

IMAGINING A NEW WORLD

This article is a call from the heart of Southeast Anatolia, from a woman who has been working with women facing violence in the region for approximately 14 years. The author shares her insights about the larger social system that renders violence a part of daily life, defining who we are. Akkoç sees the alternative of hierarchy, discrimination, and violence in an outlook that allows people to be individuals, free to make their own choices. The solution to violence against women lies in a broader transformation that involves solidarity among people who value each others differences, she concludes.

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As this article was being written, there had been a large explosion in Ankara and according to the first news, six people had lost their lives while close to a hundred were injured. The Prime Minister, Chairmen of the Political Parties, the Chief of Staff and all authorities were giving pessimistic statements. Eye witnesses were explaining what they saw in horror.

In a world where violence has been normalized, starting from the violence practiced against women at home, the violence in Ankara was normal. The Chief of Staff thus was saying ‘there may be other explosions like this in the big cities in the days ahead.’

In recent years, violence against women, and especially physical violence and violence that results in murder, has been brought to the agenda intensely. The efforts of women’s organizations and Turkey’s EU candidacy process have been effective in this sense. However sometimes we see that violence against women is taken up as if it is the “other’s violence”, the victimization of a group of pitiful people who are distant from our world. And sometimes we see a particular ethnic or religious group is described in a derogatory fashion.

However, this problem is one that involves all women. In no country, unfortunately, do women and men yet live with equal rights and opportunities. Certainly in countries like ours where change and transformation is difficult, violence is experienced more than in others, and is accepted more.

This problem is not one that can be solved with humanitarian emotions and approaches. It only makes the problem worse when one person feels like the savior and the other like the victim, and the solution is delegated to the savior. It is also not a problem that can be solved by women demanding the rights they feel are being violated. This is a problem of the system. The system is structured on a basis of violence, has defined the roles of men and women, has regarded women as someone’s daughter or wife or mother, has given men the right and responsibility to monitor women. This is the root of the violation of equality and freedom.

Our biggest gain comes from defining the problem as such. We started off not to solve the problem but to understand its roots and dimensions and to accumulate knowledge and experience about different ways to resolve it, and then to share this base. We were all victims of violence and wanted it to be on the agenda. We aim to make the problem acknowledged and contribute to the development of policies accordingly.

We worked with thousands of women and shared our experiences. We were surprised to realize just how much we had been treated like objects. Upon every realization we built new opinions about how to solve the problem. We know that the methods and principles we come up with actually create hope to become equal and free, and to dream about a new world.

We know that the problem is not just the violence women face. The violence we face is caused by the larger system, which is what we question and promote the transformation of.

We want the right to think and act freely: We want a world where people are not polarized and everyone is enriched by various senses of belonging and can live on the basis of their own decisions. Being treated like objects is not only the problem of us women. In all processes where participatory practices are not employed, some people are objectified.

We want a world without hierarchy: In wanting this, we do not claim a part of what other people possess; we recommend to start by sharing what we have. We see that hierarchy is reinforced on a daily basis in little acts that seem trivial. We know that a relationship can only be formed by valuing everyone's knowledge and experience, and the solution begins with each of us, and should not be sought anywhere else. We do not want a world that the powerful runs.

We want a world without discrimination: We want people to be free to live with their differences, for people not to be degraded or excluded because of their differences. The antidote of discrimination is getting to know each other, talking and developing empathy. The solution to discrimination is to realize that every person is different and that the adjectives we use to define differences are problematic.

We want a world without violence: We long for a world where all different forms of violence are acknowledged and no reasoning legitimizes the use of violence.

We want a world where sharing and solidarity is the core: We want a life where we share what we know and have experience, where our responsibilities and rights are shared, as is our successes.

We want to live on the basis of universal human rights without losing our local features: We hope for a world where people can live in accordance to universal human rights no matter where they live, which language they speak, what their economic situation or educational attainment is.

We believe these principles will bring about a new form of relating and communicating to each other in society –a transparent, participatory, egalitarian one, which will also end the violence women are faced with.

Indeed it is difficult to change our habits overnight. From time to time our traditional and contemporary values clash. We get support from each other to deal with these cases.

We make our decisions not based on the opinions of one of us, but based on consensus. Sometimes, we postpone decisions based on the objection of one person.

Because we know plurality is strength and we are concerned about the minority that thinks otherwise being oppressed.

We still experience violence but now we recognize every form of it –from the blatant to the discreet and refined versions. And we make an effort to live with as little violence in our life as possible. We hope that the methods that women have devised to free themselves of violence will make it possible to dream of a different kind of world.