

AYTEN ÖZTÜRK

CONTINUES TO TELL
HER STORY...



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“The courts did not give me justice.

Through the solidarity of our people, I was released, even if only under house arrest.

On 6 February I was arrested as part of a conspiracy, and the two aggravated life sentences imposed on the basis of a slanderer’s statement were upheld by the Court of Cassation.

Through the solidarity of our people, I will also be saved from spending the rest of my life alone in a single-person cell.”

AYTEN ÖZTÜRK

**FROM THIS POINT ON, WHAT I WILL TELL IS ENTIRELY A DETAILED
ACCOUNT OF THE CONDITIONS OF MY PAST IMPRISONMENT AND
HOUSE ARREST.**

**I BEGIN BY ASKING THAT THESE MATTERS BE TAKEN INTO
CONSIDERATION AND THAT I BE GIVEN A FAIR TRIAL.**

“2.5 YEARS UNDER HOUSE ARREST!”

**“IF THE PRICE OF RESISTING TORTURE IS
IMPRISONMENT, SILENCE IS DEATH!”**

INTRODUCTION...

“FROM HOUSE ARREST TO BEING BURIED ALIVE!..”

In my first book, *Resistance and Victory in Fascism's Secret Torture Centres*, I described the period in which I was tortured. I recommend it to everyone who has not read it. What I recount here begins with the three and a half years I spent imprisoned in Sincan Women's Closed Prison from 2018 onwards, continues through my house arrest, and ends with my most recent arrest.

“2.5 YEARS UNDER HOUSE ARREST”

After the torture, there was the emotional intensity of being reunited with those I loved. Because my health had deteriorated, there was also a period of rebuilding myself. Despite all the difficulties I experienced during treatment, I was recovering thanks to my comrades in prison.

The unlawful practices in the courts, meanwhile, continued and intensified. At the end of a three-year trial, I was sentenced to two aggravated life sentences and released under house arrest.

House arrest turned into two and a half years of psychological torture. Even so, my legal struggle against torture and injustice continued. My voice reached thousands of people both inside and outside the country. The only people who did not want to hear my voice were the authorities. The torture was ignored.

Nor did it stop there. I was arrested again on the basis of an unlawful case built on lies and slander. During the first months of my latest imprisonment, while writing these lines in my prison cell, I learned that the two aggravated life sentences had rapidly been upheld.

Those who want to “leave me to rot in prison” are using every means at their disposal in an effort to destroy me. They too know that I will not disappear, and that even if I am physically destroyed, the truth will one day inevitably come to light.

Right now I may be alone in a cell. But I am not alone. I know that very well.

In every line I write, I am together with those I love, with my friends and with my people... I believe in the free days when we will all be together again. I draw this belief from the strength of resistance to injustice, from my people and from those I love so dearly. In the end, it is we who will win.

“FOREWORD”

In these pages you will read, in all its dimensions, about the lawlessness, injustice and arbitrariness that a human being can be subjected to. You will read about a struggle for justice that began with six months of torture and continued for six years. I hope that the intensity of emotion you experience - sometimes shuddering, sometimes becoming

angry, and sometimes reacting by saying, “Surely this cannot happen” - will contribute to the struggle for justice.

Perhaps what is recounted here may seem to you like an “isolated incident”. And the struggle being waged may seem like a drop in the ocean. Yet if you look first at your own life, then at those around you and at the injustices taking place in our country, you too will see that this is not “isolated”, and that even if the struggle is only a drop in the ocean, it is not being waged in vain.

Human history and all human values have risen upon heavy sacrifices and reached the present day through them. Every drop in the honourable struggle against imperialism, its collaborators and the ruling classes - all of whom maintain their existence by destroying the values belonging to humanity - will contribute to a just and free future.

There are those who fall into despair and say, “Humanity has come apart at the seams,” or “Nothing can change any more.” To them it must be said: yes, humanity is close to coming apart at the seams, but what still holds it together are the powerful values of the people and the revolutionaries.

With this belief, I call upon you to become a brick in the future of which we dream, when we will build just and free tomorrows; to become a drop in the ocean; and, despite every pain, every act of persecution and every form of repression, never to abandon the struggle for justice. This applies to everyone who has suffered injustice.

There is only one thing that can be said to those who administer justice under the law: they must take independent and just decisions in favour of rights and the law. However difficult this may be within this system, it must be remembered that deciding in favour of rights and justice is both a legal and a human duty.

What I have lived through is a concrete example of injustice: six months of torture, three years of imprisonment, two and a half years of house arrest, and then another unlawful arrest. Immediately afterwards, my two aggravated life sentences were rapidly upheld. The purpose of all these injustices is to destroy me and cover up the torture. It means allowing torture to continue at the expense of the life of someone like me who resisted it.

There is no legal basis whatsoever capable of justifying two aggravated life sentences. The fact that such a sentence was imposed demonstrates that it was a political decision.

This judgment is revenge for my exposing the torture and resisting the torturers. They want to silence me and make people forget the torturers.

To remain silent means saying: “Let the torture continue.” It means that tomorrow or the day after, even an ordinary person in the street may be tortured and society will become accustomed to it. Torture can never be legitimised or normalised. I will continue to cry out that torture is a crime against humanity and that those responsible must be brought to trial.

It must not be forgotten that injustice, repression and tyranny have all taken their place in the rubbish heap of the history of societies. History was written by those who resisted oppression and tyranny.

“WHAT IS OURS BY RIGHT - AND MORE!..”

Because my hearing was supposed to take place before noon, we set off early in the morning from Silivri for İstanbul Çağlayan Courthouse. For three months we had set off each time being told that it was the “final hearing”, only to return without a decision. This time my comrades saw me off without a ceremony, saying, “There cannot be a release ceremony every single time.”

We travelled in a minibus-style prisoner transport vehicle in which only one prisoner was carried. There was glass between me and the driver and officer at the front, glass between me and the single soldier sitting beside me, and glass between me and the soldiers sitting at the back. If you count the glass in the door through which I would leave the vehicle, I was in a position where the soldiers could easily see me through glass on all four sides. Despite this, the camera placed in the upper-left corner of the compartment seemed utterly pointless and disturbing to me. Having an eye constantly watching you serves no purpose other than to disturb and humiliate you.

I dampened a tissue with water and covered the camera. The officer sitting beside the driver turned around, opened the glass partition between us and said, “Do not cover the camera.”

“I will cover it. This is a deeply degrading practice and I do not accept it,” I said.

“Do not cover it. What if something happens to you? How are we supposed to see?”

“Are you really that concerned about me? It is the camera being left on that is disturbing me. Besides, you can see me from every side.”

After continuing the verbal argument for a while, the officer turned back to the front. It was obvious that what he was doing made no sense. Nor was the camera there because they were concerned about me. It was there so that they would not have to take responsibility, and to create the constant psychology of “you are being watched”. I covered it because I knew this practice was part of psychological torture.

As I became absorbed in watching the outside through the windows, I thought about what I might encounter in court. My elder brother had come to the previous hearing too. When the hearing ended, he stood up and quickly said to the judge, “I want to ask something. May I hug my sister?”

The judge was saying, “That is not up to me, ask the soldiers,” when my brother ignored everyone and embraced me. A soldier’s arm became trapped between us. The soldier had to pull his arm away, saying, “Can I have my arm back?”

For a few seconds we embraced with the longing of years. My brother cried out, “My dear sister, we will get you out of here. Do not lose hope. You are innocent. We

will definitely save you.” He was so convinced, so full of faith and so proud. Then the soldier pulled me away and separated us.

Again I lost myself in watching the roads outside... I envied the people walking in the street with no one beside them. Their arms were free; there were no soldiers around them. I looked at their faces. Why were they so sad, thoughtful and angry? Nearly all of them had the same expression and were caught up in the same rush. Most had phones in their hands; even while walking they kept talking or looking at something, but they enjoyed the freedom of walking without a law-enforcement officer beside them.

Were they really free? How free were they? I knew the answers to those questions very well. It was precisely because I knew these things and struggled for freedom and justice that I was under arrest.

The prisoner transport vehicle approached the courthouse. We entered the road leading to the underground garage. No matter how many times that vehicle travelled along that dark, labyrinth-like road and descended seven floors underground, I always felt that the very concept of “justice” in our country had also been buried seven floors below ground. Perhaps that was why they had built the holding cells seven floors underground.

I was taken out of the vehicle and put into a large holding cell. Everything was silent... Under normal circumstances, the hearing should have taken place in the morning. I waited, expecting to be called at any moment. But no one called me.

In the corridor beyond the bars of the holding cell, the soldier sitting opposite me was reading a book. From time to time he checked on me. Usually they become absorbed in their phones, send messages or watch videos. I doubt very much that they are following the news. That too is their life, squeezed into a very narrow space.

While I waited, I would have liked to have a book in my hands, but for senseless reasons it was forbidden. I had my defence statement with me. I read it from time to time, but after a while reading the same thing becomes boring. At times like this the best thing is to pace. Pacing can carry you to very different places. Of course, you must not travel too far and lose touch with reality.

Today I had a hearing and could receive an extremely severe sentence and be condemned to prison for life. Yes, anything was possible. But in reality I should not even have been under arrest.

So why was I imprisoned?

The case concerned an incident from ten years earlier: the beating by local residents of a man accused of raping a child. As a result of the beating, apparently because there was no early medical intervention, he died. According to the indictment, “A child rapist is caught in the Okmeydanı neighbourhood and lynched.” Even the police intervened late. When the man was taken to hospital, the police asked him, “Do you have a complaint against anyone?” He replied, “I do not have a complaint.” The death report, meanwhile, contained references to the delayed intervention.

What did any of this have to do with me? Nothing whatsoever.

Yet one of those who took part in the lynching told the police, “During the lynching, a woman was watching from the pavement.” According to the police, that woman was me. Even if I had been watching - and I was not even there - that would not be a crime. Yet the person who made this statement against me, and who is described in the trial as having “taken part in the lynching” - Mesut Pekgöz - was given a reduction in sentence. Simply because of the statement he made against me, I am held entirely responsible for the incident.

From this we can understand the following: “If you want, go and kill someone, but become a confessor and a slanderer and you will be given a suitable reduction in sentence; you may even be released. But do not resist torture, do not be a revolutionary, do not struggle for rights and justice. If you do, your fate will be the same as Ayten’s.”

The result is this: around twenty people tried in this case served approximately five years each and were released. I, however, was still imprisoned.

On what basis? Was there CCTV footage, a photograph, technical surveillance, another witness statement? No. What was the basis for my detention? There was none. They did not even feel the need for one.

As I paced, anger at the chain of injustices passing through my mind made me quicken my steps. The soldier opposite, who was reading his book, noticed. I took the opportunity to ask him the time.

“What time is it?”

“One o’clock - 13:00.”

“Why has it been delayed so much?”

“I do not know. I will ask my commander.”

While I continued pacing, the soldier asked his commander.

“The hearing has been moved to 17:00.”

“What do you mean? I have been here since this morning!”

“I do not know. That is the information that came from upstairs.”

Apparently I would be pacing for several more hours. So the decision they were going to make about me was not quite so simple after all.

Of course it was not simple. At my first hearing in this case, the court had ordered my release. But my imprisonment continued because, after the torture, I had been abandoned on a piece of waste ground and was then detained and arrested on the basis of a supposed “tip-off”.

Later it was decided that the two cases would be combined. The Ankara case, in which I was detained in connection with being found on that land, was merged with the Istanbul case because they were said to contain similarities.

Two questions arise here. If the Ankara file was opened on the basis of a “tip-off”, why did they not investigate how I came to be on that land, why I was there, whether I was carrying anything that constituted evidence of a crime, the CCTV footage, and so on?

Of course they did not investigate. Had they done so, it would have emerged that the torturers had left me there. The fact that I was taken into custody from the land in Ankara naturally entered the official record, while the six months of torture before that were never investigated at all.

If they had investigated, they would have had to acknowledge that I had been abducted from Lebanon and subjected for six months in a torture centre to suspension, *falaka*, severe beatings, sexual harassment, attempted rape, electricity, electroshock, confinement in a coffin-like box and water torture. It would have emerged that when I was abandoned on the land, my body carried hundreds of wounds and marks - 898 wounds and marks were documented - and that I had fallen to forty kilograms and was in an extremely poor state of health.¹

Instead, they kept me in detention for a long period and waited until I had partly recovered so that my condition would not “cause public outrage” before bringing me before a court. The trial then continued through the lynching case and my detention continued. On top of that, I was being tried with the possibility of two aggravated life sentences.

During the three and a half years that I was detained, apart from the first hearing, this “lynching incident” was not even placed on the court’s agenda. The panel itself knew that I had no connection with it. I was being punished because at every hearing I spoke about the torture I had suffered, demanded that the torturers be prosecuted and demanded that the secret torture centre be exposed.

Yes, at every hearing I described in full detail the torture I endured for six months and cried out my demand for justice. I described the secret torture centre as far as I could from what I had heard and from the moments when my eyes had been uncovered. Yet no investigation was opened either into the torture or into the secret torture centre.

While I spoke in court, the judge remained silent. From time to time something I said caught his attention and he would raise his head slightly and look around, as if wondering about - and worrying about - the effect my words were having on the courtroom. Although he did not say it openly, whenever I spoke about the torture it was obvious from his whole manner that he wanted me to finish quickly and remain silent. When I finished, he would look down at the file and could find no question to ask me.

“Did you have anything to do with the lynching?”

“No.”

He could not expand his questions because there was no CCTV footage, no photograph, no concrete evidence of any kind. Even so, he turned through the file as if

¹Falaka: a method of torture involving repeated beating of the soles of the feet.

hoping to find something and tried to read it. But there was nothing to find, and he knew that too. The other two members of the panel knew it as well. In fact, one of the two women on the panel listened to me constantly without averting her eyes and requested my release at every hearing.

What, then, was my great crime? Resisting torture and exposing the torturers.

When one member of the panel continually sought my release, it was not difficult to understand that the decisions of the others were political. This judicial system sends us the following message:

“You can be abducted. You can be disappeared. You can be subjected to every form of torture for six months. That is ordinary. But in the end you were released, so forget the torture. Let the torturers carry on comfortably doing their ‘job’.”

There is no doubt that the torturers continue their work in comfort. People in my situation, meanwhile, are sentenced for life.

The speed of my thoughts and my anger made me pace even faster. I paced for around five hours. I cannot remember how many times I stopped to rest - perhaps once or twice. The soldier in the corridor had stopped reading his book and was now pacing as well, humming a folk song. From time to time he chatted with a colleague who came to check on him, and they showed one another things on their phones and laughed.

Suddenly their commander arrived. They straightened themselves up, stood and went over to him. The commander said, “Open Ayten Öztürk’s door.” So the time had come. The hearing that was supposed to have taken place in the morning was being held at 17:00.

Until then I had drunk only water. With excitement and anger added to everything else, I could feel my blood pressure dropping. But I did not let the soldiers see it.

After the barred metal door opened with a crash, they put handcuffs on my wrists. We were on the seventh basement level of the courthouse. We were in a place guarded like a fortress and would only be taking the lift from the holding cells upstairs. What possible meaning could there be in handcuffing me here? Fear? I was one woman; they were five or six soldiers. Was it to create a sense of guilt in me? Impossible. But perhaps they wanted to believe it themselves. Perhaps they also wanted to present that image to the outside world. In reality it was pure helplessness and arbitrariness.

After the lift we waited in an enclosed area in front of the door opening into the courtroom. Even there the officer wanted to argue with me about my views.

Referring to my covering the camera, he said, “But you are always being stubborn. What good does it do?”

“Opposing an injustice and being persistent and determined about it is not stubbornness.”

He wanted to continue. He went on talking to himself. My mind was on the courtroom. Would they once again make no decision, postpone the hearing for another

month and ask, “The hearing has been postponed for one month. Do you want to return to Sincan or stay in Silivri Prison until the hearing?” Would there be observers? How many lawyers were there?

While these questions flew around in my mind, the usher called, “Ayten Öztürk!”

When I entered the courtroom, my lawyers were sitting to the left of the door. I could not count them, but there were five or six. They greeted me. The courtroom was full, but it was full of lawyers representing defendants being tried without detention. No observers had been admitted.

It was obvious that the few people in plain clothes at the back were police. When I looked more carefully, I noticed that one person from the families had managed to get into the courtroom. They must have slipped in quietly. They were wearing a medical mask. The effects of the pandemic were still continuing and many people were masked.

My lawyer came close and said quietly that we would present our defence against the prosecutor’s opinion. I had a thirteen-page defence statement in my hands. I was tense, angry and excited. I was experiencing in their most intense form all the emotions that injustice can create in a human being.

In the crowded courtroom, the effects of asthma, exhaustion and excitement made it difficult for me to breathe. The torturers had not received the slightest punishment, while they wanted to punish me merely in order to cover up the torture. The pressure of the injustice I was experiencing had enveloped my entire body and spirit.

Cold sweat poured from my body, my blood pressure was falling and my ears were ringing. I was preparing myself to shout a slogan when the decision was read, but the ringing in my ears grew louder and I slowly felt my breath being cut off. Before I could properly hear the decision, I found myself on the floor. Unfortunately, I had fainted.

As I slowly came round, I saw a crowd of lawyers and several soldiers around me. Everyone was saying something, trying to revive me.

“She has asthma. Her inhaler will be in her bag. Spray it into her mouth so she can breathe.”

“She has gone completely pale. She probably has not eaten since this morning. Here, give her a biscuit.”

I had never before seen anyone respond to a person who had fainted by trying to stuff a biscuit into their mouth.

“Splash water on her face, water!”

“Is there no cologne? Cologne!”

“There is some on the prosecutor’s desk. Wait, I will get it.”

With the cologne, I began to come round properly.

At that moment my lawyer called from somewhere in the crowd, “You have been released, Ayten! You are being released!” trying to bring me fully back to myself.

As I got to my feet, my lawyer repeated, “You have been released on the condition that you do not leave your residence - in other words, under house arrest.”

I still had not fully recovered. For three and a half years I had described, in every detail, the torture I suffered for six months - at every hearing, in letters, during meetings with my lawyers and family, even in my dreams - and I felt as though I had lived that torture over and over again.

After all of that, I could feel throughout my body and spirit the injustice and the terrible violence of being punished in a case in which I should have been acquitted.

After reliving the same torture every day for three and a half years, I understood that the fact that I was once again the person being punished was in reality a punishment for my resistance. I would never accept this form of punishment directed against my beliefs, my values and my dignity.

“RELEASE!”

As I travelled back in the prisoner transport vehicle, lost in thought, the officer sitting beside the driver repeatedly turned to check on me.

“See? You became ill in court. What if you become ill again? That proves we have to keep you under observation.”

