
Silencing as a site of contestation during childbirth in Turkey

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Résumé

"Birth Stories are everywhere and nowhere", Della Pollock

Silence about, during and after childbirth in Turkey is an almost unexplored phenomenon in social sciences. My PhD research about childbirth experiences of women in Turkey reveals how women experienced mistreatment during their maternity process and how lack of consent induces dissatisfied memories of birth. The over-medicalisation of childbirth without informed consent has been termed from a human rights perspective as "obstetrical violence".[1] Women whose voices and desires were silenced during childbirth refer to feelings of embodied oppression, diminishment of self as well as physical and emotional infantilization.

As "maternal bodies are socially, sexually, ethnically, class specific bodies that are mutable in terms of their cultural production" (Longhurst, 2007, p. 3), the reaction and the responses of women in the face of violence and silencing during birth are varied. Some women act in accordance and use a tactic of self-silencing due to fears of leaving a bad impression and not acting like a "good girl". Internalized technologies of gender serve to make birth more difficult for women and often cause them not to ask for what they need while giving birth and/or not to put themselves at the center of the birth experience. (Martin, 2003, p.59)

Women, afraid to be scolded, end up staying silent and obeying the rules of the hospital game. Ignoring, oblivion and silence become some forms of coping with the violence and the mistreatment. Moreover, most of these women remain silent about the details of their birth stories in their everyday lives. In various fields of health care, detailed interviews have been conducted with a sample of forty women who gave birth in Turkey within the last twenty-five years. To provide a plurality of experiences, fieldwork has been conducted of mothers from various geographical settings, who gave birth at private institutions, public hospitals or at home, vaginally as well as via C-section. These women whose age at first birth varied between 14 and 40, belong to differing social classes, with educational levels varying from illiterate to PhD graduate. Based on the ethnographic interviews with mothers, doulas, midwives and gynecologists, as well as my own experience and participant observations as a doula, this presentation aims at elaborating silence as a site of contestation between various actors during childbirth as silence can be a field of power play.

This term was first officially formulated in 2007 when it was introduced in Venezuela as a new legal term as "the appropriation of the body and reproductive processes of women by

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health personnel, which is expressed as dehumanized treatment, an abuse of medication, and to convert the natural processes into pathological ones, bringing with it loss of autonomy and the ability to decide freely about their bodies and sexuality, negatively impacting the quality of life of women." "Organic Law on the Right of Women to Be Free from Violence", enacted in Venezuela on March 16, 2007.

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Biographic elements

Selen Göbelez Dumas graduated from the Department of Philosophy at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul. She received her master's degree from Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University, where she worked as Research Assistant, with MA Thesis titled "The History of Social Services in Republican Turkey: Social Change, Professionalism and Politics". She is a PhD candidate at the EHESS-Marseille. Her dissertation, entitled "Childbirth Narratives of Women in the Face of Medicalization of Childbirth in Turkey" deals with childbirth policies and construction of subjectivities of women in terms of gender relations and gender performances during childbirth in Turkey in 2000's. She is also trained as a *doula*, providing physical assistance and emotional support for women before, during and after birth.

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