

Liminal Lives in Rural Anatolia: Patriarchal Veils Dragging Infants to Death

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In 20th century, the Demographic Transition Theory (DTT) spreading from Western Europe to developing countries, has announced that every population on the earth would experience a transition from high fertility rates and high mortality rates to low fertility rates and low mortality rates, which is not rather than a bird's eye-view on cultural diversity varying by type across countries. Changes in fertility and mortality indicators can not be considered independent from anthropological aspects of cultures. Since the beginning of the 21st century, by means of international conferences and national projects, demographers have focused on decreasing infant and child mortality rates which contribute to their countries' level of development. Turkey surely is one of them. Fertility Surveys and Turkey Demographic and Health Surveys (TDHS) which have been conducted since the early 1960s¹ and also personal projects by demographers and public health specialists has attempted to understand the main causes of high infant and child mortality rates in Anatolia despite the fact that a reliable death registration system does not exist. However, the infant mortality rate had been a concern of the Turkish Ministry of Health and Turkish demographers from the mid-1940s to 2000s². Today, according to TDHS-2008, it is 17 per thousand, which is still higher than the IMRs of European Union Countries (the highest one belongs to Romania; 9,4 deaths/1000 live births) and of the Middle-East Countries with some similar Islamic-cultural values like Syria (15 deaths/1000 live births) and Saudi-Arabia (16/1000 live births).

In 1992, Akile Gürsoy, a Turkish anthropologist published an article that named the tragic adventure of the infant mortality rate in Turkey a “puzzle”³. She was attempting to understand the reasons by using a mix-method: quantitative values and narratives. The results clearly manifested cultural and political characteristics were significantly affecting the infants' and children's lives. Remarkably, a father's educational level was the most effective factor on IMR. In 2010, Turkish demographers, Ilknur Yüksel and Ismet Koç, published another article “*Is IMR still a Puzzle in Turkey?*”, revised the situation by using Child Mortality Index (CMI) sourced 1998 and 2003 TDHS data. What they found was not surprising: Early marriages bring about having more children; parent's educational level is still a determinative factor; the traditions, norms and rituals that the society embraces, especially the way marriages are arranged and the domestic marriage processes that affect child health make the index higher. For instance, if a dowry was paid to a bride's parents before marriage, CMI rises two times; if a young woman is a member of an extended-family and/or if consanguineous marriage is the topic, the index rises about two times (Yüksel and Koç; 2010, 91-93). So, the results orient the social scientists to concentrate on anthropological research methods as well as quantitative research methods.

The following study draws on my experiences from Turkey Demographic and Health Surveys, Turkey Maternal Mortality Study and extensive qualitative research on family

¹ In 1960, especially high infant mortality rates was a national matter . It was around 190 per 1000. See Yüksel, İ. Koç i., “Türkiye’de Bebek Ölüm Hızı halen bir bilmece mi?”

² 1978 IMR: 134, 1993 IMR: 53, 1998 IMR: 43, 2003 IMR: 29 (per thousand). Source: TDHS Surveys.

³³³ Gürsoy-Tezcan A. 1992. Infant Mortality: A Turkish puzzle. Health Trans. Rev. Vol. 2 pp. 131-149.

planning, induced abortion and, domestic violence, all of which provided me with the opportunity to visit almost all regions of Anatolia. During the surveys, I engaged in detailed note-taking about the points that I found really remarkable, thus collecting a great amount of information about traditional practices, approaches to health and health care, attitudes and emotional situations of women. After I went through these notes, I found out that most of them included information about a triadic, tragic and traditionally accepted relationship between the bride (*gelin*), infant (*bebek*) and older people, particularly parents-in-law. Then, I have listened to stories about becoming a bride and motherhood from the women in various ages and living in Istanbul's small neighborhoods where (in-migrant) extended-patriarchal families mostly live and listened to the anthropologists' and sociologists' experiences to analyze social and cultural conditions turning domestic sphere into a "prison of threshold".

I name the villages where patriarchal rules are ingrained as *sub-local contexts*- whose cultural codes have been reproduced by a collaborative relationship between the traditions, religious willpowers, and political discourse. The *sub-local areas* refers to the villages a) which have local appearances that remain firm against social change, b) which produce a strong relationship between patriarchy and traditions willingly accepted by the community, c) which are closed-societies in the sense that they have rarely been exposed to impacts of urbanization and modernization. The need for defining a new concept actually results from the qualitative data which do not allow achieving a clear-cut regional classification. Because, both the note-takings during large-scale quantitative researches and the records during qualitative researches point out that it is possible to encounter the villages situated at the top of mountains or silent valleys and, having traditional and religious characteristics that are peculiar to close-societies. In such areas, processing of patriarchal rules over both sexes is more intense and strict. Moreover, if you question the position of women regarding behaviors, manners, attitudes and interpretations of the relationship between womanhood, tradition, custom and religion, you mostly get through to similar and unchanged conservative sources.

