

Spring 5-2015

# A Journey of Tears: What They Don't Tell You About America, a memoir

Nilufer Gokmen  
*Kennesaw State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/mast\\_etd](http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/mast_etd)



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Gokmen, Nilufer, "A Journey of Tears: What They Don't Tell You About America, a memoir" (2015). *Master of Arts in American Studies Capstones*. Paper 5.

This Capstone is brought to you for free and open access by the Interdisciplinary Studies Department at DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Arts in American Studies Capstones by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

*A Journey of Tears: What  
They Don't Tell You About  
America*

*A Memoir by Nilüfer  
Gökmen*

## Table of Contents

Literature Review .....	3
Story One: “The System’s Fault?” .....	22
Essay One: “Welcome to Hell: Being A Foreign Student in the Age of American Bureaucracy” .....	35
Story Two: “Kennesaw State: Not for International Students” .....	41
Essay Two: “The Problem I Caused for Americans: The Question of Why I Do Not Look Like Others” .....	52
Story Three: “The Life in a Suburb in the South: Not Like in the Movies” .....	60
Essay Three: “Lies and Deceits of Media’s Suburbia” .....	73
Essay Four: “Welcome to the Wild Wild South: Gun Fever in Georgia” .....	78
Essay Five: “more than just a band: Avenged Sevenfold” .....	83
Story Four: “When the Time Stood Still: Avenged Sevenfold Concert” .....	89
Conclusion .....	106

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This capstone project is to explore different aspects of Southern and American culture, ranging from the popularity of guns in the American South to the stereotypes of Muslim and Middle Eastern women as shaped by the American media in American society, from the popularity of suburban lifestyle to the realm of American bureaucratic system and to heavy metal fandom. My goal here is to combine scholarship with my own experiences. My main contribution will be my own experiences while drawing ideas from what has been already written on the each specific theme. The literature review will also be divided into five topics, focusing on the popular literature on the relevant topic. The goal of this literature review is to back up my stories with concrete evidence where I fill in the gaps of scholarly studies with my own experiences, narrating something different.

### **Literature Review**

Bureaucracy, a type of administrative structure that is a big part of all governments and organizations, is a very broad term that can be defined as paperwork in the simplest form. Like the term, the subject is also very broad in that many scholars have written about it. Studies of bureaucracy range from sociology to history and from political science to public administration. Max Weber is a prominent figure in the study of bureaucracy. Weber's ideas on bureaucracy are strongly tied to Western imperialism and capitalism in that unlike Karl Marx, he favors capitalism because he sees capitalism as the guarantor of maximum social

mobility because only capitalism can preserve individual freedom and creative leadership in a bureaucratic world.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, he rejects Marx's idea of distribution of wealth because this can only lead to the proletariat's becoming helpless prey of impersonal bureaucracies.<sup>2</sup> In as much as he favors the necessity of bureaucracies in the modern world, he is against strict discipline and strict subordination in that they have the potential to be dangerous for any society of free individuals.<sup>3</sup> Thus, he creates a utopic administrative structure which he calls the "ideal bureaucracy." Julie Dolan and David H. Rosenbloom in their book *Representative Bureaucracy* explain Weber's idea of ideal bureaucracy. According to their explanation, the representative bureaucracy functioning in the modern world is the very antithesis of Weber's ideal bureaucracy in that his utopic structure is dehumanized, free from personal feelings.<sup>4</sup> American bureaucracies composed of departments, ministries, agencies, and bureaus, Dolan and Rosebloom claim, make more rules than the Congress<sup>5</sup>, which shows the power of a bureaucratic system in the country.

In America bureaucratic power is exemplified in the enforcement of the new laws regarding international students, especially after 9/11 attacks. The installation of Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), effective within a month of 9/11, has changed the face of the higher education in the United States both for international students and for higher education institutions. Not surprisingly, admission to higher education institutions has

---

<sup>1</sup> Mommsen, Wolfgang J. *The Age of Bureaucracy; Perspectives on the Political Sociology of Max Weber*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Dolan, Julie, and David H. Rosenbloom, eds. *Representative Bureaucracy: Classic Readings and Continuing Controversies*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

become much harder following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Both Michael C. Ewers/Joseph M. Lewis and Janet V. Danley explain how American bureaucracy played an important role in the handling of international students after 9/11 in their articles, respectively: “Risk and the Securitisation (sic) of Student Migration to the United States” and “SEVIS: The Impact of Homeland Security on American Colleges and Universities.” However, each article has a different focus. While Ewers and Lewis deal with the fact how international students have become security leaks in the country, threats that should be monitored constantly, Danley’s article focuses more on the law (SEVIS) and how bureaucracy functions, first in implementing the law, and then how the law itself has become an administrative power structure.

Perhaps, it is a better idea to provide the definition of SEVIS and how it functions as well as brief background information on why the United States requires monitoring of international students. “SEVIS is an Internet-based program which the now-defunct Immigration and Naturalization Service put in place to monitor the movements and enrollment status of international students in the United States.”<sup>6</sup> The idea of seeing foreign students as threats to national security actually started long before 9/11 even though SEVIS was implemented after 9/11 attacks.. In other words, SEVIS was not created all of a sudden right after the 9/11 attacks. It was only after the planes crashed into the World Trade Center that it was enforced. First, a Pakistani immigrant who entered the country under a student visa was identified as one of the perpetrators of the bombing of The World Trade Center on February 26, 1993. Three years later, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and

---

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton, Kendra. "Spending time on SEVIS: new system to track international student enrollment leaves educators stressed, while the federal government reports its success." *Black Issues In Higher Education* no. 15 (2003): 24. *General OneFile*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 08, 2015).

Immigrant Responsibility Act to track down international students and to electronically report them. In 1997, Cipris (The Coordinated Interagency Partnership Regulating International Students) was put into effect in 21 higher education institutions in the Southeast, monitoring all international students and certain professors. In fact, Cipris is a pre-SEVIS system. In 2000, SEVIS was created, using the same database Cipris used.<sup>7</sup> The 9/11 attacks only made the use of SEVIS mandatory.

Ewers and Lewis, though agreeing about the fact that the securitization of international students goes back before 9/11, state that it started after the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979. However, the monitoring only involved students from Iran during that period.<sup>8</sup> Danley, in her article, does not go back that far. She mostly focuses on the impacts of SEVIS after it was implemented. Danley claims that SEVIS made higher education more difficult both for the institutions and the students because schools had to hire people with tech skills and SEVIS is based on computers. Some of the employees could not cope with this sudden advance in the system. Moreover, schools were subject to pay fees for every student they put into the system.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in a national study published in *Springer Science and Business Media*, the

---

<sup>7</sup> Arnone, Michael. "Colleges expect the worst in preparing for new system to track foreign students." *The Chronicle Of Higher Education* no. 2 (2002): 33. *General OneFile*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Ewers, Michael C., and Joseph M. Lewis. "Risk And The Securitisation Of Student Migration To The United States." *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 99, no. 4 (2008): 470-82. Accessed March 1, 2015. Sage Knowledge.

<sup>9</sup> Danley, Janet V. "SEVIS: The Impact of Homeland Security on American Colleges and Universities." *New Directions for Institutional Research* 2010, no. 146 (2010): 63-73. Accessed March 3, 2015. Sage Knowledge.

negative effects of SEVIS on both international students and employees are shown. This ethnographic research focuses on morale and satisfaction of the workers and students. According to their result, SEVIS was the reason for the resignation among staff due to the low morale it caused. Again in the research, it is stated that approximately 70 % of the participants claimed that SEVIS made it difficult for them to advise international students and scholars. They also believed that SEVIS reduced the time they spent on more effective things such as orientations.<sup>10</sup>

SEVIS also resulted in the decrease of international student flow into the United States, especially during the 2003-2004 academic year, the deadline for schools to implement SEVIS. According to Soko S. Starobin, Asian countries started to send fewer international students to the United States. The sharp decline in the number of Asian students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions also contributed to the decline in the enrollment of intensive English programs, as well as computer and math majors. The main reason for this decline was due to the difficulty of obtaining student visas after the 9/11 attacks.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Ewers and Lewis state that international education is a high profit business in that international students contributed \$20 billion to the US economy only during the 2006-07 academic year, ranking

---

<sup>10</sup> Rosser, Vicki, et al. "A national study examining the impact of SEVIS on international student and scholar advisors." *Higher Education* 54, no. 4 (October 2007): 525-542. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed May 11, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Starobin, Soko S. "International students in transition: Changes in access to U.S. higher education." *New Directions For Student Services* no. 114 (Summer2006 2006): 63-71. *Sociological Collection*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 18, 2015).

international education as the fifth largest service export, suggesting also the U.S. economy suffered due to the decline of enrollment of international students.<sup>12</sup>

Inasmuch as international students are seen as security leaks, in the American society, Muslims are seen as terrorists. For most Americans, “Muslim,” “Middle Eastern,” and “Arab” mean the same thing. Muslim women, or more correctly, women from the Middle East are highly stereotyped. Even though most of the scholarly works focus on Muslim women’s lives in the United States, very few, if any, focus on women from a Muslim country among the sources I have gathered.

Stereotypes of Muslim women in popular culture is a popular study area. Scholars, like Ghazi-Walid Falah, Shelina Kassam, Asma Gull Hasan and books only dedicated to the relationship between popular culture and Muslim such as *Muslims and American Popular Culture* edited by Iraj Omidvar and Anne R. Richards, are only some of the sources in this area. They all focus on various stereotypes that dominate American society concerning Muslim women. Both Falah and Kassam’s articles focus on printed media. While Falah’s article “The Visual Representation of Muslim/Arab Women in Daily Newspapers in the United States” focuses on how Muslim/Arab women are represented in daily newspapers in the United States aftermath of 9/11, Kassam’s article “Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Representation” is more on a Canadian magazine named *Muslim Girl*. The stereotypes these two authors investigate in their works are also different from one another. Falah’s article sheds light on the dual stereotypical

---

<sup>12</sup> Ewers, Michael C., and Joseph M. Lewis. "Risk And The Securitisation Of Student Migration To The United States." *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 99, no. 4 (2008): 470-82. Accessed March 1, 2015. Sage Knowledge.

image of Muslim women: exotic/erotic and oppressed/passive victims.<sup>13</sup> Kassam's research on the magazine shows another type of stereotype: idealized Muslim women. The magazine spreads the image for the necessity of this ideal Muslim woman who is both Western and Muslim, a woman dedicated to her faith while being liberal, fashionable, modern, and educated.<sup>14</sup>

The hijab or headscarf also plays an important role in the scholarly work concerning Muslim women. Seen as the image of Muslim women, the hijab is highly associated with oppression of women by Islam. Falah, in this respect, suggests that diversity of reasons why Muslim women cover themselves is ignored by the Western media.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Mariam

---

<sup>13</sup> . Falah, Ghazi-Walid. "The Visual Representation of Muslim/Arab Women in Daily Newspapers in the United States." In *Geographies of Muslim Women: Gender, Religion, and Space*. New York: Guilford Press, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Kassam, Shelina. "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation." *Social Identities* 17, no. 4 (2011): 543-64. Accessed February 10, 2015. Sage Knowledge.

<sup>15</sup> Falah, Ghazi-Walid. "The Visual Representation of Muslim/Arab Women in Daily Newspapers in the United States." In *Geographies of Muslim Women: Gender, Religion, and Space*. New York: Guilford Press, 2005.

Esseghaier contributes what the hijab represents to American society is a woman who wears the hijab as militant, oppressed, subservient, sexual, or exotic.<sup>16</sup>

The stereotype concerning Muslim women is generally more about clothing than behavior or character. These stereotypes cause “othering” of Muslim women in the Western world because they are thought to belong to the Eastern world. The struggle to convert Muslim women by evangelists has been a concern for Christian missionary crusades for decades. These missionaries seemingly embrace Muslim women instead of othering them. In fact, Muslim women who are thought to be oppressed by their religion and by their husbands and society are seen as weak links to penetrate into these societies, thinking they can convert these weak and oppressed women who bring up kids, which will shape the future generations.<sup>17</sup> The fact that many Americans are unfamiliar with Islam makes them gullible to the influences of media. Hasan, in this respect, claims that “the media only reports the most sensational stories, and reporters tend to link Islam with the criminal act, as if to suggest that Muslims and Islam condone and approve such criminal behavior.”<sup>18</sup>

While the main focus is how the media contributes to stereotyping of Muslim women, American higher education institutions are important sites where stereotyping takes place.

---

<sup>16</sup> Esseghaier, Mariam. "The Big Conceal: Representations of Hijab in *Little Mosque on*

*Prairie.*" In *Muslims and American Popular Culture*. Vol. 1. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, Jane I. Smith, and Kathleen M. Moore. *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Hasan, Asma Gull. *American Muslims: The New Generation*. New York: Continuum, 2000.

Jodi Melamed in her article “Reading Tehran in Lolita” states that American universities play a dual role in racializing of Muslim women in that those who receive college education are seen as valuable individuals, multi-lingual, self-reflexive, and educated whereas those who don’t have access to higher education are racialized as monocultured, backward, inept, and incapable.<sup>19</sup> Melamed shows the concept of neoliberal multiculturalism as the source of this racialization. Neoliberal multiculturalism, as a new way of racial formation emerged after World War II, is the “construction of the global multicultural citizen as a privileged racial subject by using specifically racialized representations of women (such as women of color, Muslim women, Third-world women etc.) and by fashioning for its own ends the knowledge making and subject forming powers of American universities and literary studies.”<sup>20</sup> What Melamed does in this article is to compare and contrast how neoliberal multiculturalism functions in Azar Nafisi’s memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and Shirin Ebadi’s memoir *Iran Awakening: One Women’s Journey to Reclaim Her Life*. Both women wrote about their experiences after the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 and what it means being a woman in such a climate. Melamed, while criticizing Nafisi for being bourgeoisie and for encouraging assimilation into the American society, praises Ebadi’s work for Muslim-feminist activist connotation it holds. Nafisi’s memoir which includes famous Western literary works by authors such as Jane Austen and Henry James, both authors highly praised by women, advocates for the romanticization of family life, love as a form of resistance to gender oppression in the Islamic Revolution of Iran, female self-actualization, and heterosexist gendering.<sup>21</sup> She demonstrates literary culture as elitist and later in her “The Dialogue Project” she advocates for the assimilation of Muslim cultures into the U.S. culture because

---

<sup>19</sup> "Reading Tehran in Lolita: Seizing Literary Value for Neoliberal Multiculturalism." In *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*, edited by Grace Kyungwon Hong, by Jodi Melamed, 76-112. Durham [NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

she sees this assimilation as the inevitable. Edabi, on the other hand, rejects this kind of assimilation and advocates that Iranian women need to save their country without the interference of the Western countries.<sup>22</sup>

Melamed also criticizes Nafisi for attacking Edward Said based on what a student told her about Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* being both anti-Islamic and pro-slavery. Edward Said is best known for his works on the stereotypes associated with Muslims and Islam. Similarly, like Melamed's focus on literary culture in the essay, Said writes about knowledge, interpretation, and power. What Nafisi does in her memoir is to interpret famous literary works. Said, on the subject, states that "all knowledge about human society is historical knowledge, thus rests upon judgment and interpretation."<sup>23</sup> She interprets these works from what Melamed calls neoliberal multiculturalism.

Said also discusses the stereotypes regarding what the Western countries call the Orient, which comprises the cultures from China to Mediterranean. All these civilizations and cultures are considered to be the same by Westerners. Said quotes from Lord Cromer and Arthur James Balfour that "The Oriental is childlike, irrational, deprived, and different."<sup>24</sup> By attributing all these negative stereotypes to the Eastern cultures, the Western countries justify their acts of conquering their land because "the Oriental must be dominated by the Western,"<sup>25</sup> as Said states.

While the media confines Muslim women to the same stereotypes in the eyes of American society, suburbs do a similar job in determining the place of U.S. women in society because suburbs have always been the sites of American female domesticity.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Said, Edward. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Revised ed. New York: Vintage, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Said, Edward W. "Knowing the Oriental." In *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

**Suburbanization of the United States:** Suburbs are an integral part of American culture in that the “American Dream” comprises owning a nice house in the suburbs. Most of the scholarly work on suburbs focuses on their history, how they came into existence, and how they grew. Kevin Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue’s *The New Suburban History* and Kenneth T. Jackson’s *Crabgrass Frontier* are two important works that discuss history of the suburbs, as well as topics of race, gender, ethnicity, and class in relation to suburbia. These two books also include African-Americans in the discussion unlike the earlier works on suburbia. “Historians have done a better job excluding African-Americans from the suburbs than even white suburbanites,” states Andrew Wise.<sup>26</sup>

Suburbs, even though portrayed as having similar qualities in the media, differ from one another in class, race, and purpose. In *The New Suburban History*, different types of suburbs are discussed in various essays such as blue collar suburbs like Warren, Michigan; minority suburbs such as Dekalb County, Georgia; and high-tech suburbs such as White Plains, New York.<sup>27</sup> Jackson on this topic states that suburbs come in every type, shape, and size: rich and poor, industrial and residential, new and old, ethnic and dominantly white.<sup>28</sup>

Suburbs are portrayed as sanctuaries for millions of people who want to separate work from home. Most suburbs serve the purpose of demonstrating the affluence of its residents. Addisleigh Park in Queens, New York, for instance, is the perfect place which many middle-class African-Americans desire to reside in after WWII due to its physical and social

---

<sup>26</sup> Kruse, Kevin Michael, and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds. *The New Suburban History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

environment with its two-story Tudor and colonial revival houses, green lawns, and canopy of mature trees.<sup>29</sup> In other words, landscape has become a mark of status. The same idea dominates the suburbanites even today. American Planning Association's (APA) "Great Places in America" program is simply a best suburban contest in that all the places included in the program are suburban neighborhoods. One of them is Mariemont, Ohio with its Tucson style bell-tower and neo-Tudor buildings.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Steven Litt claims that although suburbs differ from one another in size and geography, they have a lot in common such as "sheer beauty" (Greater Park Hill, Denver), housing style (Park Hill built in different styles of Tudor, Craftsman, and Prairie), and landscape attractiveness such as trees (Mariemont and Park Hill).<sup>31</sup>

Even though suburban life is associated with affluence, some suburbanites face the problem of poverty. Due to the fact that "hundreds of suburbs did not create housing agencies and did not apply for federal funding, low-income housing did not go up on the cheaper, vacant land of suburbs, but in the heart of cities."<sup>32</sup> There is one more important problem, a very recent one, than the ghettoization of the suburbs: mortgage crisis and unemployment. An article published on April 23, 2007 by Eyal Press captions that "for the first time, it's suburbs,

---

<sup>29</sup> Kruse, Kevin Michael, and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds. *The New Suburban History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Litt, Steven. "Great neighborhoods: places of lasting value." *Planning*, 2008., 4, *General OneFile*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 17, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

not cities, that more people call home.”<sup>33</sup> People like forty-four year old Johnny Price from Rockingham County, North Carolina have problems paying their mortgages, thus keeping their houses due to lay-offs. Called “downward mobility,” this situation actually happens everywhere. Press’ article suggests that “from Las Vegas to Houston, suburban poverty has been growing over the past seven years, in some places slowly, in others by as much as 33 percent.”<sup>34</sup>

If the suburbs have become American way of life that television world leads one to expect, guns and the right to bear arms are an aspect of American way of life that may be surprising to a visitor to the South from the outside of the United States.