Without entering into any further argument with me, he frowned, turned to the front and fell silent.

I had been released under house arrest. What I would experience as I left prison was uncertain. Although I should have been acquitted, this outcome did not surprise me; nor would I have been surprised if I were detained at the gate or if the prosecutor objected to my release. Under the conditions of injustice in our country, it was difficult fully to experience the joy of release.

During the three and a half years I had been unjustly and unlawfully imprisoned, I had experienced another form of torture. As the vehicle moved along, I remembered my first imprisonment after the torture.

When I was arrested and brought to prison, one of the guards who saw me - skin and bone, my body covered in wounds and marks - later told me that the sight had never left their mind and had affected them deeply. When I was taken to the cell, my comrades came to me and embraced me in tears. What they said, feeling within themselves the pain of every wound on my body and in my spirit, has never left my memory.

“You are our honour.”

“You are comradeship itself. I would sacrifice myself for you...”

No - I would sacrifice myself for them. Throughout those six months I felt them beside me at every moment. That gave me a different kind of strength. I had simply done what I had to do. Had they been in my place, they would have done the same.

Prison was only another station of the torture. I had never thought the torture had ended. I had been imprisoned unjustly, and the difficulties I would face had simply taken on new forms.

Through the tightly meshed metal window of the prisoner transport vehicle, I watched birds flying in flocks and drawing close to one another, and I thought of us. My comrades in the cell surrounded me with care. They did everything they could to heal my wounds.

Where we were held there were three nominally single-person cells and one communal area. But each cell contained a bunk bed, so in practice they were for two people. My comrade immediately said, "We could actually stay in separate cells, but I am going to stay in yours."

"No, do not put yourself out. Stay in your own cell. Besides, it will be difficult for you to climb into the top bunk."

Of course, it would have been extremely difficult for me to climb into the upper bunk too. I still had difficulty moving my arms and legs. I felt extraordinarily weak.

"Nonsense. I am used to it. You are the one who would never manage to climb up there."

I suppose that was the most sensible solution. My comrade would sleep on the upper bunk and I would sleep below.

A bath had been prepared so that I could wash. When my cellmate saw that I had difficulty lifting my arms while taking off my clothes, she helped me. As she did so, I noticed her eyes filling with tears. The marks that had been concentrated on certain parts of my body and that I had tried to hide were exposed. She was seeing them for the first time. The traces of electricity and electroshock, like points of burns, covered my body. Some of them still looked fresh.

I could see in my comrades' eyes the horror produced by the bruises, swelling and paired electroshock marks that looked like burns all over my body. A few days earlier, this body that they could barely bring themselves to touch had been like a toy in the bloody hands of the torturers. They threw me from one side to another, slapped and punched me, beat me until blood came from my mouth and nose. It was as if they were taking revenge on me for every human value, every beauty and every act of resistance, beating me with anger, hatred and fury.

When they stripped me completely naked in an attempt to break my dignity, I doubled over with a sickening sense of disgust and the instinct to cover every part of myself. Yet it was they who should have been ashamed. By then I was focused only on resisting.

Now I was in prison, among my comrades. I was hesitant to show them the wounds covering my entire body. I realised that I had not lost the emotions that an honourable human being, an honourable woman, would feel. Because they had not been able to capture my mind, those feelings had always remained.

At my comrades' justified insistence, I opened my clothes a little more and allowed them to count the marks. They were right to insist, because everyone had to hear about the brutality and savagery of the torturers. They counted every visible mark. There were 898 wounds and marks.

Not once during the torture had I said, "I am tired." Yet they tortured me until my strength was exhausted and I lost consciousness. But now? The relaxation after washing, being among my comrades and the exhaustion of the day had left me completely spent. They helped me into bed. It did not take long for me to fall asleep.

During the night my cellmate heard me moaning continuously. She would lean her head down from the upper bunk and ask, "Are you all right?" Yes, I was all right. I was in a warm place, among my comrades. The thought that I would become even better filled me with peace.

After months in an environment of torture where I had been pushed around and where they had tried to destroy my dignity, the way my comrades now cared for me, together with the dozens of letters arriving from everywhere, accelerated my recovery.

I received many different letters from people all over the country, people I knew and people I did not. If I could, I would share parts of those letters with you. But because I wrote this book in prison, I cannot. As far as I can remember, some of the striking sentences were these:

"You are our flower of resistance."

"I am so sorry that I could not prevent you from suffering those tortures and being imprisoned."

"You resisted even for people you did not know."

"Whenever I am in pain and feel I can no longer endure it, I think of you and find the strength to carry on."

"They do not release you because you exposed them."

Children who sent drawings often drew me together with their mothers, fathers and themselves, as though I were part of the family.

It was striking that from all over the country I received so many pictures of babies, children and nature. It was as if people wanted me to feel the beauty of children that gives human beings strength and hope, and through the pictures of nature to feel as though I were outside. And I did. I felt the precious sensitivity of our people throughout my entire body, in every cell of my brain.

While I experienced these beautiful emotions, the clash of wills created by prison conditions continued.

My first treatments, my journeys back and forth to hospital, the single-person prisoner transport vehicle and the refusal to remove my handcuffs in front of doctors meant that everything dragged on. I had difficulty using my arms. I tried to do exercises to strengthen them. My movements and my walking were very slow.

Because of the conditions under torture, I had developed heel spurs and felt pain with every step. I spoke slowly and slurred some words. I tired extremely quickly.

Creams and ointments had been prescribed for the marks on my body and hands. Although I applied them regularly, some of the marks never disappeared. The dotted burn marks on my body, particularly on my fingers, were disturbing. My comrade carefully applied the cream so that I would not feel pain. I asked her, "Will these marks disappear?"

"Do not worry. They will all disappear," she said with a smile.

I turned my arms and looked at the deepest burn marks on my wrists. I remembered the torturer pressing the electroshock device against my wrists like someone possessed: my eyes blindfolded, my arms stretched out to either side, my wrists handcuffed to iron rings fixed in the wall. "Why, why, why won't you speak?" he shouted, pressing the electroshock device against me with all his strength.

Then, almost horrified, panting and drenched in sweat, he looked at what he had created on my fingers and wrists.

"These will remain as souvenirs for you. Souvenirs from us. Wherever you go, they will go with you," he shouted, as though trying to reassure himself.

The "souvenirs" he left are still on my wrists six years later. I do not forget. I am sure they do not forget me either. When they gave me electric shocks, my screams rose as though they would bring the torture centre down; and each time they shouted, "Speak!", my silence struck them in the face. I am sure it still disturbs their sleep.

While these memories remained fresh in my mind, my comrades who were taking part in the general resistance against violations of rights in the prisons were constantly being given disciplinary punishments. During my own days in captivity, the health problems resulting from the torture were becoming increasingly apparent. I was undergoing treatment. Even so, disciplinary investigations were opened against me as well, and at times I was given solitary confinement punishments.

Because my health problems had worsened as a result of the torture, the prison doctor had issued a report stating that I "could not be kept alone". Not satisfied with this, the prison administration wanted me to appear before a hospital medical board. The journeys to hospital for the medical board became another form of torture.

The doctors' attitude was hostile. First they subjected me to a number of tests. Everything was a formality.

The testing area was a place with its door open to the corridor, soldiers walking around outside, a female guard beside me, and a few perfunctory questions being asked. Then they handed me a test containing dozens of questions. The treatment shown to a person who had come to hospital as a result of torture made me think, "Are all of them working together?" Their prejudiced manner, indifference and unconcern made me think so.

I answered the tests as anyone could be expected to answer them in such an environment. Afterwards they locked me in a filthy, airless cell in the basement. I was kept for around three hours in this tiny cell, barely four paces long, where I had difficulty breathing. Then my turn came, I was called and brought before the first doctor.

“Are you Ayten?”

“Yes, but let us talk after my handcuffs are removed.”

Looking at my file, the doctor said angrily, “There is no need. You go and commit the most serious crimes and then come here to save yourselves.” Without speaking to me at all, he wrote a report. There were five metres between us. He did not call me closer and did not even properly hear my voice. Without looking at my face, he wrote something on the file in front of him and signed it.

I left after telling him that what he had done was contrary to medical ethics, that he was committing an offence and that I would file a criminal complaint against him.

After similar treatment from the doctors, I was told that I would be taken before the medical board. I entered a large room containing around ten doctors. They sat around tables arranged in a U-shape, with computers in front of them. I was brought to a table in the very middle of the room. With my handcuffs still on and a soldier still inside, a doctor whom I understood to have my file in front of him began to speak.

“Take off your mask.”

“Remove my handcuffs. And the soldier must leave. Are we really going to conduct the examination like this?”

“Yes. There is no need. The handcuffs can stay on. The soldier can stay too. Open your mask a little.”

No sooner had I opened my mask than I was taken out again. The result was a report stating that I “could be kept alone”. Exhausted and regretting having come to hospital at all, I was escorted back towards the prisoner transport vehicle.

The military commander began speaking to me as though he knew me personally.

“Look, if one day you are released, keep quiet. Do not get involved in things. Do not speak out about everything. Go, get married, build a home and live a quiet life.”

That made it clear: all of them were acting together. Even though I understood this, I gave him my answer.

“Is it for you to decide what I will do when I am outside? There will be injustice and I am supposed to remain silent, is that it?”

The torture continued in the arbitrary behaviour of the soldier, the doctor, the guard, the prosecutor and the judge... The criminal complaints I made about the torture I had endured for six months were closed without prosecution without my ever once appearing before the prosecutor.

I was arbitrarily not taken to my first hearing in Ankara. Various excuses were used, and I was not taken to the ongoing trial in Istanbul until a year and a half later. The reason was obvious: they wanted to prevent public solidarity and were afraid that the sight of the marks on my body would provoke outrage.

A year and a half later I was taken to the hearing in Istanbul under the imposed condition of travelling alone in the prisoner transport vehicle. On both the outward and return journeys, freezing air conditioning and very loud music were used to turn the journey itself into torture. At Silivri Prison, where I was taken, I was arbitrarily held alone for thirteen days.

Around forty letters I had sent to the press about the hearing, which was still months away, were not posted until the day before the hearing.

This was my second time in Silivri. At every hearing, one member of the court panel requested my release and entered a dissenting opinion against the decision to continue my detention, yet the hearings were repeatedly postponed to dates only a short time later. This continued for three months. And this time, I had been released.

The journey back towards the prison seemed endless. When we arrived, instead of being taken to the section where my comrades were held, I was taken to the waiting area at the entrance. My comrades sent my belongings to the gate. I was prevented from saying goodbye to them.

From a distance I heard them calling out together: “Ayten Öztürk Is Our Honour!” and “We Love You!” Songs, slogans and zılgits echoed through the prison in a farewell ceremony. I thought to myself that I would be worthy of that honour. Even though I could not make my own voice heard, I greeted them all from my heart.²

Just as all the procedures had been completed, the officer who was supposed to process my departure said, “Ayten Öztürk, we are going to detain you.”

Although I was not very surprised, I asked, “Why?”

“There is a detention order for you.”

“What is the reason? What detention? You have to give me an official explanation.”

“It has not been explained, but apparently there is an arrest warrant.”

“I am going to inform my lawyers.”

“All right. We will do it.”

What I had expected had happened. At the gate I was taken to Silivri Central Police Station. After meeting my lawyer there, I was taken to another police station that same night.

They put me into a tiny cell, barely two paces across, like a grave, with no water and a toilet covered in filth. I met my lawyer there through the bars.

²Zılgıt: ululation - a high-pitched vocal cry used in celebrations, ceremonies and expressions of collective emotion.

My lawyer told me that there was in fact no warrant for my arrest, and that I was being detained because an old order had not been removed from the system. In reality, I was being held completely unlawfully. The authorities had failed in their duty by not removing that old order and then, on top of that, unlawfully deprived me of my freedom.

They took me to hospital for a medical examination under escort by an armoured vehicle. It was impossible to understand the reason for such extreme security. I spent one night in custody. The following afternoon I was released.

When I came out, families and lawyers were waiting at the door. One person had very poor eyesight. They could see me only as a white shadow. Even so, they embraced me with immense longing and excitement, as though they could see perfectly. Although it was the first time I had met many of them, we felt as close as if we had been together for years. Some were people who had followed what had happened to me through the press and had come because of that. We could barely speak from excitement.

They were worried that I might be detained yet again. Of course there was no reason for that. But then, keeping me for one night in that disgusting place immediately after my release had also been completely unlawful and arbitrary.

As we embraced one another in turn, everyone's words became mixed together.

"How are you?"

"I am very well. How are you? Have you been waiting long?"

"We have been waiting since yesterday. Actually there were more of us. Some of the families left late last night. They send you many greetings."

"Oh! It was completely arbitrary detention. They had failed to remove something from the UYAP records that they themselves were responsible for removing. So they kept me for one night because of their own mistake."³

"They do not do their jobs and then they detain people arbitrarily. For them it is that simple."

"Come on, let us go now. There is no need to stay here. They have exhausted the poor woman."

"I am fine, do not worry. Come on, let us go."

"My dear sister, I am so sorry for what you have been through. You do not know me, and until this I did not know you either. What they have done to you! I followed everything. I am so glad to have met you."

He seemed older than me, yet he called me *abla* - elder sister. I addressed him as *abi* - elder brother.

3UYAP: Ulusal Yargı Ağı Bilişim Sistemi, Turkey's National Judiciary Informatics System.

“I am glad to have met you too, abi. You have waited here such a long time. Thank you so much. You must be exhausted.”

He was driving while answering me.

“It does not matter. We would wait again if necessary. We would not have left without you.”

The person sitting beside the driver knew the route well and warned him, “Stop, stop. You are going the wrong way. Turn right.”

“All right, all right. Do you think I have ever been around here in my life? It is my first time.”

I was sitting in the back seat between a visually impaired comrade and another young comrade.

The younger one said, “Look how we got you out, abla. I knew that whatever happened we would get you out. We love you very much.”

“I love you too. It is thanks to you that I am here. They tried very hard not to release me, but in the end it happened.”

As I watched the world outside, I thought about the torture I had endured for six months and the unjust trial almost every day. I should not have spent even a single minute inside, yet I had been kept there through coercion. Once again we had shown one truth very clearly: no oppression and no tyranny lasts forever.

The young comrade noticed that I had drifted into thought.

“Would you like some water, abla?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Are you hungry?”

“No... I have seen you. That is enough for me.”

The visually impaired comrade guided the driver: “Head towards the house...”

It was slowly getting dark. I could not even tell how long the journey lasted. We talked all the way and eventually reached the house. Every street and every building was familiar, but because darkness had fallen there was no one outside.

When I entered the house, I was greeted by the applause of a crowd. From the entrance all the way into the sitting room, the house was full of people. I embraced everyone one by one. I did not know most of them, but they seemed to know me.

In the middle of that excited and joyful atmosphere, my elder brother back home telephoned. The phone belonged to someone in the room. I was a little surprised when it was placed in my hand, but as soon as I heard my brother's voice I understood. I was embracing people while at the same time answering him on speakerphone. He was very happy. His voice was close to tears, filled with the fear of losing me again.

My disabled sister and my ill brother at home had not been able to come. But my younger elder brother was beside me. He could hardly believe that he had found me again.

It was very late. Everyone was tired from waiting, but no one showed their exhaustion. It felt as though each person wanted to say something of their own, yet they first waited for me to speak.

After embracing everyone, I made a short speech:

“I am very happy to be among you now. During the six months when I was under torture, you searched for me everywhere. You asked at hospitals, morgues and police stations... You never gave up. At the courts, during visits, through letters, you were always beside me. And now we are all together. Without your solidarity, I would not be here today.

“We showed the torturers once again: in this country you will not be able simply to abduct people and torture them with impunity. We achieved this together. I thank every one of you. Resistance was the winner. Once again, we won...”

Applause broke out and sweets were handed around. Everyone’s eyes were shining. Happiness and sadness were mixed together. I saw some people wiping away tears. It was an atmosphere difficult to describe.

After I spoke, one father said, “We thank you. Your honourable stand under torture gave all of us strength.”

I kissed his hand and we embraced. Our eyes filled with tears.

One of the young people said, “Abla, I was always writing letters to you. I came to Istanbul just to see you.”

When he told me his name, I remembered the letters he had written. I was seeing his face for the first time. He had come from another city, and on top of that he was a student. What precious emotions we were experiencing. It was as though I could see myself in every one of these people.

Another family had also come from outside Istanbul.

“There were many people where we came from who wanted to see you. They could not come, but they sent you their greetings.”

“Will you send them many greetings from me too?”

“Of course, my child. Hopefully one day we will take you to our hometown as well.”

I answered with a smile.

Everyone wanted to say something, but it had become very late. The young comrade who had brought me took hold of my arm and said, “Abla, it is very late. Shall we go?”

After saying goodbye to everyone together, we left. My brother was beside me and still seemed unable to believe that I was really there.

When we arrived home, the table was ready. During the meal I looked around and said, “Wonderful! We are together as a family again!”

My brother sitting next to me wanted to say something too, but could not. The conversation continued with questions such as, “What did you miss most?” and “What dessert do you like?” They must already have known my answers, because everything had been prepared.

The atmosphere was so beautiful and precious that it was impossible not to become emotional. This beauty, these values, belonged to us. And all those prices had been paid for this. These values were worth paying a price for thousands of times over.

I spent the first week visiting the people I loved and those close to me. Although I had been welcomed outside with enormous enthusiasm and happiness, there was also the thought: would I be detained again? Such things did happen.

Indeed, one week later, while I was visiting a family, their house was raided and I was detained again. The prosecutor had objected to my release and demanded that I be remanded in custody.

What was all this effort for? It was nothing but arbitrariness, playing with people’s lives and emotions.

Once again they detained me with the same brutality, twisting my arms behind my back and handcuffing me. I spent one night in police custody. In the morning I was brought before the court. Because there was a possibility that I might be imprisoned again, those close to me had sent clothing.

I appeared before the judge. The judge was dictating something to the clerk. I wanted to speak. He did not want me to speak at length. I could not understand what was happening.

After my lawyer’s defence, the hearing was adjourned briefly. There was silence during the break. I thought about all the emotional upheaval I had experienced recently.

“Yesterday I was outside. Now my hands are in handcuffs. We will see what happens tomorrow...”

Then we were called back inside.

The judge announced: “It has been decided to release her on condition that she does not leave her residence.”

As I left the courtroom, once again my emotions were turned upside down. Anger and happiness existed together. I embraced the people beside me. They still carried the worry that something negative might happen again. Even after that ruling, it was natural to wonder: “Will something else happen? Will they change the decision?”

But nothing did. We left normally.

On the way I thought: what had I lived through in the space of one week?

First I had been given two aggravated life sentences and released under house arrest.

That same day, before I had even been able to go outside, I was detained and kept for one day in completely unlawful custody.

