Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi
Van Yüzüncü Yıl University The Journal of Social Sciences Institute
e-ISSN: 2822 – 3136
Yıl / Year: 2026 - Sayı / Issue: 72

Toplumsal Cinsiyetin Sözlü Kültürdeki İzleri: Türk ve Kürt Atasözlerinde Kadın Temsilleri

Gendered Traces in Oral Culture: Female Representations in Turkish and Kurdish Proverbs

Memet Metin BARLIK
Assoc. Prof. Dr., Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Department of English Language and Literature, Van, Türkiye
Doç. Dr., Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Van, Türkiye
Orcid: 0000-0002-3615-7240 drbarlik@yyu.edu.tr

Fırat KAPLAN
Res. Asst. Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Department of English Language and Literature, Van, Türkiye
Arş. Gör., Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Van, Türkiye
Orcid: 0009-0005-5643-4435 firatkaplan@yyu.edu.tr

Article Information/Makale Bilgisi

Cite as/Atıf: Barlik, M. M. and Kaplan, F. (2025). Gendered Traces in Oral Culture: Female Representations in Turkish and Kurdish Proverbs. *Van Yüzüncü Yıl University the Journal of Social Sciences Institute,* Special Issue, 72, 96-107
Barlik, M. M. ve KAPLAN, F. (2025). Toplumsal Cinsiyetin Sözlü Kültürdeki İzleri: Türk ve Kürt Atasözlerinde Kadın Temsilleri. *Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 72, 96-107

Article Types / Makale Türü: Research Article/Araştırma Makalesi
Received/Geliş Tarihi: July 27, 2025/27 Temmuz 2025
Accepted/Kabul Tarihi: March 7, 2026/7 Mart 2026
Published/Yayın Tarihi: September 2025/Eylül 2025
Pub Date Season/Yayın Sezonu: September/Eylül
Issue/Sayı: Special Issue/72
Pages/Sayfa: 96-107
Plagiarism/İntihal: This article has been reviewed by at least two referees and scanned via a plagiarism software./ Bu makale, en az iki hakem tarafından incelendi ve intihal içermediği teyit edildi.
Published by/Yayıncı: Van Yüzüncü Yıl University of Social Sciences Institute/Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü
Ethical Statement/Etik Beyan: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited/ Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur (Barlık & Kaplan).
Conflict of Interest/Çıkar Beyanı
There are no conflicts of interest./Bu çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum, kuruluş, kişi ile çıkar çatışması yoktur.
Declaration of Authors' Contribution/Yazarların Katkı Oran Beyanı
This article has two authors and the contribution rate of the author is 50 %/Bu makale iki yazarlıdır ve yazarın katkı oranı eşit orandadır.
Copyright & License/Telif Hakkı ve Lisans: Authors publishing with the journal retain the copyright to their work licensed under the CC BY-NC 4.0./Yazarlar dergide yayınlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmaları CC BY-NC 4.0lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır.

Abstract

Studies on antiproverbs directed against women warrant serious attention from folklorists, linguists, and literary historians. While such expressions are often regarded as generalisations derived from the daily observations and experiences of earlier generations, their assertions are layered, multifaceted, and frequently as contradictory as life itself. The central argument of this article is that the logical coherence of antiproverbs targeting women is highly questionable, and that a consistent philosophical or rational interpretation is difficult—if not impossible—to sustain. Far from being untouchable cultural relics, many of these expressions are deeply flawed stereotypes rooted in patriarchal norms. One striking example is the Turkish proverb "Kızını dövmeyen, dizini döver" ("He who does not beat his daughter will beat his knee"), which reflects a harmful, authoritarian worldview. While such a claim may have held resonance in preliterate societies, it has no place in literate and socially conscious communities today. Indeed, the message may be more accurately reversed: "Kızını döven, dizini döver" ("He who beats his daughter will beat his knee"). This study undertakes a comparative analysis of well-known antiproverbs from Turkish and Kurdish oral traditions that encode negative and prejudiced representations of women, aiming to uncover the socio-cultural structures that sustain such gendered discourses.

Keywords: Folklore, Proverbs, Gender Discourse, Turkish and Kurdish Oral Culture, Female Stereotypes.

Öz

Kadınlara yönelik cinsiyetçi atasözleri üzerine yapılan çalışmalar, folklorcuların, dilbilimcilerin ve edebiyat tarihçilerinin ciddi biçimde ilgisini hak etmektedir. Bu tür ifadeler, çoğunlukla geçmiş kuşakların günlük gözlem ve deneyimlerinden türetilmiş genellemeler olarak kabul edilse de içerikleri çok katmanlıdır ve çoğu zaman yaşamın kendisi kadar çelişkilidir. Bu makalenin temel savı, kadınları hedef alan bu tür önyargılı söylemlerin mantıksal tutarlılığının ciddi biçimde sorgulanabilir olduğu ve rasyonel ya da felsefi bir çerçevede tutarlı bir yorumlamaya elverişli olmadığı yönündedir. Söz konusu ifadeler, kültürel miras olarak dokunulmaz kabul edilmekten ziyade, ataerkil düşünce biçimlerinin ürünü olan sorunlu stereotipleri yansıtmaktadır. Bu duruma çarpıcı bir örnek, "Kızını dövmeyen, dizini döver" atasözüdür; otoriter ve şiddet temelli bir dünya görüşünü içeren bu söz, yazı öncesi toplumlarda yankı bulmuş olabilir; ancak okuryazar ve toplumsal bilince sahip günümüz toplumlarında geçerliliğini tamamen yitirmiştir. Hatta bu ifade, çağdaş bakışla tam tersi biçimde yeniden formüle edilmelidir: "Kızını döven, dizini döver." Bu çalışma, Türk ve Kürt sözlü kültürlerinde yer alan ve kadınlara ilişkin olumsuz, önyargılı nitelikler taşıyan yaygın halk deyişlerini karşılaştırmalı olarak analiz etmeyi; bu cinsiyet temelli söylemlerin ardındaki sosyo-kültürel yapıları açığa çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Folklor, Atasözleri, Cinsiyet Söylemi, Türk ve Kürt Sözlü Kültürü, Kadın Stereotipleri.

