



Makale Geliş Tarihi: 19.12.2017

Makale Kabul Tarihi: 12.02.2018

INVOLUNTARY MARRIAGES FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE: TOWARDS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to develop an analytical framework for understanding involuntary marriages from a human rights perspective based on the United Nations' human rights conventions and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The empirical material used as a basis for an analytical framework consists of 16 thematic open-ended interviews with Kurds in Sweden. A total of eight of the 16 respondents were below 18 years of age when they married. The results from these interviews show that the majority of interviewees' marriages are arranged. The results also show that the reasons behind these marriages and the consequences of them are complex and go beyond being mere expressions of gender roles. In addition to the fathers who typically have greater influence than the mothers do, there are differences in power and influence among women as well, such as mothers' power over daughters and step-mothers' power over step-daughters. Therefore, there is a need for new and wider perspectives on involuntary marriages, and the analytical framework developed in this article is a part of such a purpose.

Key Words: Human Rights Perspective, Involuntary Marriage, Arranged Marriage, Child Marriage, Forced Marriage

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KILMNUS

Zewacê Bêzerî Sero Perspektîfê Heqê Merdimî: Vera Çerçeweyêno Analîtîk

Armancê na maqaleyî, qandê ki zewacê bêzerî bêrê famkerdene, bi perspektîfê heqê merdimî ke Peymanê Heqê Merdimî yê Neteweyê Yewbîyayî û Peymana Heqê Merdimî ya Ewrûpayî yew çerçeweyo analîtîk viraştîş o. Materyalo empîrîk ke qandê çerçeweyê analîtîkî ameyo şuxulnayene, 16 mullaqatê tematîk û akerdeyê ki bi Kurdanê Swêdî ya amayê kerden. 16 kesê mullaqatkerde ra heyşt kesî, 18 serran ra werdî biyê. Encamê mullaqatan nîşan danê ke vêşîyeya zewacê kesê ke bi înan mullaqatî ameyê kerden zewacê tertîbkerde yê. Encamî fina nîşan danê kê sebebê biyayîşê nê zewacan û neticeyê înan bol ciya yê û ne tenya bi rolê cînsiyetan ra zî sînorkerde yê. Tesîrê pîyan zafê mayan ra deha vêşîyo, labelê ciniyan miyan dezî, keynayan sero qiwet û nîfûzî mayan û dêmarîyanciya ciya yo. Qandê ney zî zewacê bêzerî sero ihtîyaceya perspektîfê newey û heray esta û no analîtîk çerçewe zî perçeyê armancê winayin o.

Kiltçekuye: Perspektîfê Heqê Merdimî, Zewacê Bêzerî, Zewacê Tertîbkerdî, Zewacê Qeçekan, Zewacê Zorakî

ÖZ

Bir İnsan Hakları Perspektifinden Gönülsüz Evliliklere Bakış: Analitik Bir Çerçeveye Doğru

Bu makalenin amacı, Birleşmiş Milletler' in insan hakları sözleşmeleri ve Avrupa İnsan Hakları Sözleşmesi'ni esas alan bir insan hakları perspektifinden hareketle gönülsüz evlilikleri anlamak için analitik bir çerçeve geliştirmektir. Tanıtılan analitik çerçevenin temeli olarak kullanılan ampirik materyal, İsveç'te 16 Kürt ile yapılan tematik açık uçlu söyleşileri kapsamaktadır. Araştırmaya katılan 16 kişiden sekizi, evlendiğinde 18 yaşın altındaydı. Söyleşi sonuçları, görüşülenlerin evliliklerinin çoğunluğunun düzenlenmiş evlilikler olduklarını göstermektedir. Sonuçlar ayrıca, bu evliliklerin arkasındaki nedenlerin ve bunların sonuçlarının çok yönlü ve cinsiyet rolleri ifadelerinin ötesinde olduklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Genellikle annelerden daha fazla etkiye sahip olan babalara ek olarak, annelerin kızları çocukları ve üvey annelerin üvey kız çocukları üzerindeki gücü gibi kadınlar arasında da güç ve nüfuz konusunda farklılıklar vardır. Bu nedenle gönülsüz evliliklerle ilgili yeni ve daha geniş perspektiflere ihtiyaç var ve bu makalede geliştirilen analitik çerçeve de böylesi bir amacın bir parçasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnsan Hakları Perspektifi, Gönülsüz Evlilik, Düzenlenmiş Evlilik, Çocuk Evliliği, Zoraki Evlilik

Introduction

According to a review of research on forced marriages conducted by the National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women (*Nationellt centrum för kvinnofrid*) [NCK], (2010) questions about forced marriage were on the political agendas of many European countries in the early 2000s following the debate about "honour killings". In Sweden this applied in particular to the murder of Fadime Sahindal in 2002. Arranged and forced marriages were discussed in Sweden in terms of "honour-based" violence and oppression, while in other European countries such as Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom, arranged and forced marriages, were not exclusively discussed in those terms (cf. Bredal, 2011; NCK, 2010;).¹

This tendency in Sweden changed² to some extent with the Swedish Government Communication 2007/08: 39 regarding the Action Plan for Combating Violence against Women, Violence and Oppression in the Name of Honour and Violence in Same-Sex Relationships (Regeringen, 2007), which was presented on 15 November 2007. One of the 56 measures in the plan was about arranged marriages against a person's will. According to the government, such marriages have cultural, social and economic causes. Girls and boys, women and men, are involved, but girls and women are particularly victimized.