**Guns in Georgia:** Considered as a constitutional right as empowered by the Second Amendment, guns are a big part of Southern culture. The right to bear arms has gained a new kind of freedom after Georgia passed the law to allow guns in public places including schools, restaurants, bars, churches, and even some parts of the Hartsfield-Jackson Airport, the busiest airport in the world, effective from July 1, 2014, making the state one of the most gun-friendly places in the world, as well as lowering the age to own a gun from 21 to 18 under the Safe Carry Protection Act of 2014.<sup>35</sup> This news article written by Patrik Jonsson focuses on the latest gun law of the state in an objective point of view, both including Governor Nathan Deal’s remarks on the law he signed that the new law make Georgia a safer place for its

---

<sup>33</sup> PRESS, EYAL. "The New Suburban Poverty." *Nation* 284, no. 16 (April 23, 2007): 18-24. *Vocational and Career Collection*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 17, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Jonsson, Patrik. "Georgia adopts law allowing guns at airports, bars, most other places." *Christian Science Monitor*, April 23, 2014., N.PAG, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 05, 2015).

citizens and the views of opponents of the law that worry over the idea of carrying guns into such places will cause gun violence.<sup>36</sup>

Georgia's approach to guns has always been "easy going." According to Alan Judd's news article published in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* on April 13, 2000,

Georgia has so few gun control laws that a new study ranks it among the nation's worst states for preventing firearms violence. Unlike 39 other states, Georgia has no law prohibiting children younger than 18 from possessing handguns. Unlike 18 states, it doesn't hold parents criminally responsible when a child uses their gun to wound or kill a person. Georgia has no laws regulating assault weapons or cheap handguns known as "Saturday Night Specials." It places no limit on how many weapons a person can purchase. It requires no check of whether buyers in private gun sales have a history of criminal activity or mental illness.<sup>37</sup>

These loose laws in regulating, selling, and owning guns are the main reason why Georgia is a leader in gun-trafficking. "There is a lot of profit to be made in the far Northeastern states where the laws are much stricter," Daniel Webster, director of the Johns

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Judd, Alan. "Study: State Gun Laws Lacking; Georgia's Overall Rank on Firearms Restrictions Is

Lower than All but Six States, N.Y. Institute Says." *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, April 13,

2000, News sec. Accessed March 5, 2015.

<http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?do>

[cLinkInd=true&risb=21\\_T21612681517&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&re](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?do)

[sultsUrlKey=29\\_T21612681521&cisb=22\\_T21612681520&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?do)

[379&docNo=3.](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?do)

Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research said. "A gun that can be bought in these three states at a retail price of \$100 can be sold for \$400 in New York City,"<sup>38</sup>

Whereas Georgia passes laws regarding gun ownership, city councils also make their own laws. Kennesaw, Georgia's gun laws are one of a kind in that the city mandates that every household has to own a gun at home since 1982.<sup>39</sup> Kwong states that:<sup>40</sup>

As a national firearms debate rages in the U.S. after several mass shootings last year, the pro-gun lobby points to Kennesaw as a paragon of armed America. Police document just four gun-related homicides since 1980, making Kennesaw one of the safest communities of its size in the U.S., according to Lt. Craig Graydon of the criminal investigations unit.

Joan Burbick's *Gun Nation Show* is a thorough work that discusses the history of gun craze in the United States, how it started, when it gained such importance, showing points of views of conservative pro-gun advocatives, drawing from the concepts of white supremacy,

---

<sup>38</sup> Davis, Janel. "Georgia Is a Leader in Gun Trafficking." *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, March 20, 2013, Main Edition ed., Metro News sec. Accessed March 5, 2015.

[http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?doclinkInd=true&risb=21\\_T21612681517&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\\_T21612681521&cisb=22\\_T21612681520&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8379&docNo=5](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?doclinkInd=true&risb=21_T21612681517&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T21612681521&cisb=22_T21612681520&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8379&docNo=5).

<sup>39</sup> Kwong, Matt. "A town that welcomes you with open arms." *Maclean's* 126, no. 14 (April 15, 2013): 22. *MasterFILE Elite*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 05, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

masculinity, male consumerism, individual liberty, and male action. Burbick, a white, female, American culture professor, traveled in the country, visiting eight states and dozens of gun shows, goes very deep into the history of gun craze in the United States. Started as a frontier adventure, empowered by the images of frontier heroes such as Buffalo Bill, guns entered into politics in the 1960s “when the country was rocked by assassinations, dissent over the Vietnam War, and the social change from the civil rights movement.”<sup>41</sup>

The main argument in Burbick’s book is that guns equate white, male power, thus disarming blacks is a way of overpowering them. Similarly, gun shows- called “political fairs” by Burbick where conservative, white male gun sellers as well as buyers focus on the rights given to them by the Second Amendment- are arenas where women are viewed in sexist ways such as cartoons that say “top 10 reasons why guns are better than women” number one being “you can buy a silencer for a gun.”<sup>42</sup> Women are also encouraged to buy guns for self-defense.

Burbick also discusses the crimes related to gun-craze. Unlike the newspaper articles discussed above, her main focus is not murders or gun-smuggling, but suicides connected to guns. Her research shows that guns are more used for committing suicides. “Fifty people a day kill themselves with a gun in the United States. These numbers increased 75 percent between 1965 and 1985 and have stayed reasonably constant since then.”<sup>43</sup> Her research also suggests that while males over 55 years old are the most vulnerable groups.

While the guns are criticized for promoting violence in the society by some, heavy metal has always been associated with violence it creates especially among young people.

**Heavy metal fandom:** Heavy metal described as being:

---

<sup>41</sup> Burbick, Joan. *Gun Show Nation: Gun Culture and American Democracy*. New York, N.Y.: New Press ;, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

pimplly, prole, unchic, unsophisticated, anti-intelligent, dismal, abysmal, terrible, horrible, and stupid music, barely music at all; death music, dead music, the beaten boogie, the dance of the defeat and decay, ... music made by slack-jawed, alpaca-haired, bulbous-inseamed imbeciles in jackboots and leathers and chrome for slack-jawed, alpaca-haired, downy-mustachioed imbeciles in cheap, too-large T-shirts with pictures of comic-book Armageddon ironed on the front.<sup>44</sup>

by Robert Duncan, a rock critic. Born in the 1970s, heavy metal, both criticized harshly and praised, has become one of the most eminent music genres. In *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, Deena Weinstein captures the history behind the birth and growth of heavy metal, its important elements such as guitar solos, band logos, colors used, album covers, merchandise, visuality, band names, themes used in lyrics, and even the importance of lead singer's appearance, making the book one of the most complete works written on heavy metal as a subgenre.

There are different opinions on whether heavy metal is a subculture or not. Will Straw claims heavy metal is not a subculture in that heavy metal audience is unable to reflect the psychedelic rock music of which heavy metal was born. "It is a musical genre which develops at the intersection between a particular moment in the music industry (the development of an "oligopoly") and a kind of social space (suburbanism),"<sup>45</sup> says Simon During, editor of Straw's article "Characterizing Rock Music Culture: the Case of Heavy Metal. His focus is more about the music industry. He also includes a very brief history of how heavy metal came into existence unlike Weinstein's long and detailed history. They both agree that the 1960s

---

<sup>44</sup> Weinstein, Deena. *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*. Rev. Ed., 1st Da Capo Press ed. New York: Da Capo Press, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> "Characterizing Rock Music Culture: The Case of Heavy Metal." In *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999). 451-461

and 1970s psychedelic rock music is the biggest influence behind heavy metal as a subgenre to rock music.

Straw's approach to heavy metal is more sociological than a fan-based theme because he does not write as a fan, nor does he concern with it as a life-practice. He connects heavy metal to suburbs in that North American suburbs in most cases discourages heavy metal musicians from performing in local venues that can develop more easily in larger inner urban areas.<sup>46</sup> Weinstein's book also follows a sociological approach, though different from Straw's article. Weinstein does not include suburbs in her research. Her focus is more on gender and race as they are related to heavy metal music. She suggests that "the barriers confronting women in heavy metal are more fundamental than those encountered by blacks. The predominance of whites in the genre is mostly a historical accident, whereas the bias against women is rooted in the delineated meanings of heavy metal music. No racist themes match the macho ideology of the genre."<sup>47</sup> Straw, likewise, suggests that masculinity is a prominent element of heavy metal music not only because it is male dominated but also because of heavy metal audience's conception of being a polar opposite of nerd type.<sup>48</sup>

Unlike Straw, Rosemary Lucy Hill sees heavy metal as a subgenre. She uses a feminist approach in her article "Reconceptualizing hard rock and metal fans as a group: Imaginary community." In her article, Hill focuses on the lack of women's experiences in heavy metal fandom. Unlike Straw and Weinstein, Hill does not discuss heavy metal as being masculine or

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Weinstein, Deena. *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*. Rev. Ed., 1st Da Capo Press ed. New York: Da Capo Press, 2000.

<sup>48</sup> "Characterizing Rock Music Culture: The Case of Heavy Metal." In *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1999.

macho because her focus is on the experiences of the female heavy metal audience.<sup>49</sup> Sara Cohen writes about male dominance in the subgenre in that “such scenes are often male dominated for a number of reasons: men have greater access to money and time to devote to participating in a scene; women face obstacles to participation in scenes due to lack of disposable income, sexism and sexual harassment from male scene members, childcare commitments, and the perceived safety implications of late nights in empty town centers.<sup>50</sup>

Although bureaucracy, guns, suburbs, heavy metal fandom, and stereotyping as themes in my project seem very different from one another, they are interconnected in that each theme is a big part of my American experience, thus this project. All these themes are parts of American culture, and each one of them represents a different aspect of American culture. These themes also connected to each other in that they all have a rich background, thus what I did was to historicize these themes while discussing numerous arguments posed by different authors.

---

<sup>49</sup> Hill, Rosemary Lucy. "Reconceptualizing Hard Rock and Metal Fans as a Group: Imaginary Community." *International Journal of Community Music* 7, no. 2 (2014): 173-87. Accessed February 10, 2015. EBSCO.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

### **The System's Fault?**

“I am jinxed!” After all the misfortunes I had to endure starting with my application for KSU, I seriously started to think someone cast a spell on me. Either that, or someone there was not happy with me coming to the United States. I began to think, I should start taking it personally.

I was 22 years old, freshly graduated from Bilkent University in Turkey when I was admitted to the American Studies program in the summer of 2013 and also hired as a graduate research assistant (GRA). “Yay!” Everyone around me both my family, relatives, and friends seemed to be happy over this great news. Since the fall semester would start on August 16<sup>th</sup>, I came to the US on August 13<sup>th</sup>, at least this is the date that appears on my passport. I couldn't have been happier because due to the laziness of both US and Turkish postal services, my I-20 document which was crucial to get a student visa arrived so late that I almost missed my plane. The funny thing was that my problems with KSU actually started when I was still in Turkey.

Dr. Rebecca Hill, the coordinator of American Studies in Kennesaw State and I were sending e-mails back and forth to each other about my admission in the summer of 2013. I signed the documents she sent me via e-mail, then I scanned them, and sent them back to her. Everything was ready except for I-20. They sent me PDF version of it so I could start my visa

application. I booked an appointment with the US Embassy in Ankara, using the information on it. As the day got closer, I was getting more anxious because the original document hadn't arrived. Still, I went to the Embassy with all my documents. Unsurprisingly, they didn't even let me enter the building with that PDF I-20. I needed the original one. I went home, crying. Back then, I thought this was just a unfortunate event. Now, I view this incident as a foreshadowing for my KSU experience. In the meantime, I went back to my hometown because the Eid was coming. I contacted Dr. Hill again. I asked them to send the document to me via UPS. I would pay for it. I gave up on the regular postal services. With UPS, the mail would arrive in three days, so I booked another appointment in the Embassy for Monday. The problem was, two days later all the governmental facilities would go on a vacation from Wednesday till following Monday due to the Eid. I went Ankara early in the morning. I was anxious as I handed in my documents. This time, they let me in. I waited for a while in the embassy, but luckily my visa was approved quickly. Due the fact that my visa arrived on the same day my plane ticket was scheduled, which was Monday, August 12<sup>th</sup>, I had the worst Eid.

This is basically what happened to me when I was in Turkey. Once I was in Georgia, the first few days elapsed insanely fast, me dealing with trying to find a place to live, getting used to the new environment, making new friends, and preparing for the new school year. And then, finally everything was sorted out and when I was about to sigh out of relief, I was told I needed to get a social security number in order to be paid by the university. "Oh well! No one had told me about it before I came here," I thought.

Then another detail I was not informed about showed up. The rule to apply for a social security number was that a person must have been in the United States for at least 10 business days. I was only here for six days, including the weekend. So I had to wait. Since I did not drive or know the city, the secretary of the Interdisciplinary Studies Department, Cherie

Miller volunteered to bring me to the Social Security Office located in Marietta. We were scheduled to go there on September 9<sup>th</sup>. I went to the Social Sciences building where ISD is located early in the morning. I remember that day very clearly. It was a very hot fall day. I was wearing a purple, floral skirt and a cute black top combined with my black ballerina flats. I also had my backpack with me, in it a file with my passport, my I-20 and I-94 documents, and my hiring proposal along with some articles I needed to finish by 6.30 pm for my art class. It took more than half an hour to get to the location. We chit chatted all the way. I was also delighted with the things I captured glimpses of during our short trip because I actually had never left Kennesaw till then.

Even though we arrived there around 9 in the morning, the Social Security Office was already packed. There were two sulky, big security guards who searched our bags. We finally got in and managed to find two seats to sit until my number was up. Cherie started to read something so I started to gaze at people. Inside the building, there were many different people from all over the world. It was like a global meeting event. Asians, Africans, Europeans, Americans, elderly, youngsters, and even babies... I then decided to finish my article but I couldn't, because I kept checking the board that showed the numbers.

After a long, long wait, finally my number was up and I asked Cherie to come with me. We sat on the chairs in front of a small window where a plump, African-American lady was doing something on an ancient-looking computer. She wore a turquoise dress with a huge turquoise ring and hoop earrings. After small talk for a bit, exchanging lots of "how are you's" she asked for my documents. I gave them to her. She started to type my passport number on her computer but I could see her raising one of her eyebrows. Suddenly, there was a cramp in my stomach. She then took a look at my other documents and continued doing something with my passport. It was taking more than most of the people before me and I was getting more and more nervous. Cherie and I exchanged some looks and she smiled at me in

an effort to encourage me. But I knew it, I knew there was something wrong. Then, the lady slowly leaned toward me and said the words that blackened my world for a while:

“But honey, you are not in the system!”

“Am I what? How could it have been?” Suddenly, the world went numb or I went deaf because I couldn’t hear anything but those words. It kept repeating in my brain. “But honey, you are not in the system!” “You are not in the system!” “The system, the system, the system...” I was too puzzled to utter a word so Cherie asked something I didn’t hear because I was still repeating the words inside my head. “the system”

Then she turned the screen of her computer to us and showed us the website for Department of Homeland Security and said:

“See?”

Yet, there was no one there with a name Nilufer Gokmen. I was indeed not in the system. But how? She told things I couldn’t understand because I was still trying to cope with the fact that I wasn’t in the system. Luckily, Cherie was there with me.

Everything happened after she told me about my situation was more like a slow motion show on TV. I slowly stood up, grabbed my backpack, got my documents back, and walked out of the building to the parking lot. Cherie was trying to console me like it was even possible. I wasn’t in the system. But how? Why? She first called the ISD and told the chair and the program coordinator about what had just happened. I couldn’t take it anymore and I burst into tears. Not knowing what to do she touched my shoulder:

“Don’t cry, I know some people in the Global Admissions, and I am going to call them now and find out what is going on.”

Yet, I kept on crying because I felt so helpless. She then called someone again but they were on a lunch break. I wondered, “Didn’t these people know we were having a crisis here?” She finally reached someone and she informed them about the situation. It was KSU’s fault in the first place that I wasn’t in the system. I knew it wasn’t about me.

Cherie drove us to Town Point, where we learned the details of this “system error” story. Some lady in the Global Admissions told us that for each student they put in the system they were supposed to pay some sort of fee, and they had been waiting for me to get paid by the HR. “Wait, what? Say it again,” I thought to myself. Did they really expect me to be paid before I got my social security number? Or get my social security number without being in the system? Seriously, were the officials in this god-damn school this stupid? “No, no, I must have heard it wrong. No one can be that stupid. How could have they expected me to get paid without my social security number?” One of the brilliant workers in the Global Admissions came up and said:

“I entered your information in the system after you (referring to Cherie) called but since it is a busy time, it might take up some time to appear it on the system?”

Scared, I asked:

“How many days?”

“Normally it takes a few days but considering the time it might take up a month.”

“A month? I wasn’t paid in August, and they won’t they pay me in September? What am I going to do? I can’t ask money from my parents again.” I was on the edge of having a nervous breakdown while these thoughts wandered wildly in my brain. Seeing my face, Cherie told me:

“Don’t worry, we will try it again next week.”

Yes, but all this time I was in the United States, I was actually illegal here. I entered the country in legal ways but somehow thanks to this stupid school, I turned out be a felon, “effing illegal like a fugitive,” I thought. I tried so hard to find a reasonable explanation to this extreme stupidity. Was it a regular procedure for them to wait? But I wasn’t the only international student to be hired by the school and yet I nobody had such an experience. Therefore, I concluded the Town Point screwed up so badly and they didn’t realize their mistake till we called them. I thought it was my bad luck striking.

Then she dropped me at my dorm. I went to class that night but only physically. I kept repeating what had happened earlier in my head. When I went to my room, I couldn’t help it anymore but burst into tears again. I felt so small, so lonely. I didn’t have my best friends or my family whom I could share and relax. The worst part was I was here all alone while they were sleeping in their beds across the Atlantic. I needed someone to comfort me, someone to pat my hair and tell me everything would work out fine. But, I was sitting on my bed, staring at my laptop’s screen, lonely. I had never felt this lonely before.

One or two days after my unsuccessful trip to the Social Security Office, I was hanging out with some international students who told me they were going there on Friday so I decided to join them. Someone in the Education Abroad office would bring them so I also made an appointment. I didn’t know if I was yet in the system but I had to try.