Introduction

Various forms of the paremiological level of language have served as a means of disseminating ideas and representative images through stereotype expressions, namely via proverbs, adages, maxims, sayings, dictums, aphorisms, epigraphs, apothegms, and gnomes that contain common didactic folk wisdom; among which, proverbs are the central focus of this study. Proverbs are thought to have existed since the earliest ages of human history, inspired and formed from the teachings and life experiences of ancestors, (Aksoy, 1988: 15). Similarly, Kurdish paremiological studies emphasise that proverbs are fixed expressions shaped by the long-term experiences of ancestors and transmitted from generation to generation as part of the collective wisdom of society (Kaplan, 2022).

The creators and collectors of wise and witty sayings go back to the biblical times of Solomon about three thousand years ago (Esar, 1968: p. vii); in fact, the proverbs reflecting the quality of a society could be dated back to the ages when human history began (Oy, 1972: p. 6). This living genre of oral literature has been passed on mainly through oral traditions (Schipper, 2006: p. 21).

A proverb is a particular linguistic unit that is distinguished from other linguistic units by its universal features: general knowledge, didacticism, aphoristic nature, closed syntactic structure, and the designation of the situation (Kotova and Lauhakangas, 2023: p. 14). They are memorable short sayings of people, containing wise advice or warnings (Flavell, 1994, p. 24). As social and cultural maxims, proverbs can also be identified as an individual's school, life guide, or handbook before the invention of writing and similar recording instruments (Çobanoğlu, 2004: p. 1-2). Because they encompass various social fields, including folklore, sociology, economics, philosophy, history, morality, and psychology, they are regarded as the transmitters of cultural memory. They may offer some advice or claim a general truth applicable to a specific situation; in this sense, proverbs refer to stories, and stories to proverbs (Schipper, 2006, p. 16). When we hear a proverb, it is as if we hear the advice of our ancestors, and a significant number of them are as memorable for the way they sound as for the things they say (Hirsch, 1996: p. 1). In this communicational domain, they are used as connotational spices, adding implicational taste and zest to speech, because, as rhetorical devices, they carry short, eloquent remarks. Aksoy (1971: p. 36) assesses that proverbs with stereotyped forms transform the judgments of our ancestors based on long trials into general rules, wise thoughts, or advice; in this sense, "each proverb is a "life motto", an explanation or a rule of life, a narration of an event" (Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 7).

Proverbs also reflect prejudices and superstitions of the human race, and "both their particular phrasing and the ideas hidden in their claims are what belongs to the cultural literacy of each nation and language" (Hirsh, Kett, Trefil, 2002: p. 47). In this respect, they are the most straightforward metaphorical folklore genres—such as song, folktale, myth, and folk play —used clearly and directly to serve a social purpose (Seitel, 1969: 159). They transfer traditions, customs, and moral or ethical conventions created by folk wisdom throughout the historical process, depending on cultural, geographical, political, social, and economic situations. Considering this function, proverbs are "reflections of the common thought and behavioural patterns, social and moral rules, traditions and customs of a nation" (Aksoy, 1981: 20).

The proverbial rhetoric does not merely take place regionally and nationally, but also on the international level, and traditional proverbs or innovative antiproverbs have an impressive role to play in ancestral didactic memory (Mieder, 2019, p. vii). They tend to give a lesson, teach, criticise, or warn the addressee, audience, or readers with straightforward, concise, condensed, and formulaic language. In this respect, the wisdom of proverbs has guided people in their social interactions for thousands of years worldwide (Mieder, 2004: p. xi). While creating proverbs, people used entities from both the human and non-human worlds as analogies. Even though the claim is expressed in simple language, there is an essential symbolic meaning behind it (Mazî, 2005: 8). In a way, they are the summating verbal adages of a particular culture, which is an integral part of partly autonomous, partly coordinated institutions (Malinowski, 1960: p.40).

The interlaced relationship between language and folklore/culture has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly in explorations of the role of language in the apophthegms of folk wisdom, which reflect the construction and deconstruction of gender identities. In this sense, the war of perception between men and women is a contentious issue on the agenda of oral and written literature and criticism. Litovkina (2019: 26), in Antiproverbs Against Women, argues that "proverbs have never been considered sacrosanct; on the contrary, they have frequently been used as satirical, ironic, or humorous commentary on a given situation. Schipper, (2006: p.13) argues that "today for the first time in history men and women are being equally educated and doing the same jobs, but globally speaking, this truth holds only for the happy few". This argument implies that we still live in a male-dominated culture, and it is not surprising that the anti-proverbs against women are regrettably widespread. Numerous slanderous/anti-feminist proverbs against women can be found in the archival or live folklore of nations. This widespread phenomenon of proverbs against women shows that male-dominated folk wisdom has created highly questionable interpretations that contain stereotypical views of women formulated in proverbial language.

Honeck (1997: p. 5) classifies proverbs according to the contextual background as "personal, formal, religious, literary, practical, cultural, and cognitive," and identifies the cultural proverbs as a "multifunctional form of folk literature that arises from and is embedded in a sociocultural context." Kerschen (1998: p.3) asserts that if one wants to explore the historical image of women in oral tradition, proverbs are an ideal subject. Today's folklore scholars are questioning the appropriateness of the proverbs' messages. The renewed interest in women's issues has prompted an examination of the treatment of women in folklore, particularly in proverbs. (Kerschen, 1998: p. 7) Considering the reflections of sociocultural specifications of a society, the following questions may be asked to fulfil a reasonable analysis of proverbs:

Whose views are represented in the proverbs?

