

To Fathers, Brothers, Husbands

I love my culture. But on the road to my personal freedom, I have lost it to a large extent. For taking this road, I have paid my price. It was long, painful and self-destructive. But my vision has always been freedom, for the sake of which I sometimes got even on the wrong track. Nevertheless, I was and still am willing to accept all that. To cut my own path still requires a lot of courage and energy, every single day.

The culture I was born into is full of treasures and wonders. As such it can be relentless. I walk through my life with my head held high though facing daily hostility and prejudice.

I did not commit a capital offense; still I am being treated by some people worse than one who did.

Today I want to say to the men of this culture: I respect your culture and your faith. Go ahead and live as you consider it to be right. However, tolerance implies to give one another the freedom needed by every individual person to live a self-determined life. That means, I want to live as free as I consider it best for me, without you massively restricting my freedom or even threatening my life. Fear and threat have nothing to do with love, understanding or even freedom. Do you want me to stay with you, under your spell, captured and distressed, like so many other girls and women, whose fear is so much larger than their courage and strength to break free from these bondages?

Why do you banish me? Why do I have to leave, if I am not taking the road paved with rules you are choosing for me? Why do you force me into a straitjacket made of stiff regulations and duties tying so firm, that it takes my breath away? Why is freedom not a fundamental value applied for all? You do not have to understand my wishes and me but you have to respect these. I am an individual. Why is it more important what other people in the society think than the happiness of your daughter, sister or wife?

How would you like to live the way you expect it from your women? With all this pressure, instructions, suppressed feelings, white lies and fears? What is so frightening looking at a free woman? Why do her own family and the Muslim society oppress her? Why don't you understand that freedom is nothing to be afraid of, that it does not harm you but is a chance for self-fulfilment? How can you expect tolerance, if you are not able to live tolerance?

I do not harm you. But the more you drive me into a corner, the more I try to defend myself. Or I beggarly perish, as I do not have enough strength to stand up against you and a whole culture. The Muslim culture can be merciless. If

somebody is for once a social outcast she will remain one forever. Yes, I know, it is about the way you are seen. You are all about what other people think, what they say. But I ask you, how do I have to behave as a woman for not being dumped? I understand your dilemma. If a family member is different, follows her own dreams, cuts her own path – this blemish is burdened to the whole family. Perhaps the brother does not find a woman to be married to because his family is disgraced.

But is the way to restore the pretended family honour to threaten or even kill your own daughter? In how far does this fulfil tradition or religion? This weird understanding of culture, paired with traditional ideas leads to an enormous destructiveness.

The family is powerful, but tradition even more. The one who has the guts to fight against these resistances and to wrench herself free is not only losing her family but also public respect and lives from then on unprotected in her own society.

Is it worth to trade in her own identity, her family and her culture against a life in freedom?

Because that is exactly what it means – to peel off the identity lived so far.

That question alone is schizophrenic. Moving between these two worlds causes inhumane pressure. It makes you crookbacked, cheerless and depressive. I do not want to lie to myself and others, to act in hidden ways, just to assure that my family and my culture hopefully accepts me somehow. I strive to live in a self-determined manner without justifying myself or being ostracised by society.

My thanks go to Terre des Femmes. Thank you, for inviting me to raise my voice for freedom. Thank you, that such an organization exists, which has the same vision as I do and which helps all these women and girls to live in a free and self-determined manner.

One day, I wish this to be not a hard struggled privilege or even a sentence of death - but part of our normal life.

*Translation of Sibel Kekilli's speech published on 3.9.2015 in the German newspaper "Frankfurter Allgemein Zeitung"*