Patriarchy presents women a "modernized" world which is hierarchically organized and, divides their "womanhood" into the statuses which are both positional and sexual. "The bride got up and destroyed the village", "The bride at the threshold, the son (baby-boy) in the cradle", "The mother-in-law is a golden veil of her daughter-in-law". More and more we hear about sayings on- indoor sometimes, but rarely outdoor- activities of the brides and relationship between mother-in-law (*kaynana*) and her daughter-in-law (*gelin*) in rural Anatolia. The sarcasm mirrored by sayings actually results from perpetual existence of conflict and competition between two women who have different patriarchal/hierarchical statuses and who are traditionally confined to living within an extended patriarchal family together: mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. These are also two women sharing love for the same man: the son, the husband. The brides living in the villages corresponding to the very description of sub-cultural context are mostly silent, withdrawn and unresponsive. They have never felt free about expressing their individuality, so their *abstracted* bodies have been condemned to patriarchal hierarchy. Here, Victor Turner's very concept of "liminality" refers to *bridehood* which hierarchically exists between "a virgin, young woman" status and mother-in-law status, which I go into particulars in the following parts. The "*patriarchal veils*" as a state, describes a *kind of "personhood"* attributed to the brides and, as a process, subjectification of their bodies in a Foucauldian manner. As for infants, the attempt to create a new liminar, who is more vulnerable, means high risk of dying. The *second subject* will be the focus point of patriarchal dialogues as soon as s/he is born. The patriarchal/hierarchical structure of the Anatolian families situates the bride's parents-in-laws at the center of decision making. The son/husband follows these hierarchies and never questions the authority of his

parents. The patrilineal family structure prioritizes the extended family and the brides are responsible as the caretakers of the entire household needs. Even when the bride has a newborn baby, it is demanded that she has to clean the house, prepare the family meals, and fulfill her role as the bride of the household. Mother-in-laws deny providing any support during the pregnancy period of the bride and after. Such a situation puts the bride on a liminal stage and the infant is incorporated in this stage just as his/her mother/bride, who is prevented from taking care of her baby, since the baby is not perceived as a “person” yet. One of the stories reported by Akile Gürsoy regards a baby who died after intense crying in his cradle: the mother-in-law did not allow the bride to go to the room and nurse the child unless she had finished cleaning the house (Gürsoy, 2001).

This study develops arguments on the ideas mentioned above by using a combined approach including anthropological theories, narratives, observations and some reflections from the questionnaires. But first of all, it should be found that following a path from the bride’s liminality to the infant’s is crucial to understand how power of masculine dominance which is also politically, religiously and traditionally approved constructs *womanhood*, how it *strings along* the women with a network which has a kind of hierarchical deprivation system - thus, it does assist the patriarchy to perpetuate itself- and, how strongly it forces them to pass over their lives and, more often, their children’s, too.

For centuries, the struggle between the brides and mothers-in-law has always been a part of the patriarchal discourse all over the world, however we know that all have different and various cultural components. In rural Anatolia, in most cases, the family structures have been built on strong traditionalism and conservatism and, this ground is typically reinforced by an *artificial* religious mentality; this mentality dignifies masculinity while downgrading femininity. In the *sub-local patriarchal contexts*, the patriarchal discourse has been reproduced in semi-closed or closed societies by a constant give-and-take policy amongst ideological belief systems, traditions and Islamic assignments. Even if the patriarchy in Anatolia seems as if it was just the preference of today’s political power, in fact, it has always been a part of state ideologies. The “*dominant instance*”, for some sociologists embracing an Althusserian approach, is merely the “*religious practice*.” However, the truth is that the stereotyped behaviors and attitudes are formalized by the traditions, customs and rituals which have been inherited by the ancestors. As Hobsbawm (1992) mentioned invention of tradition is just reproducing a new one from the old one: Invented tradition is understood as a set of practices “*normally governed by overtly and tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past*”(1992:2) Many of the traditions in rural Anatolia are irrelevant to the well-known Islamic principles and practices. They are just the consequences of *special performances* or *repetitions* which have historical, cultural and political backgrounds and, eventually, the processes of performance or constant repetitions of the rules, I may say oddly but peculiarly, create an *artificial religious mentality* guaranteeing their long-term protection. That is what makes patriarchy cultural and authentic in rural Anatolia and, such a formation is always so capable of exposing gender identities to a spontaneous but very strong internalization of gender role messages.