It was a very hot day again though it was still early. We were going to meet at Town Point. Those students, a girl and a boy from Germany named Carolin and Mark were already there when I arrived. I was wearing a pink sleeveless shirt, a black, sheer skirt with pink floral sandals accompanied with my backpack filled with my documents and some articles for the following week. Since it was a very hot day, I felt like I was at the beach and wished if I had worn a hat as well. We started waiting for another student and a professor. Not suspecting what the Social Security had for me, I was quite cheerful. I was laughing and joking with

other students. When the other two finally arrived, we were ready to go. A lady named Franckline from Education Abroad office was driving us. She seemed very nice even though her accent was quite hard to understand. The tiny, male, Asian professor took the front seat while we four students, even though Mark was very tall and well-built, had to sit in the back seat. That wasn't cool, at all. This time the trip was shorter or, since we were quite having fun in the back even though packed over there, I thought it was shorter. Again, those sulky security guards searched our bags and they looked at me like asking "what are you doing here, again?" "Yeah, Yeah, as if I wanted to return there," I thought.

Franckline got our numbers and we sat. There were less people that day, but still it was crowded. Again, there were all kind of people. We were also a very interesting group. An African-American lady with a tiny Asian guy with two blonde Europeans, one Turkish girl and a one Pakistani girl. "Yup," I thought, "this was the salad bowl I had been studying." The scholars cannot decide whether the United States is a melting pot or a salad bowl, but that day I reckoned it was the salad bowl because even though there were many people all around the world, still they managed to preserve their true identities. Most people were speaking in their native languages, there were Indian, African, and Middle Eastern women who dressed up in their national clothes instead of American style. People came here for different reasons, maybe for education like us or maybe to seek better jobs, who knows? Yet, there was one thing for sure that none of them were assimilated into the mainstream American culture. Actually, the fact that people were very different from each other was beautiful. The Social Security Office looked like a tasty salad bowl.

First, the Asian professor went and in a short time he returned with his approval document. Then, the Germans got their approval documents. Franckline was also there helping the people whose number was up. Finally, it was my turn. I went there slowly and first handed over my passport. This was another lady. I didn't like the way she dressed and

she seemed a bit bitter. She was also teaching a young girl how to operate the system using my documents. And yes, she was showing her where to type the password number. I closed my eyes and held my breath. Either, I was in the system or not. She asked for my other documents. Yes, finally I was in the system. She barely took a peep at my documents and told me:

“You don’t have the necessary documents.”

“I don’t what?” I had everything they required lying on her table. So I said,

“But I brought the documents that are listed in this application form.”

Wearily, she stood up and went back, returning with two pieces of paper. According to that new paper, I was supposed to have a letter both from a designated school official (DSO), and my employee letter didn’t contain enough information such as money to be paid, verification of the employment status, employee information, and so on. But I did have that information both in a letter and a hiring proposal signed by my employer who happens to be the American Studies Program Coordinator, by the dean and finally by me. So, I showed her my hiring proposal.

“All the information you require is here.”

“They should be in a letter.”

Franckline was also surprised. She said:

“I’ve been coming here with students for year and this is the first time a letter from DSO is required.”

Well, I guess this was my bad luck striking again. It was my misfortune that I encountered this woman in the first place.

Realizing, she wouldn't give me the approval form, I left my seat to the Pakistani girl. I then sat somewhere, thinking about what just had happened. Then two German students approached me, asking me if I got mine. All this time I had been holding myself, but after that question I burst into tears once again. They were shocked. Carolin hugged me and they both tried to console me. Of course, it was easy for them. After all, their applications were all approved in one try. Yet, I was returning empty-handed again.

After Franckline brought us back to the school, they all went their homes but my job wasn't finished yet. I needed that damn letter from DSO, whom I didn't know. Mrs. Michele Miller from the Education Abroad talked to one Mr. Julio Espana, the DSO. He told her to write down the letter with the necessary information and he would sign it. I was starving. I hadn't eaten anything all day and it was in the afternoon. Franckline, considering I had nothing but a bottle of water all this time prepared me something to eat. It was rice and chicken but it was very delicious. I was still unhappy but at least I was full. "We might have lots of stupid people working here at KSU, but there are also some very nice people." I reckoned. Mrs. Miller, by the way, prepared my letter and she gave it to me to have it signed. Mr. Espana tried to make some jokes to cheer me up, but it was because of the lack of coordination between those departments in Town Point that I was suffering.

I headed back to the Social Sciences building to tell them about this new letter thing. I was feeling so exhausted and I was thinking my day couldn't have gotten any worse. But, I was wrong. When I reached the ISD's office on the second floor, while I was telling Cherie about the latest incident, Dr. Lieberman, the chair of ISD came in told me not to worry about the e-mail. Astonished, I asked:

"What e-mail?"

“Oh, good. He didn’t send you one. Don’t worry even if you get one. We will take care of it. Dr. Hill (who happens to my supervisor and employer) is already working on it.”

I didn’t understand anything, so I asked what the deal was with the e-mail. Apparently, the Dean of College sent a very rude e-mail to both Dr. Hill and Dr. Lieberman, threatening them to cut my GRA and tuition waiver if I didn’t get my social security number, which meant me being kicked out of the program because I couldn’t afford to study without that waiver. I trusted them, but, of course, I was also deadly worried. I was playing scenarios playing inside my head. The funny thing is since I wasn’t paid, I even didn’t have money to buy my plane ticket. I wondered if the school would be kind enough to buy me a ticket to Istanbul. This was it, this was the end of my American Dream: getting kicked out of school because of bureaucracy. It wasn’t fair at all. It wasn’t my fault that the school employed so many stupid people. Due to the reasons beyond my control, I was the one to suffer. My American experience started with a huge frustration. I even hadn’t visited Atlanta and yet I needed to leave the country because of some stupid people who didn’t deserve their paychecks. I felt like I was being a scapegoat of some dysfunctional bureaucratic irregularities. First, KSU and then the social security office. Then I started to take it personally. Even though I was invited here, I felt like I wasn’t wanted here. I guess, it was America’s way of saying that they didn’t want foreigners in their country by making things impossible for them. Then why did they invite me in the first place? I was getting some mixed signals from different institutions. ISD wanted me as a student, but people behind the closed doors wanted me to give up and leave.

Then Cherie’s voice woke me up from my horrible thoughts. She said she would write my employee letter and have it signed by Dr. Hill on Monday, and we would go there again on Tuesday. In the meantime, Dr. Lieberman managed to get some extension from the Dean about my issue. He told her if I didn’t have my social security number by the following week,

they were going to cut down my GRA. If I was going there on Tuesday, it was impossible for me to get it that week. It took at least 7 business days for it to arrive. Again, I was in a huge dilemma.

Cherie started typing the letter:

Dear Nilufer,

The MA in American Studies Program has hired you for a Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA) for the Fall 2013/Spring 2014 semesters with Dr. Rebecca Hill, Director of the MA in American Studies Program. This GRA includes tuition remission and a \$4.000 per semester (for a total of \$8.000) stipend for 19 hours of work.

“She then included all the other necessary information that b.tch told me to have and finally contact information of Dr. Hill, waiting to be signed by her. There was nothing I could do till next week and I had a very restless weekend. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t focus, I couldn’t do anything except for worrying.

The next week, on Tuesday I went to meet with Cherie in the morning. Again, it was a hot day. On the way, she kept telling me

“The third time is a charm.”

If only I could be positive. While those two sulky security guards searched for our bags, I felt like I was an innocent person waiting for her execution. I felt like throwing up. It was my third time there, and if I didn’t get my social security number by Friday, I would be sacked out of school. I really wanted that degree. The worst case scenario I had before coming here was I would have to drop the program because I couldn’t maintain a 3.00 GPA. But I even didn’t submit anything, and I had to leave. So unfair! It was also going be a big

humiliation. I never heard of someone getting kicked out over paperwork issues. I guess, I was about to become the first.

Then again for the third time in 2 weeks, my number was up. I walked up slowly, taking my time trying to postpone the inevitable. I asked Cherie to join me. If something happened again, I knew my heart couldn't take it anymore. I would collapse. I sat on the chair again in front of the window. I said to myself:

“What are the chances! The same lady from my first visit.”

Yes, that plump, African-American, friendly lady was there again. Well that was lucky. I was glad it wasn't that b.tch I encountered in my second visit. Surprisingly she recognized me. She asked us how we had been.

“Let's see if you are in the system.”

“I am in the system, I came here again on Friday and I was in the system. But the other lady wasn't satisfied with my employee letter.”

She typed my passport number in the system and excitedly said:

“Yes, you are in the system.”

Then she took a glance at my new employee letter, and she even didn't touch the letter I got from Mr. Espana. And then she smiled at me in a friendly way and told me my application was approved. Again, I felt like blacking out because I wasn't ready for good news. I had been waiting for her to say there was something wrong with my application again, and yet she was there smiling at me. Cherie was also very happy. To me, everything felt so surreal. She handed to me a white paper, my approval form. Finally, I got it. Indeed, the third time was the charm. I felt so happy and I felt like crying out for joy. I wanted to scream and

shout and let everyone know that I finally managed to get my social security number approval. She said:

“In that letter, it says 2 weeks but it generally arrives within a week.”

I kept reading it again and again to make sure because it was too good to be true. On the right top corner yes, it was the date, September 17, 2013. Then on the left my name and address with capital letters.

NILUFER GOKMEN

This is a receipt to show that you applied for a Social Security card on September 17, 2013. You should have your card in about 2 weeks. Any document(s) you have submitted are being returned to you with this receipt.

I thanked the lady millions of times. I could even hug her, but she was behind a window. This time I was leaving there happy. I swear I saw one of those sulky security guards smiling at me while I was leaving.

When we reached the car, I was about to burst into tears again but this time tears of joy and happiness. I still couldn't believe it. Cherie called both Dr. Lieberman and Dr. Hill and gave them the great news. But we weren't done yet. We needed to go to HR. So one more time she drove to the Town Point. We prepared a case in the car. We were going to make them pay me in September even if my social security number didn't arrive soon because it wasn't my fault that I had to handle all that hassle. Surprisingly, they were very sympathetic and they told me, they were going to start the process using this approval letter and when I received my number, I would come to the office and give it to them so they could make a copy of it.

Suddenly, I realized something. There was no reason left for Dean to cut my GRA, and I didn't have to leave. I didn't realize until then that it was such a beautiful fall day, with a sunny sky and birds singing, squirrels running around playfully. I still needed to go to class at night and finish my readings but, what the heck, life was beautiful.

### **Welcome to Hell: Being A Foreign Student in the in the Age of American Bureaucracy**

Bureaucracy is just not boring paperwork that needs to be done in the dusty, stuffy offices. It is a part of daily life, especially in the United States.<sup>51</sup> Ever since I set foot in this country on August 13, 2013, I, as a part of the system, have been struggling against this lifeless monster that is trying to eat me alive. The more I struggle, the more obstacles it puts before me. There are times I thought I was jinxed or cursed. There are times I felt unwelcomed in this country even though I was invited to come here. There are times I thought all the school and government employees were nothing, but a bunch of stupid people who did not know how to their jobs. As I started to talk to more people about their experiences with bureaucracy, I realized something. No, those people are not stupid. They, like me, are chained to this machine we prefer to call bureaucracy.

What is bureaucracy? This question needs to be answered carefully to better understand how the system functions. The units called departments, ministries, agencies, and bureaus as parts of larger-scale administrative components of a government are simply called

---

<sup>51</sup> Maybe I was feeling this way because I had never had to deal with bureaucracy while I was still in Turkey.

bureaucracies.<sup>52</sup> Is bureaucracy particularly a government function? Not necessarily, because universities as a part of a larger administrative systems are also divided into different units, and for Kennesaw State, the heart of this bureaucratic system is the Town Point, where most of the offices, including Global Admissions and Education Abroad offices are located.

Bureaucracy itself is a very large term. Bureaucracy, as a form of how the government functions, especially in the United States is larger than me. In my country, I never had to deal with bureaucracy by myself because of my age and student status. Suddenly, I fell into the heart of bureaucratic system when I came here. That is why my focus is American bureaucracy because that's what I experienced.

Bureaucracy is a very hot topic that has been criticized by scholars again and again. If the system is faulty, its employees can do nothing but feed this fault. "American bureaucracies make more rules, which are the functional equivalent of legislation, than Congress and the state legislatures make law."<sup>53</sup> In this context, bureaucracy in this country has too much power, and power besets corruption. Lael Keiser suggests that American bureaucratic system is problematic because "unelected bureaucrats exercise substantial policymaking through their use of discretion."<sup>54</sup>

Modern American bureaucracy is the very opposite of Max Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy. In other words, in the United States, Weber's bureaucracy is nothing but a

---

<sup>52</sup> Dolan, Julie, and David H. Rosenbloom, eds. *Representative Bureaucracy: Classic Readings and Continuing Controversies*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Durant, Robert F., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of American Bureaucracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

utopia. In Weberian ideal type, bureaucracy should be dehumanized, in other words there should be no personal feelings.<sup>55</sup> However, in American bureaucracy, everything is up to what will come out of the lips of civil servants, or bureaucrats. I believe this is what happened to me with my second time in Social Security Office. When that lady told me I did not have the necessary documents including a letter from the designated school official, I felt like I was becoming a victim of something greater. On different kiosks in the office, they had papers that required what we needed to bring and that letter was not in the list. It was in the list in the one she brought from the back office, where only employees are allowed. Moreover, the fact that when I went there for the third and last time the other lady did not even look at the letter makes me wish Weber's ideal type was real, but not a utopia. Maybe, that lady was not in a good mood that day because when I said hi smilingly, she even did not respond. Maybe, she did not like me. Maybe, it was personal even though it should not be. Unfortunately, modern bureaucracy is a system of people and everything is personal.

After reading all these things written on bureaucracy, I started to wonder how that lady became the judge to decide something this big and important in my life. I do not think she has the power to make laws, but there is one thing for sure, she has more than enough power to execute laws. She was not elected to work in such a powerful position. She, most probably, sent her resume, and had some interviews. She is a civil servant, but she is authorized to make live-changing decisions for people.

Social Security Administration is a bureaucratic hell for everyone whether citizens or not as far as I heard from people around me. An American professor of mine even told me she

---

<sup>55</sup> Mommsen, Wolfgang J. *The Age of Bureaucracy; Perspectives on the Political Sociology of Max Weber*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1974.

refuses to go there to get a new social security number after hers was stolen because of all the hassle. However, being an international student, especially from the Middle East area makes everything a lot harder in this country. I have become a potential risk factor ever since I entered the country. Now, I am being scrutinized via school's bureaucratic administration offices. Global Admissions, for instance, sends all international e-mails regarding updating our current address every semester. If not, they ask International Student Association to gather necessary information for them. The system treats me along with other international students as potential terrorists.

Everything started long before 9/11 attacks, but after the attacks coming to the United States as a foreign student has become much harder. Since the hijackers involved in the attacks were students on visas, foreign students as a whole are still viewed as security threats. Every student's information is entered into the Department of Homeland Security's database, which was founded after 9/11. First, they created another bureaucratic administration: Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) within a month after 9/11.<sup>56</sup> According to this new system, every incoming foreign student is assigned a SEVIS number given to them and the only way a foreign student can even make an appointment at the embassy is to have the number. This number along with the barcode is also on the I-20 document. Without the original document with proper signatures and dates, it is even impossible to enter the embassy's building.

---

<sup>56</sup> Danley, Janet V. "SEVIS: The Impact of Homeland Security on American Colleges and Universities."

New Directions for Institutional Research 2010, no. 146 (2010): 63-73. Accessed March 3, 2015. Sage Knowledge.

With SEVIS, an enormous amount of fees have been implemented on foreign students.<sup>57</sup> Schools need to make a payment for each international student information they enter into the database. This was the start point of my problem with social security actually. Every semester, both ISA and Global Admissions send all international students an e-mail if they are leaving the country for winter and summer breaks. We are not allowed to leave the country however we want. We need to notify the school officials and get new I-20 documents with updated dates on them to be able to enter the country after the holiday. Since I have not left the country since I came here, I have not had to go through this process so far. Still, they send lots of e-mails because at the customs, they check the dates again and again. Moreover, with SEVIS, schools are supposed to report changing status for each student within twenty-one days.<sup>58</sup>

Even before the 9/11 attacks, international students were viewed by administration officials with suspicion – contrary to the perceived benefits of their presence – and as potential threats to the security of the United States.<sup>59</sup> The reason for this securitization of foreign students is the Iran hostage crisis. Even when I was applying for student visa in 2013, the requirements for students from Iran was in a different category than the others.

SEVIS's impacts are two-sided. Schools also face many hardship including creating new positions for handling international students such as primary designated school officials or designated school officials. The amount of work to be done has doubled. Steps for getting a student visa have become much harder, which reduces the number of applicants.<sup>60</sup> Approval

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Ewers, Michael C., and Joseph M. Lewis. "Risk And The Securitisation Of Student Migration To The United States." *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 99, no. 4 (2008): 470-82. Accessed March 1, 2015. Sage Knowledge.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

of my student visa was the easiest part of my journey to the United States. The civil servant who worked in the embassy asked me only three questions. “Why do you apply for a visa?” was the first one. The other two included “Why did you choose American Studies to study?” and finally “Which city are you going to?” These are all basic questions, nothing special. However, I eavesdropped the interview between the guy before me and the same civil servant, which scared me a lot. As far as I could hear, the guy was applying for J1 visa because he was enrolled in a language school in the United States for the summer. He was also a college student in Turkey. He asked him many questions, but the one question that shocked me was why his grades dropped in his junior year while his freshman grades were very high. The guy told his mother got sick and he had to take care of her. When I was checking out example questions on the embassy’s website, I had not encountered such personal questions. The same civil servant did not ask me any personal questions. I did not hear if the guy’s visa was approved or not. I still cannot make a connection between his college grades and his desire to learn English in an American institution.

“Why are you here?” This is the question I receive a lot. There are few who just wondered why I decided to come to Kennesaw, but most of the time people wanted to know why I came to the United States to study. There was another question I receive frequently. “What do you think of ISIS?” I could see the relief in their eyes when I said they are terrorists and what they do is monstrosity. They expect me to talk in behalf of all Turkish people or all Muslims. I cannot do that. I am only entitled to my own opinion. Like for the system, I am a security leak in their eyes, a potential terrorist. This is very obvious, especially at the airports, where coincidentally only people from Muslim countries are “randomly” selected for security checks. I also did not go through that process, mostly because of my European features. However, someone I know from Algeria was escorted to the security into a private room for “routine” check. She was also a Kennesaw State student, but the difference is she had a hijab,

which made her an easy target in the media, for security, and for the rest of people because international students, especially Muslims are seen as potential threats to the American society and freedom. I wonder if one day they will print our SEVIS barcodes on our foreheads and create checkpoints, and scan us to keep under surveillance.

### **Kennesaw State: Not for International Students**

When it comes to misfortune, internet phenomenon Bad Luck Brian has nothing on me. If Lemony Snicket knew me, he would write a story about me instead of Baudelaire siblings. Kennesaw State University, ever since I came here in August 2013, has become my own personal Count Olaf, always putting obstacles in my way. “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.” said Nietzsche. To tell the truth, even though I’m still physically alive, I feel like a part of me is psychologically dead thanks to Kennesaw State and its crappy bureaucratic system. I try to make jokes about the situation, yet this is just an act to show people I am alright. In reality, I am not alright; I feel exhausted and weak. Every time I fill out forms, I am dying inside worrying something will go wrong.

