



Chained Screams by Hanin Nidhal Al-Khamisi

Act 5: Denmark, Finland, Norway & Sweden, November 25, 2006

I am a young woman, who looks like most who come from the Middle East. I come from what people describe as a minority group in my first home country and of course as a minority group in my second home country. Today, I ask myself if it is possible, one day, to be viewed as a normal woman! Just to be treated equally!

Those looks in peoples' eyes, asking the same questions, like they are the only possible questions, they are starting to seem to me like infinite questions.

Once I bought an ice cream. The weather was gorgeous; I was in a hurry that day, but I sat on a bench in the street to eat it. There was a woman already sitting on the bench, so I asked if it was available? The woman seemed friendly and replied:

"Yes!"

I sat beside her, and I felt her staring at me.

Then she quickly said: "Oh! Your ice cream looks good."

I replied slowly: "Yes, it is really warm today."

I was thinking in my mind that she is probably considering to buy one, because we are right beside the ice cream store! Well, she is just being nice, I thought.

She then asked: "May I ask where are you from?"

Of all the questions she could ask, she chose to ask this question. A question I had been asked way too many times before. After that I knew it was not about

the ice cream, nor about being nice, it was about the opportunity to know where I am from. I was annoyed, because the question was thrown directly in my face. It was not like, “May I ask?” and then “Where...?”

It was a question of one sentence, and it seemed like she wouldn't divide it into two, because perhaps she thought I would run away before answering her.

Well, yes I was annoyed and was about to throw my ice cream away and go to where I was in a hurry to be. Instead, I answered her politely and accepted the fact that to some people, this is seemingly the usual and only question.

Being part of a minority is not easy, and you should not think it is negative. It might sound strange: “NOT easy and NOT negative”, but in reality it is true.

As if you were a child: “Oh, how good!”, “How clever; You could do that!”, “How could you do that?!” – those are the kind of responses you get when you do something good, or something special and you are a part of a minority group.

Well, you start to wonder why they think I couldn't do that!

Why they thought it was impossible for me to do that, or anything else! Don't I have a brain, ears, eyes... just like anyone else?

The way of asking, the way of responding, often seem as if others have categorized you as a mentally challenged person.

From my personal experience, it is often hard to accomplish things when you are not a part of the majority. You will often be told: “YOU CANNOT DO THAT”, and sometimes I ask who decides what I can or cannot do! Who measures a human being's ability? I often need to prove what I can do by giving double of the amount of work that “normal” people seem to give, and keep hoping that it will be appreciated.

All too often people look at an ethnic minority group as if it would be one person. That person contains all the negative descriptions that are fed by certain media, or by friends' private thoughts.

I often think it is a responsibility for every person from a minority group to give a good impression, to try harder in showing the good sides and to not give up.

Well, what I actually meant when I earlier said “NOT easy and NOT negative”, is that when you stretch your abilities and give extra, you start to feel the need to discover your talents by your own, which is a positive thing. But at the same time this is not very easy!

When you have been challenged enough in many different ways (and if you are lucky and strong enough not to break down), you eventually begin to feel your competence and skills improve incredibly. Being a survivor of never being good enough is a central factor here; you need plenty of self-confidence to go through this, but if you are lucky, you build up your self-confidence over time and you want to improve the world.

Do not misunderstand me; being a minority is not always about having a hard time, but it is very often about luck. What kind of luck? Well, it is the kind of luck which brings nice, understanding, honest people your way and let them be your boss, your friend, your teacher, or maybe even a person you ask for help on the street. If you are lucky and meet just a few good people, who make you feel the happy self-confidence for long enough for you to begin trusting them and yourself. Just the feeling that you have been treated equally without stretching to prove your skills is a rich feeling, which makes you smile every time you live with it or remember it.

Imagine you are sitting at a job interview and feeling that this person, possibly your future boss, is trying to find negative aspects in you. And when no risky aspect is found in you, then he/she starts imagining, creating pictures of you not fitting in the job, and not managing to carry out your duties. All of this just because THEY THINK SO, and they don't want to give you the chance!

How often do people get nervous at a job interview?

Well, it could happen to anyone!

Now, if you were a “normal” person, the chance is bigger that you would be allowed to have cramps in your stomach or being afraid at the beginning of the interview. But if it happens that you are not a part of the majority and you would have such a horrible symptom during the interview – a negative and dangerous symptom! – then it must mean ONE thing, that you are not qualified for this job.

And DONE!

So easy, so simple, all your work and effort are gone!

We call the system where I live today democratic, but it is mostly about what negative or positive thoughts are placed in peoples' minds. The people you meet during your day are not all experts in human rights or having law research! Their names are not Mr. or Ms. Human Rights! Most of them, if not all of them, are normal and different people. The media often focus on problems in society, and they often discuss just the negative sides of a given minority. Usually people can easily be affected by the media's negative picture! On the other side, there are some people, even if they may be few, who do not let themselves get affected by the media's limited picture, and who have positive thoughts about people with minority backgrounds. That is because they have met and known persons from a minority, who must have made a good impression!

In most of the countries of Europe and the Western world, the law will protect you. It will sometimes give you the strength to stand up for what you think you can do, but in all situations, whether there is a law or not, you need your own strength and power to make it through the difficulties that come from your classification as a minority, which is made by human beings. You must stretch your abilities and never give up. It's all too easy to give up for a while, if only to rest from the effort of trying so hard and I know it is tough work, but never give up forever! The result you get of "not giving up" can be compared with your favorite ice cream. Once you have tasted an ice cream you enjoy, you choose it again and again.

So why don't you just go out and buy ice cream and be proud, let people ask you whatever they want to ask.

Be proud, yes be proud.

But do not be too proud, because the feeling of being too proud is what often leads to being arrogant. Here is where the problem starts. The feeling of being overconfident and being the best is the kind of feeling that majorities have. This is one of the reasons why they start to repress and restrain other people and minorities, because they are too proud and they think they are the best!

That is why I will always be proud of who I am, but I will always try not to be too proud!