In what specific features are women portrayed negatively in proverbs?

Do they reflect women's social reality?

Are the adverse claims of women in proverbs valid/relevant today?

How can the misrepresentations of women in proverbs be defended?

Considering these questions, this study examines the nexus between language, gender, and culture, aiming to explore the construction of women and womanhood in antiproverbs. The corpus of data the study deals with comprises well-known (common) proverbs drawn from Turkish and Kurdish proverb dictionaries published during the 20th century.[1] The general criteria for selecting proverbs for analysis are the adverse claims about 'gender-based characteristics of women,' 'women as brides-to-be,' and 'women as wives.' The study employs the comparison-contrast method to examine the generalised, prejudicial, or damaging claims about the feminine world transmitted through the selected proverbs. It examines the indelible negative impressions of women and aims to analyse the validity of the truths or general views from a reasonable perspective. In particular, it examines how these impressions establish rules of social behaviour that shape women's characteristic roles as daughters, girls, wives, and parents.

1. Gender-Based Characteristics of Women

Proverbs frequently reflect the collective attitudes of a society towards different social groups, including women. Since proverbs are shaped by the specific historical and cultural experiences of communities, different societies develop distinctive proverbial expressions reflecting their own social values and perceptions (Aykaç, 2022). These expressions often reproduce stereotypes that have been transmitted across generations. The representation of women in proverbs reflects broader social attitudes embedded in cultural discourse. Proverbs do not merely function as linguistic expressions but also reflect the experiences, prejudices and collective beliefs of societies, thereby reproducing social perceptions and cultural stereotypes (Çiftçi, 2021, p. 885). Therefore, the portrayal of women in Turkish and Kurdish proverbs should be evaluated within the cultural and ideological frameworks that shape these expressions.

Intelligence is one of the primary subjects when discussing the nature of women, for it is an eternal topic in the battle of the sexes. The claims prove that the antiproverbs on gender-based behavioural characteristics of women are primarily evaluations of male-dominated folk wisdom. That is why it would be a logical deduction to suggest that women have seldom originated proverbs, as men have historically dominated oral literature and culture. So, it is not surprising that antiproverbs about women's nature mostly despise women and regard them as people with insufficient capacity for reasoning.

Some of the common Turkish and Kurdish antiproverbs are as follows:

"Kadının saçı uzun, aklı kısa" (Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 77; Çobanoğlu, 2004: p. 319) = "The women have long hair, [but] they have a short mind. [limited reasoning capacity]."

"Porê jina dirêj e, aqilê jina kêm e" (Celîl, Celîl, 2018: p. 102) = "The women have long hair, [but] they have a short mind."

These proverbs reflect a broad negative attitude towards women, separating them from men by classifying them as those with "long hair," and therefore of "short mind": The claim demean women through entirely unfounded identification and lack any valid scientific, behavioural, or social basis in both ancient and modern times. The claims imply that women possess a 'limited capacity for reasoning,' thus providing an excuse that "the female path is that of love, marriage, childbearing, and not

[1] The proverbs are translated into English in a 'trans-creative' style, which does not cause loss of meaning, rather than considering the syntactical harmony of the source language.

in careers like doctor, lawyer, etc." (Kerschen, 1998: 2), along with other similar professions that require a specific capacity for reasoning and wisdom. In essence, it suggests that women's contributions to family and society should be restricted due to their 'weak capacity for reasoning,' which underscores men's obsession with maintaining dominance in familial and social spheres.

There are similar proverbs with the same claim in different cultures. Schipper (2006: 41) assesses that "as a sign of beauty, attractive hair has been widely associated with an alleged lack of brains in women" and exemplifies this claim with the following proverbs:

A head of hair and no brain inside. (Mongolian)

Women have long hair and a short mind. (Swedish)

Though a girl's hair be long, her brain is short. (Kalmuk)

Long hair, little brain. (Turkish)

"Dişi köpek kuyruk sallamazsa, erkek köpek ardına düşmez" (Aksoy, 1988: 243; Özcan, Seuß, Seeberg, 1996: p.73) = "If a female dog doesn't wag her tail, a male dog won't chase her."

"Dêl ku ne ba be, kûçik naçe cem" (Kulaksız, 2013: p. 102) = "If a female dog doesn't wag her tail, a male dog won't approach her."

In these proverbs, the message is conveyed through a personified analogy from the animal world, where female dogs represent women and male dogs represent men. They indicate an attitude that all women have the nature of seducing men and that it's unnatural for them to behave in any other way. They have claims that accuse women of all heterosexual relationships of love, friendship, or sexual affairs. The claims imply that women have a general character of seducing men, generalising the idea that the initial call of any sexual relationship between men and women is thought to be in women's hands. The claim favours the male world by showing them as innocent partners in gender affairs, most of which are generally evaluated as immoral and unintended.

"Kız evladı çürük mal" (Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 102) = "A daughter is rotten stuff."

"Qîz dara şikestî ye" (Celîl, Celîl, 2018: p. 91; Kulaksız, 2013: p. 211) = "A daughter is a broken tree."

"Keç malê xelkê ne, dê û bav palê pûş in" (Celîl, Celîl, 2018: p. 91) = "Daughters are the properties of other people, what mother and father do for them is in vain."

All three of these proverbs portray daughters as property. In these claims, daughters are categorised negatively because they will get married and leave their families sooner or later. Addressing the parents, the claims create a discriminatory prejudice that 'having a daughter connotes a negative foreshadowing, which implies that although it is difficult to bring up 'daughters', they are the children brought up for others. There is a hidden comparison between 'daughters' and 'boys', implying that 'boys' are potential workers, the future supporters of a family. In contrast, 'daughters' are candidates for becoming members of other families. The humiliating part of the claim resembles a daughter to **'stuff'** (**mal**), which has a denotational meaning of "property; possession; wealth, or riches" (Akım, 1997: p. 727). The messages in these proverbs, which separate girls from boys and perhaps cause them to be despised by their brothers, can only belong to primitive societies that see boys as labourers who will work on the farm and girls as birds that will one day fly away from home.