I have already explained how KSU put me through a lot of trouble with my social security number when I first came here. That was only beginning. I’ve faced so many problems with different institutions in KSU afterwards that sometimes made me wish I had gone home. Writing this only one semester away from my graduation, I couldn’t help but think if this master’s degree is worth all the hassle I’ve had to deal with.

I've changed a lot. I've grown more mature in only 1.5 years, and I gained a new attitude towards any problems I face. My weapons against KSU were my extreme sarcasm and sassiness because I felt highly vulnerable and helpless. I also cry a lot. I used to think crying was a sign of weakness and I hated crying. After KSU, I could compete with Usagi Tsukino of *Sailor Moon* in crying.

I don't intend to repeat my social security adventure here, but instead prove that KSU has a dysfunctional bureaucratic system. I think the reason for this is the fact that KSU's inter-department communication is atrocious. Every employee of KSU brags about how KSU has grown in recent years and how they will be the second biggest university in Georgia after the consolidation.<sup>61</sup> I am just worried how they will take care of two different campuses when they have troubles in managing only one.

Last year, I worked as a graduate research assistant (GRA) with Dr. Rebecca Hill, who helped me a lot even before I came here, in the fall semester. In the spring semester though, I was assigned to work with a Dr. Majumder from Anthropology department. Who would have thought this simple switch would create so many problems? I received an e-mail from Graduate College regarding my payment. According to that e-mail they paid me twice, so I owed money to them, and they expected me to pay it back. I was confused because I didn't recall being paid twice. I received a total of \$742.00 every month, and I would definitely notice if there was extra money on my account because it was the first weeks of the spring semester, when I needed money to buy books. Then Jade Hill, our program specialist, sent me an e-mail regarding it. Apparently, they had been bombarding her with e-mails as well. They paid me very little and they expected me to return money I never even touched. Thanks to my wisdom I gained after the social security adventure, I knew there was something wrong. Still,

---

<sup>61</sup> Kennesaw State University and Southern Poly Technical University (SPSU) are merging as of Fall 2015, SPSU being KSU's Marietta campus.

it wasn't cool for them to strangle us over a mistake they hadn't yet realized. I kept telling myself to be relaxed but it wasn't hard. Then one day I received a call from Jade. After exchanging "What's up?s" to each other, she dropped the question I'd been awaiting.

"They've been calling me about your situation. Did you get paid twice in January?"

"No, I wasn't."

I felt like I was being blamed for getting paid extra but not telling them the truth. I felt very bad about it. They could have checked my account to see if they paid me extra, but I guess sending constant e-mails was easier for them. I wondered if those people who worked in Graduate College had master's degrees. For the sake of future generations, I prayed they didn't. Then I heard Jade's voice again:

"Are you sure?"

This was where I lost it. I had asked my parents to send me money to pay the fees and I was dead broke. I had very little money in my account, and she asked me if I was sure. I knew she was only doing her job, but being harassed over money was frustrating.

"Jade, I'd definitely knew if they paid me twice."

She chuckled and said:

"Yeah, I figured, but I wanted to make sure. I'm calling them now, and we'll figure it out. Don't worry."

And she hung up. But I was worried. I couldn't help it because my previous experiences taught me that I was the one to pay for the school's mistake, and this time the payment was literal. They really expected me to pay them. Was this KSU's way of getting what they invested me in the fall semester? I knew one thing: I was determined not to give up.

I had new friends, and I really liked being a grad student. I worked for it, and I wouldn't let some paperwork issues take this away from me.

The actual story behind their insistence that I pay back made me lose my faith in KSU for good. Jade informed me in a few days what the real issue was. Hold on tight, because what you are about to read is way beyond stupidity. The explanation they proposed to us was that since I switched working with Dr. Majumder, they thought I was paid twice. There was no proof, only thoughts. Had there been proof, they would have charged me on my Owl account. They gave me all the trouble over some assumptions. They really should leave thinking process to other people over there.

I was victimized again by the school, and it wasn't over. I knew I'd have problems with KSU again because they planted that fear in me long time ago. But what they did in the summer was very brutal. Thanks to KSU, I was about to be homeless. According to my housing agreement, my contract was over July 27<sup>th</sup>, but they didn't allow students to move into their new places not until August 15<sup>th</sup>, only a day before the fall semester started. So what was I supposed to do during those three weeks, live under the bridge next to the school? Two weeks prior to the deadline, I went to the housing office and demanded to see Miss Larissa, who I had befriended. She was always very nice to me, and we would chat a lot when I stopped by their office. I thought she would help me. So I told her about the situation which she knew perfectly. But she failed to help me.

“Housing is a private business, and it's not affiliated with KSU itself, so there is nothing we can do.”

Sitting there in her office, I felt helpless. I had a place where I wasn't allowed to live yet, so I was going to end up being homeless. “No, no! It couldn't have been right,” I thought. So I pushed my chances:

“Aren’t there any guest houses on campus where I can stay?”

Well they didn’t have any. Some words vaguely escaped out of my mouth as I stood up to leave:

“But what am I going to do?”

She looked worried about me.

“Don’t you have any friends that you can stay with?”

Yes, I had friends, and one of them already offered a room. The problem was I didn’t want to cause any trouble to anyone because it was for a long time. Plus everyone I knew had pets in their houses, and I couldn’t live with pets for three weeks since I was scared of dogs and disliked cats. It wasn’t fair because they expected me to pay full amount for August and didn’t let me move in until the school started. The reason why they didn’t let people move until August 15 was they only had few days to clean all the rooms and buildings. As far as I remembered, my room didn’t look like it was cleaned when I first moved into my apartment last year. They must have been joking.

Convinced she couldn’t help me, I went to ISD office as always. ISD office was like a haven for me, a shelter from bureaucratic monster. Cherie greeted me:

“Hey, Nilufer. What’s going on?”

Then I told her what just had happened. She listened to me and assured me I wouldn’t end up on the streets. She called Michelle Miller from Education Abroad office to ask her about the situation. Then she said there was an international house on campus where Ilham, an international student from Morocco who graduated in May, also stayed. So she called them. To my bad luck, it was closed due to some construction issues. As she was on the phone, Jade also stopped by to use the printer. Seeing me there during holiday, she knew there was

something wrong again. Cherie gave her updates on my latest problem. Jade looked angry; she didn't accept me getting thrown out of my apartment. She asked Cherie to find the housing office's phone number, and she called them. I couldn't hear who she was talking to or what that person was saying, but Jade was explaining my situation- that I was an international student with no place to go. Then it was other person's turn to talk. All I could hear was Jade repeating "okay, okay, okay." Suddenly she turned me and asked:

"How many days do you require to move?"

I was puzzled with this question.

"3 or 4 days I guess. I haven't started packing yet."

Jade transferred what I said to her to the person on the phone. Then she said:

"You can clean her new apartment first, and she can move in."

Honestly, that was a good solution. Jade was the only person who could solve this problem. And she did. They let me stay in my room till August 2<sup>nd</sup>, and then move into my new place. And what they understood about cleaning was changing some light bulbs and spraying some putrid foamy thing on the carpets. I was the one who cleaned the bathroom and the kitchen after I moved in. Later, I found out that I wasn't the only international student in such a situation. I was told that 60 other foreigners, at least 10 of them were professors, faced homelessness in the summer. The fact that we called Ms. Miller made them aware of the situation. They organized rooms for those people in a nearby hotel. The school were going to pay most of it but still, they were expected to pay \$25 daily. The funny thing it was the impersonal bureaucracy that almost put me on the streets, while human interference helped me and 60 other international people. Weber was not entirely right about human feelings and bureaucracy.

This wasn't the only time I faced the fear of homelessness in Kennesaw State. In August 2014, I started to work as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) with Dr. Griselda Thomas in the English department assisting her for a sophomore level world literature course. I had more responsibilities and did more work, but I loved it. I got to read books and discuss them and then got paid for reading. "What is not to like!" As before, I applied for the position through Human Resources' hiring page online. Since I had a bad history with KSU, I feared there was something wrong with my paperwork, but since they didn't contact me, I was relieved. I should have learned by then that KSU would never let me be relieved. On August 29<sup>th</sup> I received an e-mail from a LaDawn Moran in HR that said:

Good morning Ms. Gokmen,

HR received a copy of your background consent form and need to get information on the international address listed.

If you could provide that information the background process can be completed.

Thank you

Of course I didn't understand anything about this e-mail. What consent form? What background? It was already Friday, and it was the Labor Day weekend. Normally they pay me at the end of each month, but if the school is off, then they pay me earlier. So I checked out my Wells Fargo account so I could pay my rent and phone bill. It was empty. They didn't pay me. Then a lightning struck in my head. But I still didn't understand why they didn't pay me. Did I do something wrong with the paperwork? No, everything was fine, and the lady in the Graduate College told me it was good. There was something else, but I couldn't figure it out. I thought maybe this time they would pay us after the holiday but to make sure I asked a friend of mine, who was also a GRA in my problem to see if she was paid. She said she was paid on Thursday. Why didn't they pay me then?

My rent was due by the 5<sup>th</sup> of every month. Until Tuesday September 2<sup>nd</sup>, there was nothing I could do but wait. Honestly, I forgot about this e-mail till she sent me a reminder on September 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Good morning,

This is a follow up email to the one listed below. Please reply

Thank you

LaDawn Moran

They were very insistent on my international address, but why? After I came here, my parents moved into another apartment that I even didn't see. Why were they making big deal out of it? So I e-mailed Jade to ask her if she knew anything about it. She told me to call HR and ask them. So did I. I was speechless when I found out why I wasn't paid. HR decided to run a background check on me because I changed my position from GRA to GTA. Nothing in this school made sense.

“So you are saying after paying me for a whole year, they finally decided to do that background thing now?”

I asked myself after I hung up the phone. Later Jade told me the reason why they ran this background research:

“Yeah, since you are teaching now, they wanted to make sure you are not a pedophile.”

Pedophile? This is a college, and some of my students are even older than I am. I was thinking how stupid it was to run a background research on me while the US government had my finger prints and Turkish government laid out all my background when I applied for a passport. Did they think they gave passport to everyone or what? I was all over the system and all they needed to was to contact the US or Turkish embassy. But this wasn't the worst

part. The worst part was they would pay me at the end of September for both August and September.

Now this was trouble because I had very little time left to pay my rent. I could survive till the end of the month with the money in my account, but I needed to pay the rent. It wasn't enough to pay the rent since I had already spent most of my money to the school fees the previous week. I had to ask money from my parents for school fees, so I couldn't ask money from them again. The only option was to go to the housing office and tell them the situation. I knew they would extend the deadline for people who were waiting for their financial aid. I scheduled a meeting with Larissa the next day because I needed to go to class.

The next day, I went there after class around 5 pm, and I told her the situation in details. I reminded her that I paid my rent every month in time.

“I can pay for both August and September at the end of this month.”

From her face, I knew this was not going to happen. I was trying so hard not to cry in her office. She then left to talk to some other people. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but my eyes were burning because I was struggling with the tears. I knew if I started, I couldn't stop and let it all out. I was sitting there like an idol, frightened not to cry. That's how our one-way conversation started:

“So here's what we can do. Normally we send late notices on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the 10<sup>th</sup>, and the 16<sup>th</sup> and an eviction notice on the 19<sup>th</sup>. What we can do is to cancel the first late notice, but you will still get other two. Can you pay like \$300 by 19<sup>th</sup>?”

I didn't have a choice, so I nodded. It meant that I needed to ask money from my parents, but at least I would not lose my room.

“We’ll also disregard the eviction notice. Even if you get it, don’t mind it. They are sent automatically.”

I had money that I wasn’t allowed to use, and I would get an eviction notice, which would be very humiliating. Plus late notices each cost \$50, meaning I would have to pay more than I should thanks to HR. I was very furious, upset, and frustrated at the same time. No, no, no. a teardrop was rolling down my cheek. This wasn’t going to end well. She also realized it and hugged me, which was a mistake because this was the eviction notice for my tears. I burst into tears in her office as she tried to console me.

“No, don’t cry. It’s going to be alright.”

No it wasn’t. It had never been alright ever since I came to this goddamn school. I cried there for a while, and she brought me some sweet treats to cheer me up. I felt so stupid and small there. I didn’t know what I had done, but I wondered if I deserved all these things.

On Friday, I went to Jade’s office because I knew they were the only people who could help me. They helped me keep my room in the summer. I was telling her what happened the previous day in the housing office that I started crying again. Jade was very shocked to see me that way. Yeah, I had lots of problems but she always saw me make jokes about them. She also hugged me and at the same time she was trying to cheer me up. She was wearing a yellow, Kennesaw State tee and said lovingly:

“Don’t ruin my t-shirt with your mascara.”

I looked at her gratefully and said half crying:

“I am not wearing any.”

Then I let all my hatred and frustration for KSU out.

“I hate this school. If I hadn’t already spent the money for fees last week, I would definitely go back home. I’m so sick and tired of bullshit of this school. “

I wasn’t saying these because I was angry. I had decided to buy one-way plane ticket to Istanbul with the money they were going to pay me in September. It would be enough. Then I thought of my parents and how much they invested in my education, not only financially. Was I being a spoiled brat? I was very exhausted, and I wanted to sleep peacefully. Jade started to make some phone calls. I guess she also called Cherie and informed her about my crisis. Jade kept telling me:

“You should know you are very strong. I’d go home after what happened at Social Security Office.”

I knew she was saying these to encourage me, but it wasn’t helping. It was stupid of me to stay here. I wasn’t welcomed here. KSU showed they didn’t want me with all the obstacles they put in my way.

This time it was Cherie to fix the problem. She knew the director of HR and called her. What happened next is actually very funny. They prepared me an off-cycle check within an hour. Then Cherie took me to the bank to deposit it. I paid my rent before they sent me a late notice. The moral of this story is if you know right people, others can bend the rules for you; if you don’t, then my friend, I am sorry but you are screwed. Again, human interference saved the day for me.

I really don’t know what KSU has for me and I still have at least one more semester to graduate. I am just lucky to have people like Jade and Cherie to take care of me. If it wasn’t for them, I don’t think I would survive here. And also I want that degree badly.

### **The Problem I Caused for Americans: The Question of Why I Do Not Look Like Others**

“If you are from Africa, why are you white,”<sup>62</sup> asks Karen to Cady suspiciously when they first meet in the school cafeteria in *Mean Girls*. When I first watched this movie in Turkey, I laughed at this sentence because I thought it was just a way Tina Fey, producer, wanted to show the audience how stupid Karen was. I realized Fey was actually criticizing Americans and their ignorance of the rest of the world with that single sentence. As a person from the Middle East region, I receive such questions on a daily basis. In my situation, the questions are “If you are from Turkey, why don’t you cover your hair?” or “If you are from the Middle East, why are you pale?” It occurred to me how little most Americans know about that part of the world actually while the western media is so involved in everything going on

---

<sup>62</sup> *Mean Girls*. Performed by Lindsey Lohan, Rachel McAddams, Tina Fey. The United States:

Paramount, 2004. Film.

there. Since I came here, people view me as a classic “Muslim” girl, a potential victim of Islam, an image that has been created by the western media. What I have been trying to achieve is to show there is also diversity in the Middle East for the past two years. However, most people still do not want to see beyond what their media has been feeding them for years, so they see me as a token. Even worse, while I was trying to break the stereotypes of a Middle Eastern girl in the images of people around me, I am afraid I’ve created new stereotypes.

American society loves stereotypes. It was the first word I learned when I started studying American Studies six years ago, and it has become an essential part of my studies and my American experience since then. Ghazi-Walid Falah suggests that Muslim women are represented in the western media either as passive victims or political agents.<sup>63</sup> Then, what happens if someone does not belong to the both of these categories? According to the people around me, I do not fit into any of these stereotypical categories, so they have a hard time pinpointing my whereabouts. The easiest solution some have is I cannot be Turkish. In fact, once I got into argument with someone about my origins. A random guy in the Student Center started to talk to me when I first came here:

“I like your accent. Where are you from?”

“Thank you. I’m Turkish,” I said.

He looked at me in surprise and said those words I will hear occasionally during my stay:

---

<sup>63</sup> Falah, Ghazi-Walid. "The Visual Representation of Muslim/Arab Women in Daily Newspapers in the United States." In *Geographies of Muslim Women: Gender, Religion, and Space*. New York: Guilford Press, 2005.

“You can’t be Turkish!”

This time, it was my turn to be surprised. So I asked him:

“Why is that?”

“Because you don’t look Turkish.”

“How many Turkish people have you actually met,” I asked laughingly

I was the first Turkish person he had actually met in person. Still, he could not accept the fact that I am Turkish because I do not look like those Middle Eastern women in the media portrayals. I break the tradition. The reason for such situations keep happening to me is in most people’s mind Middle East and Saudi Arabia are closely tied. Since Turkey is a part of the Middle East, I am also associated with those stereotypes: Hijab; olive skin; big, black eyes, passiveness, lack of education, and so on. They tend to forget, Turkey is also partly in Europe. I guess this is mostly because of media’s coverage of Muslims, so I don’t blame these people. I was also deceived by the media about the suburban life before I came here.

But the problem is most Americans, especially people I met at KSU know very little about other cultures. Also, these people tend to think all the countries in the world have same customs. For instance, I was at movie night organized by the Residence Assistance (RA) in my building. Two of my roommates were also there. Allen, the RA, told us he had pizza, drinks in the fridge, and gushers. I had never heard of gushers, so I asked him:

“What is gushers?”

The look on their faces was so weird. They were all very puzzled by my question. I felt like I had committed a crime or desecrated something.

“You never had gushers before?”

Well apparently since I am asking what they are, the answer is no. I thought to myself “She could be a politician with that intelligence.” But I didn’t say anything out loud. Instead I reminded them of a fact that they all should have learned by then.

“Guys, remember! I am not American.”

It feels like most people I’ve meet think there are the same rules or same customs in every culture. One of my ex-roommates, Jasmine, was devastated when she found out we don’t have Christmas in Turkey. I guess she forgot Christmas was more than a long vacation that involves lots of presents, but was actually a sacred day in Christianity. We were in the kitchen that day. Christmas was coming up, so another roommate asked me about my plans.

“What are you doing for Christmas?”

“Well, I’ll be here, resting.

Jasmine jumped into the conversation.

“So, you are not going home,” She sounded surprised.

“Nah, it isn’t worth to go home for such short time.”

She was shocked and started to mumble things about Christmas, family, and vacation.

“Jasmine, you know we don’t have Christmas in Turkey.”

Well, she didn’t know that, and she got crazy with the idea. Then I added.

“It’s just like a regular day for me, but no school.”

This was too much for her. She completely freaked out. Her eyes got bigger. She looked at my face as if I had been some sort of extraterrestrial creature from another galaxy. Not being able to handle this brand-new information, she left the room saying the same thing again and again:

“I can’t even...”

It is surprising that in a country full of foreigners, how little Americans know about other cultures, religions, and geography. I guess they expect everyone to learn about their culture but this is a selfish idea. In addition, they have more opportunity to learn about other cultures because they live with foreign people.