Based on the above premises, the Swedish Government in 2008 commissioned the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (SNBYA) (*Ungdomsstyrelsen*) to conduct a survey on arranged marriages. According to the decision, the SNBYA would carry out the survey in consultation with the Ombudsman for Children in Sweden (*Barnombudsmannen*), the County Administrative Boards (*Länsstyrelserna*), the Migration Board (*Migrationsverket*), the Swedish Tax Agency (*Skatteverket*), the National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*), and other relevant agencies and organizations. The SNBYA were also to make use of international experiences in this field. The first survey in Sweden on forced marriage (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2009) was an initial result of this commission, and prepared the way for a further survey (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2011) in line with the governmental action plan to prevent young people from being forced to marry against their will (Regeringen, 2009). The initial survey

¹I would like to thank Seyran Duran (Union leader) and Şükran Baksi (Project leader) from Kurdistan Women's Union in Sweden for letting me use data from the project *Våga vägra tvångsäktenskap* (Dare to refuse forced marriage) for research purposes. I would also like to thank my colleagues Elinor Brunnberg (Professor in Social Work), Jeanette Åkerström (PhD in Social Work), Sylvia Olsson (PhD Candidate in Social Work), Zlatana Knezevic (PhD Candidate in Social Work) and Welat Zeydanlioğlu (PhD in Sociology) for their useful and constructive comments.

²Although there have been several murders, including the murder of the young girl Pela Atroshi in 1999, that were categorized as "honour killings", the brutal murder of Fadime Sahindal in Uppsala in 2002 put this issue at the top of the agenda in Sweden, and the murder drew attention in Scandinavia as well as internationally. Arranged marriages and marriages between partners less than 18 years (minor partners or partners who are under 18) were included in previous studies (see for example, Integrationsverket, 2000) on vulnerability and school dropout among girls of foreign origin. But research about these questions has been lacking since the late 2000s.

by the SNBYA (2009) was followed by several reports (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012).

In parallel with these reports, the Swedish government appointed a special investigator to gather more information about forced marriage and child marriage, and to propose measures to discourage such marriages. This investigation resulted in an extensive report (Justitiedepartementet, 2012) which, together with reports mentioned above, represents a significant advancement of knowledge about involuntary marriages in Sweden as well as in Europe.

The aim of this article is to develop an analytical framework for understanding involuntary marriages from a human rights perspective based on some of the United Nations' (UN) human rights conventions and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. As a basis for an analytical framework, the empirical material consists of 16 thematic open-ended interviews with Kurds in Sweden. These interviews are neither representative nor the results can be generalized to the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden. The connection of the article to Kurds is only based on this material, which can be interpreted as a case for understanding an analytical framework with a general focus. Therefore, the analytical framework that article aims at not only for Kurds in Sweden, but for the different contexts where involuntary marriages occur regardless of nationalities, religions, countries and continents with widely varying characteristics, which I will return, in the last section.

The Kurds are one of the main stateless diaspora groups in Sweden with both strong relations to homeland and integrative tendencies to the Swedish society (see e.g. Alakom, 2007; Alinia, 2004; Aytar, 2009; Emanuelsson, 2005; Eliassi, 2010, 2013a; Khayati, 2008 and Zettervall, 2013 for some research perspectives on Kurdish diaspora in Sweden). The article focuses on the following four research questions: How are involuntary marriages initiated and arranged? What is it like to live in marriages that have been initiated and arranged against one's will? Whether choice or help is available to terminate these kinds of marriages? How can a broader analytical framework be constructed to view involuntary marriages from a human rights perspective?

The Concept of Involuntary Marriage

There are various definitions of and perspectives on arranged marriage, forced marriage, and related concepts such as coercion and free will. There is also a broad spectrum of these concepts related to involuntary forms of marriage, in which different research perspectives explain the problem according to their different preferences. Some researchers argue that arranged marriage and forced marriage are two entirely different things, while others argue that they are equivalent. That arranged marriage and forced marriage coincide at a certain level is also pointed out by some researchers (Anitha & Gill, 2011; Gangoli, Chantler, Hester, & Singleton, 2011; Gill & Anitha, 2011; NCK, 2010).

According to a governmental action plan to prevent and stop young people being married against their will (Regeringen, 2009), the expression underlying my use of “involuntary marriage” (*äktenskap mot sin vilja*) is introduced to refer to any situation where a person is influenced or pressured to marry, whether through coercion or other forms of pressure. The widespread term “forced marriage” (*tvångsäktenskap*) is used in the same action plan to refer to cases where criminal coercion has been used to persuade someone to marry. This concept of involuntary marriage is also used in the investigatory report from the Justitiedepartementet (2012).

In this article, the concept of *involuntary marriage* is used for marriages that take place without the consent of one or both partners. In this context, involuntary marriages are marriages that involve any form of coercion, for instance real or symbolic threats or violence from parents or relatives, as well as others, regardless of whether or not such coercion, or threats constitute a criminal offence.