"Kadına inanma, buza dayanma" (Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 123) = "Don't believe in women, don't lean on the ice"

"Jin û derew mirovên hev in" (Kulaksız, 2013: 212) = "Women and lies are kinsman."

"Parxaneke jina kêm e, îtbar boy jin tune" (Celîl, Celîl, 2018: p. 101) = "Women are created with a missing rib, [so] they can't be trusted."

These proverbs also exemplify the male-dominated feature of folk wisdom. They convey the notion that women are unreliable as a general, prejudicial lesson. The second part of the Turkish proverb conveys a warning to the addressee about the potential negative consequences of relying on women, as 'leaning on ice' can be hazardous and lead to health issues. So, the claim implies that it is as harmful to 'believe in women' as 'to lean on ice'. The selected Kurdish proverbs also have similar negative messages about women's reliability. The first one, "Women and lies are kinsmen," conveys a direct, general negative claim without giving any reason or alibi or making any conditional comparison. Therefore, when the reader or listener of this proverb comes into contact with women, he is advised to remember that women tend to lie as a general characteristic. The second Kurdish proverb gives an unreasonable alibi for the unreliable verbal expression of women, claiming that "Women are created with a missing rib, [so/that's why] they can't be trusted," which relates the unreliability of women to their nature of

creation. The third Kurdish proverb, "Consult your wife, but do not believe what she says," seems to soften the men's prejudicial attitude towards women with the advice "consult your wife," but the second part highlights the same negative message.

"Altın başlı kadından, cılız başlı erkek yeğdir" (Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 97) = "A weak-headed man is better than a golden-headed woman"

"Aqilê jina, aqilê mirîşka" (Celîl, Celîl, 2018: p. 100) = "women's minds, [is like] chickens' minds"

These proverbs exemplify another negative reasoning as a cliché that women are weaker than men in reasoning, whose patriarchal perspective can easily be deduced from the comparison. The claim implies that a 'weak-headed man' (a man with a weak reasoning capacity) is preferable to a golden-headed woman (a woman with a high reasoning capacity).' The expression 'golden-headed' is a perceptible clue that the mental weakness of the women is implied rather than their physical weakness. These proverbs, which belittle women, who constitute the entire feminine wing of the human race, not only do not contribute to the establishment of a healthy family and society, but also contain content that undermines and disrupts communication between the genders.

"Erkeksiz avrat, yularsız at" (Çobanoğlu, 2004: p. 246) = "A woman without a spouse, [is like] a horse without a halter."

"Qîz bi hefsaran nayên grêdanê" (Kulaksız 2013: 331) = "A girl cannot be tied [controlled] with a halter."

Again, created from a male-dominated viewpoint, this Turkish proverb has a humiliating claim which compares an independent (uncontrolled) woman to a horse without a halter: It emphasizes that a woman must be controlled by a man (her spouse); otherwise, she will acquire a personality just like a horse without a halter - that is, like an animal whose whereabouts and actions are uncertain. The Kurdish proverb, on the other hand, contains a meaning that supports the claim implied in the Turkish proverb and even goes one step further; the claim that "a girl cannot be controlled with a halter" implies the connotation that a man must control her, or can only be controlled by a man; otherwise, even if it a daughter is reined like a horse, there is no possibility of her being controlled. It has been proven that the mentality that has supported the idea of women being controlled by a male-dominated mentality from the past to the present has no place in today's societies.

"Erkeğin nefsi birdir, kadınınki dokuzdur" (Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 19) = "The 'nefs' [ego]; [the potency of willing or desire] of a man is one, a woman's is nine"

The word 'nefs' came into Turkish from Persian (ن ف س), which, "when used adverbially, means "to do something willingly, of one's own accord, at one's pleasure" (Penrice, 1873: p. 140). In Arabic-Turkish Dictionary, one of the connotations of 'nefs' is "desire, wish, ambition" (Kanar, 2009: p. 1760). The 'noun' form of the word 'nefs' may convey a meaning as 'the potency of willing or desire; the power of desire that drives a person to do something with his/her own accord or at his/her pleasure.'[2] This proverb negatively reflects the behavioural reflection of 'nefs' (ego) in women. Women are identified as undisciplined, uncontrollable, and weak beings, indulging in their desires, wishes, or passions when compared with men.

2. Women As Brides-To-Be

The power of proverbial language suggests that men have used every form of expression to vent their fears, jealousies, and misconceptions about women. In this context, the antiproverbs have a psychological or behavioural impact on the candidate bridegroom's decision to choose a woman as a life partner. People who cannot spare time for personal development due to their individual mental capacity and social and economic conditions will probably consider archival 'folk wisdom' and make decisions inspired by these proverbs.

Here are some common antiproverbs considering women as brides-to-be:

"Kızını dövmeyen dizini döver" (Aksoy, 1988: 362; Çobanoğlu, 2004: p. 350; Oy, 1972: p. 25; Özcan, Seuß, Seeberg, 1996: p.41) = "He [one of the parents] who does not beat his daughter, will beat his knee"

"Ku Kurê xwe nexî, tu yê li çoka xwe bixî" (Celîl, Celîl, 2018: p. 88) = "He [one of the parents] who does not beat his son, will beat his knee"

The message in the Turkish proverb is a direct warning to the parents of daughters. However, the Kurdish proverb contains the same advice for the father of a son. Both of the proverbs highlight the importance of 'beating' (violence) in raising girls (or

[2] İmam Gazali assesses that "the Sufis consider the animal spirit of human as "nefs" and that the word "nefs" is also used in this sense in İslamic terminology" (Ghazali, 1995: p. 74).

boys) without claiming any reason. This claim belongs to primitive, ignorant, oppressive, and violent traditional societies. It has no place in conscious societies that have made significant progress in educating and teaching children, helping them develop a sense of identity and personality, and fostering self-confidence in social relationships. Today, it would be more accurate to convey the exact opposite of the message in this proverb as "Kızını döven, dizini döver" = "He [one of the parents] who beats his daughter will beat his knee."