I actually had an identity crisis on my second day in Kennesaw. I had to attend the mandatory international student orientation. In the University Rooms of the Student Center, they put pink cartoons with continent or region names on the walls. One of the first things they asked us to do go under the cartoon where our countries were located. I did not know where I belonged because I never needed to distinguish between the Middle East and Europe. Every new student chose their region/continent except for me. Then I walked to Europe section which was right behind my table. I was still uncomfortable being there because I was not completely European, nor was I completely Middle Eastern.

Most people here tend to automatically assume I am Muslim because of my country. I used to confirm, but me being Muslim is also troublesome for them because I do not wear a hijab. The image of Muslim women is associated with covering hair. During my first semester, a friend in my department asked me why I did not wear the hijab like the other Muslim women in our program did. He assumed I did not wear it only in the United States because there is this tendency to believe that Islam forces women to cover their hair. I explained to him that most women in Turkey did not cover their hair, and it was up to their choice to do it or not. He, like most people, believed that the hijab was the symbol of oppression. It is hard for some to believe that there is a diversity of reasons why women choose to wear the hijab. There are some young women in Turkey who wear hijab because they think they look more beautiful with one.

Speaking of the hijab, I continued to get a lot of questions about it and about the burqa, as well. Some people fail to understand the reason why Muslim women cover their hair is for religious reasons. A funny dialogue happened between me and an American friend who claimed to have taken world religion class as an undergrad. She asked me why the Algerian girl in our program covered her hair. She asked “Is she bald or what?” I tried so hard not to burst into laughter, but she is not the only who wonders if Muslim women have hair underneath their headscarves.

The Burqa is a different issue. Lots of people ask me if everyone in Turkey is like me. That is what I meant when I said I started to create new stereotypes. I tell them many women do not cover their hair, but there are lots of them who do for different purposes. Older women, I say, wear their headscarves differently than younger people because their reason is more cultural than religious. They also ask me about the burqa and if many women wear it. My answer amuses them. I tell them there are only very few women who wear burqa, or Kara Çarşaf<sup>64</sup> as we call it in Turkey and that I was scared of those women, thinking they were boogymen when I was young. Actually, the majority of people in Turkey regardless of gender dislike the burqa because we do not think it is Islamic. Islam does not require a woman to cover her hands or face. Those women wear gloves and even sunglasses, so it is impossible to see anything. You cannot even decide if they are actually women or men disguising as women. There are also people in Turkey, especially young males who make fun of women with the burqa, calling them ninjas.

What I also noticed during my stay here was a tendency to associate everyone from the Middle East region with Saudi Arabians. That is why lots of people ask me if women are allowed to drive in Turkey. “Is anyone with dark skin Arab-American?” asks Moustafa

---

<sup>64</sup> Black veil

Bayoumi in his essay “The Race Is On: Muslims and Arabs in the American Imagination.”<sup>65</sup> I am confused with being Arabian even though I do not have dark skin. There were a lot of people who asked me what language we speak in Turkey. When I said “Turkish” they were surprised because they thought we spoke Arabic there. I explained that there are very few people who can actually speak Arabic in Turkey, and we only use Arabic in prayers because of Quran.

“There are assumptions that the West and its warriors must rush to liberate Muslim women from the chains imposed on them by their faith... Feminists of all shades are being urged to step forward to “save” the Muslim women from her plight.”<sup>66</sup> says Halef Afshar about victimization of Muslim women in the eyes of Westerners. That is why most people are surprised by my education. They think they are giving me compliments when they say things like “Oh wow, your English is very good.” or “You are very smart.” when in fact, these so-called compliments show their subtle racism and ignorance. It is again the media to put the blame on because of constant images of Muslim women as passive victims, vulnerable, oppressed, and uneducated. Then, using me as a reference point, they try to create a new form of stereotyping: If all Turkish women are like me. They ask me if everyone in Turkey can speak English very well like I do. The problem is those people cannot see beyond the

---

<sup>65</sup> Bayoumi, Moustafa. "The Race Is On: Muslims and Arabs in the American Imagination." In *Muslims and American Popular Culture*. Vol. 1. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in: Esseghaier, Mariam. "The Big Conceal: Representations of Hijab in *Little Mosque on Prairie*." In *Muslims and American Popular Culture*. Vol. 1. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014.

stereotypes, and when someone like me challenges their stereotypes, then they have the urge to create new ones. They just cannot accept I am an individual.

I have never been religious. I became sick and tired of being “profiled” with my country of origins, and I stopped confirming the questions about my religion. For a while, I told people I was not very religious, but this also created problems in that this time they wanted to know if there were a lot of atheists in Turkey and how Muslims treated atheists. I never claimed to be atheist, though. Since when does not being religious equate atheism? I found a solution to all these questions about my religion: I told people that I worship ancient Greek deities, especially 3As: Athena, Artemis, and Aphrodite. Most think I am joking, but am I?

It is definitely not the best time to be Muslim in the United States that still cannot recover from 9/11 attacks combined with ISIS threat in the Middle East and the recent Charlie Hebdo attacks, which most Americans viewed as an attack to freedom of speech, a right most Americans only favor when they can say whatever they want about others. The media stirs up everything with the constant stereotypes it imposes on Muslim women, eventually leading up othering Muslim women. Until I said I was Turkish, most people assumed I was European because of my countenance, and they do not hide their surprise. “Oh, I thought you were European.” I also get this a lot. I do not want to be European, nor do I want to be Middle Eastern. I do not want to be a symbol for all Turkish, Middle Eastern, Saudi Arabian, and Muslim women (apparently they are all the same thing here). I am just an individual person, not a part of a media stereotype, or a cultural representation of a community. Unfortunately, I am what those people see me: exotic, sexual, oppressed, and different.

### **The Life in a Suburb in the South: Not Like in the Movies**

I have always wanted live in a white, two-floor house with a garden full of colorful flowers and clean-cut bushes, surrounded by friendly neighbors, far from the intensity of the big city life until I actually started to live in one. At least, this was the suburban lifestyle I saw on TV. Spacious houses with basements and attics, bathrooms attached to bedrooms, everyone having their own bedrooms, some teenagers mowing the grass, pools in the backyard... These were only some of the things why I wanted to live in a suburb. Maybe it was the fact that we do not have suburbs in Turkey that this life seemed so attractive to me. Then I realized suburban life was not as fun as it was always portrayed in numerous American movies and TV series. I don't know about the suburban life in the North, but the Southern suburban cities are the most boring places on Earth, where people go to sleep as early as 10 pm. Having spent a year in the suburban Kennesaw, Georgia, I am so ready to go back to big city life where everything is within walking distance.

Of course, I've experienced some good things in the South even though the suburban life isn't as cool as it is portrayed in the media. I've studied American culture for four years in Turkey, mostly American history and how race and ethnicity are major factors that affect the country since its very foundation, but I've learned more about American life in a year ever since I came here. I still don't know much about the lifestyle in the West or in the North, but the Southern experience is a must for every outsider because I keep hearing other parts of the country are nothing like it is here.

Before I came here, I heard some many stereotypical things about Americans- that they were fat, stupid, selfish, and individualistic. Everyone who heard of my going to the States warned me not to gain weight because of eating too much McDonald's. Then I came here. In the mandatory international student orientation, we were again warned not to invade Americans' personal space because most people like me came from communal countries where people helped each other. I really didn't mind about their personal space stuff because I hate to be touched by people I don't know. I don't know if they treated me special or I managed to encounter very friendly Americans, but so far everyone I've met was super nice. Is it because of Southern culture? Or is it because I am a girl whom most American guys find attractive? Honestly, I don't have a clue but I am really glad that people here are very friendly, nice and helpful. For example, when I went Charleston, NC, I was trying to find my way and I kept asking people which way to go. Most people I asked also were tourists. Then I saw an old gentleman rushing towards me.

“I see you are looking for directions, Miss. Where do you want to go?”

I was trying to find the coast, so I told him. He was very kind and directed me. This is only one example. It is true, the South is full of gentlemen, even the teenagers. People hold the doors in the school for anyone, and they apologize to you if they don't see you behind them and don't hold the door for you. Or the boyfriends. I've dated some American southern

boys, and they all are super kind. They even open the car door for me and wait until I am seated, and then close it themselves.

I believe I experienced my most American as well as most Southern experience when I went to South Pasadena, Florida in the summer of 2014, a three-day vacation with a road trip. Back then, I did not realize I was experiencing one of the most “American” things: a road trip with friends, listening to music, dancing in the car while taking videos and photos. I went there with my American friend, Erinn and her friend Les. It took us more than eight hours to reach our destination because we stopped so many times for food and bathroom breaks on the road. The first part of the road was quite boring. After 7 pm, I took the passenger seat, and then the real fun begin. We blasted the music, listening to a hip-hop song that was playing on the radio, while trying to make “gangsta” moves with our hands and faces just like the ones we saw on hip-hop videos. I even don’t like this kind of music, but it was fun during that time. Then, an idea flashed into my mind, and we decided to take videos to immortalize that moment.

We had so much fun that we decided to take videos on our way back. I was both the DJ and the camera girl. I started playing the songs we’d previously decided one by one. First, I played “My First Kiss” by 3OH!3. As Kesha and the duo started singing “My first kiss went a little like this (kissing sound) and twist and twist (kissing sound),” Erinn and I started to sing along. When the song reached the chorus, we went wild in the car. Les didn’t know the lyrics so he only accompanied the music. As they sang “She won’t ever get enough once she gets a little touch, if I had it my way, you know that I’d make her say.... Oooooooooooooooooo,” we screamed along as loud as we could and started shaking our heads, sending each other kisses and the camera.

On our way to South Pasadena, we first stopped by the University of Florida in Gainesville. There I experienced another Southern thing: football. Even though the school was

still closed due to summer holiday, there were lots of hot guys practicing in the field. I realized I was missing something at Kennesaw State because we did not have a football team. I heard football was very big in the South even before I came here, but that day I experienced its significance. The field was very big. I had never been to a football field before until then. Everywhere was orange and blue, and there were green gators. Les also taught us the Gator Chomp, UF's football team's signature clap that looked like a gator's mouth. I really wished I studied there even though I don't even like football.

To people in Turkey American food equals fast food. They are not particularly wrong though, in the South, there is also very delicious southern cuisine. Casseroles, chicken pot pies, potato soup, deviled eggs, banana bread, red velvet cake, grits, and sweet potato are some of the things I learned to enjoy after I came to Georgia. Food was the only thing that was really hard to adjust to, especially breakfast. I still don't understand how people here feel full with cereal in the mornings. I was used to having a big breakfast with eggs, black olives, cheese, lots of bread, butter, jam, salami, and other stuff. Eating a bowl of cereal only made me nauseous.

When I went to The Commons, the only dining hall in KSU, I was disappointed because the food over there is either grilled or fried. Sometimes they had two options of soup, but they didn't have stew options. Even the vegetables were fried. Ever since I came here, I suffered from constipation because of all the dry food.

BBQ is another important part of Southern cuisine and culture. If the weather is good, then people start BBQing on their porches, inviting friends, and having some "quality time." We also love BBQ a lot in Turkey, but since we live in buildings, we go to the seaside or meadows to BBQ. The beauty of suburban houses with garden is people can do BBQ whenever they feel like it. This is how they also celebrate their independence day, 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Cherie and her family invited me to their place for 4<sup>th</sup> of July. It was such a lovely day. I was

wearing a yellow-pink floral skirt with a white tank top. The grandma told me I looked like 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Of course I didn't understand it because I was missing red and blue in my outfit. So I asked Cherie what she meant by that.

“Your floral skirt looks Southern. That’s why she said that.”

Honestly, I bought that skirt on Amazon for two bucks. It was such a bargain, but if grandma told me I looked like 4<sup>th</sup> of July, I wouldn't disagree. Then a very funny thing happened. Instead of burgers and hot dogs, they decided to do shish kabob that day. So Cherie asked me:

“Have you ever had shish kabob before?”

Chuckling, I answered.

“Yeah, a couple of times.”

Then Steve, Cherie's husband jumped in.

“Honey, they invented it.”

Religion is a big force in the South. Even before I came here I knew about how conservative the South was, but I underestimated the power of religion. The South must be the only place where famous fast food chains such as Chick-fil-A and lots of restaurants are closed on Sundays.<sup>67</sup> I guess they take the biblical verse about the creation of the world too seriously. “God created the world in 6 days and rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day.” Friday is our sacred day; some places close their doors during afternoon prayer, but they reopen it after the prayer is over. But there, those places are closed all day.

---

<sup>67</sup> I have recently been told by Dr. Rebecca Hill that Chick-Fil-A is a religious restaurant chain. I did not know about it back then, so it does not surprise me anymore.

At Kennesaw I found Bible discussion groups all over the campus. They walk around in groups of 3-4 people and invite everyone to a Bible discussion study group that is about to start in 10 minutes. They also knock on each door if you live in the dorms. They wouldn't take "no" for an answer and they wouldn't leave until you closed the door. I tried to be very respectful to their religion, but I hate it when people keep asking me to join in one especially after I tell them I am not Christian. The answer is always the same:

"That's okay, you still can come."

I think it is not cool to keep asking people to join them when someone does not show any kind of interest, especially if they say they are not Christian. I have been to such a discussion group before just out of curiosity, and some people tried to convert me to Christianity, not realizing I was not actually religious at all.

If someone says that racism is over in the United States, don't believe them. It is still a part of at least Southern life. People I met there kept asking me about roommates. The most common question they asked was:

"Are they white or black?"

What does it matter as long as they are good roommates? Right! But, it is never good enough for some people. My parents also were worried about my roommates all being African-Americans, but their worries stemmed from their ignorance about black people. They only see them on TV, and most of the time black people are criminals, burglars, thieves, and rapists. Here, people live with them. I also got such questions a lot. When people learned that I am Turkish, they would ask bluntly:

"So, are Turkish people white?"

Such people also should acknowledge asking people if they are white or not is really rude. Again, Turkey's location causes this confusion. Some people think it is in Europe, but I don't have blonde hair. Others think it is in the Middle East, but I am not dark skinned as they assume. That's why they asked me, not thinking it would offend me. Honestly, I was not offended by such questions because they wanted to learn. Yet, I feel upset for them. I wonder how they would react if they knew Middle Easterners and North Africans are also in the white race category. White race in the South means pale skin, blue eyes, and blonde hair, classic Anglo traits.

During my four year college education in Turkey, I read many articles, fictions, and biographies written by immigrants in the US, and they talked about the same thing: racial discrimination. Except for one incident when I first came here, I've never experienced such a thing. On the first day I moved into my dorm room I met a blonde guy with blue eyes, the classic American image in the media, named Matt. He was a transfer student, so he was also new here. We became very close, and he even told me he liked me. Then I witnessed how a person could change in a couple of hours. The next day he told me.

“I don't want to start a relationship with you. I can't have a girlfriend that I can't introduce to my parents.”

Previously, he told me that his parents were very religious, so I knew they hated black folks. At least, that's what Matt told me. His parents always made bad comments on black people. Apparently, they also hated Muslims and foreigners. After all we steal their jobs! I was very hurt though because I didn't have any friends back then, and the first person I met was a complete douchebag. So, I told him:

“Guess what? I don't wanna meet your stupid parents!”

Indeed, I did not. I also did not want him as a boyfriend. I just needed a friend, but he misunderstood me, I supposed. He didn't say anything to defend his parents. I meant what I said. I really didn't want to affiliate with such narrow-minded, bigoted people. Back then, I feared that if every time I met someone, I would have to defend myself. Luckily, this was a one-time incident, but I learned great deal out of it. There are still people who are bigoted against foreigners that I need to be careful to protect myself. Some of these people, like Matt's parents, use religion for their personal hatred, but I know all holy books command the same things: peace, harmony, and integrity. "Love thy neighbor."

I am not really sure about why I haven't experienced discrimination here except for this incident. It might be because of my European complexion that I don't "look Turkish" or it might be because I came here on a student visa not as an immigrant. Or maybe because American guys find me attractive. The reason is my student status and me being sexually objectified by American guys. I met a guy named Tim in the summer. He was quite good looking, tall, dark haired and with big brown eyes. His grandmother was Italian, but he was American. He hated immigrants, especially Mexicans. One day during a conversation, he was again talking badly about immigrants. So I said:

"I'm starting to get offended because I am also foreigner."

"No, no! Your situation is different. You came here as a student with legal ways."

So, he hated people who only come here illegal ways to seek a better lifestyle for themselves and their families. Then he added:

"Plus, you're very sexy."

I wondered if he'd still think I was sexy if I was illegal here. I was scared to learn his response, so I didn't ask him.

While I learned about American racism in Turkey during four years of my theoretical study of American culture, none of my American professors brought up how much Southerners love guns. Most of these people are gun-crazy, and their justification is very simple- that owning guns reduces crimes. Here, you can legally own a gun when 18, but you are not old enough to drink until you reach 21. So, drinking requires more responsibility than guns, as if all those random school shootings didn't happen here. I was very surprised with the abundance of gun shops when I first came here. People over 18 can legally buy guns from those shops because it's their constitutional right, and most Southerners love to use this right. If you don't like guns, they think you're crazy. On Thanksgiving, Cherie invited me to her place. One of her sons, David is working in a gun-shop, so he bought himself some early Christmas presents there. Another son, Josh, very keen on guns, was checking out his new gun and asked me if I ever shot with one.

"I hate guns!" I said.

He was shocked and made fun of me for not liking guns.

"What kind of people don't like guns?"

I couldn't help it but, responded him sassily.

"Normal ones!"

He was amused at my answer, but all this gun-craziness does not appeal to me at all.

Another thing that still surprises me is people have the right to shoot down anyone trespassing. It doesn't matter if you're lost or looking for directions. If you end up in one of those neighborhoods, and especially you're a person of color, my friend, you're doomed. My friend, Erinn and I were searching for Red Top Mountain when we got lost in a neighborhood. As we were looking for a way out, she said,

“This looks like the sort of place where they shoot strangers.”

At first, I thought she was joking, but she was dead serious. Getting lost in the South can have very dangerous outcomes.

During our Florida trip, Erinn and I almost got shot because we accidentally broke into someone else’s flat. That is quite a funny story. At that moment, it was very scary though. On our last night in Florida, we were in the pool in the neighborhood where Les’ parents’ house was located. Les went to watch TV and left Erinn and me alone in the pool. Then the weather started to get bad. A storm was close. By the time we decided to go home, it had already started raining, so we started to run. The building was close to the pool.

Les’ place, number 302 flat, was on the third floor, so we took the elevator. Before I reached the key Les had given me, Erinn pushed the door. To our surprise it was open. “Les knew I had the key so why did he leave the door ajar,” I thought. Inside, it was also very dark; all the lights were off, which was weird because he always left the one in the corridor on. As I entered the flat, I knew there was something wrong. There was a big, antique looking mirror behind the door where it should have been the girl’s painting in red. Erinn also realized it, and we both looked at each other in great terror and surprise and responded to the situation the way most reasonable people would do: We screamed.