These types of marriages may also involve other economic, social and personal aspects that include some form of coercion in a broad sense. Common to all these aspects are that they may restrict individuals’ own freedom to marry. From this perspective, a marriage, though not illegal by current legislation, can still be called an involuntary marriage. The term *involuntary marriage* was chosen over *forced marriage* in this article as a way to focus on individuals’ own free will and how such marriages can be interpreted from the young people’s own perspectives, as they are the primary actors in marriage as a social institution.

The differences between involuntary and arranged marriages have been defined in various ways in Sweden, Scandinavia and Europe (cf. Bredal, 1999, 2006; Schlytter, 2004; Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2009). In the British context, for example, arranged marriages are a form of marriage in which girls and boys are free to accept their parents’ arrangements and have the right to say “no” at any time, while in Sweden until relatively recently arranged marriages have been equated with forced marriages (Schlytter, 2004). Hense and Schorch (2011) distinguish between “consensual arranged marriage” and “forced arranged marriage” to highlight the differences between arranged and forced marriages.

Arranged marriage has always existed to a certain extent among royal families, noble families and a few other families from the upper classes. In addition, dating and match-making sites and television programmes have increased in today’s societies. It is therefore important to avoid equating involuntary marriage with arranged marriage, since not all arranged marriages necessarily have to be involuntary marriages, and vice versa.

Forms of arranged marriage vary even within a country. For example in Southern Kurdistan, marriage is “not an individual choice but a collective affair”

and marriages are used to be arranged and imposed by male members of the group (Begikhani, 2005, p. 219). According to Begikhani;

Traditionally, men have chosen their future wives from patrilineal kin; the father's brother's daughter (*amoza*) is the preferred choice. Among certain tribes, the first cousin has the obligation and the right to marry his paternal cousin, and if he does not intend to marry her, he has to make his position clear so that she can be given to another man. Women are married off at an early age and often exchanged between families (pp. 218-219).

In India arranged marriage takes also different forms, often varying according to region and other factors (Bowman & Dollahite, 2013). Even in an arranged marriage, persons have the "right of refusal", and therefore there are relatively few forced marriages, according to Bowman and Dollahite:

Often marriage in urban areas and even many rural parts involve two adults choosing each other as romantic partners, and then seeking the approval of the parents. They still go through the formal processes of an arranged marriage in order to honor personal choice and respect that marriage binds two families in profound ways (p. 208).

Bowman and Dollahite (2013) conclude that "choice and love are sometimes part of contemporary arranged marriages even if the forms of arranged marriage may be followed for traditional purposes" (p. 208).

A Human Rights Perspective as Starting Point

There are many research perspectives on masculinity (cf. Alinia, 2013; Eliassi, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Hansson, 2010), honour (cf. Alinia, 2013; Darvishpour, Lahdenperä, & Lorentz, 2010; Doğan, 2014; Hansson, 2010; Johansson, 2005; Sedem, 2012), shame (cf. Sedem, 2012) and violence (cf. Alinia, 2013; Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2012) in close relationships and perspectives on public services for young people (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2004) that are relevant to the subject of involuntary marriage. Anitha and Gill (2011), applying an intersectional perspective to forced marriages, and Alinia (2013), applying intersectional perspective to violence committed in the name of "honour", show that these perspectives provide useful analytical tools for understanding the social phenomena surrounding marriages.

This article adopts a human rights perspective (cf. Choudhry, 2011) based on various United Nations (UN) human rights declarations and conventions and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Among the UN declarations and conventions on human rights, articles from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of

Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are included in the conceptual framework of this article.

The UN and European human rights conventions contain multiple dimensions that constitute the main pillars of many social science perspectives and also have implications for policy and practice in countries where governments have signed these conventions. Sweden has ratified all the conventions, included those making up the conceptual framework of this article. Iraq, Syria and Turkey have ratified or acceded to the UN conventions presented in this article. Iran has ratified or acceded to all these conventions except for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Except for Article 5 of Protocol No. 7 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Turkey has ratified all the articles underpinning this article.

The conventions include several provisions relating to individual choice, which is relevant for the topic of involuntary marriage. However, this article focuses on those that are explicitly about marriage or affect it directly or indirectly.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948), one of the first international treaties, deals with some aspects of marriage in Article 16:

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

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Article 23 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (United Nations, 1966a) and Article 10 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (United Nations, 1966b) stipulate the free and full consent of spouses in marriage, the same rights of the spouses, the right to protection by society and the state, etc., in line with UDHR.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, United Nations 1979) goes into greater detail on marriage and related questions. Article 16 of CEDAW is about entering into, living in and exiting from a marriage. Because of the broad perspective of Article 16, which is in the line with the focus of the analytical framework in this article, the entire article is cited below, even if it is a rather long:

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- (a) The same right to enter into marriage;
 - (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
 - (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
 - (f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

Several articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, United Nations 1989) address marriages where one of the partners is below the age of 18. Article 6 of the CRC is important in this regard, since involuntary marriage can be interpreted as arbitrary interferences in a child's life:

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.
2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

In the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Council of Europe, 1950; European Court of Human Rights, 2010, p. 12), Article 12 describes "the right to marry":

Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

Article 5 of Protocol No. 7 (Council of Europe, 1984) to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Court of Human Rights, 2010, p. 44) is about "Equality between spouses":

Spouses shall enjoy equality of rights and responsibilities of a private law character between them, and in their relations with their children, as to marriage, during marriage and in the event of its dissolution. This Article shall not prevent States from taking such measures as are necessary in the interests of the children.