"Anasına bak, kızını al; kenarına bak, bezini al" (Aksoy, 1988:147; Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 113; Çotuksöken, 2004: p. 17; Çobanoğlu, 2004: p. 83; Oy, 1972: p. 89) = "Look at the mother, marry her daughter; look at the edge, buy the cloth"

"Dayîk bün u duyet bixwaz - Ta nekefye neng u waz" (Feyli dialect of Kurdish)[3] (Kamber, 2015: p. 22)

"Dayîkê bibîn û qîzê bixwaz – Da ku nekevî tengahîyê û şermezar nebî" (Kurmancî dialect of Kurdish)[4] = "Look at the mother, marry her daughter- so you may avoid problems and not be ashamed."

"Dê Bivîn, dotê werîne" (Celîl, Celîl, 2018: p. 89) = "See the mother, marry her daughter."

These proverbs advise prospective grooms and show the 'girl's mother' as a primary reference in choosing a spouse. The claim might have a valid basis concerning the physical appearance of the mother and daughter. Still, it is elusive knowledge that a daughter will resemble her mother in all her physical aspects or that she will inherit her mother's behavioural characteristics. Besides, there is no scientific fact that a girl physically resembles her mother; moreover, depending on social, economic, and unique characteristics, nature, tendencies, and preferences, a girl may have a character opposite to her mother's. From this perspective, it is clear that the advice given by these proverbs can be misleading when choosing a spouse.

"Gelini ata bindirmişler. "Ya nasip!" demiş" (Aksoy, 1981:241) = "[On the day of wedding ceremony] The bride is on the horse, [to take her to the house of bridegroom] She says- "God knows! [The spouse I am going to marry!]

"Bûk li ser hespê ye, hefsar li mistê ye, kes nizane qismetê kê ye." (Celîl, Celîl, 2018: p. 91; Borak, 1996:46) = "No one knows who is going to be her bridegroom, even when the bride is on the horse, and the horse's reins are in her hands. [on her way to go to the bridegroom's house]"

The denotative meaning of these proverbs reflects a fatalist approach to the events that people experience in their lives. The message emphasises that whatever we live in has a predestined dimension, so even when "a bride is on a horse to be taken to the groom's house," it is not certain whether she will marry the person decided as her life partner. The implied meaning is that women cannot be trusted even on such a planned ceremonial day, and that a bride may change her ideas about her spouse even during the wedding ceremony.

"Ananın bahtı kızına" (Aksoy, 1988: 147; Çobanoğlu, 2004: p. 82) = "A daughter's fortune is likely to be the same as her mother's."

"Bextê dê, cihêzê dote" (Kulaksız 2013: 32) = "The mother's fortune is her daughter's dowry"

A word of Persian origin (Parlatır, 1998: 201), the word **'baht'** has similar contextual denotations in Turkish and Kurdish dictionaries: Turkish; "luck; synonyms (n) chance, fortune, accident, destiny, fate, hazard, lot, advantage, hap, portion, coincidence, circumstances..." (Parker, 2008: 47); Kurdish; **'bext'**: "luck, chance, fate, lot, destiny" (Chyet, 2003: 48). These proverbs, which are addressed to brides-to-be, claim that daughters are expected to have a fate similar to that experienced by their mothers. This information restricts girls' dreams, goals, and freedom of choice, locking their free will in determining their possible life paths. The likelihood of this claim coming true is unknown, but it is well understood that it cannot be generalised and is not valid for past or present societies.

"Kızı kendi gönlüne bırakırsan ya davulcuya varır ya zurnacıya" (Aksoy, 1988: 362; Özcan, Seuß, Seeberg, 1996: p.31) "If you leave the girl to her own heart, [preference/decision], she will either marry a drummer or a zurna [wind instrument] player."

"Bi a qîza be, wê xortê dengbêj bikin" (Kulaksız, 2013: 35) = "If you leave daughters to their own heart, they will marry singers"

[3] The Feylî Kurdish dialect is spoken by the Feylî Lurs, who are considered to be one of the main Kurdish tribes in the region where the Lurî population lives in Persian lands. (Curzon, 1892: II: 273) Prof. Kadri Yıldırım defines the Feyli dialect of Kurdish as "one of the subdialects of Kurdish Lorî dialect" (Yıldırım, 2023: 62).

[4] The proverbs in the 'Feylî dialect of Kurdish' are paraphrased into the Kurmancî dialect by myself.

These proverbs claim that daughters who are left to their own devices regarding marriage tend to make emotional decisions. Due to this weakness, they are likely to marry an instrumental player or a singer. This claim emphasises that girls can make emotional decisions about vital preferences, so their parents must guide or control them.

3. Women As Wives

Marriage is a legal and social institution, enforced by both the authority of the law and religious principles, implying that it is a social construct that relies on the power of the State and the moral pressure of religious authorities to sustain it. Gender roles—especially those assigned to women—are most visibly articulated within the family structure (Kayran, 2024, p. 61). It is generally expected to be a durable connection between a male and a female, strengthened by the birth of offspring. However, the knowledge passed down from generation to generation via proverbs is not left out in gaining insight into women's characteristic nature and behavioural personalities in choosing a spouse and in marital relationships. In other words, as Malinovski argued (1913: p. 10), "all social organisations imply a series of norms, which extend over the whole social life and regulate more or less strictly all the social relations".

