining order against her husband. In spite of her meagre earnings, Elena saved up “penny by penny” to buy a house in Portugal and said that, in this way, she had “bought her freedom.” These women regained their independence and took control of their lives. Those who are still married today speak ultimately of their attachment to the social recognition offered by marriage.

Most of the women had to abandon their studies, and sometimes their work, when they got married, in order to devote themselves to their children, and some of them regretted getting married, seeing it as the cause of their financial dependence. As in the preceding categories, they emphasize their determination to not force their own children into marriage.

### **5 – Other Forms of Constraint Concerning the Decision to Get Married**

There are three women in this category, whose experiences have little in common except for the absence of parental intervention and the fact that they did not want to get married, combined with their acceptance after a proposal made by their spouse. Their

experiences of marriage are profoundly different from the situations examined previously, since in these cases marriage is not seen as the social legitimization of female sexuality. In fact, two of the respondents had children outside marriage without the disapproval of their families.

In the TeO questionnaire, they stated that the initiative behind their marriages came from their spouses and that they would have “preferred to get married later on” (although the survey did not distinguish between hostility to marriage as an institution or simply a reluctance to marry at a particular point in time). They met their spouses independently, but apart from this shared characteristic, they got married in very different circumstances, involving either pressure on the part of their partners, or financial difficulties.

Gabrielle, Katerina, and Isabel were aged 28, 35 and 50. The first two were born in France to mixed parents, one with a father from West Africa and the other with an English mother, while Isabel, born in Chile, came to France to study at the age of 19. Each woman had at least one parent with an educational qualification and grew up in middle-class or executive families. They all completed higher education, but Isabel was the only one who managed to acquire a stable profession; conditions were more difficult for Katerina and Gabrielle. Although they all had a relatively “liberal” upbringing, this did not rule out the existence of very palpable gender inequalities within their families, and even violent behaviour on the part of their parents. Katerina, for instance, still remembers being hit across the face by her father because he saw her holding her boyfriend’s hand on their first date (at age 16) and Gabrielle noted the violence to which her mother, her brother and she herself were subjected during her childhood.

### **Katerina**

Katerina’s wedding, which was both civil and religious, was celebrated after the birth of her first daughter and while she was pregnant with the second, when she was 28. Six months pregnant at the time, she described her happy memory of the church ceremony attended by about a hundred guests. She is not religious, however, and explained that she agreed to this ceremony on the insistence of her husband and in-laws, who are Italian and practicing Catholics, while she herself considers marriage to be a meaningless “piece of paper.” Her statements in the TeO survey show marital disagreement on the importance of religion, but give no indication of coercion in terms of the choice of spouse, nor do they reveal spousal violence since she describes good relations in their life as a couple.

### **Isabel**

Isabel got married in a civil ceremony in 1983 when she was 23, after two years' cohabitation, during which time her daughter was born. She was forced to marry by her husband, who wanted the child to bear his name, although she did not see the point of the ceremony owing to the absence of her family, who remained in Chile. Her reluctance to marry reported in the TeO survey reflects this initial disagreement. During their 15 years of life together, she endured eight instances of physical violence, which began when her professional life started to take off (to the point where she was earning more than her husband, who was a technician) and she needed him to play a larger role in looking after the children. She felt increasingly afraid while putting the seriousness of the violence into perspective: "I was not a battered wife in the sense that he wasn't a bloke who came home drunk every night only to kick me... In 15 years, it must have happened eight times..." As she wanted a divorce, she threw herself into her career and applied for citizenship so that she could move out. As with other respondents, the violence escalated due to her bid for independence: "The more independent I was, the more violent he became." After a difficult divorce, she remarried and is happy in her second marriage.

### **Gabrielle**

The marriage, which Gabrielle described in the TeO survey as being instigated by her spouse and which she would have preferred to postpone until "later," was in fact a marriage of convenience which she kept from her family for three years. She agreed to the marriage when she was 21 owing to financial necessity and close feelings of friendship, as she was a student living in precarious circumstances at the time. This friend gave her an undisclosed sum of money. They shared the same accommodation without a sexual or romantic relationship. She is now divorced, living with someone, and contemplating signing a civil partnership contract. She is opposed to the idea of marriage and considers it to be an old-fashioned tradition in which a couple is imprisoned in a constrained relationship. She regrets her marriage owing to the quarrels with her mother once her family found out, but maintains friendly relations with the partner from her fictitious marriage. Although she was not coerced, it cannot be said that her marriage was what she herself wanted, which is why her situation was singled out by the TeO study.

In these three cases, marriage did not play the "protective" role characteristic of the previous categories in terms of the family reputation and the woman's virginity. Their statements in the TeO survey reflect a lack of interest in marriage and even marital discord. TeO was thus able to detect situations in which different types of coercion

regarding marriage – other than family control – were taking place. We note, nevertheless, the presence of violence in their family or marital histories not associated with the decision to get married.