As the selected articles from the declaration and conventions above show, issues regarding marriage, family, spouses, women and children are inseparable parts of human rights. The rights enunciated provide a sure foundation for the policy and corresponding practice of the state signatories, and for research that uses rights as a starting point or as an interpretive perspective. The prohibition of violations and requirements for the affirmation of rights are important aspects that are both preventative and punish violations in relation to international conventions. In these prohibitions and requirements, we can see an embedded perspective on power and inequality between people with different social identities, which has been a starting point in the development of many social science perspectives, such as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993; de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006), relational perspective (Bourdieu, 1984, 1995; Emirbayer, 1997) and the concept of durable inequality (Tilly, 2000).

Methodological Considerations and Material

The empirical material used as a basis for an analytical framework in line of the aim of this article is taken from an interview study (Aytar, 2013). In this interview study, the interview guide was designed with some initial, open-ended, thematic questions in order to enable open conversations on life stories between interviewees and interviewers (cf. Bryman, 2012) and questions were in Swedish. A total of 16 interviews were conducted in five different cities in Sweden during the period December 2012–April 2013. Of the 16 interviewees, 13 were women and three men. The interviewees were selected in cooperation between Kurdistan Women’s Union in Sweden and the researcher. The sample can also be called a purposive sampling (Layder, 1998) in that we selected information-rich cases regarding those who entered into marriage against their own free will. Furthermore, we took into consideration their gender for including both women and men, and which part of Kurdistan they come from because of having examples from different parts of Kurdistan if it was possible. The interviews were conducted by some members of Kurdistan Women’s Union in Sweden. The interviewers had some knowledge about involuntary marriages through Kurdistan Women’s Union in Sweden.

The interviewees chose locations where they would feel safe for the interviews. To document the interviews various methods were used, such as tape recording, written responses and note-taking. In addition to an information letter that was sent out prior to the interview, the interviewees were verbally informed that no names or statements that could lead to their identification would be made public, and that participation in the interviews was completely voluntary. All the interviewees were aged 18 or over when the interviews took place, and at the time of the interview they were assessed by the interviewer as capable of

participating in the interview and answering the questions (cf. Swedish Research Council, 2011).

When processing and analysing the interviews, the research questions were used as thematic categories (cf. Bryman, 2012). When excluding parts from the interview excerpts, three dots (...) are used to show where such measures were taken for reasons of research ethics and where some sentences were concentrated into a single quote. A total of eight of the 16 respondents were below 18 years of age when they married, but their ages were not specified in the reporting of results in order to maintain their anonymity as promised. Further, information about what part of Kurdistan the interviewees or their families come from, the social and cultural background of the interviewees and their families, and their living styles in Sweden is excluded from the results in order to ensure anonymity in relation to the reader.

Life Stories on Involuntary Marriages

Results from the interviews about involuntary marriages show that there are various factors, which are important for entering, living or exiting these marriages. The social, cultural and economic contexts of these marriages also show that there are both similarities and differences between marriages. The vulnerability of girls and women is obvious although some boys and men are also victims of the dominant social, cultural and economic conditions. Therefore, we need a broader perspective on the marriage. The following section is structured with such a purpose.

Entering into involuntary marriage

Discussions, plans and seeking a “suitable” partner can begin at an early age, before the age of 18 according to a female interviewee: “Well, I can start by saying it all started when I began to become sexually mature and old enough. ... Everyone around you would begin to discuss, plan and locate a possible future partner.”

Sometimes the process can be started by parents, but then the child, girl or boy, can also become involved for various reasons. Accepting a marriage as a way out “to a normal, free life” or to “move away from home as soon as possible” is one of example, although some of the interviewees may regret it much later. One of the female interviewees describes this process as follows:

My intention was to free myself from the misery caused by those who wanted to decide over me and control me. I just wanted to get myself a better and freer life with more and greater opportunities. I didn't have a normal childhood, a fun childhood, or any fun memories at all to think back on. The older I became, the more I saw marriage as the only way out of my problems. In my life I

mainly have felt alone, different, unloved and unfairly treated. I barely had any friends. I used to come straight home from school because that's what I was supposed to do.

Perceived group pressure among parents, a social phenomenon that emerged in discussions on problems and conflictual cases in previous studies, is also considered to be a major factor behind involuntary marriages. One of the interviewees pointed out her father's behaviour and her mother's inability to withstand his pressure:

He accused me [of behaving wrongly], and said that if I was seen at the disco or hanging out with friends someone could see me and that was bad for the family. ... Mom didn't agree with him, but was too afraid to say anything to dad. ... Their discussions and arguments about this lasted for a long time. Mostly, it was dad who argued and threatened mom ... Mom was very afraid and worried all the time. In the end, to save mom, I agreed to them bringing in a relative for me to marry, I didn't want to.

The importance of marriage within one's own extended kin is also mentioned by one of the male interviewees: "My family think that it's very important to stick together and just marry one's own relatives." The interviewee described how his father argued against marriage outside one's kin:

I refused all the time. I was in love with another woman, from the city. ... I said that I don't want to marry her, I know nothing about her. My dad said it's either her or no one. "I will never accept another woman for you. Certainly not a city dweller, who you don't know what they've done." Dad thought city women were not to be trusted. You must know the whole family and be sure that she hasn't had another guy. In the end, dad has done what he wanted. He has arranged everything himself. ...

