

FAMILY STRUCTURE and MARRIAGE CUSTOMS OF A TURKISH VILLAGE

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Research into the Ethnology of Turkey is very greatly needed and yet very little has been done up to this time. Studies of the social structure and customs of the village communities are not only important for the understanding of the Turkish people, but are also necessary to the people who are responsible for the improvement of the rural communities as well as for the personalities, such as, technicians, health officer, agricultural experts and teachers who take part in daily life of the village people in Turkey. For these reasons, I have started to concentrate my interest and efforts on the research into the social structure of Turkish villages. Since 1951 I have carried out my studies especially on two villages in the "Kuzova" region of the eastern province of Elazığ, one is "Hal" the other one is "Sün".

This paper will describe my findings in the village of Hal in northwestern Elazığ, approximately 35 km. from the capital of the province. The inhabitants are ethnically Turks, as contrasted with those in the surrounding villages and on the mountains near by who are "Kurds".

The population which comprised of 645 people in 195 households¹ is decreasing. Men are fewer. Hal was originally a farming village. However, by this time 80-90 % of the male population has become migrant labourers forced by poverty and by a high birth rate to turn for income to sources outside the village. The religion of the community is Islam of "the Sunni" sect. Almost all the villagers are related to each other and there are few outsiders.

With this brief background, let us go on to consider some of the more significant characteristics of family structure and marriage customs found in the village of Hal.

¹ 1950 Government census

Blood Relationship Within the Family

In olden times, the form of the extended family was widespread with the relatives being almost on the paternal side. The paternal side has traditionally been preferred to the maternal, and this continues in our culture, being one of principal social characteristics. The large type of family has become almost non-existent, especially within the last ten years. Nowadays families in Hal, maintain separate residences as soon as they are in an economic position to do so.

Now only 6 of 195 households in Hal can be classified as a real extended family, that is, consisting of the father, mother, the grown-up children and their families who all share everything in common *in an economic unit*.

However, in the last decade, especially, the younger generation seems to have been inclined to form individual families when economically able. Although the new couples reside in separate apartments or houses, the *patrilineal characteristics* still remain such as having the land and property continuing in the possession of the father during his lifetime, with all of the sons having an equal right to benefit from the product. When a son becomes offended and deserts the father's home, he is definitely not able to ask for any right over the land or property. In case of a separation of a son's house by the consent of the father, the household of the son is supported by the father: the father helps his son's family in every respect, and this includes the period of the son's absence during his army recruitment. There are exceptional cases where the father is helped by the sons when their financial earnings are greater, but this happens only quite rarely. In conclusion, it can be seen that the economic factor *looms* large in supporting the unity of the family as well as the factor of *paternal authority*.

We see that in "Hal" the extended family has largely been replaced by individual families and this is continuing. However, this process modified by one of the old traditions for preservation of the larger family which we find it still in operation: this is the wish of the parents to live with at least one of the sons and this is still commonly found. On the other hand, the economic factor works against this inclination to force separation of the married sons from the parent's house. Also, in the case of a separation it is found that family conflicts are naturally avoided and this is another factor in favor of individual family units.

Families with daughters only tend to arrange early marriages for them, trying to find sons-in-laws who will consent to join the father's household with the intention of helping this family to continue ancestorship.

Types of Marriage

In Hal, the type of marriage is, in general, *monogamous*. This is enforced by law, supported by economic necessity and by the fear of family conflicts in a polygamous household.

However, the older people in Hal still remember the days when there were co-wives in about one-third of the families. The major reason for the existence of polygamy was sterility of the first wife; it was because of the unfulfilled need to have children that a man could take a second wife (called "Kuma" in the native dialect). As a matter of fact, it was a former practice for a childless wife to arrange a second marriage for her husband with her consent. This had an additional advantage of providing more care for the land and herd. In the last decade, I recorded only one instance of polygamy in Hal, and this was a case where a man took a second wife because the first was childless. *Today, there is not any polygamous family left at all in Hal.*

On the other hand, I did record the case of a man who is employed away from Hal and living in Adana where he has four wives. This is an example of situations showing some aspects of polygamy where men from Hal who are forced by economic necessity to become migrant labourers take a second wife in the city. Factors bringing about this situation are effects on the village man of urban living and also, his need for having a woman's care for the necessities of life. However, the second wife is not approved of by the family, neighbors, and relatives. So, she can never be taken along to the village.

