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"Ending Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans and
Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds"

CONTRACTED MARRIAGE IS SLAVERY

Confessions of the Roma and Egyptian Women

April, 2018

CONTRACTED MARRIAGE IS SLAVERY CONFESSIONS OF ROMA AND EGYPTIAN WOMEN

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Preface

The Center for Roma Initiatives through six confessions and testimonies by Roma and Egyptian women who, as girls, were victims of child contracted marriages which were contracted by their closed relatives most often fathers, uncles, brothers and other male members of the closer and wider family, points to visible problems and consequences of child contracted marriages, with which many female members of the Roma and Egyptian community face.

The confessions of our friends confirm the fact that the child arranged marriage is a "slavery", and it normatively and morally obliges all institutions, organizations, individuals to react timely to prevent "slavery" and ensure "freedom".

Through decades of painstaking work, the activists of our organization, Women's RAE Network "FIRST", and some representatives of relevant institutions, through numerous educational activities, seminars, initiatives, including this problem in the strategic national and local plans, publications and through other different ways, have contributed to relevant institutions to recognize the importance of child contracted marriages and to raise certain issues in order to stop this phenomena, which is one of the most violent forms of violation of the rights of girls in Montenegro.

On behalf of the Center for Roma Initiatives as the Executive Coordinator, I would like to particularly thank to the interlocutors for their courage and willingness to share their heavy life stories with us, as well as to project coordinator Ms. Maja Šaćirović for support and assistance.

I thank to the Commission of the European Union for financial support through the project " Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds" that is implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Montenegro and The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN) within which we implement the program: "Together Against Child Contracted Marriages".

I also thank to the state authorities, relevant institutions, international organizations (OAK Foundation, CARE International NWB, OSCE) and other national NGOs, as well as numerous individuals who contributed to making this problem visible to the wider public.

Fana Delija,
Executive Coordinator of the Center for Roma Initiatives

Review of the confessions of the Roma and Egyptian Women

From the stories presented in this publication it is noticeable that certain mutual factors exist intertwined in all women and girls and that their uniqueness is the best indicator that this phenomenon has deep roots that cannot be easily perceived.

The causes of these phenomena are mostly the following: Negative aspects of tradition, non-enrollment and early abandonment of the educational system, poverty that creates obstacles to further opportunities for the child, which are crucial for the choice of each person's lifestyle.

Such hard causes leave behind even more serious consequences such as: destroyed childhood, hard physical work to which young girls are exposed, exposure to psychological, physical, emotional and economic violence by a family in which they contracted their marriage, early pregnancy, deprivation of the right to education, poor health status of young mothers without the right to decide, when and how many children they would give birth to, but also many others.

Out of twenty women with whom we conducted short interviews, to choose later six of them for the in-depth interviews and presentation in this publication, fourteen of them returned to the biological family after their first contracted marriage, because they did not meet the expectations of the

families they came to. So their primary families in the short terms contracted for them the second marriage, due to the repayment of money previously given to the family, during their first contracted marriage.

Particularly noticeable consequences that are originally conveyed in the text leave the greatest impression on a reader:

- *"The hardest thing was that I was young and I have not been with my parents and I find it hard for me not to have the love of my family."*

- *"I lost my childhood, I could have stayed for longer with my mother and my brothers and sisters."*

- *"I lost virginity, friends, my life, health, strength, I'm not capable anymore ... because I was tortured and suffered a great deal of life."*

- *"It was hardest for me that I could not go to school. "*

Although the phrase *"I have lost everything"* is the one that is repeated through all the life stories, the interlocutors have found the strength to point out to the consequences of child contracted marriages to other parents, girls and the wider public through their life experiences, and in such a way to contribute to the reduction of this negative aspect of tradition.

Their words seem not only to cause sorrow to every professional, but also admiration. A strange feeling is caused by the fact of how much as girls they were ready to suffer to abide to the negative aspects of their tradition. While being unaware of the cruelty of their destiny, they still mourned the separation from their parents and lost childhood. This side of the story, when dealing with child marriages, must be known by every professional, since the victim's destiny depends on his/her approach to every specific case.

We remind you that an unauthorized marriage is merely a legal and terminological definition of the term in criminal law and it represents a synonym for a contracted child marriage, that is common in the Roma and Egyptian communities in Montenegro as well as in the other countries of the region and the world. The term of child contracted marriage became known in our Criminal Law only from 2013. To stop numerous negative cases, the legislator accepted this term which was assessed as appropriate by many professionals.

However, since then, despite the fact that 60 cases of contracted marriages were registered by the Center for Roma Initiatives, in which the victims were the girls between 13 and 16 years of age, there have been no legal proceedings, except in the phase of inquest, which were qualified as criminal offenses - human trafficking from Article 444 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro, which makes it difficult for Roma and Egyptian girls to enjoy the same rights as their peers coming from other communities, which are guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

"I just said no, no, no!"