As in many cultures worldwide, many proverbs have claims that reflect common opinions on women as wives or their role, value, responsibility, and place in 'marriage'. Within Turkish and Kurdish families, the husband/father's authority is accepted as absolute; the wife/mother's role is characterised by self-sacrifice, service to the needs of other family members, and nurturance. Her activities are confined to her home and family, primarily focused on mothering, bearing, and raising children, which is seen as her primary responsibility. Oy (1972: p. 17) defines this cultural perspective from a national viewpoint, arguing that "every nation thinks, speaks and tries to act with proverbs that are suitable for its character, structure, view of life, and its habits." The negative and sarcastic evaluations/prejudices portray women to be the root of problematic relationships; they are thought to be the life partner who causes trouble in familial and social affairs because they are thought to be plotting by nature.

Some of the common Turkish and Kurdish proverbs about 'women as wives' are as follows:

"Beglere ve avrada inanma, akar suya dayanma" (Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 64) = "Do not believe in what the notables [Beg-s][5] and wives say, [and] do not lean on the flowing water."

"Kırk yılda bir karı sözü dinlemelidir" (Oy, 1972: p. 26) = "A wife should be listened to [her ideas should be taken into consideration] once in forty years"

"Pisyara [pirsa] jinka xwe bike, bes guh nedê" (Celîl, Celîl, 2018: p. 105) = "Consult your wife, but do not believe her, [do not trust her words]."

"Avradın gırtlağı olmaz" (Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 19) = "A woman hasn't got a larynx"[6]

"Bi Mîran û jinan bawer nabe" (Kulaksız, 2013: 39) = "Notables [Mîr][7] and women are not trustable people."

Sharing the role of talker and listener in a family is also a matter of power and control; men want to be in control of the discourse because they think whatever women have to say is not worth listening to anyway. These proverbs have content that emphasises the unreliability of women's verbal claims (ideas, deductions, evaluations, etc.) in general. While giving this message, women's claims are compared with the promises of male leaders, 'Beg-s' and 'Mîr-s', who have social and political status in tribal societies. For some reason, the promises of these leaders are evaluated as equally unbelievable or unreliable as the words of women. There is no logical basis for the claims of these proverbs since they put forward a generalised principle that women, as the feminine wing of the human race, tend to lie or not tell the truth. The folk wisdom has created claims of advice and warnings about women to find a way of silencing them or to create a myth that when a woman talks to a man, the listener should have an indicator in his mind that women's talk is generally made up of lies or gossip. It's a deceitful trick of sustaining masculine power in discourse to claim that women's talk is worthless and refuse to allow them to be heard.

"At ile avradı emanet etme" (Çobanoğlu, 2004: p. 99) = "Do not entrust your horse and your wife to anybody."

This proverb's surface meaning (denotation) implies that human beings (relatives, friends, neighbours) are not to entrust their horse and wife. Secondly, it highlights the advice that a woman should not be entrusted to anyone else because they have a fragile character of faithfulness. For some reason, fidelity is expected of the wife but not the husband in proverbs.

---

[5] Beg: feudal lord, country gentlemen; a feudal title bestowed upon paramount chieftain of the tribe. (Chyet, 2002: 29)

[6] **larynx** is metaphorically described as a speech organ which filters, brakes or censors verbal discourse, which implies that the addressee, time and place must be taken into account while talking to someone.

[7] Mîr' is the "title of nobility; title for tribal chieftains" (Chyet, 2002: 396).

"Kadının cenneti, kocasının ayak tabanı altındadır" (Acaroğlu, 1992: p. 75) = "A woman's paradise is under the sole of the foot of her husband."

The message of this proverb conveys that a wife's path to happiness and peace lies in her unconditional obedience to her husband. This claim evaluates the woman, the indispensable feminine wing of marriage, as an object and defines her as an incomplete and weak complement that restricts her intellectual and behavioural freedom. When evaluated with the critical questions in the introduction part of the study, it is deduced that this proverb is the product of a patriarchal culture (mind). The claim, which has no logical explanation in the past, present, or future, aims to bring the feminine wing of the family under male-directed control, restricting her role in the family to household tasks, child-rearing, and regulating her life according to her spouse's direction.

"Çocuğa küçüklükten, kadına baştan öğret" (Çobanoğlu, 2004: p. 185) = "Teach the child from childhood, teach the wife from the beginning [of marriage]"

In this proverb, a newly married woman is compared to a child, emphasizing that, just like the process experienced while raising a child, a newly married wife must undergo a specific education by her husband and, from the very beginning, be taught and trained about what to do, how to do and how to regulate her life depending on the societal and familial ethical principles; In a way, it implies the intellectual and behavioral enslavement of a newly married woman. In this way, the wife will not be able to usurp her husband's alleged position as head of the household, and she will be taught to become a wife of service to her husband as a hostess, cook, and lover.

"Peyniri deri, kadını erkeği [eri] saklar" (Aksoy, 1988: 165; Çobanoğlu, 2004: p. 409) = "The leather conserves the cheese, the husband takes care of his wife."

This proverb informs the reader or listener about the importance of healthy and hygienic nutrition. (It advises that the best way to preserve cheese in sanitary conditions is to keep it in animal skin.) It compares women to 'cheese', which has an essential place in nutrition, and emphasises that a woman (wife) can live or socially have a safe life under the control of her husband (spouse).

"Berdana jinê edeta dinê" (Borak, 1992: p. 15) = "Divorcing a wife is a worldwide custom."

In Western culture, "a divorce is a formal ending of a marriage by law; if one person divorces another or if two people divorce, they separate from each other, and their marriage is legally ended" (Sinclair, 1992: 414). However, in traditional Kurdish culture, the male partner is the authorised person in the act of divorcing; in other words, the female partner (wife) has no right to divorce her spouse. This Kurdish proverb makes a claim that implies 'divorcing one's wife' is a standard or customary act, and it emphasises this act as a custom practised all over the world. It is evident that ancient proverb makers tend to lean more toward the belief that it is the wife who causes the most problems within a marriage. Therefore, they have thought that the male partner has the right or privilege to divorce his wife without being perturbed by conscience, as it is a worldwide custom.