Besides this power of social disapproval, there is another closely related reason for the existence of monogamy in Hal, today. And that is the fear of the men caused by the native women's awareness of their legal rights in marriage; so much so that even when a wife is quite ill, the husband *can never dare to enter another marriage*. In fact the rights women hold in married life, seem to be one of the most compensating features upholding the status of women despite the fact that they would appear to be rather badly treated in this community, judged by *more sophisticated standarts*.

Among the preferred types of marriage, there is a widespread practice in Hal of the *custom of levirate*. According to this, in case of the husband's death, one of his brothers marries the widow. Economic, as well as psychological factors, doubtless account for this being widespread. First, there is the fear of losing property if the widow is not kept in the family. Second,

need is felt to lessen the likelihood of family conflicts by keeping the widow who is already a part of the family rather than by taking in a strange woman for a new daughter-in-law.

A similar practice, which is also common is the custom, in case of the wife's death, for the widower to marry her sister (*sororate*). This may be done even against the wish of the sister because of the advantages in so doing. For in this way the care and well-being of the late sister's children are assured.

Order of Marriage Among Children

Let us now trace the status of a traditional rule for the order of marriage among the youth of a family. In the old days in Hal, custom imposed the regulation that *that grown up children married consecutively in the order of their age* in the belief that are thus more mature by years and by experience. However, this was not a hard and a fast rule, in such special situations as when a younger brother who was both more capable in management and dutiful found favor in the eyes of "his parents" he would be permitted to marry first. This was justified on the ground that he would be able to take over all the family's responsibilities. Such exceptions to the old rule are observed today, particularly in cases where the eldest son is rather a vagabond or naive or away to be educated. In these cases, the younger son is married in order that the household may be managed. Recently, however, I have recorded that this rule for the order of marriage among children is not being considered greatly. Whoever wants to marry does so.

Children

Children are very desired in Hal and this attitude is held by every householder. The main reasons for this include the economic factor of supplying more helpers for the farm and home and also meeting the traditional need for the family to continue through providing succession to pray for the parents after their death and for the ancestors (*ancestors*). There is also the minor objective, in having many children, of being released from the national road tax. All children are legal in Hal, since the simple legal marriage prevails and the common law marriage is not approved.

The Situation of the Widows and Widowers

In Hal there are many more widows than widowers (100 widows and 15 widowers). Generally, the remarrying of widows is not sanctioned and the women does not marry again even if she was only 15 years old when

she lost her husband. Here, the widow is allowed to make a living by herself and she is even forced to do so¹. Widowers are immediately remarried.

Extra-marital Relationships

In Hal there is no toleration of extra-marital sexual relations and this is also true of common law marriage. The only exceptions I discovered to this were the cases mentioned above of migrant laborers living outside Hal with a second wife in the city. The Islamic faith does not approve of this type of union and regards it as a great sin; this religious factor seems to be the basic element in the strong social disapproval of any irregularity in relationships between the sexes.

Adultery,

In the event of adultery, the man is always punished by such means as being forced to leave the village. However, *the one most heavily punished is always the woman*, and this has been carried so far that the villagers can even torture a woman to death. I remember being told of an instance where the woman's head was shaved, she was put backwards on a donkey and driven out of the village². Finally, in case of adultery, while women suffer heavy bodily punishment as well as severe social disapproval, men are only blamed, because it is considered that they are easily cleaned of sin, according to the Islamic faith.

Courtship :

Although theoretically bachelors are considered free for any kind of entertainment and that they do have a great deal more freedom now, than was true in the old days, they are still blamed if it should be known that any one of them made love with a woman. Villagers witnessing such a scene would definitely attack both parties concerned. Despite this prohibition, such a relationship can go pretty far as long as it is concealed. For example, this might occur between a widow and a man (whether he is married or not). I have been told that people in Hal used to be very strict about the visiting of a widow by men, and men are still not allowed any freedom in this respect.

