

## The Case of the “Women’s Day” and What the Women Writers Go Through<sup>1</sup>

(Kadınlar Günü Halleri ve Kadın Yazarın Çektiği)

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On every Women’s Day, there are certain stereotyped paraphrases that we often times hear.

“Why is there a special day for women? Don’t we need to remember women everyday?”

“Why isn’t there a special day for men?”

“Why the emphasis is on women, and not on humanity?”

I would like to start with engaging with these questions. I am not against special days as much as I am against the ways that they are celebrated. On special days, intensified energies are channeled for a specific cause. On that day, everyone in the world looks at a certain direction and this concentration might sometimes have positive and productive results; just like the way we have gathered here today and are focusing on a particular issue. Amongst all of the unnecessary words spoken on these days, there are some that are important and worthy of attention.

My answer to the question “Why is there not a special day for men?” is “why should there be?” First of all, the world is predominantly the space of men anyways; life is shaped with their decisions, “success” as they define it, and strategic offices are theirs. Aren’t the streets, the Parliament, the Ministries and the positions of leadership all men’s? Despite occupying, and invading all spaces of life, is this dominant sex in need of us making speeches about them and handing them flowers?

Don’t focus too much on the reproving nature of my words; in this game of living during which we are all constantly excluding people by “othering” them, the roles of the victims and the perpetrators are not always clear. Isn’t this egocentric sex who we mother and pamper with love and affection with charitable kindness also a victim?

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To the ones who come forward with the question “Why the emphasis is on women and men, and not on the human?” I would like to say this: The word “human”, in various languages, semantically signifies “men”. To what extent the notion of “human” tends to concern “women”? This is not to imply that the question then becomes irrelevant, therefore, should not be posed. Rather, the question carries with it an important problem that should be discussed. Which branch of “humanity” is it that decides on what the human should be, which direction it should go to, and through which social, cultural, economic and political frameworks it should function in?

The women are positioned in the background and experience violence, negligence and inequity. However, I am not sure if we can reach a more meaningful place by fighting, and by blaming men through making generalizations and regarding them as the ultimate enemy. It becomes essential to question whether the issue is one of men and women, or rather the absence of a democratic culture in which the differences are experienced in harmony without dominating and pressuring the other. Aren't sexism, racism, nationalism and the alikes sibling—like notions?

There are also certain stereotypic approaches embedded in the TV programmes regarding the Women's Day. The ones who start from the primitive communal societies and continue with the memorizations of Engels regarding the roots of the family and the private property and how matrimony slipped from our hands; the ones who advocate the image of the modernized and westernized women without attending to the differences of class etc. as the symbol of the modern nation-states; the ones who disregard the progress that has been made and reproduce the narratives of the “domestic slaves”; the ones who frame men's participation in the reproductive domestic work as “helping”, therefore, still implicitly assigning it as the duty of women; the ones who disclose statistics to fuss about the fact that their efforts as mothers and wives are not recognized and awarded; the ones who rush to the Parliament with high heels...

To be honest, I am extremely bored of listening to the same narratives and rhetoric every year, especially bored of the male correspondents who insincerely smile and ask the same old questions just to receive the same answers.

The first point is: does anyone have an idea for a new project? Has it not been clear that we are not going anywhere like this?

The second point is: where are young women? What do they think? Are they on their honeymoon with their men? Will they join the women's movement after they are beaten up, divorced and discriminated against at the workplace?

Should the main title of women's day rather be: “How can our differences exist within harmony, how can we create societies in which hierarchical and pressuring relationships disappear?” Should we directly look at the nation-state, the locations of minorities, capitalism and faulty globalism?

I know you would like me to tell more about what I have been through in this literary space in which men dominate. I must admit that I have been through quite a bit. When my first poems were published, my father told me to write children's

poems, as he thought this to be more fitting for a woman. I don't know how he feels now about what I write.

The most important thing about writing that I know is this: When you write, you should not think about anyone else. What my father would say, what my son would think, what the government would do...When you start thinking when a "Ogün Samast" will shoot you, the authorship is hurt.

Without a doubt, there are compensations to be paid as a result of such an attitude, yet there are grand gratifications that writing grants one. I do not want to make my experiences raw materials for fussing as a woman writer. Rather, I remember them as anecdotes to life and to our struggles. Writing for me is to reach the condition of stretching the wings of freedom and flying. When recounting the human circumstance in a pure and deep manner, I cannot accept any limitation. Regardless of the nature of the experiences as good or bad, this instinct is always present. When one writes, one leaves behind the narrowness of one's life behind; one's quivering loneliness reaches out to somewhere far away where someone else who is lost between the pages of one's book can feel the quivers of one's soul...

I recollect the women who called me in the middle of the night, crying and saying "you wrote me!" This warmth that is the by-product of sharing our stories, this notion of private sisterhood is the most valuable award that I will not change for anything. Without a doubt, it is not always about awards like this...

There are some people who perceive one's writing as a threat to their own world views and regencies. The identity of womanhood becomes even more agitating. One's writings start to get punished; sometimes one is pinioned because of them. I remember the time when I spent 16 hours in a prison cell in the middle of Nicosia. I was crying in that dark cell; not because I was afraid, but because there exist in the world places as such, and people as policemen who were demeaning me.

During my childhood day we use to live close to that police office that was a remnant from the colonial times. I remember thinking as a child that they were putting the people who were harming and killing other people in there. Recollecting this childhood memory in my cell that night, I thought I am here for completely opposite reasons; I am here because I did not want people to kill and harm others. I had no idea that that day I was going to get arrested. I was wearing my silk shirt and this wonderful long skirt my friend, the last hippie in the world who chose to live in the nature, sewed for me from a piece of cloth I got from *arasta*, the market place in Old Nicosia. When they were taking me to my cell, we needed to pass by the men's cells, therefore, they locked the men in to start with. There was only one cell for women. I was going to sleep on the stone bed, and I fell asleep towards the early morning. When I woke up as the Snow White in the morning, I noticed that men were watching me from the side of the bars that were dividing the cells into two. They were collectively trying to console me, and were saying things like "There is so much unfairness in this country. If you need anything please do let us know."

A writer can say this easily: I have gone through a lot of pain, yet the pain provided me with these writings. As evident in any identity-based hierarchy, there is discrimination against women also amongst writers. There is also an erotic

satisfaction the men writers get from the attacks directed to and the struggles of the women writers. I just want to simply tell them this: I am galloping with the horse of writing. Gentlemen, I wish you happy harassments!

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<sup>1</sup> The panel discussion, Being and Writing Women in Cyprus and Turkey. 8 March International Women's Day of Solidarity and Struggle (6-10 March 2007). Eastern Mediterranean University Centre for Research and Education on Women's Studies, and the Municipality of Famagusta, 9 March 2007, Famagusta, North Cyprus.