J.H. from Niksic, who is now sixteen years old, is a victim of a child contracted marriage. She lives in an eight-member family with her mother, father, two sisters and three brothers. She has finished six grades of an elementary school. She left the school because her parents went to Germany, where she had been for two years and for that time she finished fifth and sixth grade.

The uncles of J.H. contracted for her a marriage when she was thirteen and a half years old for a cash amount of 6,000 euros. She did not know the guy she was supposed to marry, she saw him for the first time on the wedding day and she did not know how old he was, but she assumed he was much older than her.

We asked J.H. to describe us how the contracted marriage happened, and how did she feel at the time?

"A marriage took place when some people asked my uncle about me. Uncle asked me: Do you want to marry? I said that I would not, that I wanted to finish my school, on what he said to me: "You have to marry!" I did not ask why I had to marry, but I did not know why, why my family wanted to marry me ... God, I'll tell you honestly, I did not want it at all. I just said well no, no, no."

J.H. told us in tears: *"The mother was rebelling enough, she told them: 'She is young, do not marry her', but no one asked my mother anything. There were present those contracted my marriage: my uncle, father, grandfather, mother, uncle of that guy and I.G."*— she stated the name of the influential leader of

the Roma community. *I'd been engaged for about six months, during that time I had to wear a ring, and I felt it unfair to be seen wearing a ring by someone who would come to our house. I would always wear off the ring from my hand when I went to the store or somewhere else ... "*

According to the words of J.H., contracted marriage, girl's evening and wedding were hidden from neighbors, so that they could not find it out, because they were afraid of the police of the Security Center of Niksic, i.e. of the inspector S.M. – she stated the name of the police officer. Uncle A.H. warned the family members not to share anything on the social network "Facebook". When the wedding ceremony was made, A.H, as an excuse, made up the circumcision, to keep it secret and to conceal the real reason. As J.H. stated: *"The night before the marriage we use to make girl's evening, I was very sad, I cried ... That night was a disaster, how can I tell you ... I did not want to marry at all and I did not love him, I told them that. On the following day a lot of people came for me, my family led me to the car, I was not happy at all, they took me to Podgorica, when I arrived there they made me dance with the music, but I was sad... "* As J.H said: *"The hardest thing was that I did not know anything, my aunt taught me how to behave there, she told me to listen to everything they would tell me, that I should not tell anyone NO! I felt so bad that I wanted to kill myself! I was lucky that I had a period, so I could not 'sleep with him', because they were waiting for my period to stop in order to determine was I a virgin. That night I slept with his sister in another room, and the next day the police came, "she said.*

Then with a mild smile on her face, J.H. pointed out *"I just kept silent, I did not say anything, I knew that I was a minor and I knew that the Center for Social Work would not allow that. I think someone from their family reported the case, so they wanted to hide it, to say that I was not at their home."* According to JH, one of the policemen said: *"It's better for you to tell us*

where the girl is and whether she is in your place ..." when they found out that I had been, the policeman said to J.H.: *"You have to get ready and go with us "*. As she only waited for that, our interlocutor said: *"I just went for my sandals, then I prayed in myself, I think God helped me then when the police came"* - she was happy. The interlocutor told us what happened before they went to the police, since they assumed that the police would come for her: *"The mother-in-law taught me what to say, that I had known my 'husband' from the market before, that I must not say anything about the money they gave for me, or my father would go to jail, to wear off the rings, all the gold I wore, take off my clothes and dress like a girl "-* which is what J.H. did. As she said, at that moment she did not want to make trouble to anyone, so that no one would go to jail.

Further, as J.H. pointed out, the representatives of the police and the Center for Social Work of Podgorica took her to the shelter for victims of trafficking in human beings. *"Those women in the shelter were good to me, they helped me"*.

J.H. was in the shelter for victims of trafficking in human beings in Podgorica for four days, after which the Center for Social Work in Niksic engaged in the process and imposed a measure from the Family Law - Supervision over parental right. This measure lasted until the age of sixteen.

As the marriage of J.H. was suppressed by relevant institutions and NGOs, J.H. with tears in her eyes said: *"I am happy, but I am not free until the money given for my contracted marriage is returned. I am not guilty of anything and I did not know that man. I am afraid that they might come back to my parents to take me from them, because they do not have money to give them back. Negotiations started again and I should return, since I am already 16 years old, but I do not want to return there. My parents would return money if they would wait,*

but I.G. puts pressure on my parents every day to return the money. "

As we found out at that moment, she was married then, at the age of sixteen, most likely for the reasons she had previously indicated.

Her mother had a similar fate. Her father contracted a marriage for her when she was 10 or 11 years old, she did not have a mother, she lived with her stepmother.

The reason why J.H. accepted to share the story is the following:



She wanted to encourage all readers to contribute to the suppression of this phenomenon in order to help other girls.

*"I thought my family hated me –
contract marriage is a trouble"*

B.S. from Niksic is now forty-four years old and she is a victim of two contracted marriages. B.S. did not know neither the first nor the other boy for whom her parents contracted her the marriages. Her first marriage was contracted when she was eighteen, and the other when she was nineteen years old.