1 This is just opposite to the situation of the primitive societies where widows are forced to remarry.

2 This took place 70-75 years ago.

Divorce :

Divorce is a very rare occurrence in Hal. I could only record one case taking place in the last decade, the reason for this was physiological incompatibility. (It happened that the man and woman were cross-cousins). The principal reason for divorce in Hal is *physiological inability* to fulfill the marriage responsibility. A person who is unable to fulfill his or her duty as a spouse is subject to severe social disapproval and this is held to be sufficient cause for divorce.

Marriage Observances*The Brideprice and Giftgiving :*

One of the important village marriage customs which traditionally links not only the two individuals involved, but also their families is the *bride price*¹. This practice is the offer of a present to the bride's family by the groom's family. Here, in Hal, this is called "*başlık*"² and is commonly given in the form of money, often in the amount of 500 Turkish Liras³. The present may take the form of a plough, land, horses, or cattle in neighborhood of Palu and Dersim (just in the northeast of Hal) or it may be tools or a plough in Adana to the South, but such gifts have never been made in Hal. In the old days there was a custom of presenting a gift to the bride's brother which was called "*kardeş haleti*" (translated as "share of the brother"). This used to be given as currency, horse, pistol, or other firearm. However, by the present day this practice seems to have disappeared. Due to kinship obligation, some other presents were offered to the maternal and paternal uncles of the bride. However, they are of less value than the ones given to the bride herself. In turn, the bride is offered gifts by her maternal and paternal uncles, but this occurs after the marriage and will be described below.

The entire bride price is paid at one time, as a definite economic support for the bride's family. The reason for this is that girls are very essential helpers in the household so that payment of a bride price is a manner of making compensation for the member lost to the family. In Hal, girls work very hard in a variety of functions: in food production helping their mothers,

1 Known as "*gelin ağırlığı*" or "*yüz görümlüğü*" in the native dialect.

2 *Başlık* is the proper name for it.

3 As recently as 1954, this used to be in such amounts as 10, 25, or pieces of gold.

brothers and sisters in the gardens and vineyards; in hoeing¹; and in harvesting the crops². Besides these duties the girls are the principal helpers in the winter preparation of food and even grind cereals in the mill.

With the marriage of a daughter, the loss is not only material but spiritual, too. This is why, when a girl mounts her horse to go to her groom's home for the first time as a bride, everybody in the family weeps including the bride. This is certainly a visible expression of the psychological aspect of the loss³.

We should also conclude that the practice of giving a bride price has some sociological implications. In this community aside from the fact that the wife is a great help economically, she is supposed to accomplish her duty as a mate, to give birth to and bring up the children. It is clear that *women's shoulders are very heavily burdened in this kind of family life*.

In the old days in Hal there was a way of cancelling payment of the bride price, by exchanging children between two families. I have witnessed that this is still currently practiced and is called "*sister's exchange*". However, this process has been disappearing recently with the physiological explanation given that if one of the two families treat their bride badly, the other one tries to retaliate. This factor has played a great part in the disappearance of the custom of exchanging sisters.

If there should be a divorce in Hal, the bride price is not paid back. However, there might be an exception in the case of one of the leading families of the village (known as the Ağas)⁴. The reason is because these men of distinction in the community are supposed to pay and to be paid larger amount of money than the average man pays for the bride price: this supports his rank and authority in society. From this position, the Ağa's house may not accept repayment in case of a divorce since his prestige may be harmed and he might be offended by an offer of repayment.

As a matter of fact, there are cases in which the Ağa has been financially ruined by the payment of a high bride price. Such a payment is made not only by the father but by the brothers when this is required.

1 Hoeing is one of the duties assigned to women in Hal, but girl is only allowed to do this until the time of her betrothal.

2 However, men carry the harvest in bags on the backs of animals.

3 I saw instances in Hal where the fathers become ill following the marriage of their daughters.

4 Ağas are of the high rank people in the village who keep their title just nominally.

For their part, the bride's family is expected to fulfill certain traditional functions in return for the payment in question when they present gifts to the bridegroom's side. On the first morning of the marriage the groom and his bride go to the bride's family to kiss their hands. At that time the groom is presented with valuable presents such as pistols, watches and so forth by the father and brothers of the bride. These gifts are presented in a special ceremony held in public because the aim is to show what is given and who has given it. Furthermore, in a return visit according to a traditional rule, when the bride is visited by the groom's family, she is supposed to give some presents from her trousseau to each kinsman. These are such gifts as shirts, underwear, or handkerchieves for the men and scarves and the like for women relatives.