Marriage within family and friendship circles is a recurrent pattern. The daughter or a son of a familiar person, one who is perceived as a sister or brother, can with the parents' approval be a "candidate" partner. One of the female interviewees noted:

My brother came with a smile on his face and said: "Now the time has come for my sister to start a family and have a good life." I just froze and said: "No, I will not marry" without knowing who they had decided to marry me off to. He said "the person you're to marry is ... and you'll be happy. He's a good person and comes from a good

family” ... I knew who he meant. I had seen him before. ... In the end, I had no possibility to defend myself any more. ... Even today I feel so bad when I think of that day.

There are also examples where a “compromise” is made between one’s own choice and that of one’s family. It is a kind of free choice within given limits, characterized by implicit coercion. One of the female interviewees described this limited choice in the following way:

I could decide over my marriage to some extent, for example, to refuse to marry the person that my parents had chosen for me. At the same time I could not marry the person I chose. There was a family friend who I could accept and who my family approved of. It was almost like a compromise.

Parents’ new relationships after divorce can also lead to involuntary marriages in the next generation. For example, a step-mother creates problems for her husband’s children from a previous marriage. This is interesting given the traditional gender-power structure based on relationships between the sexes. As one of the female interviewees put it:

My dad’s love for my mother came to an end. ... When dad got married, his wife didn’t want us at home. After a few arguments, I was married off to a farmer. I remember how badly I felt when a car picked me up and left me in a dark and dirty house. From the very beginning they treated me very badly. I was a city dweller and couldn’t milk the cow. They beat me. ... The first night, my husband beat me. I didn’t know why.

In addition to marriage within kinship circles and other close relationships, other aspects also emerged in the interviews. Living in a poor family and being married to a “rich man” or coming to Sweden are two of the other dimensions mentioned by the interviewees. Another aspect mentioned is entering into a marriage in order to stay in Sweden. Being able to live in a home of one’s own and be self-sufficient was another dimension. In one of the interviews, extortion was also mentioned, where the man forced the woman into marriage under the threat of undesirable consequences for her family. The woman could not resist such pressure.

Living in an involuntary marriage

Involuntary marriages may fail and lead to unhappiness and violence. But there are examples, mentioned by both women and men, where they had “good fortune”:

I was married off to my cousin, someone I had viewed as my brother until then. It was pretty traumatic that he suddenly, against my will, became my husband. ... The only positive thing I can say is that I had the good fortune that my husband is a very kind person. I've heard of others who've been married to men who were aggressive and violent towards them. My husband has never raised a hand against me or treated me badly. I think he was in love with me for real when we got married.

No, I was lucky. My wife is very kind and good looking. I try to be a good husband to her. ... My mom and dad found my cousin for me. When I was ... years old, my mom told me "you shall get your beautiful wife". And she actually is beautiful. Then there was a wedding.

Several of the people interviewed have found themselves in situations where dissatisfaction, physical and psychological violence, hatred, unhappiness, etc. are part of everyday life. One of the interviewees explains how, after so many years, she hates her husband. He shows no respect for her as a woman and sometimes uses violence against her. Their relationship has deteriorated so much that he decides which members of her family she may meet.

One interviewee, who was forced to marry someone to solve a personal problem, ended up in a marriage with new problems on several levels:

He abused me mentally and exploited me sexually during the two years that I was married to him. At the same time he helped me with all kinds of things, and after each time he abused me he did good things to soothe his guilty conscience and manipulate me to stay. I did not understand it then. I thought it was my fault because I was the one who didn't want to have sex, though we were married. I thought he was really nice. Every time I was about to leave him, he would lock the door, cry and beg me to stay. He promised not to hurt me again and to make it up to me with presents and trips. I stayed because I felt sorry for him, if it wouldn't work out, so he threatened me until I stayed.

Such a marriage can affect a person's life in different ways and at multiple levels. Lies, low self-esteem, isolation, and depression were some of the problems affecting one of the interviewees:

Many evenings, I used to go to bed earlier and pretend to be asleep to avoid him in every way. ... I did almost anything to avoid him, specifically to avoid having sex with him. I lied many times, saying that I was having my

period, and sometimes he would find out that I was lying and we'd end up fighting and quarrelling. ... I was very unhappy and ended up feeling that I was worthless, fat, ugly and disgusting, because I was told these things so often by him that I finally began to believe them. I stayed away from all my friends, barely socialized with my family, and became more and more depressed, and felt I had no one to open my heart to. So I chose to isolate myself from the outside world.

One of the consequences of involuntary marriages may be that they can lead to poor health and self-esteem. One of the interviewees says that she always has a stomach-ache and that it is "hell to be forced to live and share your life together with someone you don't love." Another interviewee, who is married to a cousin, says that she has thought of taking her own life several times, because she is not happy and cannot get a divorce.

Being married against one's will may result in a marriage that is "window dressing for the sake of others" and where the partners live separate lives under the same roof, according to one of the interviewees. There are also examples, both from women and men, where the partners are not in love but stay together "for the children's sake". Several interviewees mentioned that children should be allowed to choose their partners as well.