Both of the marriages that her parents had contracted for her, were agreed with a neighbor who told the suitors that in the neighborhood there was a girl who was a clean, tidy and good housewife. B.S. did not attend school because her parents had seven children, so they did not have the opportunity to educate them. Now she knows "a little bit" to read and write because she was interested on her own to become literate with the help of the television. From the second marriage she has a twenty-two years old son. Today she is a single mother who lives with her son, daughter-in-law and grandson.

We asked B.S. to describe to us how the contracted marriage happened, and how did she feel at the time?

"One day a neighbor came and asked my father and mother whether they wanted to marry me. They said they wanted, and they did not ask me anything about it! On the same day, some people came in the twilight (the father and mother of that guy, his aunts and uncles and some other relatives), then I was in the kitchen and prepared dinner. I asked my mother why

those people had come on what she said to me: "Come on, you will hear," and I continued my work, I no longer had the courage to ask them. After that I heard them say to my father: "You have to marry her!" As she heard that, she told her mother she did not want to marry because she was young. "The most hurting in my life was the fact that I was at that engagement."

The guy they engaged her with was in a relationship with another girl." Six months after engagement he left me and took the girl he was previously in the relationship with. Then they cancelled the engagement in the way friends came telling me that I was free, but that I had to marry another man." As B.S. said her story did not end there, because her parents contracted another marriage for her after less than a year. "The guy for whom they contracted my second marriage was from Serbia, from Belgrade. When I heard that I ought to marry him, I went into the room, rebelled and tried not to accept, but they simply did not ask me, so I went to Serbia with them the same night. It was very difficult for me, I could not relax as in my own house, new people came, I did not even know who of them was my husband."

B.S. recounts the event from the first wedding night:

"When my mother and sister took me to the room I did not even think about what would happen and I did not know what I was supposed to do at that moment. I wondered why those people took me into a separate room like in a solitary confinement, as if I were in a prison, I felt somehow sad. While I was in the room, I looked through the window and thought to run away, but where could I run when I did not know the city?" - with grief in her eyes B.S. pointed out.

"When he entered the room, I wondered why he was there, I thought that we would have dinner, because the house I came in was unknown to me and that they probably knew that I

was ashamed to eat. He immediately told me: "Take off your clothes..." and I was scared and started crying, I simply did not gave up. He told me, "well, you're not a virgin...". and I did not even know what that word meant, "do not cry if you are right", but I was afraid of what he would do to me. I then told him that I did not know what he was saying, on what he said to me: "now you will know."

Before he started to make love with her, he told her that if she was not a virgin, it would be better for her not to keep him in the room: "I would get you back and my family would kill me." I defended myself, cried, pushed him away from me, after which he closed my mouth with his hand. At one point, I thought that he would kill me. They were all at the door waiting for the outcome, because it was such a custom. It was hard for me to think that everyone would know what he was doing to me. Shortly thereafter, his family knocked on the door and he took the bed sheets and threw it out to them. I got scared. When I lost my virginity, I realized that I could no longer say I was a girl. I was ashamed to go out from my room, and it was hard for me for a long time to appear in front of the eyes of my mother-in-law and brothers-in-law because I knew they had been by the door. After that I felt very bad. I am already single for 22 years and I still have this bad feeling about it. It's the hardest thing in life, when you're doing it with someone you do not love and you do not know ... "

B.S lived in the family with ten members. They immediately demanded her to do all the housework as a daughter-in-law. "They demanded me to cook, wash, tide up, to wellcome guests ... I got up first, in four in the morning, because my ex-husband, mother-in-law and father-in-law were working on a green market, so I had to prepare goods for them, cook the coffee, and besides that I worked in the field, prepared brother-in-law and sister-in-law for school, took care of grandmother-in-law, i.e., his aunt who was immobile. I thought that I became a

mother before time, because I had to do everything that was needed for grandmother-in-law, I was really tortured, I washed carpets and blankets while it was raining."

B.S. stated: *"They married son so they did not have to do house work, I was like a servant, nobody wanted to be by my side, to help me, but I kept quiet all four years of the marriage. His mother kept telling her son to let me go, that I was sick, that he did not need me, to command me ... after which he shouted at me. I suffered so much because of my mother-in-law, she and my brother-in-law beat me, my mother-in-law hid food from me. "*

While B.S. was in Niksic, in order to prepare her personal documents and, in order to be able to marry, mother-in-law brought another woman for her son. *"I did not know anything about it, when I returned to Belgrade I saw another woman in the house. I immediately went to my neighbor to call my parents. Not long after that my mother-in-law came after me, she told me I could stay if I wanted to, and if I did not want, to go home. I just asked her why they did it to me after all I did for them, and she simply kept silent. "*