## **Conclusion**

This research contributes to the study of coercion and consent, with focus on the diversity of social pressures on women and the impact of these pressures on the creation and expression of the desire to get married, or conversely, to not marry. It shows that, in addition to the cases where their experience is defined by the respondents themselves as a forced marriage, the situations in which coercion is used to obtain consent are numerous and that this coercion is not only embodied by a third party (spouse or parents), but also, and sometimes exclusively, by a precarious financial situation or lack of qualifications, with these two elements being intrinsically linked to structural inequalities between the sexes. More widely, all the categories included in our classification reflect a system of gender and class unfavorable to women, also constituting coercion in terms of women's agency, and their capacity for taking complete control of their emotional, sexual, and financial destiny.

Only the marriages in the first category were identified as forced marriages by the women themselves. Initiated by their families, they were early and hurried, and the respondents' explicit refusal was completely ignored. These marriages were imposed by the use of psychological abuse and a variety of constraints, with emotional blackmail being the most common, along with the threat of physical violence.

In categories 2 to 4, the pressure, which was exerted (consciously or unconsciously) by the parents or spouses, is not as clear-cut as in the first category and the women's opposition is not as marked. The testimonies recorded in these categories represent an outer circle around the central core of marriages labelled by the women themselves as forced, one where circumstances external to the family may hasten the marriage decision. In most of these situations, the respondents described feelings of ambivalence. Their accounts were often contradictory, vacillating between the "resolve" to get married and the absence of a "desire" to do so. The cases in which marriage is desired because it is seen as the only possible way out of a strict, even violent, family environment, are examples of the situations where the survey respondents' wishes did not constitute an expression of the desire to get married, first and foremost, but rather a determination to escape the lack of freedom in the (uncertain) hope of gaining independence. It seems that parental coercion in relation to marriage can also exist when marriages are not arranged, for example in instances where marriage is imposed as a result of pregnancy or premarital sexual relations. Situations coexist in which marriage is seen by women as a means to acquire both freedom of movement and freedom to control their own sexuality and fertility.

The marriages in the last category relate to situations with no parental intervention. Instigated by the spouse, they correspond to marriages of reason or to marriages characterized by marital discord, and all share the feature of being not initially desired by the respondents.

The ambivalence towards marriage expressed by the women in the second and fourth categories reflects a lack of real freedom and an unsatisfied yearning for “another life” that corresponds to their «absolute desire» rather than a desire constrained within a rigid gender system. These women are now aware of the restricted nature of their liberty at that time, a restriction that has pushed them in all sorts of apparently contradictory directions. The choices which they made can appear paradoxical and it even seems in some ways that they have consented to domination (for example, marrying to escape a controlling family and falling pregnant so as to deliberately precipitate marriage). Their stories are only comprehensible if we take into account the system of constraints with which they are associated, so that the lack of financial and educational resources, the women’s youth, and norms relating to gender all combine to create an environment forcing them to desire marriage because there are no other alternatives.

The accounts given by these women confirm the pertinence of previous studies on consent. We would do well to remember, as Nicole-Claude Mathieu (1985) has noted, that “giving in is not the same as consenting” and that resignation or the choice of marriage in the face of domination and even violence does not mean that there is “consent to domination on the part of the dominated.” In the same way, it is very useful to remember, as Geneviève Fraisse has pointed out, that “accepting is not wanting” (Fraisse 2007). We might also add, with regard to the women’s accounts, that “wanting” (in an environment where the range of possibilities is restricted) does not equate to “creating our desires freely,” something that requires the existence of alternatives. We might remember that not one of these women instigated her own marriage. They were all in a position where they had to respond to the demands of their families or spouses, unlike other women in the TeO survey, who stated that they had “made the decision with their spouse.” The absence of genuine liberty is reflected by the prevalence of gender violence in their histories. Taking all these interviews as a whole, violence, whether parental or marital, occurs across all five categories. In addition to family violence, violence on the part of the husband, both physical and sexual, affected 14 out of the 29 respondents, i.e. half of those interviewed, although the percentage of female victims of physical or sexual violence in the married population in France is estimated at 2.3% (Jaspard et al. 2003). The replies to the two questions in the TeO survey on the instigation of marriage and consent are, therefore, strong indicators of a high level of violence within the respondents’ marriages.

In spite of normative, financial, and family constraints, and even psychological and physical violence, all these women devised strategies of resistance. They were thwarted by financial hardship and their lack of qualifications, however. They only succeeded in protecting themselves when they had attained genuine financial independence, something that sometimes took years, particularly for those who had married early or those without an education. In the process of rebuilding themselves, women in less favoured social categories were in a much more vulnerable position than women from more advantaged backgrounds. Finally, opposing marriage and defining it as forced presupposes that the person concerned is able to perceive, and therefore to verbalize, their opposition. Indeed, this capacity can be hindered by the absence of resources, especially education and a knowledge of one's rights, notions that call for socialization that is open to the idea of autonomy.

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