One week later I was detained yet again. This time the reason was the prosecutor's objection. And that same day I was once more released under house arrest.

If nothing new happened, it seemed that my days from then on would pass under house arrest.

“HOUSE ARREST!”

My house arrest began in the middle of June 2021.

When I arrived in the garden of the Küçük Armutlu Cemevi in Istanbul, there were several people there to welcome me. We greeted one another and I introduced myself. Some had heard my name; others had never heard of me. Those who knew me began explaining to the others who I was.⁴

One of them said, “Are we going to talk standing up? Shall we sit?”

The wooden tables in the Cemevi garden were pushed together. Those who heard told those who had not, and the number of people gradually grew. Some of the new arrivals looked at me with astonished and worried eyes. A deep conversation began.

“Welcome! Get well soon. Are you all right?”

“Thank you. I am well. You all look well too.”

An elderly mother said, “We are well, my girl. What will happen to us? But you look well too, maşallah, strong as a lion. You are only a little thin. We will build you up quickly, do not worry.”⁵

“May your hands never know trouble,” I said, kissing her hand.

A young man said, “Abla, I followed the news about you on social media. Your photographs appeared too. I am glad you are better. Get well soon.”⁶

“Thank you. Yes, I was thinner. Thanks to my comrades in prison, they looked after me very well. Are you a student?”

“No, I am a worker.”

I looked at the other young people. “And you?”

4Cemevi: an Alevi place of worship and communal gathering.

5Maşallah: a common expression of admiration and good wishes, also used to ward off the evil eye.

6Abla / Abi: literally “elder sister” / “elder brother”; also affectionate or respectful forms of address for an older woman or man.

Each gave their name and introduced themselves. They had come from different cities. Some were students, some workers, and some unemployed.

One of the young people asked, “Abla, how were you released?”

“They gave me two aggravated life sentences and released me under house arrest.”

“That is a huge sentence! I followed the trial. They sentenced you over an incident you had nothing to do with. House arrest is still better - at least here you can see people. Even if you are imprisoned at home, it is better than prison.”

“In truth, neither is good. These are unlawful decisions. But as you know, we cannot eliminate injustice without resisting it.”

“They are doing this because you resisted torture. Otherwise, what did you do that could justify aggravated life imprisonment?”

The elderly mother said, “They are openly taking revenge on you, my girl. What was it supposed to be - that you stood on the pavement and watched while the neighbourhood beat a rapist? What nonsense! Honestly, they punish whoever they want. They release thieves, mafia men, torturers and murderers.”

Another young person joined in.

“Abla, how did you endure it? I think about it and wonder whether I could endure it.”

“You would. You would endure it too. Once you make the decision to resist, the rest follows. When you are prepared to face death, you discover a strength greater than you could ever imagine.”

“Abla, not now, but another day, would you tell us what you lived through?”

“Of course. I also wrote a book about it. If you want, read the book first, and afterwards you may have questions.”

“Shall we have some tea?”

“Yes, that would be very good.”

“Was there anything that felt strange when you first came out?”

“The way people I had never met treated me as though they had known me for years was very beautiful. And the absence of Zeynep Abla and Haydar Abi, whom we lost to coronavirus, is very noticeable. I felt the emptiness they left behind.”

“The Cemevi had become inseparable from them. They put so much labour into this place. It is impossible to forget them. They have now named the Cemevi after Zeynep Abla.”

The elderly mother said, “My child, we have lived through so much more. Helin and İbo were in this red house of yours. What did they not do to them? Our hearts burn. Come on, my girl, go inside now and rest. You must be tired. You are not used to crowds; it will exhaust you.”

“All right, thank you very much. We will see one another again. Have a good day, everyone.”

“You too...”

I said goodbye to everyone and entered the house painted red on the outside.

The house known as the “red house” was one of the highest houses in the neighbourhood. It was a *gecekondu* house with a view of the Bosphorus and a small garden in front. The garden was a little neglected and had no gate. It was obvious that no one had lived there for a long time after Helin and Lawyer Aytaç.⁷

Küçük Armutlu was a *gecekondu* neighbourhood built through the collective labour of revolutionaries and people who had migrated to Istanbul from different parts of the country. For years it had been one of the neighbourhoods that “urban transformation” policies sought to hand over to monopolies. It had been demolished and rebuilt many times. The people had even been attacked with armoured vehicles and machine guns.

Despite everything, they resisted for the right to housing and the right to live. Children, young people and the elderly had lost their lives. Those prices were paid to protect their most basic rights - their homes, their labour and their dignity. That was why they were constantly made a target. Yet they never abandoned resistance, unity or solidarity. At times they withdrew into themselves and fell silent, but even when silent they spoke through their way of life, their solidarity and their culture.

They call Küçük Armutlu the “Pearl of Istanbul”. With its magnificent views of the Bosphorus visible from every side, its flower-filled gardens and productive fruit trees, it was a place worth seeing and worth living in. Above all, those who had laboured to build it had the greatest right to live there.

Darkness had fallen. Although I was extremely tired, I could not sleep on that first night. I thought such things were normal until one became accustomed to a new place. I got up and made coffee. Outside, I could hear the sounds of the neighbourhood slowly waking up. From the window I became lost in the view of the sea. How much I had missed the sea... Unfortunately, for the time being I had to be content with the view alone.

I had no idea what the conditions of house arrest would be. I was sure I would soon learn all of them through experience. What other upheavals were waiting for me? We would see.

“TREATMENT!”

About a week later, two men I did not know came to the door. From the file in their hands it was clear that they were officials. Even so, I asked, “Who are you?”

“We are from the Probation Office. From Gayrettepe.”

⁷*Gecekondu*: literally “built overnight”; an informal or self-built dwelling, and by extension a neighbourhood of such housing.

“I do not know you. May I see your identification?”

One of them handed me his ID. I checked it.

“We are going to take your signature confirming that you are here. You know that you are not allowed to leave the house. If you do, we will draw up a violation report.”

“The garden immediately in front of my door is part of the residence.”

“All right, that may be true. But what it says here is that you are not to leave the residence.”

“Look, if you come here and do not see me, then write a violation report.”

“All right. But we can come at any hour of the day to obtain your signature.”

“You already have. I understand that.”

“Get well soon. Have a good day.”

For a long period the same people arrived at intervals in a civilian vehicle and took my signature. Meanwhile I could not leave even for hospital without obtaining permission from the court. I did not have an electronic tag on my ankle and there was no order requiring one. Even so, a court permit was compulsory every time I went to hospital.

My health was not good and I now needed to begin treatment as soon as possible. Towards the end of my first month under house arrest, with the court's permission I went to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey - TİHV - for treatment.

First I described the torture I had suffered during those six months, as well as torture and adverse conditions I had experienced in earlier periods of police custody and imprisonment. They asked detailed questions about the effects these had had on me. They listened to me for a long time.

I was then referred to hospital. Again with permission, I went to hospital to give blood. Because my blood values were extremely low, they wanted urgently to administer an intravenous substitute. The doctor was amazed that I was still standing.

I told the doctor at TİHV about this.

“They were surprised because they do not know what you have already endured. Scientifically, yes, with blood values like these it is difficult to remain on your feet.”

The doctor looked at my file.

“You need to raise your blood values, have the nodules and fibroids checked regularly and continue your asthma medication. There is damage in your arms. For that you need to attend physiotherapy regularly for fifteen days.”

“Will the damage go away afterwards? How serious is it?”

“The strain has caused oedema in the fibres. If you experience the same things again, if the arms are forced again, you may no longer be able to use them.”

“As long as this system continues in our country, there is always a possibility that it could happen again.”

“Yes, you are right, but you must be careful.”

It is easy to say “be careful”, of course.

“Will you give me medical documents proving that I was examined here?”

“We will write down the hours during which you were here as well, correct?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Do you have difficulty obtaining permission to see the doctor?”

“This is how it works. First I obtain a written appointment from the doctor. I arrange it by telephone. I send the appointment document to my lawyer. My lawyer writes a petition requesting permission for me to attend the appointment and sends it to the court together with the appointment document. A few days later the court usually approves the request. There have also been times when it refused.

“When it refuses, I cannot go to the doctor. When it approves, the court itself determines the hours during which I am allowed to be at the doctor: ‘permission is granted between such-and-such hours’.”

“What happens if you are not at home during those hours?”

“Suppose things take longer at the hospital. If there is an emergency, you have to obtain an official written document from the hospital proving that you were there and being examined, and submit it to the court. If you are late, they draw up a report saying that I violated the house arrest. But if I have documentation showing I was at hospital, the violation decision can be cancelled.”

“You send the documents showing that you attended the doctor to the court trying you, correct?”

“Yes, but the Probation Office also wants a copy. And they tell me, ‘Do not bring it yourself; send it with a relative.’”

“And if you do not have a relative?”

“They say, ‘Find a way.’”

“Then we should not delay you. I am also giving you the document stating that you will begin physiotherapy. Get well soon.”

“All right, thank you.”

When I stepped into the street, I noticed plain-clothes police walking nearby. There had been others on the way there. They must have handed surveillance over to one another. I ignored them completely and looked around me.

The streets were very crowded. Everyone was rushing as though they had somewhere urgent to reach. Sullen, angry people who looked ready to explode at any moment quarrelled most often on buses and the metro.

“How many more are you taking, brother? We cannot breathe in here!”

“There is space in the middle, move in a little more, come on, just a little effort!”

“What is this, brother? Are we human beings or sardines packed in a tin?”

We too squeezed onto the bus. There was no alternative. We had to get back within the time allowed. A little further away we saw the police following us forcing their way onto the bus as well.

Let ten or a hundred of them follow me; I did not care. At that moment I was interested in the streets and people of Istanbul, which I had missed so much. I realised that I had even missed Istanbul’s arguments.

Ah, my working, loyal, long-suffering people... One day your faces too will smile.

We hurried all the way home. A few minutes later the Probation Office arrived once again. I signed to confirm that I had returned, and they left.

“MY MOTHER ÖMÜR!”

Ömür Mother and her daughter came from my hometown. When Ömür Mother embraced me, I felt as though I were embracing my own mother. Since my mother’s death she had never wanted to leave me alone. She looked at me with full, tearful eyes as though seeing me for the first time and would not let go of my hand.

In the accent of our hometown, mixed with a little Arabic, she said, “My child, I cannot believe it. You are standing in front of me now. Maşallah, you look well, my girl. We have lived to see these days too, a thousand thanks.”

“I am well, mother, do not worry. How are you? You look much younger yourself.”

“Yes, my child, of course, of course... Pain has made me resilient. Your resistance gave all of us strength, my girl.”

“I thought of you all the time too. I drew strength from you.”

“What they did to you, my girl... We searched for you so much. We could not sleep. If only you knew how many vows we made. Your sister immediately sacrificed an animal. Her first vow was for you to be found. She has another vow for the day you are completely free.”

“May she be well. Despite her disability, my sister became an entire family to me.”

“Yes, my child. She is sad because she cannot come here, but she is happy that you are outside. Are you going to stay here all the time?”

“I am here for treatment. I gave this as my address, and since my court is here too, I thought it would be easier. Of course I would very much like to go home, visit my sister and the graves of our loved ones. But unfortunately house arrest prevents it.”

“I was so sorry about your mother and father. My condolences, my girl. What suffering they endured, what suffering... They died longing for their child. I do not

want to upset you either, my child. Look, I am your mother too. Hold out your arm and let me put on the *halğa* I brought from the shrine. May it bring you good fortune and protect you from the evil eye.”

“Thank you. Because you are the one putting it on, it will bring good fortune.”

(*Halğa*: a thin strip cut from the green cloth found at shrines and tied around the wrist. It is believed to bring good fortune and protection from evil.)

She tied the strip of green cloth around my wrist while quietly murmuring prayers. She embraced and kissed me, and I kissed her hands.

According to this tradition, which carried me back to my childhood, it is best not to remove the green strip from the wrist until it becomes old, fades and falls apart. Out of respect for the beliefs and values of our people, and out of my love for Ömür Mother, I kept the strip she tied around my wrist for some time.

Later she burned *bahur* - incense - over glowing embers in a small pan and fumigated the house.

According to the belief, incense is burned to protect ourselves and the home from evil, to bring success and happiness, and to remember those who have died.

During the few days she stayed, Ömür Mother brought our traditions, our culture and even our famous Antakya table into my home. Although it was difficult to part from her, she promised she would come again.

“THE FIRST HOUSE RAID!”

After a while I began physiotherapy. I had to attend for fifteen days, excluding weekends. I was forced to tell the physiotherapy doctor the same things all over again.

After listening to what I described in astonishment, the doctor said, “What do you mean? Did your arms become like this because of torture? Does torture like this still happen?”

“Yes, it does, and I was subjected to these tortures in that torture centre for six months.”

“How can a human being do such things to another human being?”

“They had ceased to be human.”

After the examination I went to the physiotherapy department. First I was kept for some time beneath a cylindrical device positioned above the treatment bed; then electrodes were attached to my arms and shoulder. After waiting for another period with the electrodes in place, I was given arm exercises and finally ice treatment. The treatment was varied from day to day.

The physiotherapy centre was a considerable distance from the house. I had to change transport three times. In order not to exceed the time permitted by the court, I hurried there and back.

Sometimes I bought water on the road. Every time I did, I noticed that the price had risen. Ever since coming outside, I had been struck by how expensive everything had become.

There were many foreigners in the streets, most of them speaking Arabic. Even the owner of one small shop I entered to buy water was Arab. A customer came in and asked something in Turkish. The Arab shopkeeper did not understand. I had to intervene in the strange exchange.

First I asked the shopkeeper in Arabic, “How do you run this shop without speaking Turkish?”

“There is no one here who speaks Turkish well. I communicate through gestures,” he said.

“Where are you from?”

“Lebanon.”

I translated what the customer wanted and left in astonishment. Once again I changed vehicles three times and hurried so as not to be late. I arrived home exactly on time.

I quickly prepared something, ate, read for a while and went to sleep early. At around seven the next morning, the sound of pounding on the door made me leap out of bed.

“Who is it?”

An aggressive, commanding voice shouted, “Open the door, police!”

Before I even had time to change my clothes, the door was hammered again.

I looked from the window. My house was surrounded by uniformed and plain-clothes police, special operations officers and armoured vehicles.

I opened the door.

“What is happening? What kind of raid is this first thing in the morning?”

Masked, armed special operations police rushed inside without answering. They moved through the rooms pointing their weapons at me and at the rooms. An uproar broke out as the argument began with shouting and commands.

I noticed they were not wearing shoe covers.

“There are shoe covers by the entrance. Put them on! You are terrorising the home of someone already under house arrest. Get those weapons out of my face!” I shouted.

The special operations officers left without answering. As soon as the plain-clothes officers entered with two witnesses they had brought from the neighbourhood, they began searching.

“What are you doing? Do you have a search warrant? Why have you come?”

One of them covered most of a sheet of paper with his hand and showed me only the section containing my address. Meanwhile more plain-clothes and uniformed officers and special operations police filled the rooms.

“We are looking for someone.” He gave a name.

“Are you going to come here every time you are looking for someone? You have looked; they are not here. Now leave!”

“We are going to search the house.”

“Do you have a search warrant? If the person you are looking for is not here, you have no right to search the house.”

“Yes, we do,” he said, and they began the search.

For around an hour they ransacked the house before leaving. They found not a single thing that could constitute evidence of a crime. But that was not what mattered to them. What mattered was creating terror and presenting me to the neighbourhood as though I were guilty.

After they left, I began putting the house back in order. Neighbours who had heard what happened came to ask what had happened and to help. The house was quickly tidied.

That day we learned that other addresses had been raided in the same manner. At each one the excuse had been, “We are looking for someone.” From the news we discovered that the very people they claimed to be “looking for” were already in police custody. The purpose was nothing but intimidation and arbitrariness.

“HEART-SHAPED BISCUITS!”

Apart from the days when I went to hospital, I spent the entire day at home. I generally read books and wrote about the torture I had endured and the period of my imprisonment. Some people who contacted me for interviews spoke with me online; others came to my home.

When I looked at social media, I saw that dozens of people had experienced similar things during the period when I had been abducted and tortured. Many were people dismissed from their jobs by decree laws.

Their descriptions, including their accounts of the places where they had been tortured, were very similar to mine. I wondered: “Could the seven people who were in the place where I was tortured be among those now speaking out?”

Some had still not been found, and their families continued making public statements.

Searching social media, I found three MPs who had spoken about me in the Grand National Assembly while I was missing. Some columnists had written about me, and internet television channels had carried a great deal of news about my case.

During that period I was the only revolutionary woman who had been abducted, tortured and then exposed the torture she suffered. Perhaps that helped prevent new disappearances and new acts of torture.

One thing is certain: I wanted to do everything I could so that nobody else would ever live through what I had experienced. Torture is an unforgivable crime. I would never accept this crime against humanity, nor would I allow it to become normalised.

Now the torture was continuing in another form.

As I was lost in these thoughts, the telephone rang. It was my sister.

“Hello, sister, how are you?”

“I am fine, my dear. I miss you so much. Can you not get even one day’s permission? I want so much to see you.”

“No, sister, they will not allow it. But we will see each other. Do not worry.”

My sister Selva had laboured for all of us siblings. After my mother, she was the one who did everything in the house and held the family together. Although she deserved a beautiful life, sadly misfortunes had left her disabled.

Because of her disability she could not come to me, and I could not go to her. Like me, neighbours visited and helped her. After our usual daily conversation, I ended the call. She would ring again tomorrow anyway.

While thinking about my sister’s difficult life, I forgot about my neighbour Şaziye, who was in the kitchen helping prepare food. Just as I turned towards the kitchen, I heard a faint “tap tap” on the sitting-room window.

It was Ayşe, a little girl from the neighbourhood. She was striking the glass with a stick in one hand while shouting, “Open up, open up!”

Ayşe, the six- or seven-year-old daughter of a neighbour, occasionally came to ask for things. She would bring along other children who had become tired of playing in the park in the Cemevi garden.

“What is it, Ayşe? What do you want?”

“I want cake.”

“What kind of cake?”

“Heart cake.”

I held out the plate of biscuits on the coffee table.

“No! I want heart cake.”

“What is heart cake?”

Fortunately, my neighbour Şaziye Abla understood.

“She wants one of the heart-shaped biscuits.”

They should have been in the first drawer. I remembered that on an earlier visit I had given them heart-shaped biscuits, but I had completely forgotten it as something unimportant.

“Well! So even biscuits have to be heart-shaped, is that it? Well done, Ayşe. Bad luck, there are none left. Would you like a sweet?”

“No! You gave me one the other day. I want that.”

“But there are none left.”

“All right then, give me a sweet.”