When B.S. returned home in Niksic she wanted to make an abortion. However, her mother did not allow her to do such a thing, and she said to her: *"I'll raise your child ...". Only then I took my child for the first time in my hands, I felt what a child was like. Then I told to myself that I would always be with him, even if I would have to beg on the street, just to keep him in my arms. I raised him and thank God I'm great. It is difficult to raise a child in my birth family, my wounds from my heart will never cure and remove."*

Looking at the distance, B.S. said: *"I lost my youth. If my mother-in-law dies tomorrow I will „forgive her everything“ even that she harassed me, but I will never forgive her the fact she made an orphan from my own child, besides a living parent, and deprived him of love of his father. "*

The reason why B.S. accepted to share the story is the following:



To motivate young girls, to let them know that today there are rights for everything: *"If girls do not want to marry, they can complain, because there are people who will defend them, they have protection from society."*



"I have never told this to anyone in my life, I have been protected my brothers and sisters from great misery".

B.S. at the very end thanked for the invitation and given opportunity to open her mind and she pointed out: *"With my story I want to give to somebody advice and an example of how not to treat children."*

*"They did not ask me anything,
I was a child"*

S.H. from Niksic is now thirty-eight years old and she is a victim of a child contracted marriage. Her parents arranged the marriage for her when she was fifteen years old for a guy she did not know. She saw him at first wedding night for the first time. However, she specifically get to know and fell in love with her husband during marriage. They have five children, their eldest son is twenty years old and married. Their youngest child is now two and a half years old.

S.H. has finished only four grades of an elementary school. She left school when she fled because of a civil war from Bosnia and Herzegovina, after which she came to Montenegro. By the age of fifteen she lived in Podgorica, until her parents had arranged the marriage for her with her current husband from Niksic.

We asked S.H. to describe to us, how the contracted marriage happened, and how did she feel at the time?

"They arranged the marriage for me thanks to my sister-in-law, so I would not escape as my sister did." Her sister got married by "escaping" with the man she had loved and chosen herself. "My father did not want to marry me, but my oldest brother contracted the marriage." S.H. said: "When father, uncles, aunts ... of my current husband came to make a marriage proposal for me, my brother said," It would be better to marry her, so she would not run away like the other one... ", thinking of her sister. "My father disagreed with my brother's opinion and

my mother was rebelling, but she could not prevent him from his intentions, so, nevertheless, my marriage was arranged. Nobody asked me anything, even did I want to marry. The hardest thing for me was that I was young, 15-year-old child. "

They only asked S.H. to go to the living room, so that people who came to make a proposal would see her. *"They taught me not to say anything, just to greet them. After that they told me to make coffee for all the guests and to serve them."*When her present father-in-law drank coffee, he said: *"I'll take her for my son or none ..."*.

S.H. had been engaged for three weeks, and during that period her father regreted and wanted to return everything that the people who came for the girl had brought for her (goods, gold and money), since she was a child, but her mother did not allow it: *"Now it's all over"* she said.

S.H. said: *"I had no feeling before the wedding, I cried, I did not even know what was waiting for me there. The next day they brought me to Niksic. Until late in the night, I did not know who my husband was, nor what a husband is! The custom was to be a virgin; first I entered the bedroom, then he came after me. I looked at my husband, and I did not know, who he was, or what he was. I had a huge anxiety, I was afraid of what he would do to me. Then he told me that "it" was not a big deal, and then he asked me if I had a boyfriend before. Since I told him I had not, he told me "we will see it now." When it all ended, he told me: "Congratulations!"*

What would happen if you were not a virgin?

"I do not know how to explain, my parents did not ask me anything about it, they knew I was certainly a virgin. Someone returns a girl immediately to her parents, when she is not a virgin and someone does not! "

The family in which her parents had contracted her marriage was an eight-members family. She had to get up every morning before six o'clock to start a fire and make coffee for all who got early to work. In case she was asleep, she would not leave the bedroom, because of fear. "If I woke up, I wondered how I would then get up and appear in front of them, why they married me so young." Her sister-in-law was a strict woman, when she would be asleep, she would tell her: *"You need wake up early, you are young, you have to work."* At that time S.H. did not even have a washing machine nor water in the house. *"I had to wash manually and to clean up after everyone, we lived in a barrack where there was no bathroom. When you are married, you have no other option, you can only clean, wash, cook and give birth to children."*

In addition to everything she had to work as a child, S.H. was in the problem, because, as she said, she could not get pregnant, probably because she was still a child. *"The mother-in-law told me if I did not stay pregnant that year, she would marry her son. Then I told her: Mother do it freely, how can I stay pregnant at the age of 15?"*

S.H. gave birth to her first child at the age of eighteen. *"My son is already married, he is 19,"* she proudly said.

We asked S.H. to describe to us how her son got married.