The short stories below can be good examples that illustrate the artificial religious mentality and patriarchal hierarchy reflecting who really the boss in the household is. During a field-survey, a daughter-in-law who I interviewed with, Ayşe, was living in a small village and told me about how her mother-in-law yelled at her one day:

“Come on, go and tell the nurse to take it out of your body! If you die while it’s in you, you will never be clean and pure in the presence of Allah, it’s haram (not lawful according to Islam), a big sin!” (Black Sea Region, 27, 2005)

The ‘it’ referred to by the mother-in-law was an IUD. Ayşe told me that her husband had allowed her to use a contraceptive device but her mother-in-law took her to medical center by force and made the nurse take the IUD out. In this case, as in many others, the mother-in-law’s attitude towards contraceptive methods derives from beliefs, practices and utterances inherited from members of previous generations, and perfectly represents a process of learning and internalizing whereby repetition is in charge.

Another daughter-in-law, Nazife:

“They want us to die out... the government sends all of them to sterilize us. My mother- in-law told me. She had heard it from my father-in-law. The men of the village have forbidden using any of them” (South East Anatolia, 22, 2008)

This extended family was living in a small village in the Eastern Anatolia and women’s attitudes towards contraceptive methods are rooted in conflicts between ethnic discourse and the government. Actually, the men living in the villages in this region, as opposed to the Ayşe’s husband believe that the government sends them contraceptive methods-free of charge as a way to prevent the reproduction of the Kurdish population. This perspective on contraceptives has also been imposed on women, contributing to keeping them away from the idea of family planning.

Sherry Ortner and Lévi Strauss (1972, 1969) suggest that if the specifically reproductive function of the family is taken into account, the family, and hence woman, is identified with “nature” that is pure and simple, as opposed to “culture”. Man is the epitome of culture. Because, men are short of having a natural origin (giving birth, nursing, child caring) for familial orientation, their activities are defined at the level of interfamilial relations. Moreover, *men are the proprietors of religion, ritual, politics, and other realms of cultural thought and action in which universalistic statements of spiritual and social synthesis are made* (Ortner: 1972). Patriarchy in the rural Anatolia factually has such a masculine character.

“All the men here think that women must *do womanhood*⁴ for them every time they want to. My husband always yells at me if I don’t want to have sex with him” (East Anatolia, 34, 2003)

The dominant discourse, as Margot Badran (2009) points out in “Feminism in Islam”, has been constrained women reconstructing and maintaining the customs which are accommodated for distinguished traditional acceptances. Likewise, in the Anatolian region, there exists a cultural structure which has bounded women’s activities and defined their gender roles within a domestic area. A set of ideological practices identified with state politics, religious commands, traditions, customs, moral laws, values, preferences and even rituals generates a particular network of interpersonal relationships. In this network sex roles and hierarchical positions in a family structure are acutely defined. This kind of “habitus” is also *a product of a history*. The instruments of construction of the social that depends upon knowledge employed in practice and upon action are socially constructed, in other words, *structured by the world that they structure* and which has “*an endless capacity to engender products-thoughts, expressions, actions-whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production*” as Bourdieu mentions. (Bourdieu, 2005). It is obvious

⁴ “*Doing womanhood*” refers to fulfilling sexual responsibility.

that historical and social embeddings of the patriarchal rules are totally rested on the performances of the subjects themselves.

At this point I cannot help mentioning the “*performativity*” concept of Butler, the key word of construction of gender identity. She puts forward that gender is not only just a process but also *a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame* (Butler, 1999). The subject is not free to choose which gender she or he is going to enact. The “script” is a creation of this regulatory frame, and the subject does not have a lot of “costumes” to wear because the thing which is identified as gender style is already a constrained choice. Therefore one’s gender is performatively constituted, that “*who wears what*” is even predetermined by the context. If the subjects do not do what they have to do, their choice will be punished by society, so gender refers to a repetition, copying one-another. I am aware that Butler talks about gender identity construction and about gender as a corporeal state. I understand that she also means this is a way to see how society or context determines differences or similarities or equalities between “woman” and “man” that is while constructing gender identity, it is clear that society or context aims to construct gender roles, too: “*Wear this and act like a woman!*”. What I want to add to this point is performativity is also related with another process of following gender identity. The context also provides *subsidiary* roles to rigorously identified genders: “*become a daughter-in-law*”, “*become a mother-in-law*”, and “*become a head of household*” ...