One interviewee pointed out that both he and his wife had been married against their will, which is interesting because it focuses on both partners. Even young men may be subjected to some pressure, even if the most obvious pressures are usually directed toward young women. This is an important dimension that should not be denied in discussions about involuntary marriages:

I have said that I felt like a dead person. I had other plans than to get married. From the beginning everything was really hard. I made several plans, for example, to just flee and leave everything ... But a short time later, she said she was pregnant, and I couldn't do anything. I think, it's not just me who is the victim, but she is as well. Right now we have a normal life like everyone else, but we are not in love, I just live as a man, respecting my wife as she is.

One interviewee says that she decided to study and become someone for her children and family. "I studied really hard, working at home, it was very difficult, but I did everything. Now I am ... and have good money, but still, to be honest, I do not have any self-confidence at all", the interviewee says and continues:

One thing that hurts me is that my husband's family, and even he himself, look down on me. They do not respect

me at all. It makes me feel bad. We've made attempts to separate, but I couldn't succeed with that either. Everyone comes and says, "No, it is not good for you and your son and your brother." If I get angry, my brother's wife argues with my brother. If they are getting a divorce, I must also separate, and vice versa. I'm not free to do anything at all, if you know what I mean. It all depends on how my brother and his wife are doing. If they divorce, I must as well, otherwise not. ... I think, I had a very hard life, not at all happy. I feel guilty, above all, and toward everyone. I'm not myself anymore, despite that fact that I have a good education and have children. But I have bad relationship.

In this story, we see another dimension of involuntary marriage. The siblings from two families have married each other through a form of marriage generally referred to as "*berdel*", "*bedel*", "*jin ba jin*" among Kurds. This is a form of marriage based on the "exchange" of brides, which in turn causes a problem in one marriage to affect the other marriage. This makes problems even more complex.

Choosing your own partner can lead to good chances of success, but this need not always be the case, according to one of the interviewees. In the event of failure, it may be good for your own self-esteem that the marriage has been your choice, according to the same interviewee.

Exiting involuntary marriages

For some individuals, an involuntary marriage can end in divorce without any trouble between the families involved. One of the interviewees provides such an example:

Since my ex-husband and I barely knew each other and came from completely different backgrounds, it was very difficult to understand each other. I was still studying and had not lived by myself and did not really know what it meant to manage a household. A man does not make the same sacrifices as a woman. The marriage transition will not be difficult for a man. ... I was afraid of not being good enough, not so much for my ex-husband, but I was more afraid that I was not good enough for my own family. I was very unhappy and it was difficult to keep up with my studies, which had never been a problem previously. We argued a lot in the time before we separated, and after that I moved back to my parents.

For one of the interviewees, it is difficult to get a divorce: "I have ... children, for their sake, I must go on and live a life which I don't want. I'm not in love

with him at all, but cannot provide for myself alone, have no job.” One of the interviewees still does not accept the situation, feels cheated and is always getting into arguments with her husband. Even if the person knows that help is available if she wants to get a divorce, she may not be supported by her own family. But she will not give up and will do everything she can to be free.

For one of the interviewees, her marriage, which ended in divorce after a few years, was filled with big problems right from the start. She got some breathing room when her husband was not at home:

It was no ideal marriage that I had entered into. There was absolutely no warmth, love, respect, communication, friendship, and so on. All the basic characteristics that a really good, functioning marriage should have. I did not feel good at all during my ... years of marriage. Every day was enormously painful for me. I used to count the seconds until he went out ... because then I could finally feel free enough to be myself and not have to keep pretending...

Perceived kinship ties can cause a person to stay in an involuntary marriage. One of the interviewees expresses such a problem as follows: “She is my cousin. I cannot separate myself from my relative. But if I want I can remarry with someone else, and I don’t want to. Life is hard sometimes.”

A lack of support from people around a family may lead an unhappy partner to stay in a marriage even if she or he is ready to try to break free. One of the interviewees describes how she was made unwelcome by her parents and other relatives, so she went back to a relationship that she did not like at all. There are cases where someone’s children have not supported a divorce because of their fear that their mother could end up in loneliness or have other problems. This is a sign of how fear can be passed down for several generations.

But in some cases, life became much more difficult if the person stayed in the relationship. One of the interviewees told how she was not able to stay in the relationship and turned to the women’s shelter for help:

After I had been at the women’s shelter and talked to them, I felt much stronger. I had always known deep down that it was like the women’s shelter said: that he oppressed and manipulated me. But I understood it for real when someone else said it. It was thanks to them that I was able to move out ... After that I lived at the women’s shelter. I felt very bad psychologically, once I began to relax. Gradually, I began to get an education. ...

There are examples of deep scars from bad relationships: “I was very hurt by this marriage. I still do not dare to trust people and I always wonder what sick

sides people have deep inside. I am disgusted by sexual behaviour.” However, such a person may, as in the example below, move forward in life when starting a new relationship:

It took ... years before I got rid of him. I met another guy and fell in love, that’s how I got out of the marriage. It was then that I understood how a relationship should be. I knew what a hell I had been through, that I am worthy of being treated well, and that there were better guys.

Sometimes traces may remain from the failed marriage. These can make it difficult to enter a new relationship. But even such people, as in the statement below, have taken important steps forward:

I have no contact with my ex-husband or his family. He remarried, that’s what I know. However, I am more negative toward remarrying. It’s fortunate that we did not have a child. I don’t know how it would have been then. Maybe we would not have got divorced. Now at least I can live my life. Sometimes I wonder whether my parents are disappointed in me. It feels that way at times, but they don’t say anything about it, since I finished my studies and have a good career in my field.