"At the age of fifteen he met his current wife, they were dating for four years. She lived in Podgorica and in the meantime she moved with her parents to live in Germany. The two of them loved each other a lot. They loved so much that my son went to Germany every second month to see her. When her parents get to know that their daughter was dating with my son, they wanted to marry her for another man, to sell her, I swear with my life! She did not want anyone else, only my son, she was just

crying, she even drank Bensedins when she heard her parents had wanted to marry her in Germany for an unknown man. "

According to S.H, the family of her daughter-in-law was significantly rich. *"They had money and they lived lived lavishly. They were talking everything and anything about us. My daughter-in-law called my son and told him to come for her to Germany and she would run away from her parents. My son went to Germany and they together run away from her parents and came to Niksic. This what my son did is better, they loved each other and then they married".*

S.H. was worried about how she would save money to marry other sons. *"I have three more sons who are not married, for their future wives their families will seek from me from ten to fifteen, and even to twenty thousand euros. I have one salary and I should marry three sons. The money that is being sought, the parents take for themselves, and by such actions they destroy their child, because that money is constantly mentioned, they are constantly saying to a woman: "Your father took so much money ..." They were constanty saying this to me, because my father took money for me. "*

The reason why S.H. accepted to share the story is the following:



"I believe that through my story I will point out the problem why the custom should be changed and how harmful it is to all of us. When they sell their daughters as "cows," then they are suffering a lot. "

"Contracted marriage is the cause of eternal suffering."

S.H. from Niksic, is currently forty-eight years old and she is a victim of child-contracted marriages. She has two contracted marriages behind herself and both contracted marriages took place in Kosovo where she had previously lived. Her first marriage was contracted when she was thirteen and she has been married for seven years, she has three children. She gave birth to her eldest child when she was sixteen. From the second marriage with the current husband she has four more children. Due to contracted marriage, she left the sixth grade of elementary school.

We asked S.H. to describe us how the contracted marriage happened, and how did she feel at the time?

S.H. : *"My aunt negotiated my marriage by proposing her brother to marry his daughter in order to marry his son. Aunt was talking to my father, and on that occasion she told him that that was a good place to marry me and that they can also at the same time marry their daughter, which my father accepted, so they contracted a marriage for me to marry my brother. They did not ask for money because it was an exchange. "*

They contracted her the marriage while she was at school, when she came home they only told her to go to her uncle. S.H was happy on that occasion, but on the way to her uncle's place of residence she was told that they were not going to her uncle, but to her new family.

S.H. : *"When we entered their house, they told me then who was my husband and I did not know what the husband meant. When they explained to me, I lost consciousness, that was a great shock for me. When the family of my husband saw in what condition I was, they did not allow my son to sleep with me for the next three months, because they were afraid that something might happen."*

"After three months when he started sleeping with me, I felt a great fear, I did not know what he would do to me, and after he made love with me, I lost consciousness. According to the stories that my mother told me later, the husband's relatives called my relatives and they all tried to wake me up for about an hour. As they could not wake me up, they took me to the hospital but did not tell the doctor why, they just told him that I did not feel good. "

When she woke up, she saw a lot of people around her, she asked them where she was, but nobody did not answer her anything until she was returned to her husband.

S.H. she had to take over the role of her sister-in-law, although she was only thirteen. She did not know how to cook, clean and wash. Her step-mother did not want to learn her anything because she expected that she should already know this.

S.H. : *"In the house where my parents married me, there were six orphans. The oldest brother-in-law was twelve, and the youngest sister-in-law was six months. I had to take care of my husband's sisters and brothers. "*

In addition to the obligations she had in the house regarding her brother-in-law and sister-in-law, she had to do other difficult jobs.

"They had a saw and I had to learn how to milk a cow. I've been doing all this work when I was thirteen years old, all the time while I'd been with them, I even had to cut woods one meter long because before they did not cut it with a saw. "

The family in which her parents had contracted her marriage was very poor, her bedroom was without windows and doors, the blankets were placed on the windows and doors, and on the ground they placed a sponge on which she and her husband would lie, and later their two children too.

According to S.H. *"It was a barn because they kept a cow in the hallway."*

After almost four years of marriage, her husband received an invitation to work in Germany by his sister.

S.H. : *"Because of the poverty he accepted the invitation and went to Germany. I was pregnant with my third child. After a while, his sister found another woman for him, allegedly because of documents. As I was left alone with my children, my father came for me and returned me home, but after two years I returned to my father-in-law, because my brother was rebelling because the children were restless and I was burdened in the house. "*

She lived for three years and six months at her father-in-law, hoping that her husband would return. *"Father-in law and sister-in-law did not allow me to use electricity so I lived for three years with children without electricity, when I would have dinner with children, I would open the door from the stove in order to illuminate the room so that they could see to eat. Every day my father-in-law would argue with me just to get me out of there because he needed the room where I used to live for a cow. When my father-in-law expelled me from the barn, I met a friend and I lived with her at the house of her brothers-in-law, because that house was empty. I was lucky. Then I started to work in*

homes of rich families where I was whitewashing, washing the carpets so I could feed the children and myself. After ten years my husband appeared and then he asked to see us. He asked me to come back to him. I was very disappointed and I did not want to come back to him. "

The sad life story of S.H. did not end there. Her father contracted her another marriage when she was 22 years old.