“I was 14 and a very beautiful girl... I had long hair, covering my back... my father chose a husband for me... He was older than me but very rich... my mother told me that this is also the way she got married to my father and how much she loved her husband after marriage... Yeah... I loved him in time... I was young but quite good at house chores...my mother-in-law really loved me. She taught me everything I need... how to dress outside, how to look after my husband and my children, how to keep my house in order and clean... Now, I am a mother in law, too and act just like her. I taught everything I knew to my daughters-in-law” (South East Anatolia, 80, 2012)

In the comment above, Hamide thought that she and her mother-in-law were getting along so well. She was unaware of the power exerted on her and on thought she constructed her sexual identity self-interestedly. “*Acting just like her*” is the most commonly encountered expression among the brides, showing that the process of internalizing patriarchal principles is actually based upon a series of repeated performances (roles) in a hierarchical structure. Accordingly, the brides like their other female relatives and counterparts routinely and customarily help patriarchal order continue and re-celebrate its existence, just by fulfilling their strictly defined domestic roles. Foucault mentions that the *power is not exercised simply as an obligation or prohibition on those “who do not have it”*; *it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure on them...*” (Rabinow, 1991: 175). Being a form of power relation exerted on both men and women, both sexes are exposed to a process of internalization of patriarchy.

As in the Foucauldian point of view, power produces knowledge and, power and knowledge directly affect one another. However, such a relationship can be analyzed or questioned by subjects if and only they identify the objects of power - in other words, if challenging the subject is possible when “he/she is the one who knows”. When subjects recognize the power exercised on their bodies and start to understand its strategic positions then the power dies out. However, patriarchy as a form of power relation, subtly maintains its continuity because of social practices around such as state politics, economic system (capitalism, presenting the richest area of labor force reserved for white men), religious determinants and traditional aspects fed by them. If going back to Hamide, as a subject, she

does not have a chance to understand and position herself towards the power of knowledge exerted on her – and unfortunately most probably will not till the end of her life. She had stayed as a “*gelin*”, daughter-in-law, from the day she wore her wedding dress to the day her own son got married to a young girl. In this process she had fulfilled domestic duties traditionally imposed onto her. However, after she became a mother-in-law who had to pass on everything she knew (internalized) to her young daughter-in-law, she became a different subject, belonging to another social group and with a higher status: a mother-in-law.

According to Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı, a Turkish sociologist, in an extended-patriarchal family structure, for a young man, maintaining a good relationship with his relatives is more important than the relationship he has with his wife (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1990). Traditional values and patterns of behavior have taught him that even after getting married, a young man shows great respect for the family’s elders and customarily his wife must take the responsibility of looking after them as well as the children as a “*derivative relative*”. Attaching more importance to patrilineal ties covering up all characteristics of the bride’s family makes her position more ambiguous, nothing less than an outsider. Carol Delaney, author of “*the Seed and the Soil*” talks about the loneliness of the daughter-in-law; she is an outsider in a new environment even though she is living in the same village with her family. She is the one who has to accommodate and change. Her husband does not have to agree with her in disputes and she cannot request any help from her own mother. This is a situation that no one can deal with easily (Delaney, 1991). The narratives reveal many patriarchal dialogues pointing out the young daughters-in-law living in the extended-patriarchal families are subjected to an authoritarian control mechanism by parents-in-law. In their defense all they want to do is to protect their young daughters-in-law from the external impacts such as evil eye, people who have evil spirits or bad intentions and the like. A daughter-in-law always expects that she will achieve the same comfort with her mother-in-law in the future thanks to the strong bond between her and her own son. Such an expectation will help her internalize the sense of being a mother-in-law and mentally develop her own image of mother-in-law for the future. Here, two theoretical concepts come into question: “rite of passage” and “liminality”. Transferring from daughter-in-law status to mother-in-law status refers to a rite of passage and, the state of being “derivative” represents the experiences of a “liminal persone” as a whole.