To be questioned, not valued or appreciated, can lead to “seeking approval from others”, which has led to new problems for one of the interviewees. Being exploited when you are vulnerable also leaves scars, according to one of the interviewees. One interviewee talks about what she has been through, but at the same time she shows a strong side and is confident about her future:

I have very low self-confidence and poor self-esteem as a result of everything I’ve been through. But I must thank God for giving me the courage to get away and change my life and strive for something better. And I will succeed with everything I’ve dreamed of. I know I will arrive, with the help of the many wonderful people who have come into my life. ...

The failure of an involuntary marriage can also give new life to the relationship between parents and their children. It is an important factor in being able to move forward in life, even if the wounds have not yet healed. One of the interviewees expresses this in the following way:

Compared to other women’s stories, I have been lucky. My family finally understood that I was very unhappy in the marriage. They saw that my ex-husband was not right for me and that we had an unhappy marriage. They understood that I had not been able to resist the social pressure ... I understand that it was difficult for them to

understand that I did not want to marry that man. I think that I was confused and didn't know if I wanted to get married or not. I just did what I thought was the right thing, in other words to get married. The result is that my parents and I have become closer, even if it has been a long road.

One of the female interviewees is highly critical of political leaders and points out an important aspect for those who can influence the processes and mechanisms that contribute to involuntary marriage:

I wish that politicians would really help families stop trading their daughters with each other. Though I am very disappointed with Kurdish politicians; they do nothing, just talk; they see everything, but are quiet. I don't know what they're thinking about all the time. Hope that women themselves find good self-confidence and protect themselves more.

Another female interviewee makes some interesting observations on parental education and jobs: "We know that life is a certain way, but we do not know why. Sometimes there is cause, but not always. Sometimes I think that if had had a good job and my mom had an education, maybe we would not have been affected so hard."

Final Discussion: Towards an Analytical Framework

As I mentioned earlier, the interviews reveal that various factors lead to involuntary marriages, which echoes previous studies of such marriages among different groups in Sweden and other Nordic countries (cf. Bredal, 1999; Integrationsverket, 2000; Justitiedepartementet, 2012; Schlytter, 2004; Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012). Experiences of living in involuntary marriages have implications for couples, children and other interested persons. Some health and life related problems are mentioned by interviewees, but some research studies from Kurdistan and other countries show a wider spectrum of problems from unhappiness and fears to self-harm and suicide (e.g. Bhardwaj, 2001; Bağlı & Sever, 2003; Hoyek & Sidawi, 2005; Mutyaba, 2011; Doğan, 2013)

Further, examination of the problems in involuntary marriages shows that they are varied, deep and more complex than what is sometimes simplified and discussed regarding oppression against young Kurdish women by their parents, brothers and other relatives. Such simplifications often dominate mainstream media discourses and scholarly perspectives on ethnic and cultural differences in Sweden (see e.g. Eliassi, 2010, 2013a and 2013b for problematisation of some of these discourses and perspectives).

A large proportion of the marriages in the interview study in this article were arranged, but there are cases that cannot directly be classified as arranged, but where some factors, such as social and economic aspects of the situation, serve to exert real or symbolic coercion on the person involved. Marriage within extended kin is a dominating form of marriage. Parents are often the driving force in marriages between relatives, but there are cases where other family members also play a major role. Among the 16 respondents that were interviewed in the interview study, six (including two young men) said that they had been married off to relatives, with the involvement of various family members.

The interviews also show that in addition to the typical dominant position of fathers, as compared with mothers, there are differences in power and influence even among women, such as mothers' power over daughters, and a step-mother's power over step-daughters. The complexity of such power relations has some parallels with earlier studies (e.g. Anitha & Gill, 2011).

Although it is girls and women who are subjected to oppression and violence associated with marriages and suffer the most, the results presented in this article show that boys and men are also forced into marriages against their will (cf. Samad, 2010; Mutyaba, 2011; Asaad, 2012). This result confirms that it was important to mix both women and men in the choice of interviewees. It is also important to consider whether the fact that one of the spouses (regardless of gender) is forced into a marriage could be oppressive and amount to a violation of the other spouse's free will as well, because a happy marriage is based on both partners' own free will. This complexity regarding involuntary marriages must be taken in consideration without neglecting the partner who is most exposed.

As the selected articles from various international human rights conventions (Regeringskansliet, 2006, 2011; European Court of Human Rights, 2010) show, involuntary marriages concern human rights on various levels (cf. Choudhry, 2001). An involuntary marriage is foremost a question of universal human rights in view of the different participants' involvement and the consequences for them. Further, an involuntary marriage restricts most of the women's rights related to protection from oppression and violence against women. Because the majority of those forced into such marriages are below 18 years of age, the question is also one of children's rights, regardless of their sex.