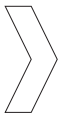
"For the sake of safety and because of fear that my children might stay on the street, I accepted my father to arrange me another marriage, but on condition that my future husband would accepts my children. My current husband has accepted my children and I am with him today. "

Because of the war in Kosovo, refugees came to Montenegro and after several years her ex-husband reappeared.

"He realized that he had made a mistake and he came with his current wife to take the children. I gave them children, because they could make the conditions for a better life for them, since I was not able to give them what they could. "

S.H. now regularly contacts her sons and daughters, they occasionally visit her. Her sons now live in Switzerland, while her daughter is married in Kosovo.

The reason why S.H. accepted to share the story is the following:



To share the inner feeling that she has and to throw it out of her, because she wants everyone to know how much she suffered only because her parents married her when she was young. She is grateful to God that now the new Law came into force, which does not allow the girls to marry very young.

*"For twenty-eight years I suffered
the weight of a contracted marriage"*

A.Š. from Niksic, is currently sixty years old and is a victim of a child-contracted marriage. Her mother, brother, and brother-in-law contracted a marriage for her when she was fourteen years old. She met the future husband when she, on persuasion of her mother, climbed to the attic of her mother's house and from the attic, through a hole, she saw how he looked like. Now she was a widow and she had that one marriage. She has ten children out of her marriage. She attended school only until the sixth grade, after which her mother forced her to leave school so that she would marry. During the contracting, her family did not seek financial compensation for her marriage. The mother wanted to marry her as soon as possible because she had five more daughters. Her mother kept telling her: *"It's hard to be a widow with five daughters."* Considering that the guy she was supposed to marry had been married before, their families agreed for her to take over all the wardrobe and the gold left by his first woman, she came to Niksic in 1999, because her family from Kosovo ran out because of civil war.

We asked A.Š. to describe to us, how did the contracted marriage happen, and how did she feel at the time?

A.Š. : *"One morning my brother-in-law came to our house and talked with my mother and brother about my marriage. As a young girl, I lost my father. "*

Her father-in-law awoke her that morning and told her that that guy fell in love with her and that he would like to propose to her. Her mother immediately went into her bedroom and told her to get up. *"Son some people want to propose to you, it's important for me to say if you want to marry or not,"* I told her then that I would not marry.

Then she told to her brother-in-law to convey her opinion to those people. Those people then gave up, but her suffering did not come to an end. A.Š. : *"After two weeks, the same people came for me again, then I had to say "yes ". My mother told me that it would be better for me to marry than to embarrass her, everyone who came to propose to me told me it was a good place and I should marry. Then the mother went to school and talked with the teacher, explained to her that they wanted to marry me. The teacher told to my mother: "Ok. It's no problem!"*

They withdrew A.Š. from the school and married her after two weeks. *"I cried all the time because I really liked going to school, but they married me anyway, so I did not make my peace with it. The day before the wedding ceremony, my mother told me that she expected me to be "a virgin" so that I would preserve the honor of everybody in the family, from my and from his side. On the wedding day, before the wedding guests came, my mother and my cousin taught me how to behave, when I enter the bedroom that I should sleep with my husband, that I should not be annoyed, not to argue, not to resist when he starts to make love with me. "*

When she stayed alone in the bedroom, she began to shake and was very scared, and when her husband entered the room, she began to shake even more. A.Š.: *"He then told me: 'Why are you shaking, do not be afraid.' Regardless of what they taught me, I opposed myself as much as I was able to. I pushed*

him several times from myself, I saw that I could not defend myself. After that resistance, I could no longer defend myself. "

The demands of her new family were difficult immediately after the first night of marriage:

A.Š. : "I got up every day at six o'clock. If it happened that I was asleep and woke up an hour later and saw that the mother-in-law got up, I would not dare to get out from the bedroom because of fear. If I went out of the bedroom or in the yard, she would immediately start yelling because I was asleep, and she would not give me anything to do on that day. "

She could not eat herself until the mother-in-law was hungry, so they would eat together. She would stay hungry and wait for her husband, so she could eat then. A.Š. : *"The mother-in-law would know that it was for me, and then she would spill it all over the house and she would tell me: Who are you to decide when it is time to eat?"*

As further A.Š. stated: *"I was washing everything manually, my mother-in-law did not allow me to take water from the house, but from the fountain, which was in front of the house. When the mother-in-law would tell a story to my husband telling him I was doing nothing, she would fill her son's head, after which he would beat me. "*

He mother-in-law locked her in the house and did not give her anywhere to go, because she always carried the key with herself. A.Š. : *"When she would lock me up, I would think about my mother and think in myself what would happen if she would come and I did not have a key to open the door for her. It happened that once my mother came to my house, and when she knocked at the door of the house, I asked who was it. She replied: 'It is your mother'. I did not dare to tell even to my mother that she was locking me in the home, so I pretended I did not know where the key was; it hurt me most. "*

Her mother was waiting in front of the door until her mother-in-law came. A.Š. : *"My mother asked her why she was locking me in the house, and she answered that I had asked her to lock me because I was supposedly scared. My mother asked me if that was true. Out of the fear of my mother-in-law I had to say "Yes". I had to suffer all this because my husband and I did not have a place anywhere else to live in. "*

She lived for 28 years with her mother-in-law she felt relief only after the death of her mother-in-law.