I held out the sweet dish. They shared them, then ran away without saying anything.

Şaziye Abla said, “You are the one who spoils them. They ran off without even saying thank you.”

“Do not say that, they are very sweet.”

“Yes, yes. Very.”

After eating and washing the dishes, we were drinking tea when the sound of the door startled us. I opened the glass panel and looked out. Ayşe and her friends again.

“What is it, Ayşe?”

“Waaater!”

“Water?”

“Yes, I want water!”

I gave them water and they all drank in turn. As I handed back the glass I said, “Here...”

“No thank you?”

“You come too.”

“Where?”

“To the park. Come and play with us.”

“I cannot.”

“Why?”

“I cannot go out. I am under house arrest.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means I have to stay here all the time. I am forbidden from going out.”

“Do you not have a mum and dad?”

“No.”

“Oh... Well, you stay there then, all right. I will come again tomorrow.”

She left with her friends. What had she thought? Had she understood? I was not sure.

I asked Şaziye Abla about the children. Ayşe's mother worked and she was being raised by her aunt. It was difficult to know where her rough, combative side came from, but it was obvious that beneath it she had very delicate feelings. The other children were calmer and quieter. Ayşe was like their leader.

When the weather warmed, it was possible to see them almost every day. The park stood directly opposite the house. All of their characteristics were connected with the conditions in which they were growing up. In every way these beautiful children brought excitement, enthusiasm and happiness into a person's life.

I was not spoiling them. I valued them. They are our future.

After this long conversation, I thanked Şaziye Abla and saw her off.

The next day the children came again. Although sweets were once again requested, I understood that what they really wanted was to see how I was.

"What are you going to bring me?" I asked.

"Would you like flowers?" one of the children said.

"Yes. You can pick some of those wild flowers further along and bring them to me."

They immediately gathered a bunch and brought them. I thanked them and waved them goodbye. I put the flowers in a glass of water and placed them on my table. For several days I woke to the wonderful fragrance of those beautiful flowers.

Throughout the time I remained at home, especially in summer, Ayşe and her friends constantly knocked on my door, asking both for heart-shaped biscuits and whether I needed anything. When there were biscuits, I gave them biscuits; when there were not, I gave them whatever I had. I could not send the little ones, but I could sometimes ask the eldest among them to go to the shop for small things.

"ELECTRONIC TAG!"

When the doorbell rang, I understood that someone unfamiliar had arrived. I looked out of the window. A white official vehicle was parked outside.

"Who is it?"

"Probation!"

"For a signature?"

"We are going to fit an electronic tag."

"A tag? Where has that come from? There was no electronic tag in the court's decision."

"That may be so. This is something within our discretion. We did not fit one before because we did not have any tags available."

“How can that be? When you want, house arrest can be imposed without a tag, and now suddenly you say you are going to fit one. I am going to call my lawyer.”

“You can. Whether you let us fit it is up to you.”

“What happens if I refuse? I have already been under house arrest until now and there has been no problem. Why a tag now? That proves the supervision can be carried out without one.”

“That is the decision. We have to fit it. If you refuse, we will have to take action.”

“You mean arrest me?”

“We draw up a report and send it to the court. The court makes the decision. Refusing the tag will count as a violation. For that reason, you could be remanded in custody.”

“I am going to speak to my lawyer.”

“All right. We will wait outside.”

When I spoke to my lawyer, he also told me that the court decision did not specifically state that an electronic tag had to be fitted, and that the Probation Service was exercising its own discretion.

He explained the possible consequences if I refused and left the decision to me. Refusing would mean the possibility of imprisonment. I had to think and decide.

For five or six months I had been without a tag and had not violated the order not to leave my residence. So why a tag now? How convincing could the explanation “we did not have any tags available” possibly be?

Clearly this supervision could be maintained without an electronic tag. Officials regularly came to the house to obtain my signature. Armoured vehicles fitted with cameras regularly passed in front of the house to check. Police from the local station could arrive at any moment. Since house arrest had functioned without a tag until then, it could continue without one.

This was completely arbitrary. It was another dimension of psychological torture.

I had read reports about electronic tagging. When the system was first introduced, it was supposedly used “to protect women subjected to male violence”, by fitting tags to men who committed violence against women. Now one was being fitted to me.

Murderers, torturers and drug dealers could walk around freely, while the tag was being put on my ankle. To subject me to this while I was being tried in a case with no evidence whatsoever was completely arbitrary. It was psychological torture.

However much they tried to present me as “guilty”, I knew one thing: in the eyes of the people, I was right. There is no power greater than being right. And sooner or later these truths would come out.

Believing this, and filled with anger at the decision to tag me, I allowed them to fit it.

So they wanted me to become my own “tagged prison guard”.

Over time I would see that none of the buttons on the device ever really served any useful purpose.

“What happens if the electricity is cut? Does the tag signal stop too?” I asked.

“No. It has a battery that lasts a long time. Do not move the monitoring unit. Do not even wipe it. Otherwise it could count as a violation.”

Apparently if the unit was moved they could no longer monitor it, so they treated that as a violation. The unit remained fixed on a coffee table in the sitting room. I covered it with one of the small cloths normally placed on such tables. Since I was not allowed to wipe it when it gathered dust, that was the method I chose.

Now I could not go outside at all. Not even into the garden in the courtyard of the house.

House arrest is a different form of torture. You seem to be outside, but you are not. You cannot do anything beyond the small area in which you are confined. Even if two people fight directly in front of your house, you cannot step outside to separate them. You cannot do your own shopping. If you become ill, you cannot go to hospital without permission.

House arrest forces you to become your own prison guard.

This practice is contrary to human dignity, and in my own case it was also entirely unlawful and arbitrary. Yes, it has aspects that are better than prison, but in my view the two cannot even be compared in that way. If the original decision is unlawful, then every form of “punishment” imposed as a consequence of that illegality is also unlawful.

And what a person finds most impossible to accept is precisely this injustice. There is a reason people say: “The greatest violence is injustice.”

From the first moment, the tag began to disturb me. An object whose properties I did not understand had been fastened around my ankle, affecting even the way I moved. I found it extremely difficult to sleep on the first night. Later I would wake whenever the tag struck my other leg.

I do not think I would ever become accustomed to this tag - and it was better that I did not.

“THE PEOPLE’S THOUGHTFULNESS!”

Early one morning the doorbell rang. I did not reach the door quickly enough to see who it was. I looked around and there was nobody there. Then I noticed a bag hanging from the metalwork of the door. Inside were greens and vegetables gathered from a garden.

I assumed one of the neighbours had left it. I wished I had seen who it was so that I could thank them. I looked inside: fresh vegetables picked from a garden, enough for at least two meals.

This too was an example of the culture of solidarity among the people. Whoever had left it, may their hands and labour be blessed. It was very welcome. There would certainly be a way, somewhere in life, to repay the labour our people had given.

Our people's sense of justice is very clear. They know very well who is right and who is wrong, who is subjected to oppression and who is carrying it out. There is no confusion in their memory. When choosing their side, they take their own values as the measure. Whoever defends those values, they stand beside. Whoever tramples on them, they stand against. It is that simple and that clear.

When I opened the window, I realised that the person calling me was my neighbour İhsan, who used a wheelchair. He was shouting with all his strength, but the words came with difficulty.

Because of an illness that had developed over years and gradually spread throughout his body, parts of İhsan's body had slowly lost their function. He could no longer walk, had only limited use of his hands and spoke with great difficulty, drawing out and slurring his words.

Although he knew where this serious illness could ultimately lead, he challenged medicine and science by continuing to live with hope and resistance. He had a very powerful way of expressing himself. Why was he calling me with such effort?

"Hel-looo! Hel-looo!"

"Hello, how are you, İhsan?"

"I am fi-ne. How are you?"

"I am well too, thank you."

"Do you have bre-ad?"

"No."

"I bought bre-ad for you too. Come and get it. You know I cannot climb the stairs with the wheel-chair."

"I cannot come, İhsan. They fitted an electronic tag to my ankle. Give it to one of the children passing by and ask them to bring it to me. Thank you."

"That is all right, but why did they fit a ta-g?"

"They say they did not have tags before and now they do, so they fitted one."

"What an ex-cu-se! They did not have one un-til to-day - did something suddenly hap-pen? Are you all right otherwise? Do you need any-thing?"

"I am fine, I am fine, thank you. No, I do not need anything."

"All right then. I will send the bre-ad with the chil-dren."

“Thank you. Have a good day.”

“You too, have a good day.”

“THE TAG IS NOT GETTING A SIGNAL!”

I went into the kitchen. I was almost finished with what I was doing when the telephone rang. It was the Ankara Electronic Tag Monitoring Centre.

“Ms Ayten, where are you?”

“Where could I be? I am at home!”

“Where in the house?”

“In the kitchen!”

“Could you go to the monitoring unit? We are not receiving a signal from your tag.”

I went over to the unit. There were at most seven steps between the kitchen and the device. A short time earlier they had replaced the tag and moved the monitoring unit, but now apparently it was not getting a signal in the kitchen either.

Could anything be this absurd? Apparently it could. It was unbelievable.

While thinking this, I listened to the person on the phone.

“Could you press the blue button?”

“I pressed it. It has started ringing.”

“All right. Do not move away from the unit.”

“What do you mean? Am I not supposed to go into the kitchen either?”

“How many square metres is your house?”

“I do not know, but you were supposed to set the distance according to the size of the house.”

“That has nothing to do with us. This is the electronic tag monitoring centre. What you are saying is being recorded.”

“Then record it. Am I not supposed to move around inside this house?”

“If there is a problem, someone will come and fix it.”

“I must be able to move inside the house. Otherwise this becomes room arrest.”

Without answering, the person said, “Have a good day,” and ended the call.

I was astonished. What did it mean that the tag did not work in the kitchen? It was absurd. It was nothing other than tormenting someone under house arrest. It meant that I could not even move freely inside the house.

Over the following days they called me even while I was in the kitchen. On different days they telephoned at least fifteen times for this reason alone. House arrest

was being applied like confinement to a single room. Yet for a long time no one came to adjust the range of the tag.

Every day I had to finish whatever I was doing in the kitchen as quickly as possible. This continued for several months, until one day another call came from the Monitoring Centre.

“Ms Ayten, is there any damage to your tag? Has any piece broken off or anything like that?”

“I do not know. I have not noticed. It is possible. The tag has been on my ankle for a long time.”

“All right. An officer will come to replace it.”

They would come because of the excuse that “the tag is damaged”, yet for months they had not come to adjust the range.

“REPLACING THE TAG!”

The same two officials who had come before arrived at the door carrying a box.

“We are from Probation. Apparently there is a problem with your tag. We are going to replace it.”

“What kind of problem is there?”

“We are going to check. Have you forced or pulled it at all?”

“What do you mean, forced it? If I had, would it still be on my ankle?”

“All right, we are only asking. They can be damaged by forcing them or hitting them against something. We are going to check.”

“I thought you said they were very strong.”

“No, apparently the locally made ones are better.”

They came inside and sat down. One examined the tag on my ankle while the other waited at the table, ready to write the report.

“Yes, a small piece has come away from the side.”

“It is obviously worn. Look how long it has been on my ankle.”

The other looked too.

“Yes, it is worn. Of course, you have had it on a long time.”

They cut the tag from my ankle at the side using a tool like pliers. There were several tags in the box. One of them took one out to try it.

“Shall I put it on the right or the left?”

“The same place, the right.”

I wanted the disturbing and damaging effects of the tag to remain confined to only one leg.

After wrapping the strap around my ankle, he attached a square piece to the part resembling a watch and locked it into place. The square piece made a click when attached. That must have been the lock.

“Could you go over to the unit?”

I went over to it. While fitting the tag, the official was also speaking to someone at the Ankara Monitoring Centre.

“Yes, we fitted it. She is beside the unit now...”

The person on the other end must have told him to wait, because we stood there for around five or ten minutes.

We were waiting for what they called “activating the tag”. This procedure made the tag compatible with the monitoring unit so that it could be followed from the Monitoring Centre. During the process, a tiny red light on the tag blinked on and off. Once the necessary connection had been established, the light disappeared and was never seen again.

Now it was time to set the distance. Because the tag did not work in the kitchen, its range had to be extended. Without ending the call with Ankara, they began checking the range.

“Go into the kitchen.”

“It does not work in the kitchen. You need to extend the distance.”

“Then we will move the unit. We will take it from the room into the sitting room.”

“All right, do that.”

“You will not be able to step outside the front door then.”

“Extend it as far as the front of the door. Is the courtyard not part of the house?”

“No, it is not.”

“This is a gecekondu house. What is the logic of that? It is arbitrary.”

“That is what we were told. We do the same thing to others too. For example, there is someone with a two-storey house who cannot go upstairs.”

“Do not compare my situation with someone who has a two-storey house.”

They gave examples that even they themselves did not seem convinced by. They also repeatedly said, “We just follow orders. We do what we are told.”

They moved the unit from the room near the garden into the sitting room. From there it was closer both to the front door and the kitchen. At least now I could go into the kitchen. Going into the courtyard still remained a problem.

After setting the range, they ended their call with the Ankara Monitoring Centre. While the officials were completing the written report, the Monitoring Centre rang me directly.

“Am I speaking to Ayten Öztürk?”

“Yes.”

“Where are you?”

“At home.”

“The location of your monitoring unit has changed.”

“Yes. Your officials moved it. They are here now.”

The hard tone of voice with which the caller had begun changed instantly.

“Oh, really? They are there?”

“Yes.”

“Put one of them on the phone.”

Was everyone wearing an electronic tag supervised from all sides as I was? I very much doubted it. They did not even trust one another. The Ankara Monitoring Centre had spoken to the official in my home five minutes earlier, yet five minutes later it was calling to ask about the device.

Were the person who had first called and the person calling now different people, even different institutions? I could not know. But it was obvious that at every moment I was being monitored by at least four different institutions.

The paperwork was completed. I read the report: it recorded the replacement of the tag because of damage and the change in the position of the monitoring unit. I signed it and they left.

Immediately afterwards, there was another knock at the door. It was one of the neighbours.

“Why did they come? Has something else happened?”

“No, Hasret Abla, nothing has happened. They replaced the tag and moved the monitoring unit from the room into the sitting room because it did not work in the kitchen.”

“Why do they keep coming and going all the time? You did not have a tag before. What changed that they suddenly put that thing on you?”

“Nothing changed. From time to time they do things like this. They want to turn this place into another form of torture. There is no other meaning to it.”

“They are wasting their time. You have overcome so many ordeals. You will overcome this too. You will see.”

“Come in, abla. Let me make you a coffee.”

“No, thank you. I am in a hurry. I am going to the market; today is the community market day. Do you need anything?”

“Yes, there are a few things. Wait, I will write them down. Here is the money too. Thank you in advance.”

“Oh, please, do not mention it. Your sister still calls, does she? How is she?”

“Yes, she calls. She is well, what can she do? She can walk a little with crutches but then becomes tired. Most of the time she lies down. The wounds from her operations apparently open up and do not heal. She is always waiting for me.”

“And you cannot go to her. One day you will, though. I believe that. Give her my greetings. Get well soon. I should go before I am late.”

“Thank you. All right, see you.”

“LITTLE SEVİL!”

There was a cactus on the window overlooking the road. A newly married couple who had read my book and been moved by it had brought it to me. It had been as small as a finger and was now almost the size of my hand. I changed its tiny pot. Every time I went to the window I checked on it. It even flowered.

Although it did not require water or special care, in very hot weather I gave it some water.

I looked outside. People hurried to work. Children going to school had not yet shaken off the sleepiness of the morning, but they still had enough energy to joke with one another. In the distance, beneath the magnificent sight of the Bosphorus Bridge, the sea lay completely still and deep blue, smooth as a sheet. The sound of people and cars mixed with birdsong.

There was a beautiful, lively world outside. For me, however, the days passed under house arrest between walls built from prohibitions. Of course I moved around inside the house too, but it could never be the same as outside.

During the time I spent confined there, babies grew, trees blossomed, and years were stolen from my life.

While I was lost in thought looking towards the sea, I heard the voice of Sevil, the little girl who lived opposite. She had not yet started school.

“Ayten Ablaaa! Ayten Ablaaa!”

I looked across but could not see her.

“Ablaaa! I am here, look down, I am here!”

Then I saw her jumping up and down behind the half-height barred gate at the entrance to her house, trying to make herself visible. The gate barely reached the waist of an adult. Five-year-old Sevil’s head only just reached the barred section.

“Good morning, Sevil. How are you?”

“I am fine, abla. How are you?”

“I am fine too. What are you doing?”

“I just woke up. I washed my face and came to the gate.”

“Can you not go outside?”

“No. The gate is locked. They locked it so a car would not hit me.”

“Do not go out while your mother is not there anyway.”

“Alright, abla. Why do you never go out? You are always there.”

“I cannot go out. I am under house arrest.”

“Oh! Why? How can that be? Is your door locked?”

“No, it is not. I have an electronic tag on my ankle.”

“A tag? What kind of thing is that? Why?”

“I will explain why later.”

“Alright then. I will see you when I go to the park.”

“Alright.”

When my house arrest began, this little girl had been a baby. At night I used to hear her crying. The only child in the house, she had been raised with great care and was a sweet, pampered little girl. In a manner of speaking, I had watched her grow from infancy until now. And now she had grown old enough to call out to me. On top of that, she was being neighbourly.

She came over on her way to the park. I tried to explain things to her, but she did not really understand. The only thing that mattered to her was that I could not go outside and that every time she passed, she would call out to me.

One day I heard her calling again. I looked out.

“When did you wake up?”

“I woke up early. I called you before I even washed my face.”

Then she lowered her voice and said, “My mum is sleeping...”

“Alright, do not wake your mum,” I said.

“I am going to start school. I will come and see you on my way.”

“I am very happy for you. Alright, I will be waiting.”

She stopped by on her way to school. She looked very sweet in her lovely uniform. I wished her success and saw her off.

Sevil called out to me and waved almost every day after school. Even when she received her school report, she came running straight over to me. I embraced her and congratulated her. She showed me a photograph of the pupils in her class. According to her, she was the prettiest girl in the class. There was another girl who thought she was pretty, she said, but actually she was very ugly...

That was how my little friend and I formed a bond. I gave her colouring pencils as a present. She responded by drawing pictures for me.

Sevil was the youngest witness to what was being done to me in that house. I am sure that when she grows up, she will remember and understand all of it, because the memories of innocent and pure children are very strong.

“THE STREET LAMP!”

In summer the neighbourhood was full of life, but after a certain hour at night there was a deathly silence. The nights no longer belonged to kind-hearted, cheerful people full of life. The nights belonged to those who fed on oppression, evil and hatred.