“OMG! I can’t believe we are in the wrong place, let’s get out of here.”

As I said this, the couple who owned the flat also heard our breaking in, and they called out a girl’s name. Erinn then apologized:

“We are terribly sorry, we mistook your flat for ours.”

We closed the door and rushed to the elevator. I was still looking at the flat’s number. Yes, it was 302, and I was perfectly sure ours was also 302. Then it hit me. We were in the

wrong building. Before we reached the elevator, the couple came to the door and Erinn and I started apologizing altogether.

“We are really sorry, we confused the flats”

“It is crazy outside so we were running and we thought it was our friend’s flat,” I added.

It must have been quite a funny view: Two girls, in their bikinis, soaked, constantly apologizing. I was so scared to death because I heard all the stories about the right to shoot trespassers. We went there for fun, and yet, we committed a crime, unintentionally. All these thoughts passed through my mind as we stood there, apologizing to the couple. Luckily, they didn’t call the cops or they didn’t shoot us. But the guy told us:

“If you girls were in another state, you could have been shot.”

Honestly, I thought that was a funny thing to say because we were in that state where people shot trespassers. I guess we were lucky that day.

Even though Georgia is not supposed to be very cold in the winter, last year it was freezing. I wasn’t prepared for it because when I’d searched the climate before coming here, I read it had a mild climate. I don’t know if it’s global warming or my bad luck, but it gets cold here in the winter with strong winds that hurt every cell in my body. However, people still tend to wear flip-flops even when it is raining. Flip-flops are like a pride uniform for Southerners. People wear them with shorts, dresses, jeans, skirts, shortly under every piece of clothing. Sandals are also very common. But something I’ve seen has lead me to question Southern taste in clothing. I’ve seen many young men on campus who wears sandals with white socks. In Turkey we call such people hillbillies. I don’t know how the word is used here, but in Turkey it is insulting. Yet, these folks are college students. Guys need to understand it looks atrocious to wear sandals with socks, especially white ones. I also do not

get the logic behind this horrible combination. I wear sandals so my feet can breathe in the summer. So why would I suffocate my feet with socks? Or I wear socks with sneakers when it's chilly outside so my feet won't get cold. Then why wear sandals if you're worried about cold? I really couldn't make sense of it.

Speaking of hillbillies, some people have very thick Southern accents, but they do not realize it. When I didn't understand what they were saying, they automatically thought it was because my English was bad. No, I can understand English perfectly, but not with that thick accent. My buddy, Chris and I used to go to the Sidelines, a sports bar in Kennesaw, to play air hockey in the summer. One day after my victory, we were sitting on a table next to the air hockey table in the back of the bar. Then two guys came to play. Chris and the guy on our side started to talk. I had too much drink, so I was a bit tipsy. I couldn't understand anything he was saying. I kept asking Chris:

“I didn't understand that, what did he say?”

Chris was translating his speech into normal English for me. The guy, of course, thought my English wasn't good. Well, I couldn't understand anything he said because of his accent. I don't remember if I told him about his accent or not. Maybe I was more than tipsy.

The final topic I learned about is the hardest thing in the southern suburban life: public transportation. If you are not driving a car, then you're so screwed because the public transportation system here is terrible. My American professors in Turkey didn't warn me about it, maybe because none of them were from the South. Most people own a car and drive, but there are a lot of people who don't. However, nobody cares about us. I couldn't even go to grocery shopping whenever I wanted as I used to in Turkey. Last year, I needed a ride from someone else, and I hated asking someone to give me a ride. The fact that there is no public transportation made me dependent on others, which really upset me. This year, B.O.B, KSU's

shuttle for students and faculty, goes to Wal-Mart on Chastain Meadows, but it was limited. The green route goes there on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 10 am and 3 pm. It didn't always fit into my schedule so, I hated it. I hated being an international student who doesn't drive here at KSU. It really sucked. The school wants to attract more international students, but they do not provide necessary services for us. If the busses would work at the weekends during the semester, it'd be much easier. One thing I have observed on my B.O.B rides is American students, especially blacks, ride it to go to Wal-Mart or to Town Center Mall more than the international students. I guess that not all American students drive in KSU.

The city's public transportation is even worse. There is a Cobb County Transit (CCT) that comes to campus every hour that goes to Marietta, but it doesn't work on Sundays. One day, I needed to go to downtown Atlanta for a class project during the day, so I decided to take the bus. That turned out to be a big mistake. I took CCT till the last stop, Marietta Transfer Center. There, I took another one that went the Art Center. Normally, if there is no traffic the distance between Kennesaw and Atlanta lasts 25-30 minutes. Instead, it took nearly an hour to reach Marietta Transfer Center, then another hour to go to the Art Center. The Art Center is a stop where people also can take MARTA, the crappy subway/train system. There are different lines that are signified by colors, and each line runs every 15 minutes. I don't remember which one I needed to take but I remember I also needed to transfer again. It took me more than 3 hours to reach my destination. And on my way, it was even longer because I waited for the bus on each stop. I promised myself not to use public transportation ever again while going to Atlanta.

What I noticed during my trip to Atlanta that day was only African-Americans and other racial minority groups tend to use the public transportation. The only white people who used the bus was elderly people, most probably they are no longer allowed to drive due to their age, and a handicapped lady who needed to go to Kennestone Hospital. The other

passengers were all racial minorities from all age groups. There were no young or middle-aged, white passengers.

People here do not question the lack of public transportation because they drive. But with a proper public transportation system, it would eliminate the traffic jam on I-75 during rush hour, and it would be more environment-friendly. I kept asking people about this issue but none of their responses satisfied me. Then I found the answer in a book for a class. In the spring, I took a course related to prisons and criminal justice system and there we read Kevin Kruse's *White Flight*. According to Kruse, the white people after 1950s didn't want to live with black people in the same neighborhood so they started to move out of city center, thus creating neighborhoods in Cobb County and elsewhere. They also didn't want to share the public transportation with black people, hence they opted for not having a public transportation at all. This answer seemed plausible to me but my ex-boyfriend, Adam-born and raised southerner, antagonized me by saying it was stupid. So I confronted him:

“Then tell me why there is no effective public transportation system in one of the biggest cities in the United States?”

He couldn't propose an answer, but he knew it wasn't about racism. Well, if he can't propose a counter argument to Kruse, I will take Kruse's argument into consideration.

This is basically my experience in the South. I lived here only for a year and a half, but I learned so much more about American life and American culture than all the books, articles, and essays that I read. Southern life is the practice part for my theoretical knowledge. It is also good to be a part of the culture that I've been studying since 2009.

## **Lies and Deceits of Media's Suburbia**

When I first spotted Cherie's house on my first day in the United States, the first thought that crossed my mind was it did not look like the classic suburban houses I saw on TV. Having growing up in Turkey, unfamiliar to suburban culture of the United States, my only source was American TV series or movies I used to watch. *Desperate Housewives*, *Pretty Little Liars*, *Gilmore Girls* and even *The Stepford Wives* showed me how the suburban life was. All the houses in these TV series or movies were the same. Everyone knew each other. They would say "hi" to each other. Each house was white, big, two-story, with a garden full of colorful flowers, clean-cut bushes, nice trees, fences to separate properties, a big porch in the front, and a wooden mailbox. When I was in Turkey, my sister and I would have conversations about owning a suburban house just like the ones on TV because they looked spacious, neat, and fancy. All the children would have their own rooms where they decorated to their own taste. They even had their own bathrooms attached to their rooms. How cool was that! Having lived all my life in a three bedroom flat, having to share my bedroom with my sister until she got married in 2009, the same year I started college, I had never had privacy at home unlike the kids on TV. How I wished many times if only we had suburbs in Turkey. Well, living in the United States in a suburban town, now I am counting days to go back to city life because, only now can I see what is wrong in the portrayals of suburban life on TV. Suburbs are not only identical housing units like the ones on TV, they are the degenerated American way of life.

The more have I researched about suburbs, the more appalled I have felt. Even though suburbs are the dominant residential pattern in the United States, what it does is to create separation. Even though, houses in the suburbs I have seen or visited in Kennesaw, Acworth, Woodstock, or Marietta are not all similar, there are a lot of factors that suburbs have much in common such as class and race. What I observed on my first day in the United States was

quite a revelation to me. On the outside, the suburban neighborhood where Cherie and her family lives seems like it is different from what I have seen on TV. Cherie's suburban house does not have a big porch in the front, though it did have a deck in the back. There were no fences or fancy bushes. Even the houses in the same neighborhood differed from one another in size, color, and shape. That is why I thought suburbs might be different.

When I was watching *Desperate Housewives*, I have never questioned why the main characters except for Gabrielle Solis were white Americans. It never felt weird why there were only white and very few Hispanic-white people lived in Wisteria Lanes, the fictional suburban town in the series. Honestly, I did not realize there was a racial pattern in the suburbs until I started researching on the suburbs. The reason why I started researching on the suburbs was actually the fact that I have always wanted to live in one. Yet, my research showed me the other face of the suburban life: that they are the representation of American culture. According to Kenneth T. Jackson, "Suburbia is perhaps more representative of American culture than big cars, tall buildings, or professional football."<sup>68</sup> When I was a freshman in college, I did a presentation on American Dream, and owning a suburban house was a part of the dream. It did not seem very clear back then. I never fully understood why owning a house in the suburbs would be a part of the American Dream. Yes, everyone wants to have their own house, but why suburbia? I explored the real meaning behind those words in Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier*. "Suburbia symbolizes the fullest, most unadulterated embodiment of contemporary culture; it is a manifestation of such fundamental characteristics of American society as conspicuous consumption, a reliance upon the private automobile, upward mobility, the separation of the family into nuclear units, the widening division

---

<sup>68</sup> Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

between work and leisure, and a tendency toward racial and economic exclusiveness.”<sup>69</sup> Most people see owning a house in the suburbs is their constitutional right. Combined with suburbia meaning American culture, everything started to make sense.

Suburbs differ from each other in terms of race and class. The notion of similarity of the suburbanites is actually more about how much those people make or what color is their skin than suburban houses being alike. When I watched *The Stepford Wives*, I did not understand it was criticizing this type of sameness because as Kevin Kruse points it out, early suburbanization is the culture of domesticity and separation of work and home.<sup>70</sup> The suburban town in the movie is full of similar kind of perfect housewives with beautiful gardens and clean houses. They are all rich and white, perfectly happy and content with their lives.

With the advancement of more and more women joining to the workforce, suburbs are no longer arenas of domesticity, but the desire for the separation of work and home still dominates the minds of most people. When I think of suburban life, the image of retired couples comes to my mind. However, even the young people desire to buy a house in a safe neighborhood, far from the hassle of the big city life, where they can have a big, happy, nuclear family in the future. Most of my friends even hate going to Atlanta during the day, claiming it is too dangerous. As a person who lived in Ankara, capital of Turkey and the second biggest city, for four years by myself, I do not think Atlanta is more dangerous than any other big cities. However, the metropolitan is notorious for homelessness and crime, at least for people I met here. Michael Jones-Correa asks a question in his essay. “If middle class and poorer immigrants live in the same metropolitan area, will ethnic similarities lead to

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Kruse, Kevin Michael, and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds. *The New Suburban History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

organizational links and common political mobilization, or will middle class Latinos find more in common with other middle-class homeowners regardless of ethnicity or race?”<sup>71</sup> In other words, does class overshadow ethnicity or race? Jones-Correa does not provide a clear answer for his question, but I can answer this question based on my own experience.

Last year, I shared an apartment with three African-American girls, two of them from Georgia and one from Wisconsin. During a conversation in the kitchen, I told Chandler, from Georgia, and Taneisha, from Wisconsin, that I wanted to go to Atlanta. They looked at me as if I was crazy, and started telling me very horrible stories about crime incidents in the city. While they were talking, Taneisha’s boyfriend walked in to the kitchen. Taneisha involved him in the conversation.

“Hey, Jovar. Did you know she (referring to me) wants to go to Atlanta?”

“Oh no, you don’t want that,” he told me. Then he started telling me how foreign girls, especially Asians, disappear at the airport, referring to human trafficking. Well, they did scare me a lot. Then they all told me to be careful about black guys in downtown Atlanta.

From this one example it can be claimed that these three black teenagers who all come from middle-class backgrounds favored class over race. They all grew up in the suburbs, and never lived in a big city. They even did not go to Atlanta during the day because they thought it was a very dangerous place. They advised me not to go there to protect me while they failed to recognize the fact that they were contributing to the stereotype of the big, bad wolves wandering in the city. In this case, big, bad wolves are poor, black men who pickpocket, rob, kidnap, even murder.

If I had my own means to go to Atlanta, most probably I would spend most of the week there, but it is nearly impossible to go to the city from Cobb County. The last time I went there by myself, which was a day before the St. Patrick’s Day, I first took Route 40 to

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

Marietta Transfer Center from Kennesaw State's campus. The journey lasted an hour. Then, I took route 10 to Arts Center Station in Atlanta from there for a good hour. There, you can take MARTA to your destination. So, in order for a person without personal transportation to come to Cobb County, they need to spend at least two hours on the road. There is a vicious cycle here. Due to the scarcity of public transportation, people rely on their cars. On the other hand, since people use their personal means of transportation, the demand for public transportation remains very low. The growth of the suburban lifestyle is heavily based on the popularity of personal means of transportation. Since the majority of people drive including high-school and college students, people prefer to commute to their work and school while they live far from the city. Kennesaw State, for instance, has a reputation for commuter school. This is also another reason why there is always heavy traffic on I-75, the Interstate next to Kennesaw State that goes to Atlanta.

Normally designed to be affordable housing units for veterans who came back from WWII and working class people, suburbs are now more preferred by middle and upper class people because they are seen as privileged places. There are some suburbs that have their own swimming pools, golf courses, gyms, and other kind of leisure activities. These units are exclusive to the suburbanites only and can only be entered with an electronic key card to eliminate the risk of intruders. These kinds of suburbs are the image of heavenly place on Earth, where people who can afford can enjoy their spare time. What they do is to alienate themselves from the city and its problems while they alienate themselves from other people in their perfectly trimmed backyards, having only salutations with their neighborhoods. Welcome to the fake paradise where everyone salutes each other and wishes one another "Good day, neighbor" smilingly but actually do not even know each other's names.

## Welcome to the Wild Wild South: Gun Fever in Georgia

“This is not Texas.” This is an expression most people tend to use in Turkey to indicate there are certain rules that should be followed or people cannot act violently. Most probably, the expression comes from 1950s famous comic Texas-Tommicks, an Italian comic book series. Second class, maybe third class western movies shown on TRT, Turkish National Broadcasting Company, every Sunday morning that take place in the Wild Wild West also may have something to do with this expression. Texas, thus, has a reputation in Turkey for cowboys, guns, horses, and barren land. If only people in Turkey knew about gun-craziness in Georgia, then they would change the expression into “This ain’t Georgia.”

Passion is the right word to describe most Georgians’ relationship with guns. They call owning guns their constitutional right, freedom, or self-protection. However, guns mean more than just tools for protection as far as I have observed. Nor is it about freedom to fulfill the Second Amendment of the U.S Constitution. This is simply “gun fever.”

Effective from July 1, 2014, guns are permitted in public places in Georgia including restaurants, schools, and even some parts of Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, the busiest airport in the United States under The Safe Carry Protection Act of 2014.<sup>72</sup> This legislation excludes legislative chambers. Universities and business owners are still allowed to have their own gun policies. As for Kennesaw State University, all guns and sharp objects that could be considered weapons are forbidden on campus territory including the dorms. This policy is the one thing KSU is doing right.

When I express my views against extreme armament in the state, I receive a particular question: “Would I wish to own a gun when I encountered someone with a gun?” I really do

---

<sup>72</sup> Jonsson, Patrik. "Georgia adopts law allowing guns at airports, bars, most other places." *Christian Science Monitor*, April 23, 2014., N.PAG, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 05, 2015).

not understand what kind of sick fantasy those people are living. Do they expect me to pull a gun from my purse and shoot the person before they shoot me? I have never believed guns are the source of protection. There is also a big logic error here. According to the popular belief, I need a gun to protect me from other guns. How about making some strict laws regarding owning and carrying guns, or even producing more guns? The same legislation also lowers the age to carry a gun from 21 to 18.<sup>73</sup> Here is another logic error I see in Georgia. One needs to be 21 and older to consume alcoholic beverages, but when 18, you can get a gun. So, drinking requires more responsibility than owning a lethal weapon in this sense.

Georgia, as far as I have seen from my research, has always been flexible when it comes to guns and gun-related legislation. That is why gun smuggling is very common here.<sup>74</sup> Georgia is also very geopolitically convenient for gun trafficking in that it is in the middle of the South, and is connected to lots of different highways.

According to *the Atlanta Constitution's* article on December 13, 1994, Georgia "is the prime source for gun-runners' deliveries into major cities of the nation's Northeast corridor. Transportation is part of the reason, with Interstate 95 providing an easy route for dealers shipping guns into that lucrative market. But just as Willie Sutton is apocryphally quoted as saying he robbed banks because that's where the money is, gun-runners work out of Georgia because that's where the guns are available."<sup>75</sup> Even the criminals make fun of Georgia's loose

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Davis, Janel. "Georgia Is a Leader in Gun Trafficking." *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, March 20, 2013, Main Edition ed., Metro News sec. Accessed March 5, 2015.

[http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21\\_T21612681517&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\\_T21612681521&cisb=22\\_T21612681520&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8379&docNo=5](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T21612681517&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T21612681521&cisb=22_T21612681520&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8379&docNo=5).

<sup>75</sup> "Georgia's Deadly Export." *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, December 13, 1994, Editorial, Section A sec. Accessed March 5, 2015.

<http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd>

gun legislations, yet people still think of guns as necessary evil- something that would protect them against all the bad things out there. It is Georgia's lack of laws that create the problem, and with this new legislation, they only add more ingredients into the crucible.

A few weeks ago, I saw on my Facebook timeline a post regarding guns. It read "A couple of hours ago, I put my rifle in the porch directed to the passers, when I checked on it, I could not believe it, but nobody was killed." The person, obviously, was trying to be funny, but I do not think guns are a joking matter. Yes, gun themselves do not kill anybody, but they create a heightened sense of self-confidence in the people to carry them.

Every week, we hear about school shootings throughout the United States. How in the world a high schooler obtains a gun is a mystery. Most probably, they find it among their parents' belongings and decide to start a killing spree because of their own personal problems. Georgia has a solution for this: armament of high school teachers. Again, more guns to make up for already existing ones. It is like a bad cop-good cop story. The ones that are supposed to "protect" us are the good guns while the ones that are to harm us are bad guns.

Kennesaw might seem like a regular, boring suburban town, but this place has its own crazy gun laws. Since 1982, there has been a law in Kennesaw that makes gun ownership a mandatory task for all homeowners.<sup>76</sup> It is said that robberies have dropped drastically since the law enacted. I really do not care if people keep guns in their bedrooms to feel safe, but there is something for sure. It is easy to kill your spouse easily with that gun during an argument. Indeed, these kinds of things happen a lot in Kennesaw. I remember one of them

---

=true&risb=21\_T21612681517&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\_T21612681521&cisb=22\_T21612681520&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8379&docNo=11h.