A.Š. : *"Only after she died I felt relieved"*

A.Š. did not marry her daughters by contracting marriages, she was lucky that her husband had the same opinion. She managed to free them from the chains of tradition, make them think differently by telling them the stories of her suffering. Today she has four daughters-in-law, and she always returns to how she suffered and she never happened to treat her daughters-in-law as her mother-in-law was treating her.

The reason why B.S. accepted to share the story is the following:



A.Š. decided to share her story with us in order to motivate girls not to marry young and not allow themselves to endure violence, as she allowed herself.

"I was mistreated because of money"

S.R. from Niksic is currently twenty-two years old and is a victim of child-contracted marriages. She has two contracted marriages behind herself, from which she has a girl who is seven years old. She currently lives in an extramarital union with her husband and a son, who is two and a half years old.

She was born in Germany where she finished two grades of elementary school. She left school when she was deported to Serbia. She came to Podgorica with her parents, where she lived from 2003. From her birth she did not manage to get personal documentation.

First marriage to S. R. was contracted when she was thirteen, then she escaped without the knowledge of her parents with her first husband, so the parents agreed, in order to reconcile the family according to customs. The second marriage was arranged for her because of repayment of the money that was taken during the reconciliation for the first marriage. The second marriage was contracted by her ex-husband and his family when she was only fourteen years of age. S.R. also had a third marriage that she arbitrarily agreed with a partner whom she had chosen.

We asked S.R to describe to us, how did the contracted marriage happened and how did she feel at the time?

S.R. met the man with whom she run away at her cousin's wedding. After a month of correspondence, S.R decided to escape with her former, first husband. S.R. : *"When I came to*

Niksic, they immediately called the police and told them that their son had married, that he was eighteen and that the bride was thirteen years old. The policeman asked: "Do they love each other? Is it with force or without? My mother-in-law told them that our marriage was not agreed with force and that we loved each other, to which the policeman said: "I wish them all the luck."

S.R was forced to sleep with her husband immediately. S.R.: "His mother and his aunts wanted to persuade me to sleep with him before my parents would come, so that they could not take me back, but I did not want, because I realized that he was eighteen years old and that my parents would kill me. 'I do not want to, I'll kill myself rather than do it, I just do not want to'. They could not persuade me. My parents, as soon as they heard that I had escaped, came for me and brought me home. His uncle told my parents that I had already become their daughter-in-law and that they could not take me back. My mother told him that I was her daughter, she slapped me in front of all of them and put me in a van. Dad was angry, he argued and argued with my mother, my brother beat me when I got home and everyone asked me did I sleep with him. I told them I was not, but they did not believe me."

The story with that epilogue did not end, but her parents agreed with her future family to marry her according to the customs. S.R.: "As my parents were not for this marriage, regardless of the outcome, they did not want to take money, but the parents of her husband insisted that my parents should take 2,000 euros. After a week, many people came to take me to bring me to my former husband.

"When I came to Niksic, a wedding ceremony on which my family and a large number of guests were presented was made." After some time, as S.R. said she had to prove to everyone that she was a virgin. S.R.: "When they sent me to the

bedroom with him it was terrible, I cried, I was very scared. At that time at the door of the bedroom stood women who waited and men celebrated outside. I felt ashamed to leave the bedroom, because everyone knew what had happened inside, and I felt guilty because something like that happened to me when I was thirteen. Then I realized that the entire world had collapsed, that my childhood had been destroyed because I became someone's wife. "

In the multi-member family in which S.R. married, there were fourteen members, so we wondered what was expected of her as a thirteen-year-old daughter-in-law:

S.R.: "I had to get up at 6:00 am, to make coffee and tea to my whole family, before they went to work. Five of them worked. I had to make the bread, do cleaning, washing, cooking lunch, but that was not a problem for me, since I've done it all since I was very young. "

She stated nothing was difficult for her. However, after two months, quarrels began due to debt. S.R.: *"My first husband's family took money under interest and they told me they were starving because of me and they were maltreating me because of that. They forced me to call my uncle who lived in Germany and they asked for money so that they could repay the debt. Because of the money, I was maltreated every day, because my parents did not have the money to return. I got beaten for two hours and I did not dare to ask for what. I was their servant."*

S.R. for five months lost all contacts with her parents, S.R.: "Those five months I have gone through all the worst."