Because I had not become accustomed to the electronic tag, I had difficulty sleeping. There was an object on my ankle that was not part of me, and it disturbed me with every movement. Since my bedroom window looked onto the street, I noticed the smallest movement or light outside.

The street lamp on the corner directly opposite the house lit the street as brightly as daytime. But that day it had broken down, and at 01:30 in the morning they arrived to replace it - with a huge municipal vehicle equipped with a crane.

I looked outside in astonishment. Which dark street elsewhere in the country was shown such care and attention, I wondered? Of course, the concern was not lighting a street in a gecekondu neighbourhood. The most reasonable explanation to me was that they wanted the lamp there so that my house could be seen more clearly from the police station around one hundred metres away.

I was not surprised, because their tight surveillance did not end there.

As on every night, plain-clothes police would slowly drive past the house in the armoured vehicle they called the “Scorpion”, turning its lights on strongly enough to illuminate the inside of the room and deliberately making noise. Sometimes they stopped and made noise, waiting for me to come to the window and look out “anxiously”.

They wanted the satisfaction of saying, “Good, we disturbed her, harassed her and stopped her sleeping again.” I did not give them that satisfaction. I did not go to the window. But I can admit that they did disturb me, harass me and keep me awake.

After this pathetic harassment, which became routine even though the hour sometimes varied, I would try to sleep. Just as I was beginning to drift off, at around three in the morning, my telephone would ring.

Half asleep, I answered.

“Hello?”

“Is this Ayten Öztürk?”

“Yes.”

“Where are you?”

“Where do you think? At home, asleep. Has something happened?”

“The signal from your tag disappeared for a moment. Could you go closer to the monitoring unit?”

“I am already close to it. Look, I am being harassed by armoured vehicles, Probation officers come at all hours, and now you are calling in the middle of the night. If there is a problem with the tag, replace it.”

“Ms Ayten, this call is being recorded.”

“Let it be recorded. I am telling you what is happening.”

“Are you beside the unit?”

“Yes.”

“Alright, press the button.”

“I pressed it.”

“Alright. We will send an officer if necessary.”

After the call I could not sleep for at least an hour. I could make no sense of what was happening. They had apparently abandoned all other work in order to concern themselves with me - and several official institutions were involved at once.

While the country was overflowing with criminal organisations and mafia gangs, they were spending their time on a woman confined at home with an electronic tag on her ankle. This was what psychological torture looked like under house arrest.

I thought about what they wanted and what their purpose was. In fact it was clear: they wanted me to remain silent. They wanted me to forget the torture, to give up seeking justice and defending my rights and my dignity.

But was that possible? Can a human being accept torture or grow accustomed to it? No.

They would not be able to torture everyone as easily as they had tortured me. If I remained silent about torture, would that not mean allowing torture to continue? I knew that torture was still continuing - silently, secretly and out of sight.

But I would continue to do my part and expose torture. There was no other possibility.

With these thoughts, I eventually fell asleep.

In the morning I woke with swollen eyes and without having had enough sleep. The activity during the night had not been normal. I wondered what would come next.

At around ten in the morning, my house was surrounded by armoured vehicles, plain-clothes and uniformed police, and special operations officers. They hammered urgently on the door.

“Open up! Police!”

The special operations officers pushed past me and rushed inside. My anger reached its peak.

“Why have you come? What do you want? Were your harassment at night and your six months of torture not enough? Show me your search warrant!”

Again they showed me a name. They said they were looking for a young woman from the neighbourhood, one of my neighbours, over a criminal matter.

“Fine. It has nothing to do with me. Get out of here!”

“We are going to search the house.”

“You cannot.”

“We have a warrant.”

“This raid is completely arbitrary. You have come simply to disturb me. I have a tag on my ankle, I am under house arrest, and you know that, yet you still come here.”

A bearded, middle-aged plain-clothes officer whose eyes were full of hatred came right up to me, leaned towards my ear and threatened me:

“We will come for you too. We will take you too. We will do to you what we did to Aytaç!”

Then he hurried outside.

I turned towards the cameras, which were recording at the time.

“Film this too. Film this! That plain-clothes officer who just went outside threatened me. Let the prosecutor see this too. He says, ‘We will come for you as well.’ How exactly are you going to come? With what fabricated conspiracy? I am here. Despite all your repression, harassment and arbitrariness, I am here. And I am not going anywhere, because I am right. You know that very well too. Stop protecting the real criminals, the torturers!”

The camera did not record everything I said. The man who threatened me did not come back inside. They ransacked my home and then left quickly. Once again there was not a single item in the house that constituted evidence of a crime.

I looked from the window as they left. In a manner of speaking, they had deployed an army. The plain-clothes officer who had threatened me caught my eye. He stared at me with hatred and menace, then climbed into a car.

With the help of the neighbours, we put my ransacked home back in order.

“VISITS FROM MPs AND ARTISTS!”

Today MP Hüda Kaya came to visit me together with a poet and one of the people’s respected artists. Members of Grup Yorum were also visiting at the same time, and it became a very pleasant gathering.

Hüda Kaya said, “I am following all the developments. I absolutely reject torture. It is also clear that the legal grounds for the house arrest are not valid.”

Once again I explained why I was under house arrest.

“For watching from the pavement while a child abuser was beaten in the neighbourhood? It is unbelievable. Even if that were true, what is this demand for two aggravated life sentences?” the poet said.

“They are taking revenge because I resisted torture. My house was raided recently as well. Almost every day they harass me. Either they call on the telephone, the armoured vehicle known as the Scorpion passes in front of the house, or they come to the door. They do these things repeatedly and frequently.”

The conversation continued around the need to make all of this known and how that might be done.

Hüda Kaya said, “Send me a file containing everything you have about what you have experienced - medical reports, information, documents - as well as an explanation of your legal situation. I will raise it in Parliament.”

I told MP Hüda Kaya that I would send her a file about my case.

Later we discussed the repression directed at Grup Yorum in particular, and more generally at intellectuals and artists. After listening to a beautiful song from Grup Yorum, we saw our guests off.

I sent the file concerning the torture and lawlessness I had experienced to other MPs as well as Hüda Kaya. I also followed the parliamentary questions submitted on the matter.

Alongside Hüda Kaya, MPs Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu and Tülay Hatimoğulları, and former MP Murat Çepni, were among those who raised the issue and submitted parliamentary questions.

In Parliament, the torture I endured for six months after being abducted from Lebanon in 2018 was raised, along with the unlawful proceedings against me.

Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu began a speech in Parliament by saying, “Ayten Öztürk was tortured for six months in a secret torture centre...”

He was interrupted.

“Why are you raising an incident from the 1990s today? That case was closed years ago. Ayten Öztürk is not even alive.”

Gergerlioğlu replied, “I am not talking about that. I am talking about Ayten Öztürk, who was abducted from Lebanon in 2018, brought to Turkey through unofficial means and tortured for six months.”

They answered, “Alright, then let us investigate.”

Yet no explanation was made about this incident, which was in fact very well known. Instead, attempts were made to conceal it, close it down and pretend it had never happened.

During budget discussions, after Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu asked about the matter, the Vice-President said that “an abduction could not have taken place”. When the same MP raised it again at another meeting, there was complete silence.

This silence meant neither that they accepted it nor that they denied it. But their silence and their attempts to ignore it did not eliminate the truth. One day they would inevitably have to confront that truth.

“ARBITRARINESS!”

From time to time I continued going to doctors. The eye doctor I visited did not look at my face at all apart from examining my eyes through a machine. With his head lowered, he reluctantly wrote out and signed the prescription while I explained my situation.

“I am under house arrest and my permitted time is limited. I have to be home by a certain hour. Could you please move a little faster?”

For the first time, the doctor lifted his head and looked at me.

“I wish I were under house arrest,” he said.

He looked so exhausted and fed up that I felt sorry for him. That someone could become so weary even of a profession so valuable to humanity was one of the consequences of this system.

Yet if he knew that house arrest was not an environment in which you could put your feet up, relax, sleep soundly and breathe freely at your doors and windows, he would not have wished for it.

I wanted to explain this to the doctor, but my time was limited. I could not. Under house arrest, even conversations have a time limit.

I would have liked to tell that doctor:

“To be under house arrest means being constantly checked by telephone and by officials arriving at the door; being harassed by armoured vehicles; having the electronic tag repeatedly replaced; being subjected to house raids and threats of imprisonment. It is a practice that turns into psychological torture.”

In the place where I was tortured for six months, the torture was carried out by around fifteen people, naturally with the knowledge of their superiors. Under house arrest, at least five official institutions were involved in this torture.

Which institutions were involved in this surveillance that had become torture? The nearest police station, the District Police Directorate, Vatan Police Headquarters, the Istanbul Probation Office and the Ankara Electronic Tag Monitoring Centre.

Why was the electronic tag replaced fifteen times in two and a half years? Why was my house raided six times? Throughout those two and a half years there had not been a single violation of my house arrest and no evidence of a crime had ever been found in the house, yet there was no end to the arbitrariness.

Harassment with armoured vehicles, telephone calls in the middle of the night... Could the reason really be strict supervision? Of course not. The aim was to wear me down, exhaust me and silence me. Above all, it was to make people forget the torture and separate me from the people.

There could be no other explanation for refusing me permission to go to my hometown even after an earthquake, a death or an illness, or for all of these arbitrary measures.

Were they achieving their aim? The answer was in the life I continued to live.

“THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WAS SURROUNDED!”

One night I realised that my house had been surrounded by police vehicles. Some officers wearing balaclavas jumped from the vehicles in a panic. They pointed their weapons as though they were about to sweep the entire area. Above us came the sound of a helicopter.

Even far away I could see from the headlights that vehicles had encircled the whole neighbourhood. It looked like a scene from a war.

“They are going to come to the house,” I thought, and waited. By now it had become routine.

I watched them from the window. They filled the garden and surrounded an empty container beside my house.

At that moment elderly women from the neighbourhood arrived, shouting:

“What are you doing? Are you going to murder Ayten the way you murdered Dilek? We will not allow it. Get out of here. We have had enough of your raids. Leave our girl alone!”

The police said, “Alright, we are not going to do anything. You go away,” while continuing to terrorise the area.

Then a group of armed special operations officers in balaclavas moved silently towards the container door, hiding behind shields. They began trying to break the door down with a battering ram.

One of the women from the neighbourhood called out, “What a shame. That belongs to an old man who lives alone. Do not break it!”

They ignored her and continued battering the door.

When the door finally broke, a frightened cat ran out. The special operations officer who had opened it recoiled in shock. After all that, the only thing to emerge from the container was a cat. There was nobody inside. The elderly man had not even moved in yet.

In other words, hundreds of uniformed and plain-clothes police, special operations units and a helicopter had conducted an operation against an empty container. In a manner of speaking, they had deployed an army in the neighbourhood.

They did not enter my house that day, but they caused almost as much disturbance as if they had. Pointing weapons and encircling the house, creating an atmosphere of panic, and at the same time filming everything as though staging a show went on for a long time.

Although they did not always say so openly, everyone in the neighbourhood was disturbed by this “show of force”. People returning from work were made to wait and could not reach their homes; people who wanted to leave could not get out. For several hours the neighbourhood was made to suffer. Identity checks were carried out in the streets.

No one fully understood what they were trying to achieve. The only thing that was clear was that they wanted to create terror and intimidate people.

And was this display of force not itself an expression of fear?

“BOOK-SIGNING DAY!”

My book *Resistance and Victory in Fascism’s Secret Torture Centres*, in which I described the six months of torture, was almost sold out. The number of people calling and asking, “Will you sign my copy?” was steadily increasing.

The most sensible solution was to hold a signing day and sign everyone’s books at once. People who had read the book also had questions and wanted to speak to me personally.

On the day of the signing, I dressed a little more formally and began preparing by spreading a red cloth across my table. I placed the remaining copies of the book on it. Beside me was a painting about the torture, and around the room were photographs connected to my demand for justice.

As the signing hour approached, people began arriving gradually.

When I looked at those who came, I did not know how to express what I felt. There were eighty-year-old uncles and aunts, young people and even a seven-year-old girl. Women and men of every age were there.

It was not an enormous crowd, but the fact that every age group was represented and that people had brought their children moved me deeply. Some arrived carrying potted flowers; others brought tea, sugar or fruit. Although they were very poor, they wanted to bring whatever they thought might be useful, adding their beautiful hearts to the gift.

After a short conversation over tea and introductions, I went to my table and explained how I had written my book.

Almost everyone asked questions:

“How did you endure it?”

“What did you think about while you were there?”

“How is your health now?”

“What is your legal situation?”

I tried to answer every question. But above all I wanted to explain this: under torture I tried to do what I had to do. Simply being in that place was itself degrading. By remaining silent there, by protecting my values, I tried to defend my dignity. The only thing I had to lose was my life.

An elderly uncle said, “You are our honour, my girl. I read your book and I tell everyone about it. Many people know you and ask about you. We will come again.”

Because he had difficulty hearing, I tried to speak loudly throughout. In the end we understood one another.

The youngest child hugged my book to her chest and had a photograph taken. Then she wanted a photograph with everyone together.

In truth, that whole gathering was itself a photograph of honour.

We parted with the promise that we would meet again when I regained my freedom. I sent my greetings and love to those who had been unable to come.

The book I had written had reached the people and was completely sold out. But the chain of torture had not ended.

“MY BOOK WAS ORDERED CONFISCATED!”

Those who had subjected me to this torture were trying every possible method to make me remain silent. An order was issued for the confiscation of my book.

Perhaps the most absurd thing was that the order came only after the book had sold out completely. By then copies existed all over the country and even abroad.

Moreover, there was not a single unlawful sentence in the book. But what difference did that make? I did not expect them to behave according to the law anyway.

The allegations were things such as: Mahir Çayan's poem "Adalı", a poem by Ümit İltir, my mentioning Grup Yorum, and my referring to my sister, brother and sister-in-law as "martyrs".

Although the book from beginning to end described the torture I had suffered, the prosecutor treated only these matters as grounds for action. The real criminals in the book - the torturers - were ignored.

Nor were they satisfied with this highly strained confiscation order. They also opened an investigation against me for "propaganda for an organisation".

Many journalists interviewed me about it and the interviews were published. The number of people wanting to obtain and read the book increased. But I no longer had any copies. People began borrowing them from one another.

Some urged me to write a second book. Others wanted to turn the documentary into a film. There were even people who composed songs and sent them to me.

The efforts of those who tried to portray me as a "monster" failed. Would they give up? I did not think so. But each time, it was certain that they would collide with the wall of the people's solidarity.

When the hearing in the case opened over the book, the courthouse corridor was full. Everyone who came embraced one another, and some became emotional. Until the hearing began we talked and made statements to journalists. MPs and artists were also there, and they too made statements.

Even though we faced obstruction every time we opened our mouths, we still made our voices heard.

Fifteen people were allowed into the courtroom. I went through the accusations in the indictment one by one, explaining that they were not crimes and that what I had written was legitimate. I said that the real criminals who should be tried were the torturers.

At the first hearing the prosecutor's opinion was to be read. Before the date of the second hearing, I was going to undergo an operation. We asked the court panel to set the next hearing for a date after the operation. The request was accepted.

Those who attended the hearing left with embraces and wishes for freedom. We believed that sooner or later victory would be ours.

"EARTHQUAKE!"

One morning I jumped out of bed at the sound of the telephone. It was my sister. She called every day, but never this early. What had happened? I answered anxiously.

"Abla, what happened?"

"My dear, we are alright. Do not be afraid. There has been an earthquake. We are fi-"

The line cut before she could finish.

I tried to call again and again. I could not get through.

Eventually, on one attempt, she answered.

“It is very bad here. Everything has collapsed. We managed to get outside. The earthquake is continuing. Do not worry about us.”

The line cut again.

I called dozens of times. No answer.

I switched on the television. I did not want to believe what I was seeing. I felt as though boiling water had been poured over my head. I became weak and could not remain standing, so I threw myself onto the sofa.

Helplessly I watched images of my hometown reduced to ruins, people screaming and running in fear. Cold sweat began pouring from my body.

More than anything, I wanted at that moment to leave the house and go to the earthquake zone. Once again I rebelled against the tag on my ankle. This too was another form of torture.

Unfortunately I could not go to the disaster area. The tag, and the sentence hanging over me as a threat, prevented it. I had to obtain permission from the court as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, everyone who heard what had happened came to see me.

“Get well soon. My condolences.”

I had not lost anyone from my immediate family. But many close relatives and people we knew had died or were trapped under the rubble. I could not obtain complete information. Telephone lines kept failing. I could not establish contact.

I could not stop my tears. Everyone around me looked at me with eyes that, like mine, were red and wet. They did everything they could to ease even a small part of my helplessness.

One visitor tried to reassure me by passing on the news they had heard.

“Do not worry. Friends who work in health care set off immediately.”

“People are travelling from everywhere to help with the rubble.”

“Everyone has started collecting aid. Rescue teams are on their way.”

“Your sister is alright. As far as we know, no one in the household has died.”

Who was left of my family anyway? If the earthquake had taken those who remained, there would have been almost nobody left from such a large family. Even the thought was unbearable.

One thing was clear: unsafe buildings that were death traps caused far more people to lose their lives. Everyone who died was part of me. My anger and my inability to endure what I was seeing were as great as my helplessness.

It is very difficult to describe the pain I felt. My pain and anger, strong enough to shatter rocks with a single cry, burned inside me.

I kept calling my sister. There was no connection. The aftershocks continued, and so did the deaths.

From television I learned that telephone connections were down. When I looked carefully at internet reports, I discovered that the internet connection in Antakya had been cut, supposedly "to prevent the spread of false information". Not only Antakya - Maraş, Adıyaman, Antep... It was unbelievable.

How were people trapped beneath rubble supposed to be reached without the internet? Every second lost could mean another death.

After intense public reaction, internet service was restored several hours later. But the electricity was still cut.

The television reporter's account made my hair stand on end. It was night, pitch black, and even the camera lights had been switched off.

The reporter said, "At this moment there is not a single light in Antakya. Exactly as you can see, it is completely dark."

Only the reporter's voice could be heard. Then the camera lights were turned back on and he continued:

"From beneath the rubble we can hear groans and cries for help. We have nothing in our hands with which to get them out. I am sorry to say this, but we are walking past slowly so they do not hear our footsteps. If they hear us they will have hope, but we cannot do anything. There are not enough rescue teams or equipment to remove the rubble. This place is like hell."

The telephone rang. It was someone from my hometown whom I did not know, calling from abroad. They asked me for help. Relatives of theirs were alive under the rubble, but nobody had reached the location.

They asked me to direct people I knew in the area there. I did everything I could. Contact was made. A family was beneath the rubble and alive.

For two or three days they asked for help. Their surname was the same as mine. We were probably distantly related, but that had no importance then.

After three days the voices stopped.