<sup>76</sup> Kwong, Matt. "A town that welcomes you with open arms." *Maclean's* 126, no. 14 (April 15, 2013): 22. *MasterFILE Elite*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 05, 2015).

distinctly because the women who killed her husband worked for Kennesaw State. I have never seen her, but she helped me with my project. It would have never occurred to me that she would do such a thing. She first killed her husband, then herself with a gun most probably purchased as a part of the law of 1982.<sup>77</sup>

In season nine, episode two of *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, Sweet Dee and Dennis try to show everyone how easy it is to purchase guns, but they are denied at the registered gun shop, Dee having a history of institutionalization and Dennis having a background of felonious acts.<sup>78</sup> Pennsylvania, New York, and some other states might have stricter laws regarding purchasing guns, but Georgia does not. New York City is portrayed as the crime capital in the United States. This lovely peach state is where most of the guns involved in crimes come from. Or should I say “gun state”?

What is also horrifying is Georgia even does not have laws relating people under 18 possessing guns.<sup>79</sup> So, if a child kills someone with a gun, a parent cannot be held responsible for it. I wondered “Seriously, who writes these laws?” Parents are supposed to responsible for their children and what they do until they are legal, and that age is 18. If a child kills someone with a gun, it means either the parents fail to educate their kid, or they are neglectful.

The Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, the busiest one where hundreds of flights take off and land, where thousands of people come and go every day is one of the venues

---

<sup>77</sup> Kathianne Boniello, “Spousal slay and suicide,” *The New York Post*, June 8, 2014, All Editions. Accessed May 12, 2015.

[http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/Inacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21\\_T22026721466&format=GNBFI&sort=DATE,D,H&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\\_T22026721462&cisb=22\\_T22026721461&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=164207&docNo=10](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/Inacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T22026721466&format=GNBFI&sort=DATE,D,H&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T22026721462&cisb=22_T22026721461&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=164207&docNo=10)

<sup>78</sup> *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, performed by Charlie Day, Glenn Howerton, and Danny Devito (2005; Philadelphia: 2013.), Web

<sup>79</sup> Judd, Alan. "Study: State Gun Laws Lacking; Georgia's Overall Rank on Firearms Restrictions Is Lower than All but Six States, N.Y. Institute Says." *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, April 13, 2000, News sec. Accessed March 5, 2015.

[http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/Inacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21\\_T21612681517&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\\_T21612681521&cisb=22\\_T21612681520&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8379&docNo=3](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/Inacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T21612681517&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T21612681521&cisb=22_T21612681520&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8379&docNo=3)

where guns are legally carried; at least, some parts of the airport. As a part of the new law, the police are not allowed to ask for permit to carry guns, so those guns might be legal or illegal. Let's create a small scenario here. Someone with a gun walks in the airport visible to the eye because remember, as a part of the new law, they do not have to tuck their guns underneath clothing. The airport security is not allowed to see the permit, or ask the person to leave. What kind of chaos would that situation make? Seeing someone walking in the airport with a gun. The United States has been crazy about airport security since 9/11 attacks. Guns in a busy, international airport? Yes, this seems very smart. Let's stir up the situation. The guy carrying the gun is dark skinned, wearing a turban, having a beard. How would airport security respond to this man? Would they still see it as a man performing his right to carry a gun with him or would he be a vile person trying to attack the freedom of the United States? If Georgia loves having guns, I think the next step they should take is to make it legal to carry guns on planes coming to Georgia in case someone sneaks a weapon into the plane and tries to overthrow the pilots and hijack the plane. Then the freedom lover, law-abiding peach state citizens can take out that person with their guns. This sounds silly, doesn't it? Making guns legal in public places is also stupid. I do not know how I would react if I saw some people with guns while I am eating at a restaurant. I was taught in my high school philosophy classes your freedom ends where mine starts. Who cares if their freedom to carry their guns with them intervenes my freedom to have dinner in peace?

The only argument pro-gun people suggest is guns are for protection. I wonder what they are protecting themselves against with AK-47 or armor-piercing bullets. Aliens? Zombies? Invasion of freedom-hating countries? It would be honest if they admitted they just loved having too many guns with them. In fact, I knew someone who bought guns every month because he saw purchasing guns as his constitutional right, which he liked to perform.

I don't like guns. What I don't like more than guns is when some people here make fun of me for not having shot with a gun. Why is it surprising here not to fancy guns? I don't even want to touch a gun. I held one once, and I hated the feeling. I feel like anti-gun people are outnumbered in Georgia considering all the gun shops. There are more gun shops than bookstores in this freedom-oriented place. Who needs to buy illegal guns in the dark alleys whereas everywhere is full of gun shops?

### **More than just a band: Avenged Sevenfold**

On a cold, gloomy afternoon in Ankara on December 28, 2009, I was checking out the Internet, hoping something amusing would come up to brighten my day. As always, I was clicking on some headlines on my favorite forum-style website mundanely. Then I saw The Rev's, drummer of metal band Avenged Sevenfold, title. Excitedly, I clicked on it, hoping someone wrote about their new album. Around that time, the band members were in the studio, working on a new album. However, what was written was not amusing at all, nor exciting. If that was a joke, it was not funny. Someone wrote the Rev was found dead earlier in his house. I was shocked; I could not even blink my eyes. I sat there as if I had been petrified. Then what I did was to look at Facebook page to see if it was real. "How could have he died? He was too young to die. Too cheerful, too talented. He was supposed to make dozens of new albums, full of brilliant music. No, no. There must have been a mistake," I thought. If someone was joking, surely I was not laughing. Unfortunately, it was not a joke. How I wished millions of times it had been a terrible joke.

What I did next to run to my friend, Ece's room because I could no longer stay in my room. I ran towards her and started crying on her shoulder. She was shocked to see me that

fragile because among our group, I was the tough one. I knew she was the only person to understand how I felt. None of my other friends could not relate to my pain because for them Avenged Sevenfold (A7X) was just a metal band that I liked. They were wrong, so wrong. I did not like them, my feelings for A7X had surpassed liking.

“Fandom is more than the mere act of being a fan of something: it is a collective strategy, a communal effort to form interpretive communities that in their subcultural cohesion evaded the preferred and intended meaning of the “power bloc” represented by popular media,”<sup>80</sup> write Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington “Why Study Fans?”. As they say, I was not the only who suffered from Jimmy’s death, and we the fans collectively supported the remaining band members using social media.

People often ask me why I love Avenged Sevenfold. Honestly, I do not have an answer. I have thought about it, and I could not come up with a non-cliché answer. Then, one day the answer occurred to me while I was listening to them. I do not have to have an answer for this question since this question is wrong. Nobody asks a mother why she loves her kids. She does not need a reason to love her kids no matter how stupid, ugly, violent her kids might be. They are a part of her. Ever since I heard “Bat Country” on TV, A7X has become a part of my life, and they have the ability to make me happy in my darkest hours.

People also call me a “basic fan girl” because of my unconditional love for them. As Rosemary Lucy Hill points out in her article “Imaginary Community,” women in music scene tend to be seen as groupies, and they are highly underestimated in fandom-related studies.<sup>81</sup> I do not even fit into a regular metalhead stereotype. First of all, I do not wear anything black unless they are cute outfits. I do not have any tattoos, or piercings. That’s why most people do

---

<sup>80</sup> “Why Study Fans?” In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington. New York: New York University Press, 2007.

<sup>81</sup> Hill, Rosemary Lucy. “Reconceptualizing Hard Rock and Metal Fans as a Group: Imaginary Community.” *International Journal of Community Music* 7, no. 2 (2014): 173-87. Accessed February 10, 2015. EBSCHO.

not believe me when I say A7X is my favorite band. Some even see me as a “wannabe princess” who tries to act like a rebel. This is also wrong. I am not a dysfunctional teenager who finds a safe haven in music. I just love their music. Yes, there are times I can relate to their songs, but most of the time I don’t because the band members tend to write about their political and religious views which I disagree with. Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington explain what being a fan is with the fact that in early fandom studies, stereotypes adhered to the fans were the dominant factors.<sup>82</sup> The stereotypes remain as a powerful tool in describing fans even today.

Then what does it mean to be a fan? Early fan studies, as explained in “Why Study Fans?” focused on fans who were involved with conventions, letter-writing campaigns, and other interactions with entertainers. Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington also discusses fans who do not participate in such interactive campaigns, but just enjoy the product.<sup>83</sup> They also concentrate on the effects of social media in fandom. Social media not only made it easier for fans to reach out the bands/actors/writers they adore but also created a way for fans to interact with each other everywhere just using their phones.<sup>84</sup> Social media is also the best way to start campaigns because of accessibility. Avenged Sevenfold, for instance, has Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram accounts where they interact with their fans, answering their questions, and making polls such as which city the band should visit. Here, the collective power of fandom is very important because the majority of cities voted in the poll have a greater chance to be visited by the band. Even though, I filled out some of those polls, they never came to Turkey due to their lack of fan base there.

---

<sup>82</sup> "Why Study Fans?" In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington. New York: New York University Press, 2007.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

Am I a fan? Or more correctly, do I consider myself as a fan? Yes, I am a fan. I am the biggest Sevenfoldist. When I am listening to their music, I leave my political and religious views aside. I have read hundreds of articles, interviews, and websites about them. I cannot say anything for sure all of the band members, but M. Shadows is Republican, pro-American, patriot, pro-military. He constantly says that he has friends in the army.<sup>85</sup> That is why the band went to Iraq to give concerts to soldiers over there for moral support during the Iraq War. He also states he does not believe in any religion.<sup>86</sup> Like any other songwriters, he also translates his ideas, views, and feelings into his songs. Because of his political views, he is also seen as pro-war, but his songs tell a different story to me. For instance, In “M.I.A,” he sings the Iraq War through the viewpoint of a scared soldier there.

Avenged Sevenfold is an American band, comprised of brilliant, young Americans who are proud of their country. I knew it before I came here. M. Shadows even has photos on Google Images wrapped in an American flag. Their songs describe the Iraq War such as “M.I.A” and “Gunslinger” through the eyes of a soldier who were sent there as a part of his mission, as well as American politics in the homeland, especially the controversy between the right and the left such as “Critical Acclaim,” “Blinded in Chains,” and “Crossroads,” and they explore the American Dream and American way of life in songs such as “The Fight” and “Bat Country.”

When I was at their concert on August 5, 2014, I did not see much difference between the concerts I have been to in Turkey to their concert. Most people, especially guys dressed up black t-shirts with different band logos, especially Avenged Sevenfold’s t-shirts were the most

---

<sup>85</sup> Brandon Geist, “Interview Outtake: Avenged Sevenfold’s M. Shadows on Playing for the Troops,” *Revolver Magazine*, October 7, 2011. Accessed May 12, 2015.  
<http://www.revolvermag.com/news/interview-outtake-avenged-sevenfold-frontman-m-shadows-on-playing-for-the-troops.html>

<sup>86</sup> “Avenged Sevenfold’s M.Shadows: The Current Q & A,” October 17, 2013. Accessed May 12, 2015.  
<http://www.sacurrent.com/Blogs/archives/2013/10/17/avenged-sevenfolds-m-shadows-the-current-q-and-a>

common ones, and other accessories that are associated with metal music. Some girls wore only bikini tops. The only things that reminded me I was in the United States and in the South was that there were some people with American flag accessories or even t-shirts, and flip-flops. Other than that, the climate was the same: young people in black outfits, most of them involving in mosh pits, taking selfies, and drinking beer.

As a female metal music fan, the biggest issue in the genre is the exclusion of women from the making of music and confining them into stereotypical images of “groupies.” Heavy metal is a genre created to fulfill the satisfaction of men on the stage.<sup>87</sup> It is an exclusively boys club. It is also associated with Satan. Even after more than two decades of heavy metal’s introduction, there are lots of people who think heavy metal is satanic. What is worse, there are people like rock critics Robert Duncan who think heavy metal is unsophisticated.<sup>88</sup> Like classical music, heavy metal is a complex music, which includes lots of different instruments combined in harmony. Avenged Sevenfold, whose name is derived from the Bible, is mistaken for being a Christian metal band. I say mistaken because even though they have a lot of biblical references in their songs and videos, they are far from being religious. I think what they like in religion is its morbidity; all those horrible stories, destruction, punishment, chaos, corruption, and so on. According to Deena Weinstein there are two types of themes used in heavy metal songs: Dionysian themes and Chaotic themes. While the former refers to “losing self in a pleasurable now with no thought of past or future,” the latter term, as can be understood from its name, refers to destruction and other chaotic elements.<sup>89</sup> Avenged Sevenfold has some Dionysian themed songs such as “A Little Piece of Heaven,” “Scream,” and “Second Heartbeat,” most of their songs are Chaotic. Especially after Jimmy’s death, the

---

<sup>87</sup> Weinstein, Deena. *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*. Rev. Ed., 1st Da Capo Press ed. New York: Da Capo Press, 2000.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

lyrics have started to get darker. In their latest album, *Hail to the King*, they have a song named “Planets” which talks about destruction of the Earth in an intergalactic war.

Heavy metal and heavy metal fandom are very large topics that for scholars. Heavy metal, which came into existence in the Great Britain in early 1970s, has become a prominent genre in the United States because music has no boundaries, no nation, no culture. This is why I do not have any problem listening to even political songs of Avenged Sevenfold because they only criticize their own government. They do not talk badly about other cultures or countries in their songs, or their interviews. They do not refrain from hiding their American identities- something I never expect them to do because if I love my country and tell this out loud, so can they.

### **When the Time Stood Still: Avenged Sevenfold Concert**

It feels like there is an unwritten rule in my life that first I need to shed lots of tears before I fulfill my wishes and desires. I shed lots of tears before I finally saw my all time favorite band live. I am the biggest Avenged Sevenfold (A7X) fan, or I am the ultimate sevenfoldist, the way we the fans like to call ourselves. Lots of people also refer themselves like that, but when I finish this story, you’ll have to accept that I am the number one Sevenfoldist.

Although it is really hard to express with plain words, I need to explain what going to their concert meant to me. First of all, it was a dream come true. I had waited for this moment for seven years, and until I get to meet them in person, August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014 will be the best day of my life.

I used to buy music magazines when I was in high school. There was a music channel in Turkey named Dream TV, and they also had a music magazine with the same name. That’s

how I first learned about this Californian metal band. The irony was I hated them back then. They had articles about them every month, which annoyed me because the picture in the article suggested they were a stupid, emo band. Five of them all had intense, black eye-make ups and black nail polish on their fingers. They all wore very tight, black t-shirts and pants. But the article always claimed “they were going to be so big.” Well, whoever wrote those articles, they saw them coming.

They were not popular in Turkey at all. It was 2007, and they had just released their self-titled album, I started to listen to them for the first time out of curiosity. The article kept talking about one song in particular: “Bat Country” from their 2004 *City of Evil* album. I was curious about it. One day, I came home from school at around 4 pm. I had a TV in my room. It was the time when MTV still aired some good rock and metal songs, not only crappy reality shows. As always, I turned it on and started to take off my school uniform, dancing in front of the mirror. Then there was this black screen with the words in white font:

“He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man. DR.  
JOHNSON”

Then a voice of a race car’s tires drifting on a road just like the ones that could be heard in “Need for Speed” franchise followed by a long scream were all I heard. That scream and the drum and guitar mixed intro were more than enough for me to be absorbed by their fun video and powerful music. I stopped taking off my uniform and focused all my attention on the song and the video. They were not lying. This song was awesome even though the video that took place in Las Vegas was a bit creepy. Back then I didn’t know both the song and the video were attribution to Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and the movie titled the same, starring Jim Carrey. This is how I embarked on Sevenfold train and started my long journey.

They also play major roles in my big, life-affecting decisions. The real reason why I actually chose American Studies as my college major was the hope that one day I might be able to go to the United States and see them live because I knew they wouldn't come to Turkey due to the inadequate number of fans. Still, this doesn't mean I didn't hope all my college life that they would come. I wrote on their Facebook page and filled out the polls of which country they should visit countless times on their official website. Still, every year in big metal festivals, they weren't in the list. I kept checking the announcements for those festivals and every time, I was heartbroken.

Then I made another life-changing decision for the sake of seeing them live. I had an opportunity to go to grad school in the United States, and I did everything to be eligible to come here. Of course this doesn't mean they are the sole reason why I am in grad school, but honestly they are a great part of my decision to come to the United States. They are the reason why I am far from my homeland. Plus, they are the reason why I was interested in getting to know more about American culture in the first place.

I saw the post about the Mayhem Festival in Atlanta on A7X's Facebook page in May 2014. I clicked on the link with shaking hands, and scrolled down the dates with hope: June, July, and finally it was there. August, 5<sup>th</sup> at Lakewood Amphitheater in Atlanta, Georgia. I was about to have a minor heart-attack. They were coming to Atlanta, but there was a problem. Actually there were many problems. Where the hell was Lakewood? I couldn't go there alone.

I had this American boyfriend named Adam that I dated nearly 3 months in the spring. He also liked them. We'd broken up, but we decided to remain friends because we really sucked as a couple. The only reason I was dating him because I felt lonely. I even didn't have strong feelings for him. Since there weren't many people around me that liked metal music, I decided to ask him. We were going to have lunch together on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. We went to a café in

Kennesaw that served brunch around noon. It was such a beautiful spring day, warm and a little breezy. I was wearing a black top and a short, red, skater skirt, which gently wavered. I'd forgotten my sunglasses, and the sunlight made it very hard for me to look around.

“Dang, if only I remembered to bring my sunglasses. I can't see anything.”

He smiled at me and opened the door for me. He was always very kind and kept apologizing for things, which was quite annoying sometimes. I thanked him. A waitress with a huge smile on her face showed our table. Even though it was a beautiful, Saturday afternoon, the place wasn't packed, which was good. Mostly, families with lots of kids were there. A sea of waiter/waitresses flowed back and forth to fill coffee cups and bring orders. Adam asked for coffee, and I ordered orange juice and water until we decided what to eat. Everything on the menu looked great so it was very hard for me to choose. I really don't remember what we got for lunch, but mine was delicious. Eating our food, small talking, I suddenly dropped the bomb:

“Avenged Sevenfold is coming here in August. You wanna go there together?”

As always, I talked too fast because I was too excited. So I had to repeat it. He agreed excitedly. That moment, I felt like I was the only person in the world. The noisy café disappeared, and I rejoiced with the idea that finally I was gonna see them live.

“Then we need to get the tickets as soon as we can because I don't want them to run out. Their tickets are always sold out.”

He kept looking at me smiling. He knew how crazy I was about them, so he assured me we'd buy the tickets that day after the lunch. Even though I wasn't finished with the food on my plate, I just wanted to leave there at once to buy the tickets. Unfortunately, he was still eating. I kept talking gibberish on our way back to my dorm.