15 days after the marriage ceremony the bride and her groom are invited by the bride's father to visit the family. This is called "*invitation of the fortnight*". The newly married couple stay in the home for three days and nights. During their stay, the bride is given some gifts by her paternal and maternal uncles in return for those given the bride's family as described above. These presents may take the form of animals, money, clothing, and so forth. The feeling attached to this practice is expressed in an old Turkish saying: "The bride's family never send their daughter with an empty hand". There is no need to tell of the affection and love for the newly married couple which underlies this.

Here, we must call attention to the difference in value of these presents to the groom's family for they are certainly less expensive and their worth is largely symbolic. Similarly, these gifts are publicly announced and by the accompaniment of native music on drums and pipes, the gifts are carried to the fiancee's house on trays lifted over the heads of crowds of women which may number as many as one two hundred. During the period of engagement, when a Bayram (an Islamic religious festival) is being celebrated, there is a further presentation to the girl by the groom's family of some gifts of clothing and a sheep (because of the religious tradition of sacrificing sheep at the festival).

Marriage Customs

In Hal, there are two parts to the marriage, the religious and the legal ceremony. The former is given so much importance that even in cases where the young people concerned are not able to marry because of not

having come of age, the religious ceremony is consummated while the legal one comes later after some years.

In the marriages in Hal there is no rite symbolizing the union of the young pair and they do not even share their supper in a half secret way¹. This is because the bride is not supposed to be seen by her man until the ceremony is completed, after that the groom is allowed to enter the nuptial room.

In Hal, the marriage ceremony is accompanied by a great feast traditionally given by the groom's family. This is so expensive that the family's finances are usually completely used up. However, in present-day practice only the well-to-do can afford large feasts and this part of the marriage observance has been much modified.

Traditionally, the girl's house offers only a sweet dessert which used to be a concentrated grape juice resembling molasses (called "pekmezhelvası" in the native dialect). However, today this has been replaced by raisins and candies in order to economize on expense. Following the serving of this dessert at the bride's house, a very impressive procession takes place to escort her to the groom's house.

Some rites which are parts of the marriage ceremony have particular interest for us such as these with the purpose of furthering the prosperity, fecundity and happiness of the new couple. One of these rites is the sending of a mirror and a Koran from the bride's house to the groom's just before her entrance to the groom's house. Bringing of the mirror is to assure the couple's happiness. Traditionally, this Holy Book is wrapped in heavy silk crepe and the bringer of the book is given baksheish. The mother of the groom then raises the Koran in her hand at the main door of the house and the bride passes under the Koran as she enters the house to make her home there. The object of this practice is to insure prosperity and happiness to the young couple.

Some other rites, too, are practiced to assure a happy marriage. The skin of a lamb and wooden spoon are arranged at the main door of the groom's house so that in entering, the bride walks over the lambskin and breaks the spoon. Tradition holds that the bride's passing over the skin certifies that she will keep a mild temper in her married life and also have fecundity to the extent of the number of hairs on the skin.

¹ For example, you would not see the couple sitting hand in hand nor eating in public from some dish as it done in Europe.

The bride is also supposed to put an amount of salt, a cooked dessert ("helva" in the native dialect), and some dough into the trousseau chest. The purpose of insuring happiness for the marriage through these acts is quite obvious.

The spiritual aspect of the wedding observance is stressed in prayers religious processions.

In the forefront of the bridal parade bringing the bride to the groom's house are priests "Hoca" singing hymns to hallow the occasion. Also, a ceremony of blessing takes place at the time the groom is dressed. In addition the veil of the bride is blessed by the priests before it is worn¹. After the groom enters the nuptial room he performs traditional ritual prayers on a prayer rug especially provided in the bride's trousseau: these prayers are held to be of particular significance, as all the blessings requested in these prayers are supposed to come true.