Tragically, around ten days later the same person called me only to ask for help getting the bodies recovered.

I was under house arrest. What could I do? Damn it.

Eventually, on different days, the bodies were recovered one by one. The family was relieved simply because they had been able to reach their dead.

That is the kind of country we live in: even recovering the bodies of loved ones can become something people are grateful for.

The court refused to allow me to go to the earthquake zone, see my family or visit the graves of those we had lost.

So I buried my pain and anger inside me and tried to keep alive in my imagination the former beauty of my beautiful hometown.

The names of relatives we had lost began reaching me gradually. The pain belonged to all of us.

Our house had been seriously damaged. The old earthen house inherited from my grandfather had collapsed completely.

My sister enclosed the arbour in front of the house with sheets and lived there for a while. My sister, who has an 85 per cent disability, had nobody beside her except my eldest brother, who himself was very ill.

I worried about them constantly. They had received packaged food aid. After a while hot meals began to be distributed. They did not receive tents until months later. They had been abandoned without electricity, water or tents, left in deprivation and helplessness.

Even a year and a half later the situation had not fundamentally changed. Homes that had suffered only slight damage were being seized after being declared “reserve areas”, and their water and electricity were being cut.

Instead of those responsible for the destruction in the earthquake being punished, the earthquake victims themselves were being punished.

“OPERATION!”

A health problem that had affected my life for a long time had recently worsened. Masses that kept growing and causing bleeding had to be removed.

When I began trying to obtain a hospital appointment and court permission for the operation, I had no idea that it would be so difficult.

First I obtained permission to attend hospital for the examinations needed to determine whether I was fit for surgery. The court set the permitted time according to the distance between the hospital and the house and the expected length of the appointment - for example, from 07:30 to 14:00.

At hospital I naturally had to queue for some of the tests. I asked the person waiting ahead of me whether they would let me go first, but they had to get to work and could not give up their place. They themselves were late and worried that they might lose their job.

Eventually I completed all the tests and it was decided that I was fit for the operation.

Very little time remained before my permission expired, so I had no choice but to take a taxi. But as luck would have it, none of the taxis would stop. Eventually I got into one that had been forced to stop at traffic lights.

I told the driver the name of the district rather than the name of the gecekondu neighbourhood where I lived. He agreed to take me without hesitation. When we approached the area he asked which direction to go. When I gave the name of the neighbourhood, he said:

“Why did you not tell me that from the beginning? That is nowhere near where you said.”

“If I had told you, you would not have brought me.”

“Honestly, it does not pay. What are we supposed to do?” he complained.

I did not continue the argument. I got out of the car. I had arrived in time.

When I reached home, I was supposed to call the Probation Office. If I forgot, they would certainly call me. Every time they warned me with things such as, “If you do not inform us, we will draw up a report.”

Exactly at my expected return time, the Ankara Monitoring Centre called.

“Are you at home, Ms Ayten?”

Oppression dressed up as “politeness”.

They could see I was at home from the tag on my ankle, telephone tracking, cameras and the plain-clothes police following me. So what was the purpose of the question?

I gave a short answer and ended the call.

My blood values had to be normal before surgery. At intervals they would fall, and then return to normal either through an intravenous infusion or tablets taken by mouth. The fact that the tests finally showed normal values meant the operation could proceed.

Now came the court permission.

We submitted a petition to the court giving information about why the operation was necessary, when and where it would take place, which doctor would perform it and how long I would need to remain in hospital.

The court asked the hospital for a written statement.

The doctors who would perform the operation sent the court a letter explaining both the necessity of the surgery and the requirement that I not have any metal objects such as a watch or jewellery on my body during the operation.

The court asked for another letter, saying the explanation had to be “more detailed”.

Meanwhile, I was already at the hospital early on the morning of the operation. The surgery was supposed to take place in the morning. This correspondence continued until 17:00.

Finally the court sent a decision saying, in effect: “If you can operate with the tag on, then do it.”

The two doctors were put in a difficult position. Although the outside of the tag was plastic, it contained metal. There was a risk of electric shock during the operation, but the surgery was also medically necessary.

One of the doctors tried to explain the seriousness of the situation.

“We will insulate the tag with plastic gloves. This operation cannot be delayed any longer. Your health is at stake.”

I was furious that the court imposed such a condition.

Previously, when I had needed an MRI scan, two Probation officers had come and cut the tag from my ankle. Afterwards they came back to the house and fitted a new one. It was obviously possible to do this. Why was it being prevented now? It made no sense.

In the end I was forced to agree to undergo the operation with the tag insulated.

I asked the doctors, “Alright, let us do it, but you are very tired. Will that not make it even more risky?”

“No, we are used to it. Come on, let us operate immediately,” they said, and began preparing.

I was quickly taken into surgery. The operation lasted around an hour and a half and went well. A fibroid mass weighing approximately 250 grams was removed. Regular follow-up examinations would be necessary to make sure it did not return.

When I regained consciousness after the operation, I learned that early that morning the door of my house had been broken open, the house raided and ransacked. It had been one of many addresses raided.

I became very angry at yet another example of the arbitrariness they practised routinely. They knew that I was in hospital and undergoing surgery. What kind of desperation was this - raiding my home while I was not even there?

What was the meaning of rushing into my home as though rescuing valuables from a fire? Every time they had found “no evidence of a crime”. So what was the purpose of repeatedly raiding the home of someone already under house arrest?

I could not help wondering whether the difficulties placed in the way of my operation had been connected with this raid.

“THEIR EFFORTS ARE IN VAIN!”

Even for me to remain in hospital for two days after the operation, correspondence had to take place between the hospital and the court.

On the second day I managed to stand, although only by holding on to something.

Some of the visitors who came to the hospital with flowers were people I did not know, but I am certain that their presence helped me recover more quickly.

While I was in surgery, some people were raiding my home and trying to harm me, while others were trying to put balm on my wounds. The effect of the latter was stronger.

When I had recovered enough to return home, the sight of the house after the raid made me even angrier.

The front door consisted of thin metal below and glass above. A single shoulder against it would probably have opened it, yet they had bent the metal with a battering ram. The neighbours who had cleaned the house after the raid had arranged for the broken glass to be replaced.

As I have already explained, the house where I was under house arrest was a single-storey gecekondü. Because plaster had fallen away in places, gaps had even opened between the outside doorframe and the wall. Many houses nearby had strong metal courtyard gates; mine did not even have that.

Anyone who wished could walk through my courtyard and continue into the neighbourhood, towards the road to the police station or towards the Cemevi.

There could be no rational explanation for repeatedly raiding such a house or for continually harassing and threatening me even though I was under house arrest.

It was obvious that they trusted neither me nor one another. Being subjected to constant monitoring in different forms by official institutions that did not trust one another became a form of torture in itself.

Even so, I was the one who was right. I knew that there was no alternative but to resist these arbitrary attacks and remain strong.

With these thoughts I entered the house.

With the help of the person caring for me, I was put into bed. A few days later visitors began arriving to wish me well. Those who could not come sent messages and good wishes.

Because of the operation I had to restrict my movement for some time. I stopped even the limited exercise I had been doing inside the house. We took whatever precautions the circumstances allowed against infection.

For the first few days I could not receive visitors. I later learned that this had hurt the feelings of some people. Of course, I found out about it only much later. I was very upset.

As soon as I learned, I tried to contact the family whose feelings had been hurt, spoke to them and apologised. I know that some hurt cannot be repaired by a simple apology, but I will do everything I can to make amends.

I had recovered a little more and could get out of bed.

The person looking after me said, "You have visitors."

I slowly got up and went into the sitting room. It was full of people.

“Welcome!”

“Thank you. Get well soon. How are you feeling?”

“Thank you. I am better.”

An elderly woman from the neighbourhood said, “I brought you soup, my girl.”

“Bless your hands, auntie. You should not have gone to the trouble.”

“What trouble, my girl? It is given with all my heart. May it bring you healing.”

“Thank you.”

Someone had brought a basket of fruit. A little surprised, I asked, “Who arranged this?”

“I did,” said a young man from a Circassian migrant family.

He had previously been addicted to drugs and was trying to leave them behind. He had apparently not used them for a long time.

“My mother knitted these slippers for you. She said, ‘They are wool; they will keep her warm.’ She sends her greetings.”

I had never met his mother. Her son had read my book and told her about it. The mother had sincerely sent this gift and her warm greetings. May they both be well.

“Thank you very much. Give her many greetings from me too. I kiss your mother’s hands. I wish you had brought her with you.”

“My mother is ill. She has Alzheimer’s. It is difficult for her to come.”

“I am very sorry. I hope she gets well.”

“The leaves of this flower are red. It is beautiful. What is it called?”

“They call it the Atatürk flower.”

“Does it have to stay indoors?”

“Yes, at room temperature. It likes attention. If you do not pay attention to it, it wilts.”

“Alright, I will look after it. I hope I do not kill it. And this orchid?”

“The orchid can stay indoors too. It looks very good here.”

“Thank you all very much.”

“You are welcome. We wish you a speedy recovery.”

After drinking tea and talking, they said, “Visits to the sick should be short,” and left.

Three months after the operation we sent a petition to the court asking permission for a follow-up appointment. Astonishingly, the court refused permission.

The purpose of the follow-up was to see whether the same masses were forming again and to check the results of the surgery. But because the court refused permission, I could not attend.

Even though this put my health at risk, going to the doctor against the court's decision would have been treated as a "violation of house arrest", which could be used as grounds to imprison me.

As someone facing two aggravated life sentences on entirely unjust grounds, the threat of being put back in prison was always held over me.

As someone struggling for a fair trial, I believed that sooner or later these injustices would end. Even if it cost me years of my life - years already filled with pain, torture and resistance - even if it cost me my life, I believed that we would create justice.

I appealed against the refusal to allow the medical examination. My appeal was rejected. Finally I applied to the Constitutional Court.

During the time that passed, there was a possibility that I could lose my health. As can be seen, the court knowingly accepted that risk through its decision.

All of these attacks were methods of slowly killing a person.

But could they change the truth? Never. What I had lived through had already become known to the people and to the world.

"THE POWER OF WOMEN!"

Recently, actions organised by women had become some of the most visible demonstrations in the streets and squares. Even when the police tried to prevent them, women resisted, clashed with the barriers and overcame them.

The fact that women were murdered every day, oppressed and exploited as women naturally carried women's anger into the streets. The target of that anger was "men" and, in their words, this system "run by men". They opposed "male violence".

Up to that point I had contacted many women's organisations and explained my situation and the torture I had experienced. Those who restricted the issue only to "male violence" were somewhat hesitant, so their approach was unclear.

Some never replied at all. Others became reluctant as soon as they heard the word "torture" and said they were not interested. Yet despite everything there were also organisations that said they would stand beside me.

In situations like this, women acting together has a particular importance. Every form of support - visiting, sending messages, raising the issue publicly, making statements, filing criminal complaints, recording videos - is valuable and effective.

The telephone rang.

"Who am I speaking to?"

“I am calling from the Women’s Commission of the Contemporary Lawyers Association - ÇHD. How are you? We have wanted to visit you for a long time. We have left it far too long. Please forgive us. We finally wanted to make this long-overdue visit. When are you free?”

“Thank you. I am well. Tomorrow would be possible.”

After giving directions, I ended the call.

The women from the ÇHD Women’s Commission arrived speaking warmly and sincerely, but also with a sense of embarrassment.

Their spokesperson said, “We have followed what you have experienced from the beginning. We should have come before. But as you know, the agenda is always very busy. One day became the next and only today were we able to come. We are late, please forgive us, but believe us, you have constantly been on our agenda.”

“I am glad you came. Thank you. I try to make my voice heard by every section of society that is sensitive to these issues. Naturally I was waiting for you too. What matters is that in the end you are here beside me. You know the lawlessness involved.”

“Yes, we followed your court process. A demand for a sentence like this is consistent neither with the case file nor with your situation. Has there been any development concerning the house arrest?”

“The house arrest continues completely unlawfully.”

“Nobody else from your case remains in detention.”

“Yes, that is correct. They keep the two aggravated life sentences hanging over me as a permanent threat. And they have turned the house arrest itself into psychological torture.”

“We followed the house raids and harassment. It is completely arbitrary. There has been no prosecution in relation to the torture either. How is your health now? Are you able to see doctors?”

“I can go only after obtaining permission from the court. If permission is not granted, I cannot go.”

I explained the situation. They were astonished.

It became a good conversation in which we discussed many things. They said they would follow my legal situation and, as a women’s commission, would concern themselves with the case.

I know that no effort is wasted. I believe that.

“SYMPOSIUM!”

The volunteers of “Freedom for Ayten Öztürk” booked a municipal hall in Istanbul in order to bring the subject of “Torture, Disappearances and Abductions” onto the public agenda.

I was going to participate online. All preparations had been completed. Every detail had been considered: visuals, press work, the programme, the form of the stage, badges, invitations.

The speakers were ready: MP Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, MP Murat Çepni, Press Workers' Union President Faruk Eren, ÇHD President Lawyer Murat Yılmaz, a representative of the Turkish Medical Association, representatives from among artists and intellectuals, my lawyers and myself.

But on the afternoon before the symposium, without any concrete reason or document being presented, the police prevented it at the last moment.

People who had not heard that the event had been banned arrived at the building and found the entrance surrounded by police, riot squads and armoured vehicles. The police sent everyone away.

That day I made a statement explaining the arbitrariness of preventing the symposium. I was extremely angry. Our legal and constitutional rights had been blocked entirely arbitrarily.

It was obvious that the matter would not end there.

We explained what had happened, announced that the symposium would take place online, and immediately began new preparations.

The speakers from inside the country remained the same. There would also be participants from abroad. We prepared the invitations and visuals online. The texts of the speeches were requested in advance for translation. There were volunteer interpreters. Naturally, all of this was organised online.

Hundreds of videos were recorded in Turkey and in countries around the world calling for participation. The symposium had participants from nineteen countries.

After the speeches and questions, a final declaration was announced. It was decided that "a commission should be established against torture, disappearances and abductions, and that cases of torture and disappearance should be followed medically and legally."

At the end of the symposium we saw once again that torture, disappearance and abduction were among the policies systematically used by all oppressors.

What unites the peoples of the world are these shared sufferings and acts of resistance.

Some participants said that what I had lived through was one of the most striking examples of the recent period.

Even though the event was online, we shared unforgettable and moving moments with people from different countries who called me and invited me into their homes through the screen.

The symposium we wanted to hold in a hall had been prevented, but through the online symposium we made our voice heard around the world.

“FILMING A DOCUMENTARY!”

A director from Italy contacted me and said that he wanted to visit me and make a documentary about my life.

He spoke no Turkish. Apart from Italian, he spoke English. With my limited English and translation applications on my phone, we were able to communicate.

When I said that I wanted to know a little more about him, he sent me a newspaper for which he had written articles and a documentary he had made. He seemed to be a democrat with strong humanist qualities. I saw no problem with him visiting me to discuss the documentary.

He said he had first learned about me through the online symposium.

“What you explained at the symposium was very important. I have been thinking about it ever since. Why should there not be a documentary about it?”

He explained how he imagined the film. He wanted to shoot it in my home and conduct an interview at the same time. I was happy that my voice had been heard in Italy.

Some time later, the Italian director arrived. We welcomed him with flowers. He became very emotional.

Alongside all those who were blind, deaf and mute in the face of torture, the sensitivity of an Italian director who travelled to see me and decided to address the subject was very valuable to me.

We prepared dishes and desserts that we considered special. What was “special” for us may have been a little heavy for him, but he did not refuse to eat them. He was simple, sincere and modest.

News of the director’s arrival spread quickly through our small neighbourhood. People came out of curiosity, asked questions and wanted to talk. Naturally, every one of them had their own painful story.

When the director listened to these different and very striking stories, he decided to broaden the scope of the documentary.

Having someone arrive from a foreign country, our efforts to communicate, the later arrival of more visitors, and the sudden liveliness of the atmosphere were tiring for me because I had been confined to the house for so long.

Our time was also limited. The director would finish his work and leave within no more than three days.

Although the exhaustion showed on my face, we began filming. We sat in an armchair in front of the bookcase. The director fixed the camera in place. He asked questions while also taking notes. The camera recorded us throughout.

He paid attention to everything - voice, posture and facial expression. Some of the filming lasted for hours.

Even when I was literally exhausted, there was little opportunity to rest, because filming continued as the subject expanded. He interviewed other people as well.

During each interview, a storm of emotion passed through him. You could see it on his face. The stories seemed unlike anything he had heard before in his life.

He too appeared exhausted by listening to such real and painful stories from our country. The pain and anger showed on his face. People say that the language of pain is universal. We experienced that fully.

After three days of work, filming ended and the director returned home. He would carry out the editing there and prepare the final version.

Some time later he told me that he had titled the documentary *Ayten's Revolution*. A trailer was released on social media. Screenings were held abroad alongside seminars.

I was invited to participate online in many of them. The final screening was to take place in London, and I was going to participate in that one as well.

But because I was arrested, I could not attend.

After my arrest I learned that the documentary continued to be screened in different countries.

“ARRESTED AGAIN!”

On 6 February 2024, the first anniversary of the earthquake, I had slept hardly at all during the night and had watched the live broadcasts from my hometown, Antakya.

I had been unable to go to my hometown after the earthquake. I still carry the pain and anger of that inside me.

In the afternoon, the door of my home was suddenly smashed open with a battering ram.

The door could have been opened with a single kick, so there was no need for a battering ram, but I looked at those pouring inside in anger: special operations officers, plain-clothes officers and uniformed police suddenly filled the house.

A special operations officer in a balaclava pointed a long-barrelled weapon at me and, with a movement of his hand, forced me to the floor.

I tried to stand, telling them that what they were doing was torture and that they were terrorising the place.

When I got to my feet, I asked to see their search warrant.

As their “search warrant”, they showed me on a telephone a list that included my address.

Their commander called someone.

“She has an electronic tag on her ankle. There is also a device connected to the tag on the coffee table. What are we going to do with these?”

Apparently he had not yet received an answer, because at the same time he asked me:

“What happens to the unit in situations like this?”

“What situations?”

“We are going to detain you.”

“On what grounds?”

“There is a detention order. They will tell you when we get there.”

“You are obliged to tell me the reason. Doing this to someone under house arrest is arbitrary. It is torture.”

“You must have heard about the incident. There are operations everywhere because of it. You are coming with us.”

“What does it have to do with me? No, you have no right. I am going to call my lawyer.”

“We will call your lawyer. Come on, take her.”

They dragged me out across the broken glass of the door.

The neighbour’s seven-year-old daughter watched everything in fear from behind the glass. Some neighbours had come outside and were protesting against the police. The officers tried to take me away as quickly as possible.