She suffered violence, until one day her neighbors informed her parents. S.R.: *"My neighbors asked my mother was she alive, invited her to come and see what was happening with me, they asked her did I had anyone. My mother immediately*

reported it to the police and came with the police for me, my mother-in-law and father-in-law were leaving the house, and they threatened me: you are a minor, if you say something you will go to the juvenile detention center, we will kill your brother. "

With S.R. in the Security Center of Niksic a conversation was conducted by the inspector for domestic violence and juvenile delinquency, and she was afraid of the threats, she denied all the allegations made by her mother. The inspector for domestic violence and juvenile delinquency gave her his phone number to call him for any kind of problem she might have. When she returned home, an even bigger problem was caused by her mother's actions.

S.R.: "Close relatives of my former husband and the respectable neighbors gathered and made the decision to return me to my parents, since my husband's family was threatened with the police."

Her father-in-law did not agree to such an agreement. *"We do not have a daughter-in-law to let her go, and they will return money! I have a smarter plan ... "* S.R. stated: *"It was not even at the end of my mind that they were planning to marry me for another man in Belgrade."*

When she opposed and told them that she would not allow it, that she would report them to the police because of that, her father-in-law hit her so hard that her nose was bleeding. S.R.: *"Nobody defended me and when I went to find in my jacket the phone number to call the inspector, I did not find it, they threw it away. I felt even worse when my mother-in-law at the same night sewed my old wedding dress to prepare me for the new husband, because the mice had bitten it at several parts. The next day, my further uncles came to us, but they did not mention anything about my marriage, then I took the opportunity, while they were leaving, to tell one of them to call my parents because they wanted to marry me again. That night,*

about nine in the evening we had to go to Belgrade, but I said I would kill myself if they marry me. I prayed that my mother would come with two principals - these are people who solve the family problems, the old council and that they would take me. Luckily my parents came, my uncle and principals, and when they saw in what kind of state I was, since I was whole in bruises, they agreed that my uncle for a month would send 1,500 euros to them. "

Unfortunately, her story does not end there, because her uncle did not respect the agreement and did not sent the money, because of what her further uncle, without the knowledge of her parents, contracted her a marriage in Podgorica, because my father-in-law would take his house in the case he did not return the money, since he had previously given his word.

Her second marriage was contracted two months before her fourteenth years of age. For her first marriage, during the marriage contract, the family of the groom gave 1,500 euros, out of which her further uncle took 1000 of euros. The guy she was engaged to, she did not know, he was older than her, he was about twenty-one years old. "This time they gave 1000 euros for me and that money was then taken by my uncle. "

The whole case S.R. wanted to report to the police, but her relatives prevented her, telling her that she would not achieve anything. From the day she was engaged to the wedding S.R. was at her further uncle, where she was restricted from every communication with other people, to make sure everything was, as S.R. said, running according to plan.

S.R. stated that her further uncle worked all in agreement with the family of her first husband. S.R.: *"One evening they brought me the wedding dress and a ring, they put the ring on my hand and told me to wear a wedding dress. My aunt made a makeup for me and I removed it out of anger. I did not want to have make up. Soon they took me to the car and*

headed through the old road to Podgorica. On the way I wanted to commit suicide, I opened the door, but my mother prevented me. When we came to the place, the ceremony was ongoing, but I was just crying."

S.R. in got pregnant in another family, when she was fourteen. In the family where she had been married then, her father-in-law was a heavy alcoholic, who was constantly mistreating her, and he used to call her husband to help him chain her to the pillar and to put a padlock so that she would not escape. S.R.: "When he chained me, he used to leave me bound and he would go somewhere. Once I was bound for an hour until my husband's brother came. "

When S.R. got to know that she was pregnant, she purposely raised heavy things. S.R.: "I did not eat or drink, because I did not want me and my baby to survive."

S.R. suffered for two years, until the day when she found out that her aunt died. S.R.: "*When the aunt died, they let me go to the funeral. We agreed that my mother would come for me, to go together to the funeral. However, when my mother came, my father-in-law asked me where I intended to go and told me that I could not go. He said to me: As long as I'm alive, you will not go to funerals even when it comes to your family... then he came to me and slapped me two to three times, then I pushed him for the first time and told him that my leg would never cross over their threshold again, I took my daughter and left their house and never came back there again. I knew I was not allowed to go back to that house again, If I came back, I would have been killed."*

When S.R. got out from the second marriage she was only sixteen and she had the seven-month-old daughter. The case of violence she did not report because she was under threat that if she did anything the family of her second husband would kill her brother, mother and father. Problems are still following

her. S.R.: *"Even today I have problems with that family, they want to take my child, she is studying in Podgorica and she is coming to me on Saturdays and Sundays."*

The reason why S.R. accepted to share the story is the following:



"Because I did not have a happy childhood and I could have it. Because I go first from my child, a man cannot know how it hurts if he does not try it and pass through it... I had nine uneasy nights in the blood and threats, but I do not want, I cannot think of nice days, I would like to, but I did not have them. I do not want my daughter to pass through that way. I want it to stop."