Marriage by Capture

Marriage by capture is not a widespread practice, the incidence of these cases not exceeding 5 %. Because this type of marriage is characterized by the consent of both the man and the girl, people welcome it, believing that the couple can get along well together. Despite the fact that the couple are usually agreed, they often encounter severe disapproval from one or both of their families. I have heard of cases where the girl's relatives have even tried to shoot the groom. Following the capture, the girl is usually taken to the house of one of the man's relatives. This is an example of help extended by kinsmen, as a part of kinship relations, for it is very rarely that the girl is taken directly to the man's house. This may be done when the girl's family is not strong. At this time through the help of kinsmen, the legal and religious ceremonies take place.

After the marriage by capture, the girl's family usually ignores the couple and also the man's family for sometime, maybe even for years. Sometimes, hatred for the groom is so strong that he is followed by the girl's family for sometime. If the girl's family is powerful, it may be necessary for the couple to go away from the village or for the man to leave the girl in the good hands of relatives for a time until the incident can be somew-

¹ After this the veil is put over the bride's head. It can never be lifted up by anyone except by the groom, because this right to lift the veil, which has been blessed, is given by the Islamic faith only to the groom.

hat forgotten. Later, a mediator can effect a reconciliation between the families.

Although this kind of marriage does not always take place by force, this sometimes happens. I recorded two instances of this in Hal in the last decade. In a case where the man and girl are both from the same community, people do not worry too much about a marriage by capture, although of course the girl's family are deprived of the bride price. However, if the man comes from outside the village, then the people become offended and go in a body to the man's village to bring their girl back home. Sometimes, in this situation a fight will ensue. Accordingly, *the people of Hal are very sensitive about capture by force*. The resistance which results is a reflection of the socio-economic loss to families making up the community as well as a repercussion of hatred and revenge concealed in the kinship relationships resulting from marriage.

Preferential Type of Marriage

Marrying a relative is the most widespread type of marriage in the community. In this way the kinship system binds all the inhabitants to each other and there is somewhat of an obligation felt to marry a relative. In selecting a mate, people have a tendency to prefer the relatives from the paternal side and this is to be expected under the strong patrilineal system found in Turkey. For example, it is very rare to marry maternal uncle's child and this is even considered to be bad luck, despite the fact that it is approved by the Islamic faith. Marriage between foster relatives is permitted, although this is not permitted between a foster sister and brother. As mentioned above, "the levirate" and "sororate" are commonly found as preferred types of marriage.

The selection of mate :

In making selection of marriage partners in Hal certain requirements are adhered to very strictly. Both girls and men are expected to have upright character, industriousness, and ability, and to come from a good family. A girl who shows laziness and lack of ability stands little chance of being selected for family responsibility. In Hal, *marriages are arranged by relatives and the village elders* as it is felt that they are in the position of being able to choose sensibly to find industrious helpers. Instances where sentimental nearness is a major factor in selection of a mate are so rare as to be almost unheard of. For this reason, there is no objection on the part of young people

to the mates selected for them by their parents. In Hal, although the marriage is not romantic, this however does not mean that affection does not develop between the marriage partners.

It is quite obvious that the kinship relationship has an important stabilizing influence throughout marriage (I). This is illustrated by the part relatives and even neighbors play in bringing about reconciliation between a husband and wife in the event of a quarrel.

Preferential Type of Marriage

Marriage in Hal is the most important type of marriage in the community. In this type the bride price is not a substantial one and there is no element of an obligation for the bride to return to her natal home. People have a tendency to prefer the preferential system. In this type the bride price is not a substantial one and there is no element of an obligation for the bride to return to her natal home. People have a tendency to prefer the preferential system. In this type the bride price is not a substantial one and there is no element of an obligation for the bride to return to her natal home. People have a tendency to prefer the preferential system.

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The selection of mates in Hal is based on the family's economic and social status. A girl who shows a good character and a high level of education is preferred. The bride price is not a substantial one and there is no element of an obligation for the bride to return to her natal home. People have a tendency to prefer the preferential system. In this type the bride price is not a substantial one and there is no element of an obligation for the bride to return to her natal home. People have a tendency to prefer the preferential system.

1 Especially, the most important aspect of kinship obligation is shown in the event of marriage.