There were dozens of people in custody. They were trying to connect all of them to the incident at Çağlayan. Among them were sick people, disabled people, elderly people, children and even my lawyers.

We were furious.

In custody they tightened our handcuffs and tried to force our heads down. They wanted to create a visual spectacle for the cameras in this way. Although they knew their efforts had failed and had turned completely into torture, they continued until the end.

My hands and arms were bruised and swollen.

After four days in custody we were brought before the prosecutor.

I was appalled by the prosecutor’s questions. Reclining in his chair, he asked questions that were unserious, judgmental and hostile. It was as though he had already constructed an accusation against me in his mind and believed in it.

Even when he received answers to his questions, he did not stop making accusations. Most likely, after imprisoning me they intended to begin creating what they would call evidence.

They were simply searching for an excuse to detain me.

In the police holding cells we were packed tightly together. Every person detained had a completely different story.

One woman said, "That husband of mine - I already divorced him. This is definitely because of him."

Another said, "Ah, my foot hurts so much. I am supposed to have an operation this week. What is going to happen now? My baby is at home too. Who is going to look after the baby?"

Another said, "I own a restaurant. I was there doing my job. I do not even understand how it happened, but now I am here."

Another said, "We had just stopped by to see a friend. I had not seen them for a long time. I was going to say hello and then we were setting off on a journey. But now I am in custody."

One of the artists asked, "Why am I here?"

Naturally, almost everyone repeated that question many times.

Despite everything, the detention was lively. There were songs and marches. On the final night, although everyone knew they might be imprisoned the next day, there was no demoralisation.

On the contrary, people talked for hours. Funny memories were told and acted out, many of them prison memories. Laughter echoed throughout the place.

An elderly guard who could not tolerate this shouted, "Stop laughing!" and ran away.

We did not understand why he ran. There were plenty of people eager to answer him, but he did not come back.

The next day we were taken to the courthouse to appear before judges.

They had divided us into groups of ten. A different court would deal with each group. I was in the group facing the heaviest requested sentence.

When we saw the other comrades, we greeted one another and everyone asked how the others were doing.

One comrade asked me, "Why did they bring you? What are they accusing you of?"

"Being responsible for Turkey," I said.

She replied, "Oh! They told me exactly the same thing."

Then everyone began asking one another, "What are you accused of?"

People answered, "responsible for this", "responsible for that", and everyone burst into laughter.

The police surrounding us watched our laughter in astonishment.

Then we began appearing before the courts.

Somehow, they changed the other comrade's accusation of "responsibility for Turkey" and attached something else to her. We were not surprised by that either. In their eyes, you can become anything within a few minutes. Our lives depend on the words that come from between their lips.

In the end, I was arrested together with dozens of people, including my lawyers. I was first taken to Silivri Prison and, shortly afterwards, to Kandıra No. 1 F-Type Prison.

"THE PEOPLE'S HONOURABLE LAWYERS!"

My lawyer, who had stood beside me for exactly six years through court hearings, prison visits and every legal problem I experienced during house arrest, was also in custody with me. That made me even angrier. While I was under house arrest, my home was raided many times. I would telephone this lawyer in the middle of the night or at the crack of dawn, and each time my questions about the lawlessness and arbitrariness were answered and legal support was never withheld from me. I cannot accept the oppression inflicted upon my lawyer.

And it was not only this lawyer. One of the lawyers who first saw me after the torture, my visually impaired lawyer, and another lawyer who had only recently been released were also handcuffed. By putting defenders of law and justice in handcuffs, they want to legitimise lawlessness and injustice. Through this legalised coercion, they are in fact trying to silence and intimidate every section of the people. This injustice will certainly come to an end one day, because we possess the rightness and legitimacy with which justice will be brought into being. Even if my lawyers are confined within four walls together with me, they will always remain defenders of justice for me and for the people.

When an order was issued to confiscate my book, an investigation was also opened against me for propaganda. Before the hearing, my lawyer and I discussed the matter and prepared our defence. With the defence of my very valuable lawyers and the support of the people, I was acquitted. We were happy that day. Perhaps it was a simple case, but obtaining a positive decision amid so much injustice showed that our efforts had not been in vain.

My visually impaired lawyer was released by the prosecutor. One of my lawyers and I were sent to the same prison. Two other lawyers were sent to a prison in Ankara. The lawyer who had been arrested despite having only recently been released from another prison was later released in Ankara. That left, in the Ankara prison, the lawyer who had followed my cases for six years and the lawyer who had first seen me after the torture.

After one year of imprisonment, both of those lawyers were released too. I was very happy that two lawyers who had been kept imprisoned for an entire year for nothing regained their freedom. I wish them a lifetime of happy, free and just days. I thank

them from my heart for standing beside me through every act of lawlessness and injustice.

“UPHELD BY THE COURT OF CASSATION AT LIGHTNING SPEED!”

In the fifth month of my imprisonment, in July 2024, I learned that my case before the Court of Cassation had been brought forward and upheld at extraordinary speed. My two aggravated life sentences were upheld on the basis of a single sentence from an informer and slanderer. Moreover, despite the dozens of cases waiting before the 3rd Criminal Chamber of the Court of Cassation, my case was brought forward and decided.

In November, an order was issued for me to be removed from the three-person cells and placed in a single cell. This meant the beginning of the conditions of aggravated life imprisonment.

The conditions of aggravated life imprisonment are like burying a person alive. You are allowed a telephone call once every two weeks. Visits are shorter than those of other prisoners. Nephews, nieces, cousins, aunts and uncles are not allowed to visit. Only immediate family and a legal guardian may visit. Prisoners serving aggravated life sentences may go to communal conversation only with one another; they cannot mix with or meet other prisoners. They are allowed into the exercise yard for only two hours a day. Their right to make all legal decisions for themselves is taken away, and a guardian is appointed for them. To be condemned to four walls for the rest of your life is, in reality, a form of slow death.

At one moment under torture, when I felt that I was close to death, a torturer had said: “Dying is easy; living is hard.” They wanted to make me live through that hardship and kill me slowly. They tried many times. But they never achieved their aim, and they never will. They themselves have already seen the answer to this question.

How? Let me explain with another comparison. The torturers constantly asked me: “Is there anyone you love? Is there anyone who loves you?” I did not understand why they asked this. During my latest arrest, the prosecutor also asked me: “Do you have nobody?” Naturally, the similarity of the questions makes you think that the purpose is the same.

The purpose was to create a feeling of “loneliness” within me, to weaken me with the thought that “there is no one and nothing worth resisting for”. Or perhaps they asked these questions in order to threaten or harm those I loved and thereby force me to surrender.

Whatever the reason, I resisted for those I love, for my honour and, of course, for those who love me and for my people. I resisted because I was right. And over the past seven years they too have seen the answer in the anger of the thousands of people who have embraced me against torture and injustice, and in the support they have given me.

That is why they impose these sentences. In order to take revenge on me, to eliminate me, they are closing this door upon me until I die. But together we will open this door as well, and we will heal the wounds opened by injustice. We know that the sharp sword of justice has the power to cut all tyranny out by the roots.

IF THE COURT OF CASSATION UPHOLDS THE DECISION, I WILL BE HELD IN A CELL FOR LIFE - LET US END THIS INJUSTICE TOGETHER!

After everything I endured for six months - electric shocks, suspension, falaka, sexual harassment and attempted rape - if the Court of Cassation upholds the two aggravated life sentences imposed upon me on the basis of the claim that “she was watching the lynching”, I will be held alone in a single cell for the rest of my life. I will explain what I went through in this thread:

In 2018 I was abducted from Lebanon and brought to Turkey. For six months I was held without any detention order in a secret torture centre in Ankara, where I was subjected to every form of torture, including electric shocks, suspension, falaka, being kept for hours in an upright coffin-like box, sexual harassment and attempted rape.

While torturing me they said: “We can disappear you; no one will even find your body,” and “No one is looking for you or asking about you.” Throughout this period I was constantly threatened and tortured in order to force me to make false statements against other people.

I believe the place where I was forcibly held and tortured was on a lower floor of an official institution. I understood this because on certain days of the week I could hear the sound of high heels from the floor above the place where I was being tortured. And one day I heard a woman’s voice say: “The commission is coming today.”

At the end of the six months of every kind of torture, the torturers told me: “We are releasing you now, but we will leave you to rot in prison.” They blindfolded me and took me out of the torture centre. After putting me in a vehicle, they placed headphones over my ears playing a very loud engine noise.

About an hour later, when I was taken out of the vehicle, I realised that I had been left in a deserted area. By then I had lost 25 kilograms and could barely stand. A few minutes later officers from the Ankara Counter-Terror Branch arrived and said that “there had been a tip-off about me and they were taking me into custody”.

They were asking questions such as, “What is your name?” I was so weak that I could barely react. They listed various names and eventually said “Ayten”. After they said “Ayten”, one officer remarked: “Ah, she reacted to ‘Ayten’, so her name must be Ayten.”

After I was taken into custody, the doctors at the hospitals to which I was taken for examination were afraid of the police and did not record the torture marks in their reports. At the end of the police custody period I was taken to the courthouse.

When we showed the prosecutor my torture marks, he replied: “That is not my responsibility. You can file a criminal complaint if you wish.” Of course we did file a criminal complaint, but a decision of non-prosecution was issued. I was then sent before a judge with a request for my detention, without evidence or justification.

When I appeared before the judge, I was so weak that I could remain standing only by holding on to my lawyer. It was then that I learned that my father, who had worried about me and searched everywhere for me while I was being tortured for six months, had died during that period. While the torturers were telling me, “No one is looking for you,” my father had died while searching for me...

When I showed the judge my torture marks, the judge too said, “You may file a criminal complaint if you wish,” and ordered my imprisonment. When I was taken to Sincan Women’s Closed Prison, the guards refused to admit me.

The guards at Sincan Prison said: “The report shows no injuries. If she dies in this condition, responsibility will fall on us. Either bring us a report recording these injuries, or we will not admit this woman.” The police took me back to hospital, and for the first time the torture marks were entered into an official medical report.

I remained imprisoned in Sincan for about three years over an incident in which I had never taken part. The case concerned the death in 2008 of a child rapist in Okmeydanı who died from a fat embolism two days after being beaten by local people, apparently because his injuries had not been effectively treated.

One defendant in that case was shown my photograph and said: “This woman was standing there watching the lynching.” On the basis of that statement, without any other evidence, I was tried as though I had instigated the incident and was sentenced to two aggravated life sentences.

After the Istanbul 3rd Assize Court imposed two aggravated life sentences, even the judge must not have believed the decision, because I was released under house arrest. I was kept under house arrest for about two and a half years and did not violate judicial control even once during that period.

Because I was under house arrest, I could not even visit the grave of my father, who had died while searching for me. Whenever I had to go to hospital, I obtained permission from the court. After 6 February, they took me from my home and arrested me through a conspiracy. Once again they showed no evidence, because there was none.

And now the case in which I was sentenced to two aggravated life sentences is before the Court of Cassation. If the Court of Cassation upholds the decision, I will be held alone in a single cell for the rest of my life without seeing another human face. They could not kill me under torture; now they want to do it through court decisions and unlawful sentences.

What I have described is only the briefest summary of what I have experienced. Perhaps you may find it hard to believe; perhaps you were shocked. But everything that

you find difficult to believe is something I am still living through. And I call on every person with a conscience: let us expand the struggle against torture and injustice.

I call on bar associations, democratic mass organisations, revolutionary and democratic people: together we can put an end to this injustice and these tortures.

With endless hope and endless faith that we will win...

Ayten Öztürk

Kandıra No. 1 F-Type Prison - Kocaeli

“6 YEARS AND 3 MONTHS ON THE STATEMENT OF A SLANDERER!”

After I was detained because of the “6 February Incident”, I was told in court that “I had nothing to do with this incident”. Yet efforts were made to find other accusations, and an unlawful sentence was imposed on the basis of the false statements of two slanderers.

Every one of my hearings was attended by a large crowd. Those valuable people who did not leave me alone were a source of strength. Most of them were deeply upset that I had been taken from my home and imprisoned. I could read it in their eyes. I could also guess what was passing through their minds. Unfortunately, however, we live in such a country that no one has any guarantee. You can be outside today and inside tomorrow for no reason at all. The prisons are overflowing.

Despite this, those who stand for rights and justice were always beside me. At some hearings the judge had to intervene because people who had been left outside insisted on being allowed into the courtroom. Not everyone was permitted to enter. The courtroom was completely full. From time to time there were interventions when those who had come to watch the hearing tried to speak to me. Even when the judge said, “You can have your conversation later,” I do not think he believed it himself. I was going back to prison and they were going outside. Where and how could we meet again?

Although the concrete reality seemed to show that this was impossible, I believe that I will meet those people again and have the conversations we were prevented from having. Just as I came out of torture and imprisonment before through resistance and solidarity, once again, together with my people and those I love, I will obtain what is rightfully mine. I know that I am not alone.

“EXCERPTS FROM MEMORIES OF HOUSE ARREST!”

“WHY?”

While all these inhuman practices were taking place, I was also witnessing some of the most precious forms of humanity.

The doorbell rang. A young man I did not know had come.

“Who are you?”

“Abla, I live in this neighbourhood. I am not a stranger. On the first day you arrived, I was among the crowd that welcomed you. May I come in?”

“Please do.”

He put the bag he was carrying on the coffee table and sat down.

“Abla, I went to Antalya with my friends for a holiday. I stayed a few days, but I could not stand it. I came straight here.”

“Why?”

“My conscience would not allow it. I kept thinking about what you had been through. I could not feel at ease. I wanted to come and visit you. I did not know what to bring. If you will accept it, I brought some sweets.”

“Thank you very much. You could have finished your holiday with your friends and come afterwards.”

“No. For me, being here and showing you that you are not alone was better.”

He was a very thin, dark-haired young man, and even when he smiled there was a trace of pain in his expression. What he had done moved me deeply. During our conversation it also emerged that this was not actually the first time we had encountered one another.

“In the first days after I arrived, there were some young people listening to loud music in the middle of the night.”

“Yes, abla. I was sitting there with friends that night.”

“You were there too?”

“Yes. We wanted you to hear some music. We played all the Grup Yorum songs we thought you might like.”

“Playing music loudly at that hour must have disturbed the whole neighbourhood.”

“The neighbourhood is used to things like that. It is fine.”

“That is probably true, because as I remember it, I was the only person who came out and warned you.”

“Yes. We played ‘Direnç Çiçeği’, and when it finished we went away.”⁸

“Why did your other friend not come?”

“He is a little embarrassed. He is ashamed because we played the music so loudly that night.”

“Look, you came and nothing happened. Tell your friends they can come and visit me too. The music thing happened once, I warned you, you understood, and that was the end of it.”

“Abla, we were very angry when we heard what they had done to you. Are you all right now?”

“I am. I am better. They would very much have liked me to be unwell, but they failed. Of course our anger is great.”

My conversation with this young man was one example of the impact that the torture inflicted upon me and my house arrest had on the people. I did not know these young people at all, yet they were prepared to give up their own comfort and come here in order to help heal my wounds. The oppression our people face because of their living conditions, and the hardships they endure in life, are not so different from what I have experienced. Pain and resistance to that pain unite us. I am proud to be a child of a people who stand by their children under every condition.

Those who turn a blind eye to torture tried to portray me as someone who deserved terrible torture and house arrest, but they failed. As time passed, I could see that this was not how the people saw me. This is proof that those who feed on oppression have already lost from the beginning.

“I BROUGHT GREETINGS FROM THE BLACK SEA.”

A smiling young man with bright eyes came to visit me carrying his tulum, accompanied by a curly-haired woman who knew where my home was.⁹

“Hello. I have come from the Black Sea. I have been following what you have been through. Since I was in Istanbul, I wanted to visit you as well.”

“Welcome. Where in the Black Sea region are you from?”

“Rize. My elder brother is also a prisoner and has been for a long time. I visit him from time to time.”

“Give him our greetings when you go.”

“He sent his greetings too.”

⁸Direnç Çiçeği: Turkish for “Flower of Resistance”; also the title of a song by Grup Yorum.

⁹Tulum: a traditional bagpipe associated especially with Turkey’s eastern Black Sea region.

“Are you a student?”

“Yes, but I am thinking of continuing my studies abroad.”

“Is that so? I suppose you will stay there afterwards.”

“No, no. I am not thinking of staying. I will study and come back.”

“That would be better. So many young people are choosing to study abroad...”

“That is because there are no job opportunities here, but I have more or less arranged my work already.”

“Good. Then I wish you success. Of course tea is famous where you come from. Do you work with tea as well?”

“Yes. It is very labour-intensive work.”

After explaining in detail how tea was produced, he promised that he would send me some from there.

“Do you play the tulum?”

“Yes. I am going to play you a folk song that my grandmother and I sing together.”

First he played me a recording on his phone of the song he sang with his grandmother. In that way I saw his grandmother too: despite her age, she was a lively, vigorous woman. You could tell from everything about her that she was a hard-working woman of the people.

“She has a beautiful voice too.”

“Then I will play.”

We listened with pleasure to the folk song he played. For a while, the atmosphere of the Black Sea filled our home.

After I answered his questions about my situation, we talked about my book. He said it had reached people in the Black Sea region too and passed on their greetings. He promised to come again and left. I thanked him very much for the little concert he had given us and saw him off.

“THIS IS YOUR HOME TOO!”

While looking through my messages, I noticed that there were voice calls as well. I had not seen them before. It was one of the many calls from people I did not know. I called back.

“Hello, did you call me?”

“Hello... How are you, my daughter? I am a retired teacher.”

“I am well, thank you. How are you?”

“I am well. My wife and I are trying to rest here. You know, this is mainly a holiday area.”

“Where?”

“Muğla...”

“Have a good holiday.”

“It is not exactly a holiday. We live here now. Our minds are always on the problems of the country. I heard what you had been through too, my daughter. Do not worry. After a while things will change. Believe me, everything will change. You will come out of there too. We will not leave you alone. And when you are free you will come and visit us. Remember: this is your home too.”

It was before the election, and he was one of those hoping that the CHP would win.¹⁰

“Thank you. That is very kind. Do you not come to Istanbul?”

“Yes. My older sister is ill, and I come to visit her. I will come and see you too.”

“All right. Thank you. Give my greetings and love to your wife as well.”

“She sends her greetings too. You must like reading books. I will bring you some books when I come.”

“Thank you. See you.”

Months later, an elderly man I did not recognise knocked at my door.

“I am the retired teacher who called you from Muğla.”

“Welcome, please come in. You did not forget - you came.”

“How could we forget? You are always in our thoughts. How are you, my daughter? Are you well?”

“I am well, thank you. And you?”

“I feel even better now that I have seen you looking well. Thank you. Here, these books are for you.”