According to Van Gennep, a rite of passage, as a process comprises rites of separation, threshold rites and rites of aggregation. “*For groups, as well as individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change for and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest and then to begin acting again, but in a different way.*” (Van Gennep, 1960:89). Marriage, as a ritual, is an authorized access into a new social status, referring to a transition from the place of the birth-parents to the place of the parents-in-law’s, from becoming a “girl” to becoming a “bride and wife”. Actually it does count a rite of aggregation with the idea of re-assimilation into a new family group (husband’s family) and the world of brides or wives. In my approach, the period of remaining as a daughter-in-law completely refers to the experience of living on a liminal stage. Victor Turner points out that “*the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, ‘invisible’*”. (1967:95). That is, the status of liminal individuals is socially and structurally ambiguous. During this phase, *the ritual subjects are given new names to denote their “no longer/not yet status. The symbols exhibited express that the “liminal personae” are neither living nor dead, and both living and dead; they express the ambiguity of the interstructural period. This ambiguity is also demonstrated by the fact that the ritual subjects are during the seclusion period disguised or hidden; they are considered neither male nor female, deprived of rank, status and property. They are all treated equally and are subjected to the rest of the*

community. In sum, the liminal subjects are “neither here nor there”, they are betwixt and between the position assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner, 1969:95) To clarify my contention, I can associate a short story reported by Gürsoy to Turner’s ideas: A woman living in Centre Anatolia gets married too young. Despite the fact that she provides financial contribution to the family by knitting carpets, she tells that she has always been shoved around and despised. After her husband leaves the village for military service, her baby gets pneumonia but her mother-in-law does not care and never allows her to take the baby to the nearest hospital. Her own mother visits the neighbors and unsuccessfully tries to collect medicines for her grandchild but that does not work either. The disease lasts 40 days and, at last, her baby passes away. Gürsoy adds that under the roof of patriarchy the bride is faced with a system of dominant values which bring about long-term tension and conflict between parents-in-law and daughter-in-law. Patriarchal/hierarchical structure entails steering of the mother-in-law in every occasion and her limiting power mainly focusing on her daughter-in-law negatively affects the relationship between the bride and other members of the household, particularly with her husband and child(ren). Moreover, such a negative domestic setting also affects the young mother’s ability to nurse her child and even to keep him/her alive (Gürsoy, 2001). Although the ritual subject of this story, who is given a name to denote her “no longer/not yet” status, seems to be the daughter-in-law, however, we are supposed to take notice of the other ritual subject who is involuntarily involved in this clash: the infant. Frequently, the mother and her child, together, have to be exposed to the arrangements of this interstructural period, usually ending up with becoming of a mother-in-law for the daughter-in-law and surviving or dying for the infant - with the former usually lasting longer than the latter.

“...My mother-in-law was really mean to me... Every night she was telling me on to her son...untrue stories with no basis in fact...Sometimes my husband did not want to listen to her; sometimes he did and beat me up...During a trip, it’s cold but though I warned her kindly, she opened the window in the car on purpose and started smoking. The day after my one-month daughter caught pneumonia... She had three daughters-in-law more and we all lived in the same hell until she passes away at her 80.” (East Anatolia, 32, 2010).

Many ethnographic writings point out that childhood refers to a permanent stage and as a transitional (liminal) life stage devoid of any intrinsic meaning or value. They pay attention to children’s lives or value of a child in a community because especially in many local areas on earth, childhood is a stage shaping up with the strictly defined gender roles by culture. Infants who are born in the rural or less developed areas of Anatolia have also been condemned to ‘public morality’ as well as their young mothers. However, the changes in certain social processes - such as ‘acculturation’, ‘development’, and ‘socialization’-take place through movements from the less developed areas to the more modernized areas (rural to urban migration). In order to overcome strong patriarchal determinants of public morality, it would be useful to create social health policies including legal policies (i.e. child abuse laws) which will be able to affect the relationship between elderly members of the family, daughter-in-law and infant. Such a relationship surely is related with social constructions of kinship, parenthood, and personhood in a community.

