

KUVVET-KUVVET (Force Counterforce)

Zehra Doğan

5:46 mn

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Venue: Amna Suraka Museum, Sulaymaniyah / Kurdistan

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In the 90s, while still a child, I attended Coranic classes in the neighborhood mosque. While listening to the things said there, my woman's body raised its hackles for the first time...Hodjas¹, members of the Turkish Hizbullah² were teaching us the obligation to be "good women", by providing examples taken from Coranic verses, in order to prepare us for our future. They constantly talked to us about hell, filled with millions of women who were there bound in burning chains, hanging by their hair, their breasts, their mouths stitched shut, their genital organs burnt away...for their faileure to obey men.Each scene described by the hodjas, sent shivers through our childish bodies.

They told us all this and said we had to love God and obey him. I fact, I was afraid of this God we were supposed to love. This was perhaps the first lie I learned to pronounce: I did not love the God, but in order to go to paradise, I had to lie by saying that I did. How could I not have done so? Was this not the same God who read inside us even when we did not speak? I couldn't find a solution to this enigma. For many years, I kept this lie inside me, repeating in my head that I loved him.

Then, little by little, I realized that the paradise described by the hodjas as "a place of beauty, peacefulness and amusement" was a place I did not want...The paradise thus described frightened me even more than hell did. It was a garden filled with men stretched out in leisure on the shores of rivers flowing with wine, with thousands of houris³ at their service. Houris with rounded breasts⁴ and whose hymen repaired itself following each sexual act...According to the hodjas, if we managed not to fail in our servicing of our husbands and kept them well contented, we would go to paradise and still be with them. As "good men" they would be entitled to 70 houris each, and we would be allowed to be the houri in chief, above the others. So that even in paradise, not only would I not be freed of my obligation to serve a man, but also in competition with 70 houris awakening his voluptuousness with the usual fantasy of being the first one entering new grounds. This was the only reward for this long list of obedience to the duties I was to perform on earth...

Paradise or hell? Which was best? During these childhood years when, feeling helpless before my sentence, I walked toward becoming a woman, my body was suspended in purgatory between two eternal worlds, and I felt closer to hell. During those years where I wished with all my heart to grow up as slowly as possible, little by little, I realized that the women thrown into hell were the more dignified of the two. And at that point, I felt as if pulled by claws grabbing at my hair. The time had come to choose. Was I to give up and yield, or was I to resist this force? My story, and that of millions of women, began in this way...

Men's hegemony began in Mesopotamia, when humans having acquired competence in the use of the first tools, established City-States before moving on to civilization as we know it. My resistance against this hegemony spread like a virus but it also began on these same Mesopotamian lands. I was now part of the resistance conducted for years by women who were left breathless in the claws of both the micro and the macro-domination exerted by macho States, dominators and powerful ones with the right to confiscate labor, bodies, lands.

1 Title given to Koranic teachers or more generally to teachers in Turkey

2 Turkish Hizbullah is not directly related to the Lebanese Shiite Hizbullah, although it is also an Islamist organization. Hizbullah is listed by the United States and Turkey itself as a terrorist organization. It was originally a bloodthirsty Sunni Islamist movement with a Kurdish majority and ultra-radical.

3 According to Islam, virgins in paradise, which will be the reward of good Muslims.

4 Described in particular, in Sura 55, verse 56 as female beings who "have not been touched by men or jinns", as having large black eyes, rounded breasts.

The power exerted against the body used as an instrument of domination lives on through the manipulation of perceptions regarding the relationship between the body and the lands. Through sexist discourses, the dominators personify the world as the body of a woman and objectify it as a piece of property.

Thus, we are women who refuse the mechanically-imposed fate tying us to the instruments of domination in the world of contemporary States, with our hair rooted in our memory making us who we are. As we attempt to distance ourselves from this destructive machine trying to grab each of our steps forward, ever-deeper pain is awakened in our body of suffering.

Oh macho world! I resist you to the very end of my hair which you grab to forcefully pull me to you. With my hair, the memory of my universe, my hair rooted in my body, I resist your force with my counter-force.

In Turkey a title given to Coranic teachers, or to teachers in general. The Turkish Hizbullah has no direct link with the Lebanese Chiite Hezbollah, although it is also an Islamist organization. Hizbullah is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States, and even by Turkey itself. It was originally a bloodthirsty Sunni Islamist movement, with an ultra-radical Kurdish majority. According to Islam, virgins in paradise that will serve as reward for good Muslims. Specifically described in verse 56 of the 55th surate as female beings "untouched by men or djinns" and having large black eyes and rounded breasts.

This performance took place in Southern Kurdistan, in Irak, one of the four parts of Kurdistan which was split and shared between Irak, Iran, Turkey and Syria by dominant States that met in Lausanne one hundred years ago.

The armored vehicle shown in the the video is one among the many such vehicles that killed thousands of Kurds under Saddam Hussein's regime.

The venue in which the performance was held is a former torture center, now a memorial: the Amna Suraka Museum. Under Saddam, Amna Suraka (Red Prison) served as headquarters for the Northern wing of Mukhabarat, Irak's secret intelligence organization. In the memory of the region's Kurdish population, it is also "the house of tortures".

Between 1986 and 1989, the Iraki State conducted Operation Anfal, a genocide against Kurds. Ordered by Saddam Hussein's Iraki regime, it was conducted by Ali Hassan al-Majid, with the aim of annihilating the Kurdish population. Anfal used bombings, terrestrial attacks, chemical and gas weapons, destructions of homes, massive deportations, executions, tortures...The massacre in Halabja with its 5 000 killed with chemical weapons is one of the most cruel phases in the Anfal which globally caused a minimum of 50 000 and perhaps up to 100 000 systematic and premeditated assassinations of Kurdish civilians, according to the report by Human Rights Watch.

This venue in which thousands of Kurds were arrested, tortured and assassinated was liberated in 1991 during the Desert Shield Operation, the first phase in the Gulf War, following attacks led by the Peshmergas.

Henceforth, Amna Suraka has the status of war museum and memorial.

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Translation by Renée Lucie Bourges