"Gur got: - **"Te li pîreka xwe bixista, wê jî li qîza xwe bixista, hinek mû (bend) birista, lingê kerê reş bixista, min jî li van sirtan ew nekuşta."** (Borak, 1992: p. 17) = "The wolf said: 'If you had beaten your wife, and she had beaten her daughter, and she had spun some goat-hair, and had tied a donkey's foot with the rope, I wouldn't have killed it at large."

This Kurdish proverb emphasises that women are responsible for the daily chores of a family and that whenever there is a problem, the probable reason stems from male-centred indiscipline. The proverb recommends remedying this lack of discipline by violence against the women in charge. The striking point is that women are held responsible for the loss of domestic animals or their being eaten by wild animals.

"Bar era pîya, tewn era jin." (Feyli dialect of Kurdish) (Kamber, 2015: p. 9)

"Bar ji boy mêra, tewn ji boy jina." (Kurmancî dialect of Kurdish) = "Burden [the tasks that necessitate physical strength] is for man, weaving for a woman."

This proverb has content that indicates the period when societies made their living from animal husbandry and farming. This proverb, which has lost its validity in today's societies, is the product of a patriarchal mind and emphasises that women are weak in terms of physical strength. The advice emphasises that women should not be involved in jobs that require physical strength; in a way, it conveys that women should focus on tasks such as knitting, weaving, cleaning, and kitchen work, most of which are now performed by machines.

"Jini bî şu, kemçigi bî du" (Feyli dialect of Kurdish) (Kamber, 2015: p. 42)

"Jina bê mêr, heska bê dû ye" (Kurmancî dialect of Kurdish) = "An unmarried woman is like a ladle without a handle."

This proverb is the product of a patriarchal understanding, for the claim conveys the message that women who are not married or not under the control of a husband are incomplete and dysfunctional. Women are thought to be or shown as weaker than men in reasoning and as the must-be-controlled partner of the family. So, their responsibilities are limited to domestic tasks, such as caring for their family's well-being, which includes serving their husband, cleaning, cooking, and caring for the children. (Litovkina, 2019: p. 20) This practice of patrilineage is primarily due to factors such as power, economic reasons, settlement, housing, food supply, and division of labour, among others. (Malinowski, 2001: p.5) It is an explicit insult to the feminine wing of the human race, but it has no validity in today's living conditions. Millions of women have successfully made contributions to their families and society through professions and positions that require intellectual capacity and physical strength; – such as farmers, drivers, engineers, academicians, pilots, company managers, members of parliament, and ministers or prime ministers of a country – and have proven that the patriarchal folk wisdom that had produced these proverbs is not correct.

Conclusion

The selected antiproverbs present a world where women are weaker than men, vulnerable, and often mistreated or despised, for the proverbial comparisons, similes, and metaphors portray women as empty-headed, sharp-tongued, talkative, unreliable, and long-winded life partners. The women are considered complementary partners in a patrimonial family or society, where men are expected to rule and control them. They are portrayed as having a more fragile nature than their owners, to whom they belong, such as livestock or property. It is observed that when the subject of proverbs is women, the humour becomes bitter, satirical, and even macabre. Unfortunately, they have functioned more effectively than religious or ethical norms in informing the hearer or reader about good and evil, what to condemn, what is acceptable or unacceptable, and who is respectable and who is not; that is to say, these proverbs had been used as rules of conduct in primitive societies, indicating what the people of those societies recognized and hold to as their rules and ideals of personal, familial and social relationships, including general advice or warnings about the feminine wing of human race.

It is a provable theorem that educated people do not need to use proverbs, and using them means returning to a primitive, illiterate cultural memory. However, even the best-educated tend to use some archival cliché verbal tools in daily conversations. In this respect, proverbial language may either train or betray the addressee, as it has a powerful didactic impact in reflecting the social context.

The folklore researcher will not fail to understand that much of the verbal advice offered by societies governed by patriarchal culture has lost its validity in contemporary societies; their claims reveal prejudices and mores that are no longer congruent with the modern mentality. Because women are presented as the weaker gender, a life partner must strengthen her position by linking herself to the male sex and primarily by accepting the dominant social status of the male world. At the same time, men are considered more welcome individuals destined to inherit the realms of parental, social, and political control. Ultimately, men hold power and wealth as a form of ancestral inheritance. At the same time, women can only access it as someone under control, a faithful, complementary partner, and an attentive worker whose obedience is an important facilitating asset in this process.

The images of women, as presented in the Turkish and Kurdish proverbs, make the reader understand the stereotypical understandings of the way patriarchal society wants them to be. The characteristics of institutions, such as happy marriage and devoted parenthood, are often male-controlled domains and are considered successful when male partners fully control the female actors. The denotational and connotational meanings of the selected proverbs indicate that women are not considered subject partners or respected for their feminine nature. They have less freedom than men or are not considered in power, social, and familial matters. The patrimonial mindset has determined that staying faithful to traditional roles, such as domestic servitude, including homemaking, housekeeping, and childbearing, are the only domains where women regularly exert more influence than men. They are the passive individuals who are expected to marry and are not free in their choices; they are told what they should and should not do, while the males are procreatively independent.

It is an essential critical analysis that approaches proverbs from the angle of their treatment of women or analyses other elements of folklore in such terms, for the negative gender stereotyping, as examined in this study, may cause a misleading socialisation process. That is why modern generations need to question the accuracy of the information conveyed through proverbs and compare it with the contemporary interpretation of gender that humanity has adopted today and the women's rights that the feminine world has achieved through centuries of struggle. Consequently, the analysis of antiproverbs against women from two different cultures has shown that it would be a misleading interpretation to regard proverbs as a source of

accumulated wisdom and that they might be evaluated as practical, preformulated, experience-based lessons, ideas or advice for instant use in an appropriate individual situation.