“It’s gonna be awesome.”

All we talked about was the concert. Once in a while I screamed with my high-pitched voice:

“OMG! I am so excited.”

Despite my shaking fingers, I managed to type the words “Mayhem Festival tickets” on Google. Then I clicked on the Ticketmaster’s website. There 2 tickets for August 5<sup>th</sup> was bought. I really couldn’t believe it. It felt like I was having a sweet dream. In 3 months, I was going to fulfill my dream.

“I can’t wait for it. I don’t know how I can wait for three whole months.”

Adam kept smiling at my childish excitement. I couldn’t sleep properly that night. And I couldn’t sleep properly for the rest of the summer due to the excitement. I fell asleep with the idea of their concert at nights, and I woke up with a huge smile on my face in the mornings. They were the last thoughts before I fell asleep and the first thoughts when I woke up. I told everyone cheerfully that I was going to the concert. I was so damn happy till mid-July, when Adam told me he wouldn’t be able to make it to the concert.

I guess you can never count on an ex. We really couldn’t manage this friendship thing but we were doing okay. I hadn’t heard from him for a while so I sent a message him on Facebook on July 15<sup>th</sup>.

Nilüfer 15.07.2014 14:58

Are you still gonna come to the concert with me? If not tell me now so I can find someone else.

Adam 15.07.2014 15:31

It's on the 5th, right?

Nilüfer 15.07.2014 15:50

Yes

Then I didn't hear from him for some time. I knew he was at work and would leave at 5 pm, but I really didn't like this silence. My intuition told me to be brave and not to be pissed off. Then I got a message from him.

Adam 15.07.2014 19:16

I'm sorry, Nil. I don't think I will be able to. One of the key people I work with will be out of town and I'm expected to be around covering for him. I doubt I will be able to get off or leave early that day... I'm sorry.

He also inserted a crying emoji at the end which annoyed the hell out of me. I promised myself I wouldn't be too angry, but I couldn't help it. He knew it. He knew better than most people how passionate I was about them and how I desired to go to their concert all my life. For the first time in my life, I hated an ex. I really wouldn't be this mad even if he'd cheated on me. Then I typed a message to him that ended everything between us.

Nilüfer 15.07.2014 19.19

I knew it! Well I'd rather you have told me sooner before I asked. You know how much it means to me. Honestly I never expected you'd come. And you never let me be wrong. Thanks!

This was our last interaction. I would kill him with my bare hands if he were next to me then. I hated him so much. The reason why I was so angry with him wasn't the fact that he ditched on me. It was because he didn't bother to tell me. I felt so unhappy that I started crying. I was alone in my room, and I didn't have anyone to solace me. I cried and cried for

hours. I had this killer pain in my head. I just crawled on my bed and cried all night. I really couldn't miss the concert. Since I didn't know how to get there, I needed someone to come with me. I started thinking of who would want to come with me. The concert was on Tuesday, so most people I knew would be working then.

I cursed at Georgia and its crappy public transportation system. Even if I took a couple of buses to get to Lakewood, the last one for Kennesaw was at 11 pm, and they were headlining the festival, so they wouldn't be up on the stage not before 9 pm the earliest. Also, seriously where the hell was Lakewood. Most people who lived here didn't even know. I was getting more and more anxious each passing day. Then I decided to ask Andrew to come to the concert with me. He was Cherie's son. I met him a couple of times in Cherie's place during holidays because Cherie always invited me to spend American holidays with them. He was a very relaxed person and so much fun to hang out with. He looked like one those Scandinavian metal-heads with his long, straight hair, tattoos, in all black outfit. He always wore long, black boots with lots of straps throughout the year. I was scared to ask him because there was a possibility that he and Cherie would misunderstand me. I wasn't really interested in dating him. I just needed a friend, someone who would enjoy the concert and someone fun and as talkative as I was. Determined not to cry and take action, I sent a message to him on Facebook.

Nilüfer 15.07.2014 21.33

Hey Andrew, Are you going to the Mayhem festival on August 5th? The friend I was going with bailed on me and now I have an extra ticket for it. You wanna come? I know you like metal music unlike the rest of my friends. Let me know asap. Some of the bands include Trivium, Asking Alexandria, Cannibal Corpse, Korn and Avenged Sevenfold as headliner.

I added the sentence about friends on purpose so he wouldn't misunderstand. He kept me waiting for some time, though because he doesn't use Facebook a lot. I felt so anxious all this time. 5 days later, he responded:

Andrew 20.07.2014 02.08

ya that sounds awesome! im pretty sure im free then and would love to! lemme know if u found someone else already, i havn't been getting on facebook very much lately  
haha

Well I hadn't found someone to go the concert with. In the meantime I'd asked my buddy, Chris but he had the most obnoxious boss ever so he couldn't get the day off. My other friends hated metal music and I really didn't want to go there with people who would complain about how loud the music was all the time. Nope, I wasn't gonna let anyone ruin that night for me.

Then it was settled. Yes, I was still going fulfill my dream. Again, the excitement started for me. When I went to ISD suite, I also told Cherie that I'd invited Andrew to come with me. I wanted her to hear it from me because I was scared that she would misunderstand my intentions.

As the big day drew closer and closer, I started to lose my ability to function as a regular human being. I was living in a dream world. I kept imagining how awesome it would be. I watched a lot of their concert shots on YouTube and I was always so jealous of the people who were there. Some of my friends in Turkey were also jealous of me. I promised I would take videos of the whole concert.

Even though the festival would start at noon, we decided the go there in the evening because I really didn't care about other bands playing. I was okay with Korn though. They were right before A7X, the headliner. It was such a hot summer day. Not a single leaf moved.

I was going crazy because I really didn't know what to wear. I didn't have any kind of black tops other than cute ones, and the weather was too hot for me to wear jeans. I even didn't like dressing up like those metal-heads. So I decided to be me. I wore red shorts with a black tank top that had a lace needlework and my navy blue loafers. Those shoes didn't really fit my outfit but other than flat ballerinas and sandals, I didn't have shoes to wear. I didn't want to wear floral sandals. Since I had the tickets, Andrew was going to drive. He came around 6 pm. We decided to stop by Taco Bell on Chastain road to have some awfully tasty but equally unhealthy, fake Mexican food.

Andrew also had never been to Lakewood but he printed out the directions that he lost in the mess of his old car. As he was driving, I looked for the paper for directions. First, we needed to head to I-75 to go to Atlanta. We lost our way a couple of times.

“Are you sure you don't want me to use my phone's GPS? It's really good.”

Men can be very stubborn when it comes to navigation.

“Nah, we already have them here. Let me look at the paper.”

I knew I wouldn't win that fight, so I held the paper so he could see the map and the directions.

We were out of city center and it was more like forestland with dense tree lines nearby both of the sides of the road. Then we saw all these parking lots that cost \$5-10, but there was also a free parking spot. It was after 7 and the weather was still hot. There were many people who decided to come late and they were mostly young people. There were also some parents who escorted their kids and very few old people. Most people wore black Avenged Sevenfold t-shirts. Andrew was telling me another concert he went 3 days ago and how he hurt his back in the mosh pit. Then I heard “Falling Away From Me” by Korn being played. No, it couldn't have been right. It was still early for them to be on the stage. I just hoped I didn't miss

“Comin’ Undone,” my favorite Korn song, though. I was also happy that they were already on the stage because I didn’t have to wait too long for A7X to show up. I had this funny feeling in my stomach due to the excitement. We found ourselves a spot on the lawn

Lakewood Amphitheater was an open air arena with good acoustics. The voices didn’t echo or disperse. I started to sing along to Jonathan Davis of Korn, but I kept wishing each song was their last. As it started to get dark, Davis introduced his band members, thanked the audience, and left. It was very close. I was going crazy in my mind. Then they closed the curtains of the stage and started playing songs from record among which one of my favorite songs, “Master of Puppets” by Metallica. We sat on the grass. A boy and two girls were sitting next to us. Andrew started to talk to them, but the girls didn’t mind. The boy was pretty friendly.

“We drove from Alabama, so we have been here all day.”

“Oh yeah, guess what? I came from Turkey and been waiting for this moment for years.” I said inside my head, but I didn’t say anything out loud.

As the waiting got longer, the more impatient I felt. I kept checking the time. I stopped listening Andrew and the guy from Alabama chit chat. I couldn’t focus on anything but the thick curtain that concealed the stage. Then I heard a distant voice of church bells ringing and rain. Yes, it was time. I recognized the song and I suddenly jumped up. I wasn’t the only one, though. People around me also got up, and we all started screaming. Finally, they were on the stage. It was so dark on the stage, so I couldn’t see anything. Then I heard Syn, the lead guitarist, start his magic. I had waited for that moment too long that it felt surreal. I tried so hard not to cry out of happiness. I kept screaming with the rest of people there. As the drummer Arin hit his drum set very hard, suddenly the stage lit up thanks to numerous flames. Then I could see Syn, Zacky (rhythm guitarist), Johnny (bassist), and Arin behind his drum

set. I knew their vocalist M. Shadows walked on the stage when the lyrics started, so he wasn't there yet. The stage was awesome. There was a huge King, sitting on a throne in the middle of the stage. That King was also on the cover of their latest album, *Hail to the King*. I hailed the Kings on the stage when Shadows finally walked in with a very high-pitched scream. They started with "Shepherd of Fire" from their latest album. I started to take a video of the concert because I wanted to remember those moments forever.

There are some bands whose live performances are not very good even though they are very good in the studio records. Those six minutes proved A7X was not one of those bands. They prepared us a great performance of 1.5 hours with brilliant music, small jokes, and laser shows. What was remarkable also how they treated their fans. It didn't feel like they were one of the most well-known metal bands in the world, but like a long lost friend. Shadows kept talking to audience during the songs and between each song. After "Shepherd of Fire" He greeted us for coming there, and of course we responded by screaming.

Welcome Atlanta!

YAA!

The second song on the setlist was "Nightmare." As the sound of hitting glasses spread in the arena, M. shadows screamed at us:

ARE YOU ALIVE, ATLANTA???????

We responded in unison:

YEAAAH!

Instead of flames, this time really cool lights dominated the stage. M. Shadows constantly encouraged us to scream more and more. Before the last verse he said:

LET'S HEAR WHAT YOU GOT!

Then we started to sing along to them:

Fight (fight)

Not to fail (fail)

Not to fall (fall)

Or you'll end up like the others

Die (die)

Die again (die)

Drenched in sin (sin)

With no respect for another

My throat started to hurt from screaming too much, but I didn't care at all. I turned to Andrew to tell him how my throat hurt, then I realized Andrew was gone. I started to look for him, but I knew exactly where he was even though I couldn't see him. He was in the mosh pit behind me. Then I started to watch them, running and kicking each other. I thought I'd be never able to understand the purpose of mosh pit. But luckily, the festival security was there to control them, so I couldn't get hurt.

The third song they played was the reason I became such a big fan. As they sang "So sorry you are not here I've been chained too long my vision's so unclear. Now take a trip with me but don't be surprised when things aren't what they seem." very slowly, we waived our hands in a very slow motion. During Syn's guitar solo, the crowd went crazy. There is also another slow verse at the end of the song, but Shadows improvised there and changed the lyrics a little bit. This is the best part of seeing your favorite band live. They have so much more to offer on the stage.

As Syn started his solo for "Hail to the King," Shadows talked to us:

“There’re quite a lot of you with beautiful faces, beautiful people, beautiful souls. I need you to raise your beautiful voices. One word, and the word is HAIL. Can you do that?”

I definitely knew I had the most awful voice ever, but if Shadows wanted me to raise my “beautiful” voice, of course I’d oblige to him. Our response was of course lots of screaming:

YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Then Shadows started chanting:

“Hail, hail,hail...”

Then we joined him. The whole arena echoed HAIL. The King on the stage was lit up, and he looked frighteningly gorgeous. Before the chorus Shadows said:

“Give it to me!”

So did we. I started to sing the chorus so loud that I felt like my lungs were going to pop out of my mouth.

Hail to the king, hail to the one

Kneel to the crown, stand in the sun

Hail to the king

For me, on that stage that night there were five kings, and I was ready to do whatever they told me to. I had hailed to the Kings 7 years ago, and never regretted even a second.

The next song was “Almost Easy.” In the audio version, M. Shadows laughs like an insane person after repeating “I am not insane.” I wondered if I’d hear his laughter live. Maybe it was because most people were in the arena all day under the sun, or because they were dead inside, but there weren’t enough voices coming from the audience. So Shadows

kept encouraging the audience saying “C’mon!” The best thing about this song was to hear his laughter. Yes, he did laugh insanely, which was so cool. I fell for him again then.

What makes A7X a very successful live performance band is their ability to prepare a great setlist. They only included their most well-known songs, which was sad for me because I love their half-scream half-clean songs better. But also, they did a great arrangement. So far, the songs were all very fast. Then they changed the mode with “Buried Alive.” This one starts slowly, and then it gets fast at the end. We clapped during the intro solo. The two huge LCD screens on the stage and two on the sides showed Syn during his solo. It was a slow song but still people were in the mosh pit. “How crazy is that,” I thought.

In the meantime, I had been recording the whole concert- at least the song performances but my phone was warning me about the memory card being full, which got me worried. I was determined, though. If necessary, I’d even delete some of the apps on my phone to leave enough space on my memory card. As I was thinking, the stage was lit up with flames again that kept blinking. Whoever did their choreography did a great job.

The next song was “So Far Away” which was about the death of their long-time friend, and the original drummer, Jimmy “the Rev” Sullivan. Shadows did a speech about him, how they felt heartbroken with his death in December, 2009. I remembered that day clearly. I sobbed so hard on my friend’s shoulder. I felt like I’d lost a family member or a close friend. I was also scared they would never make new albums. Then I came back to the reality with Shadows’ words:

“This one is for all lost loved ones”

I felt like crying. I got so emotional. So what I did was to delete all the videos and photos from my Florida trip a couple of days ago. I prayed my Dropbox account backed up all of

those memories. Exhausted, Andrew showed up and sat on the grass, inhaling and exhaling very fast.

“Man, that was so much fun! I’ll go again.”

“Didn’t you say your back was hurt?”

“It still does.” And he started to chuckle.

Then they started my all-time favorite song: “Afterlife.” It was the best way to raise the mood as well because it starts with a violin solo, it’s emotional, and it also has scream vocals in it. Even though I couldn’t see, I knew there was a string orchestra somewhere around the stage because they had them before. I was so excited about “Afterlife” that I forgot to touch the play button on my phone’s touch screen. I realized it wasn’t recording after the first chorus, which devastated me. I had waited that song the most, and I couldn’t believe myself for making such a stupid mistake. Still, I didn’t let that mistake to ruin the moment for me. During the third verse, Shadows showed his ability in scream vocals to all the haters. There have been many rumors going on about him saying that he no longer can scream. “All those haters can suck it up, because he still has the talent.” I thought happily.

After it was over, he started to say something I forgot, and he connected them to the final song before encore: “This Means War”. This song was harshly criticized for being a copy of Metallica’s “Sad But True,” but in reality the whole *Hail to the King* was a tribute to their favorite bands that influenced them. Instead of doing covers of their songs, they used similar riffs to create new songs, and it was definitely a great job. They again impressed with flames and lights. When the song ended, the stage got dark suddenly. Some people were surprised because they thought it was over. But I knew they still had two more awesome songs to play.

“A Little Piece of Heaven” was the first song they chose for encore. Before the song, M. Shadows started a one-way conversation with us. Our response was nothing but screaming. He said:

“The next song has murder and sex in it.”

We cheered because we all die-hard A7X fans knew which song he was talking about. It was one of the fan-favorite songs.

“But the sex happens after killing.”

We cheered even more.

“You guys are all sick son of bitches. I need to be careful walking in Atlanta streets.”

We laughed. Then the piano solo started. One of the group members was playing the piano on the stage, but I couldn't see who he was. Yet, I assumed it was Zacky. He was also singing as the priest in the song. After Jimmy's death, he and Syn took up the back vocals. This time on the huge LCD screens, they showed the animated video clip, which looked like a short Tim Burton movie with all the blood, skeletons, and violence. Unfortunately, I couldn't record all of the song because it took more than 8 minutes, and I needed memory for the last song.

Unfortunately, that last song came very quickly. I couldn't believe it because it felt too short. “Unholy Confessions” was the only song from my favorite album, *Waking the Fallen* in the setlist. This was a half screaming and half clean song. Before he entered the song, he said:

“Give me the old school”

And he started the song with a scream vocal. Andrew, so exhausted from mosh pit, started headbanging with his long hair. Some people started to watch him instead.

Unfortunately, my phone's memory only recorded 2.33 minutes of the song. I really wanted

time to freeze that moment. I wondered why all good things would come to an end very quickly. I had waited for that moment for 7 years, and it elapsed in a heartbeat.

As Shadows heralded his band members, focusing on the newest member, Arin to welcome him to the family, I realized that the more you wait for something, the sweeter it gets. It was the best time of my life, and I enjoyed every second of it. I slept with a smile on my face that night and the following nights. Even though I learned Adam took the week off to go on a short vacation, I wasn't very mad at him. He had lied to me, pretending he had to work. If only he had been honest with me, but I didn't have anything to lose. Now, every time I feel sad, I think of them and it always cheers me up. I am glad that I listened the advice on that article, and gave them a chance. They literally changed my whole life.

## **Conclusion**

Even though the themes I discuss both in the stories and in the essays seem different from one another, they have something in common: they are all important parts of my American experience as well as American culture itself. My journey, in the pages of this memoir, starts with tears of suffering and ends with tears of joy. What all these experiences have taught me is that there is no black and white in life. It is all gray.

America might be portrayed as the paradise on earth on television, but my experiences show that this is a misconception. There are a lot of things, wrong about American society that are hidden under the false images of perfection such as bureaucratic problems, stereotyping and racism, obsession with guns, and lack of public transportation in the South. On the other hand, my experiences also show the U.S is not an entirely awful place to live in since I had a lot of positive experiences here, met new people, learned new things, and most importantly I realized I can survive without my parents.

Before I came here, I thought I knew a lot about the United States and American way of life. It was only when I started living here that I realized my knowledge was very limited. I experienced lots of good and bad things about the country. I even did taxes for the first time in my life. Then I thought I learned a lot of things about America just by living in it. I was

mistaken again. This time it was my perspective that was limited. I experienced things without understanding the meaning behind them such as my road trip to Florida or living in the suburbs. The suburbs, to me, were just beautiful neighborhoods until I read about them. Then I found out they were the sites of social, political, even philosophical discussions. Or, I have never thought road trips were known to be very important to the American youth. I only saw it as a fun activity among friends.

I have never believed in the existence of American Dream. Ironically, America is the very place where I experienced my long-wished dream: seeing Avenged Sevenfold live. That is why I started to call it “my very own American Dream.” I believe I have grown up in these one and a half year mentally. There are certainly a lot of things I will be missing when I go back to Turkey, but constant paperwork problems is definitely not one of them even though I know I will have to deal with Turkish bureaucracy this time, considering I am an adult now.