So, while talking about the infants who are at risk of dying especially in the first year of their life just because of the patriarchal power relations we should bring our attention to the ideas about “personhood”, too. “Are they persons?” Mary Picone and Lynn M. Morgan (1998)⁵ illustrate the way the notions of fetal and infant ‘personhood’ are informed by particular political and cultural circumstances looking at cases in Ecuador, North America and

⁵ Both studies were published in 1998. Morgan, L.M. 1998. Ambiguities lost: Fashioning the fetus into a child in Ecuador and the United States. See Shepper-Hugs&Sargent 1998, pp.58-74. and, Picone, M. 1998. Infanticide, the spirit of aborted fetuses, and the making of motherhood in Japan. See Shepper-Hugs&Sargent 1998, pp.37-57

Japan. Similarly in Anatolia, notions of both ‘personhood’ and ‘parenthood’ should be considered as a cultural and political issue for both the young mother and their infants. For instance, during the demographic surveys and national censuses, as a researcher I have frequently come across a household head not declaring the baby sleeping in its cradle as a household member. We, Turkish demographers, always have to use “*a warning question*” to understand if they declare the household members accurately: “*Is there any child or infant sucking a pacifier we did not add to the household list?*”

The risk of a baby dying born in an extended-patriarchal family structure is quite higher than those who are born in a nuclear family structure (Gürsoy, 2001, Gürsoy-Tezcan, 1992). Anthropologist Erdal shared one of his remarkable experiences on the field with me:

“I was in Bismil⁶ and visiting a house. I was talking to a young man and his little child was with him. During our conversation he held him up and started to hoop him up. There was a ceiling fan in the room and it hit head of child. The father got sad and wanted to take him to the doctor without delay. But his mother shouted behind him that ‘why are you taking the child to the hospital’, you are very young, so, you can have one more!”

After telling this story, Erdal added that “*This is totally a personhood issue. It’s obvious that they do not identify a baby as a person*”⁷. So, an infant or a baby has to reach physical maturity which is also culturally determined in order to deserve respect for his/her existence, so, this condition throws it into a liminal period that has to be survived, similar to the mother. I should state that in such an exceptionally patriarchal context, re-productivity and fertility means to sustain the husband’s lineage and has to occur frequently. Meanwhile examples such as the one presented by Erdal makes me think that infant or child death is a fact that is also culturally constructed as childbirth. The following stories demonstrate the lack of personhood for infants while alive as well after death.

“I was 8... My mother and I visited the village where she was born to see her childhood friends. There were children everywhere...their mothers and a few old women were sitting in a large living room, drinking tea and chatting. Suddenly one of them noticed that the baby sleeping in the side-room was dead. There was not even any scream... The small dead body was covered by a blanket and put on a divan silently...the young woman found the baby dead and kept serving tea and the women in the living room kept chatting loudly, just like nothing happened...”(Central Anatolia, 35, 2009)

While Carol Delayney is talking about the babies dying in the first year of their life, she mentions that the swaddle (*kundak*) turns into a burial shroud (*kefen*). Meryem, another bride from Gaziantep told that

“In our village, generally some of the close relatives of the bride, especially her own mother visits her when she loses her baby... but the ones who live away from the house don’t... If an infant death occurs, two or three persons take the corpse to the cemetery for burying... there is no need for a grave stone...they put a couple of stones around the grave and abandon it...the grave is not visited anymore.” (South East Region, 35, 2010)

Kaufman and Morgan (2005) claim that “*producing persons is an inherently social project*” and according to them, in many cultural contexts infants are accepted as the creatures which are unripened, unformed, ungendered, and not fully human and this situation turns personhood into a cultural attribute. According to the women I talked to in the villages,

⁶ A small town in the East Anatolia

⁷ A conversation with Yılmaz Selim Erdal, the Turkish physical anthropologist 2011, Istanbul.

infants are not fully a person, but there are a varieties of steps that will make them reach personhood and which are associated with becoming more visible: walking, talking, eating by her/himself, serving any purpose. On the other hand, however, circumcision for baby-boy and, menstruation for baby-girl are indeed, the most common answers I came across; the former refers to “*erkek olmak*” (becoming a real man) and the latter refers to “*kadın olmak*” (becoming a real woman) and they both are associated with achieving reproductive capacity. However, the women who have ever become both a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law told me that there is one way a daughter-in-law can have a better status in the house: when she gives birth to a boy, and accordingly, when she guarantees she will become mother-in-law in the future. This makes her feel more confident and comfortable in the presence of her husband and the family elders, especially her mother-in-law. But, ironically, the baby-boy has to see his first birthday because according to the data I have collected in many villages, an infant has a sex/gender on the first day he/she comes to the world, when people are enthusiastic and excited, but afterwards, until the baby completes the first year of their life or start walking, they have no sex and even no personality. So, in rural Anatolia, especially in the sub-local contexts, a particular kind of patriarchy has been observed for years, a patriarchy that is perpetuated by traditions, religious assignations, hierarchical relations, and these four factors confines the bride and infant to a restrained and pacified life that we identify as a liminal stage where they do not count as a real person.