References

Acaroğlu, Türker. (1992) Türk Atasözleri. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları

Akım, U. Bahadır et al. (1997) Redhouse Turkish – English Dictionary. 16th Addition, İstanbul: Ceylan Yayıncılık

Aksoy, ö. Asım. (1988). Atasözleri ve Deyimler Sözlüğü I. İstanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi

Aksoy, Ö. Asım. (1971). Atasözleri ve Deyimler Sözlüğü I Ankara, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları

Aykaç, Y. (2022). Kêşeya Wergera Biwêj û Gotinên Pêşiyan di navbera Tirkî û Kurdî de. Bingöl Üniversitesi Yaşayan Diller Enstitüsü Dergisi, 7(14), 69-83.

Borak Mustafa. (1992). Ferhenga Bivêjan. İstanbul: Enstîtuya Kurdî, Zend Basın Yayın

Celîl, Celîlê. Celîl, Ordîxanê. (2018) Gotinên Pêşîyan. İstanbul: Wardoz Yayıncılık

Chyet, Michael L. (2003). Kurdish-English Dictionary. Yale University Publications

Çiftçi, T. (2021). Zayenda civakî û îmaja jina baş-nebaş di gotinên pêşiyan yên Kurdan de. Şarkiyat, 13(2), 884–901. https://doi.org/10.26791/sarkiat.935312

Çotuksöken, Yusuf. (2004) Türkçe Atasözleri ve Deyimler Sözlüğü. İstanbul, Toroslu Kitaplığı

Curzon, George N. (1892) Persia and the Persian question. Vol 2, London: Longmans Green.

Esar, Evan. (1968). 20.000 Quips and Quotes. New York: Barnes & Noble

Flavell, Linda & Roger. (1994) Dictionary Of Idioms and their Origins. London: Kyle Cathie Ltd.

Gazali, İmam. (1995) İmam Gazali Ledun ve Tevhid Risaleleri. İstanbul: Furkan Basın Yayın

Özkul, Çobanoğlu. (2004) Türk Dünyası Ortak Atasözleri Sözlüğü. Ankara, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı

Hirsch, E. D. (1996) A First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy. Boston, New York Houghton Mifflin Company

Hirsch, E. D., Kett, F. Joseph, Trefil, James. (2002) The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy. Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Honeck, Richard P. (1997). A Proverb in Mind: The Cognitive Science of Proverbial Wit and Wisdom. New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers

Kamber, Saiwan. (2015) Kurdish Proverbs and Sayings. Schweden, Published & Printed by BOD

Kanar, Mehmet. (2009) Arapça Türkçe Sözlük. İstanbul: Say Yayınları

Kayran, M. (2024). Di Gotinên Pêşîyan ên Kurdan de Fehma Zayenda Civakî. Artuklu Kurdology (17). 44-64

Kaplan, L. (2022). Berawirdkirinek di Navbera Gotinên Pêşiyan ên Kurmancî û Tirkî de. A Comparison Between Kurdish and Turkish Proverbs, 197–217.

Kotova, Marina Yu, and Lauhakangas, Outi. "Terms of a Paremiological Minimum and a Paremiological Core in the Current Paremiology" in Proverbs Are Never Neutral. (2023) Kotova, Marina Yu, and Lauhakangas, (eds.) Cham, Palgrave Macmillan.

Kerschen, Lois. (1998) American Proverbs About Women: A Reference Guide. London: Greenwood Press

Kulaksız, Mehmet Ş. (2013) Ji Gotinê Berê. İstanbul: Weşanên Dozê

Litovkina, Anna T. (2019). Women Through Antiproverbs. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan

Malinovski, B. (1913) The Family among the Australian Aborigines. London: University of London Press

Malinowski, Bronislaw. (1960) A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays. New York: A Galaxy Book, Oxford University Press

Malinowski, Bronislaw. (2001) Sex and Repression in Savage Society London and New York: Routledge

Mieder, Wolfgang. (2019) Right Makes Might: Proverbs and the American Worldview. Indiana, Indiana University Press.

Mieder, Wolfgang. (2004) Proverbs, A Handbook. London. Greenwood Press

Mustafa, Borak. (1992) Ferhenga Biwêjan Stenbol, Enstîtuya Kurdî

Oy, Aydın. (1972). Tarih Boyunca Türk Atasözleri. İstanbul, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları

Özcan, Celal. Seuß, Rita. Seeberg, Ina. (1996) Türk Atasözleri, Türkische Sprichwörter. Türkisch Deutsch. Dtv.

Parlatır, İsmail. (1998). Türkçe Sözlük 1; A-J. Ankara: Sözlük Bilim ve Uygulama Kolu Yayınları

Parker, Philip M. (2008). Webster's Turkish-English Thesaurus Dictionary. USA: ICON Group International, Inc.

Penrice, John. (1873) A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran. London: Henry S. King & Co.

Sarup, Madan. Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

Schipper, Mineke. (2006). Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet: Women in Proverbs from Around the World. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press

Seitel, Peter. (1969) "Proverbs: The Social Use of Metaphor," The Powers of Genre 2: 143-161.

Seitel, Peter. (1999). The Powers of Genre: Interpreting Haya Oral Literature. New York: Oxford University Press

Sinclair, John. (ed.) (1992) English Language Dictionary. London and Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers

Türk Dil Kurumu Sözlükleri, https://sozluk.gov.tr/ 12.10.2024.

Mustafa Borak, (2005) Ferhenga Biwêjan. İstanbul: Weşanên Enstitûya Stenbolê

Yıldırım, Kadri. (2023) Aşağı Kurmancî Lorî. Van: Zilan Akademi