Since eight of the 16 persons interviewed were below the age of 18 when they were married, these marriages can also be called child marriages (cf. Thunander, 2007), which constitute an important dimension of involuntary marriages. Regarding child marriage, it is also important to avoid linking this phenomenon only to persons with foreign background, arranged marriages, or involuntary marriages. According to the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

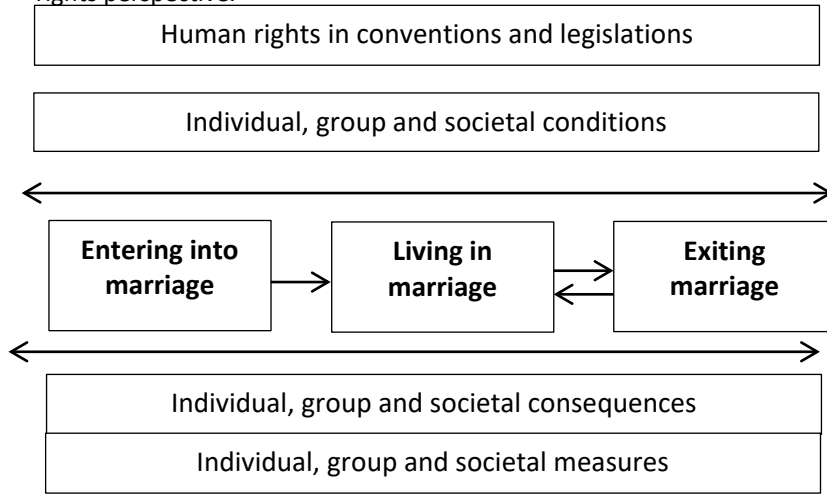
(Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2009) child marriages occur even among persons of Swedish background. For example, according to statistic from 2007, 61 out of 254 married girls and 680 out of 933 young mothers between 12 and 18 years of age had Swedish background, which is an indication of variations in the phenomenon of child marriage and cohabitation at a young age.³

The results presented above show that the processes and mechanisms behind the phenomenon of involuntary marriage are complex. Therefore, there is a need for broader perspectives that do not solely focus on the consequences of such marriages or the underlying power structures, but also focus on processes from the formation of marriage through divorce or being forced to live in these marriages. These perspectives are needed in research, legislation and different types of practical works. In this regard, an analytical framework, as shown in *Figure 1*, consisting of individual, group and societal conditions, consequences and measures, from entering into and exiting marriages, together with human rights in international conventions and regulations of particular countries, can contribute to a better understanding of involuntary marriages.

Because the international conventions on human rights presented in this article contain regulations about different phases of a marriage, and the state parties have passed or have been pressured to pass domestic regulations, such as laws, rules, and other governing documents, a human rights perspective can be taken as a starting point for addressing involuntary marriages. In this regard, this analytical framework can even be used for various interventions that are needed to prevent or reduce the harmful consequences of involuntary marriages.

³In the report (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2009, p. 236) of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, “married” refers to those who were married in Sweden, “mothers” to those who had children in Sweden, and “foreign background” to those who were born abroad or were born in Sweden with both parents born abroad.

Figure 1. An analytical framework for involuntary marriages from a human rights perspective.



Along with creating such an analytical framework, it is also important to problematize some of the concepts and approaches that are often mentioned in connection with this problem and related issues. Discussions on involuntary marriages and related phenomena show that the ambiguity surrounding certain concepts is decreasing, particularly in relation to differences between arranged marriages and forced marriages (cf. Bredal, 1999, 2006; Schlytter, 2004; Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2009; Hense & Schorch, 2011). But there is still a need to further clarify the concepts for use in further studies. For example, marriages involving specific constellations of parents, relatives and friends have always existed in different societies, but force has only been used in some of these. Arranged marriages have always existed in some royal families, noble families and other families in different countries and over time.

Modern societies are also characterized by different institutional arrangements for pairing people who are looking for a relationship. Contact ads have become a classic example of this, with roots stretching far back in time. Dating and match-making sites have increased a great deal in today's societies. Swedish television programs such as "Farmer Seeks a Wife", "Mamma's Boys", "Single Mom Seeks", and "Paradise Hotel" are other institutional forms of creating new relationships in the context of large-scale public events. Similar arrangements exist in other countries too. Because of these multiple dimensions regarding arranged marriages and other types of relations, it is important to be cautious when it comes to the degree of overlap between arranged and forced marriages.

In line with the need for clarity in the use of concepts and the choice of the term "involuntary marriage" rather than "forced marriage" in this article, it is important also to problematize the concept of "honour" as used in "honour killings", "honour-based" violence and oppression, etc. These ideas are often

used in contexts where involuntary marriage is mentioned. It is important to focus on the free will of both partners, to recognize their status as the primary actors in marriage as a social institution, and to interpret marriages from their perspective rather than the perspective of perpetrators and oppressors. In this way the concept of “honour”, which historically has had positive connotations, can be freed from associations of murder, violence and oppression, and the perpetrators’ misrepresentations of social norms and values can be dealt with more effectively.

It is also important to avoid stereotyping and labelling certain groups of people from a generalized “cultural” perspective. Studies (see example Bredal, 1999, 2006; Johansson, 2005; Thunander, 2007; Ouis, 2009; Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2009, 2010b, 2012; NCK, 2010; Doğan, 2011, 2014; Hense & Schorch, 2011; Mutyaba, 2011) show that involuntary marriages occur among different nationalities, religions, countries and continents with widely varying characteristics. Discourses strongly opposing involuntary marriage are also found in the different contexts. These opposing discourses are neglected in some mass media discourses and generalizing culturalist approaches (see for example Eliassi, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, Alinia, 2013 and Doğan, 2014 for the discussion of problems of such approaches), when labelling a certain nationality, religion, etc.

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