“Thank you very much. That is very thoughtful of you.”

“Not at all. I love reading. I guessed that you did too.”

“Yes, I do.”

Throughout our conversation he spoke with complete conviction about how “everything would improve after the elections”. I explained that there was no guarantee of this. We talked about the reality of the country and how changing a single political party might not, by itself, change things. But he genuinely believed that a CHP victory would change a great deal.

10CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People’s Party).

His visit was short. "I will call again," he said.

After the election he video-called me. I answered the phone smiling. His spirits were very low.

"My daughter, you can still smile. Your morale is better than mine. Well done! Keep it that way. Never lose hope, never let your spirits fall. Your situation will go on a little longer."

"You should not upset yourself. This possibility was always there."

"It will definitely change, but let us see when. Look, I will show you our home. My wife is beside me; she sends her greetings too."

I greeted his wife as well. They had a beautiful house surrounded by greenery.

"Look, when you get out we are waiting for you, all right?"

"Let me get out first; of course I will visit you. Thank you. Goodbye."

"OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES!"

After the earthquake, messages saying "get well soon" and "my condolences" arrived one after another. Although I had not lost anyone from my immediate family, the loss of relatives, people from my home region and every person who had died caused me pain.

One of the people who called was a diving instructor. He had shared posts about diving deep in the Mediterranean, the happiness of discovering the world beneath the sea and the immense peace he found there. He called me, briefly introduced himself and asked whether I had lost anyone close to me.

"No, but my older sister is disabled and the earthquake affected her badly. She could walk a little before. For some time now she has hardly been able to walk at all, and only very rarely can she stand with someone's help. Have you lost anyone?"

"Friends and distant relatives. We are from more or less the same region. Our traditions and culture are the same."

"My condolences to you too."

"Thank you. Where is your sister staying now? Is she alone?"

"I have an older brother as well. He is ill too. They have made something like a tent out of plastic sheets and bed sheets, and they are staying there."

"Has no tent arrived?"

"No. A long time has passed, but unfortunately their conditions are very bad. We are trying to arrange a tent too. From here I cannot do anything except search by phone. House arrest ties my hands and feet."

“Then I will try to send them food and other supplies. We are already going to send a lot of aid material from our district to the earthquake area. We can include something for them too.”

“That would be very helpful, thank you. Do you work for the municipality?”

“I do some work for the municipality, but mainly I am a diving instructor. I would also like to read your book. Could you send me a few copies?”

“Unfortunately they are all sold out. But if I find one, I will send it.”

“Thank you. Goodbye.”

He was one of dozens of people who called me during the earthquake. Most people who called were frantically trying to obtain news of relatives under the rubble or to find help to remove debris. It was as though this suffering had united everyone in the country, whether we knew one another or not.

I pushed my imagination, trying to compare the old Antakya with what it had become. As I made that comparison, tears flowed without my being able to stop them. I felt frozen. My home city, reduced to rubble; my memories, my longings and those I loved - all of them now buried beneath tonnes of debris. Those who survived were left alone and helpless amid cries for help, cold, hunger and their injuries, abandoned to death.

While I was deep in thought, experiencing the most intense emotions, another follower called. He began to talk about the earthquake, starting a sentence with, “Can you imagine...?” I was about to say that I could not bear to imagine any more and hang up. He understood my state, stopped himself mid-sentence and said that he wanted to help the earthquake victims.

He was a conscientious person who followed both general news about the country and the earthquake in particular.

“I am very sorry about the earthquake. I wish you recovery and offer my condolences. I want to send aid for the earthquake. I called you because I thought you might know what is needed most.”

“Thank you. Everything is needed, but I know that the most urgent needs are medicines, bandages and other medical materials. There are many injured people. I heard that people taking medical aid will be setting off from Istanbul.”

“All right. I will reach them and do whatever I can.”

“Thank you.”

“You are welcome. I wish you hopeful and free days. Goodbye.”

“Thank you. Goodbye.”

Later I learned that he had contacted the people taking medical supplies and had helped them. Dozens of people like him wanted to send whatever they had. Our working people - loyal, devoted, enduring... This earthquake showed us once again that

we have no one but ourselves. Together we will heal our own wounds. But we will never forget the thousands of our people left beneath tonnes of rubble.

“THE RETIREES’ VISIT!”

Looking out of the window, I saw a group of elderly people approaching with flowers in their hands. I think they were trying to work out which house was mine. I opened the window and called to them. They said they were looking for me, and I directed them towards the house.

“Welcome. I am sorry I could not come outside to meet you, but I have a tag on my ankle.”

“Not at all. We came to see you anyway.”

They introduced themselves. Some were older brothers and sisters who had previously been involved in Emekli-Sen; others had taken part in local associations in their youth. They were older, but as cheerful, enthusiastic and full of life as children. I admired their energy. They had been meeting regularly for years and had never lost contact. They had not forgotten friends who had passed away either; on the anniversaries of their deaths they held commemorations at their graves.

“They were our companions on the road. If we forget them, we forget ourselves,” they said. In words like these, they showed both their attachment to one another and their determination to preserve the values they possessed.

One of them said: “There are actually many of us. Most of us have read your book. We are here because of the respect and affection we feel for you for preserving values that are being destroyed, despite all that torture. We are glad to have met you. We are always beside you.”

“Thank you. I tried to do what had to be done.”

“How long will you have to remain here under house arrest?”

“It is not clear. If the court lifts the order, it will end. If it does not, and if the Court of Cassation upholds the two aggravated life sentences, they will imprison me.”

“Could they uphold them?”

“Legally, they should not. Because there is nothing in the case apart from a slanderer’s claim that I ‘watched from the pavement while a child rapist was being lynched’. In fact, I was not even there watching, nor did I have any connection with such an incident.”

“So they have been keeping you like this for all this time for nothing. Does that make any sense? They must be holding you because you spoke publicly about the torture - to take revenge.”

“Yes. It is obvious that this is what is happening. They do not feel any need for evidence or proof in order to pass judgement on a person.”

“We will always be beside you. Do not lose hope. In the end, the fact that you are right will be recognised and you will be free. Do not lose your faith.”

“Thank you. I am not losing it.”

“THE OIL LAMP!”

I look at the pages opened in my name on social media, the posts shared there and the comments. On my own page, which was later closed down, there were lawyers, academics, artists, healthcare workers, engineers, MPs, intellectuals, journalists and many ordinary people following me.

One of the lawyers who followed the page had written long posts explaining, in legal terms, the injustice and illegality of my situation. They caught my attention. He was also making suggestions to me, explaining where and how applications could be made and how this lawlessness could, sooner or later, be overturned.

One day, together with a group of lawyers who had come to visit me, this lawyer, who had travelled from another city, also met me. He was a conscientious lawyer with many years of experience who wanted to move to Istanbul because most of his work was there.

A short time later he did move to Istanbul. He came to visit me again and brought me a small patterned oil lamp as a gift. He had brought the lamp oil as well. The lamp had traditional designs on it and was very beautiful. It was one of the most unusual gifts I received during house arrest. I asked what had made him choose it, but as I remember, he did not offer an interpretation. I placed the lamp in the inner room and thanked him very much for the beautiful gift.

After a long conversation about the lawlessness I had experienced and what could be done against it, I saw our guest off. The approach of people I had never met moved me deeply and also made me feel even more strongly the necessity of winning this legal struggle.

“MY BROTHER!”

Before the earthquake, my elder brother tried to visit me whenever he could. There was no one else in the family who was able to come. My older sister was disabled and could not travel. My brother also had health problems, but he came despite them.

Particularly after the earthquake, he experienced serious financial difficulties. The shop our father had left us was destroyed. Our homes were damaged. He and his wife lived in a tent for a long time. He no longer had a job. Even in those conditions he tried to find a way to come. After a while, however, worsening health problems and the necessity of working made it impossible.

I feel deeply the labour, loyalty and love of my brother, who came to me despite all these difficulties. Every time he visited, he told me with complete sincerity that he would always be beside me. And that is exactly what he did.

His eyes would fill both when we met and when we parted. He would become emotional and say: “When I hug you, I think of our mother.” He said he saw some of our mother’s qualities in me and spoke of how much he missed her. Most of all, he repeated to me the words our father had impressed upon him and offered me advice: “You do not really need advice, but I will say it anyway,” he would begin, and in this way express all the wishes and hopes in his heart.

My brother’s loyalty, love and labour have a special place within me. I try to be worthy of the value he gives me.

“THE NEVER-ENDING BIRTHDAY!”

I have never had the habit of celebrating my birthday. During house arrest, those who could visit came with cakes, while those who could not sent messages. Every one of them brought a different surprise.

One night, not long before bedtime, the doorbell rang. I thought it was another raid on the house. I opened the door and there stood a little girl holding a cake with candles burning on it. Behind her came her mother and father. Of course they entered singing the familiar “Happy Birthday” song. I was both surprised and moved.

The girl was about eight years old. They lived in another neighbourhood. Only a few minutes earlier they had video-called me to celebrate my birthday, but I had never imagined that they were coming. We embraced and took photographs together. The gifts they had chosen together showed all their thoughtfulness. Without listening to my protests that there had been no need, they offered their good wishes and we held a brief birthday celebration, because it was already very late. We embraced and I saw them off.

A few days later an older brother came carrying a cake.

“What is this?”

“A cake. I brought it for your birthday. I saw it on social media and realised I had missed your birthday, so I brought your cake today.”

“All right, thank you, but do not do it again. I do not celebrate birthdays anyway.”

I can still hear his laughter: “Fine, you do not celebrate it. I am celebrating it. Come on, bring a knife, plates and forks and let us eat.”

With his laughter filling the room, we ate the cake and drank tea. He had made the atmosphere so cheerful that it felt as though we had gone on a little journey together.

Some time later the same brother came to visit again, once more carrying a cake.

“This time, if you say it is for my birthday I will not accept it,” I said.

He burst out laughing again. “No, no. I just brought this one for no reason.”

This brother also came to my court hearing. When I saw him, I remembered our cake stories. Of course this time I was not sitting beside them.

“Buy a cake for the people next to you,” I called out to him. And he did - thank you.

At the penultimate hearing I was released, although of course I did not actually get out. This time the same brother reacted to the news by saying: “When you come out now, we will cut a cake...”

“Enjoy it,” I said.

Although I was not able to leave despite the release decision that day, I know that even when I am physically separated from them, I remain free as long as I resist. That is why it felt as though we had all eaten that cake together.

“NO, THEY CAN NEVER IMPRISON YOU!”

These words belonged to Mete Abi. He became so angry about the injustices I had experienced that he constantly said there was no rational basis for arresting me again.

“What have you done? Why would they put people like you in prison? No, there is no reason. We are here and we will never allow it. Look, I will come and visit you often. You are never alone. You know that, do you not?”

And just as he said, Mete Abi never left me alone. He visited frequently to ask how I was, and when he could not come he telephoned and asked: “Is there anything you want or need?” At every hearing I saw him in the front row. He looked at me with eyes filled with sadness, pain and longing. “We will get you out of there!” he said with conviction.

At one hearing I attended while under house arrest, he became so angry with a police officer who was trying to silence us that I thought something might happen to him. He was furious that they intervened and tried to stop us speaking. Fortunately the tension did not last long. He, meanwhile, felt relieved because he had expressed his objection.

Mete Abi met people like us, who resist injustice, relatively late in life. He too was one of the people confronted by the hardships and injustices of life. Despite his age, he had a young spirit, excitement and enthusiasm. He was full of love and compassion towards us, and full of anger towards those who oppressed us. He was deeply upset and angry when I was arrested. “We are always with you,” he said.

Like many of the families who visited me, Mete Abi became a brother, a father and a sibling to me. “You do not have your mother and father; you have us,” he would say. And it really was so. They remain my strongest support now too; they are always beside me.

“WE STAND WITH THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED!”

From the side window of my home I could see the Armutlu Cemevi and its garden. The view from my house was the sea to the right and the Cemevi to the left.

People coming to the Cemevi sometimes called up to me from the window and asked how I was. This time, those who came were the heads of several cemevis and of the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association. They came to visit me too.

When they arrived, there were enough of them to fill the large sitting room of the house. One of them spoke:

“As institutions that stand beside everyone who suffers injustice and oppression, we have come to say that we stand beside you. Because of our faith, we could not remain silent in the face of such a situation. Get well soon.”

“Thank you.”

“When will the house arrest end? What is the legal situation? We followed with great sadness the torture you experienced. How is your health now?”

Our conversation continued for about half an hour as I answered their questions. After we drank tea, they said that they would continue following my case, offered their good wishes, prayed for me and left.

It was important to me that visitors from faith organisations had come. It showed me that it was not only a limited section of society that had heard my voice. People from every part of society had heard it, and that was the effect of the power of truth.

“BABY SILA, WHO VISITED ME BEFORE SHE WAS BORN!”

One evening I had guests from Antep for dinner. Everyone who had come was involved in preparing the meal. The young men of the family were outside by the barbecue, and our neighbour’s daughter-in-law was helping them.

At one point I looked outside and saw another person I did not know standing by the barbecue. Because it was dark I could not make her out properly. She was a tall, strongly built woman.

I called out: “Hello, good evening!”

The woman replied: “Good evening. How are you, Ayten?”

“I am well, thank you. I did not recognise you...”

“I know you. I came to visit you.”

When she approached the window I saw that she was pregnant. Surprised and concerned, I said: “Oh! Why are you staying outside? It is cool out there.” She came inside.

“How many months?”

“Eight. She will be here soon.”

“What will her name be?”

“Sıla.”

“That is a beautiful name.”

“We loved Sıla very much. I am going to give her that name.”

“Do you have other children?”

“Five more.”

I was very surprised; the woman looked so young.

“I even used to go to Grup Yorum concerts while I was pregnant with them. Now I wanted to bring this one to see you before she is born. I will bring her after she is born too.”

I was deeply moved. The woman was so relaxed and calm, as though we had known one another for years. After we ate together that night, I thought about her a great deal.

Time passed. One day she came back into my mind and I wondered what had happened with baby Sıla. Then one day I looked up and there was a mother with a baby at my door. Sıla had been born and was ten days old.

I could not believe it. How had her mother managed to take such a tiny baby outside?

“Nothing will happen. Her brothers and sisters were the same. I took them everywhere. Some people will not let anyone touch their babies. I am not like that. They all grew up in the arms of their older sisters and brothers...”

I was afraid to hold the baby. I took her very gently so as not to hurt her. She was tiny, no bigger than my hand. That day was unforgettable for me.

Baby Sıla’s mother had affected me deeply. To be a family - such a broad, large, immense family united with the people - gives a person such powerful feelings.

She brought baby Sıla to see me at intervals. In that way I saw every stage of her growth. I met her brothers and sisters too. Later I saw Sıla’s mother during the final mass detention operation, when there were so many of us in custody. Later still I saw that she had come to my court hearings.

Baby Sıla must be talking and walking now. May she never stop. The future belongs to her.

“FINAL WORD!”

I thought house arrest might last a long time, but it was difficult to imagine a period as long as two and a half years. The lack of movement caused new health problems. Throughout that time, I tried as much as possible to preserve my will. I continued exercising, communicating with people and producing.

It was clear that the objective was to arrest me again. I could not remain silent in the face of this injustice and lawlessness. Although many developments occurred that did not fit into any plan, I prepared visuals and short videos and wrote articles in order to make my voice heard against injustice.

While under house arrest I tried to reach many intellectuals, artists, journalists, MPs and democratic mass organisations, and to make my voice heard. Although it was not enough, this work did have an effect. People came to visit my home; others said they would follow what was happening.

People from among the public whom I had never met contacted me. Injustice, arbitrariness and lawlessness had begun to be applied to every section of the people. Torture, detention, reverse handcuffing and sudden house raids became so widespread that there was an attempt to make them seem like a normal part of everyday life.

Judges and prosecutors who had studied law for years were able to ignore torture and injustice and issue unlawful and unjust decisions. And they called this an “independent judiciary”. For example, the ministry can send this “independent judiciary” a letter about me saying: “She is dangerous.” This was even referred to in court. Is it possible for a court not to be affected by such a description?

They speak of a “danger”, but there is no basis or foundation for it. What is dangerous? Is it that I resisted six months of torture? Or is it my stance under house arrest - head held high, conscience clear - despite every act of arbitrariness, harassment and threat? Is it that, against the two aggravated life sentences upheld at jet speed immediately after I was imprisoned, I continue my legal struggle and say: “Your sentences are null and void”? Is it dangerous that the reality of torture has been exposed to the world? Is it “dangerous” that people of every age - young people, elderly people and children - stand beside me and embrace my cause?

What is it that this system considers “dangerous”? To be “safe”, must one remain silent in the face of every act of lawlessness, injustice and torture?

Resisting torture, injustice and lawlessness is not “dangerous”. It is the duty of an honourable human being.

What is truly “dangerous” are the unjust and unlawful decisions that are issued. It is secret and open torture. It is abductions. It is people no longer feeling safe. It is living every day with the thought: “Will my door be smashed open tomorrow morning?” It is our elderly and sick mothers and fathers being dragged along the ground, detained and imprisoned.

It is young people being packed into prisons. It is the voices of people on indefinite hunger strike in pit-type prisons not being heard.

What is “dangerous” is remaining silent in the face of all this.

Because I did not remain silent, I am now confined within four walls. And this door has been closed upon me until the end of my life. We all know that this door was

closed in order to conceal torture and injustice. But we also know that through our common struggle against injustice, we can open closed doors again.

Nothing is over. With the belief that we will see all those we love again...

With the hope of meeting on free days...

FROM THE PRESS

A HARBINGER OF A HURRICANE: AYTEN!

SELÇUK KOZAĞAÇLI - BİRGÜN - 23 JANUARY 2024

Are you interested in meteorology?

It has always interested me. Weather conditions remain subject to causality, yet they depend on so many variables and produce such complex combinations that, despite our enormous capacity for measurement, there are few other scientific activities that produce results on this scale with such limited success. In fact, any other discipline would probably regard the second word in its job description as an insult: Weather Forecast!

For the same reason, meteorology is also the positive science that most resembles our efforts to make predictions about the future from the past and present of human societies. Countless variables, immense movements of fronts, stable repetitions, sudden local developments, strange surprises... Once everything is over, we realise that the seasons have nevertheless followed one another after all - just like history.

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In October 1945, John von Neumann wrote to Vladimir Zworykin: "...We shall predict all stable processes; we shall control all unstable processes." Considering the date of the letter and the national identities suggested by those distinctive names, one might assume that the two men were discussing political history. Yet they were merely engaged in an animated correspondence about global meteorological measurements.

If you will allow me, I will take the opportunity they appear to have missed and make a meteorological analogy about human societies.

Countries have thermometers of legitimacy. As you know, a thermometer measures heat, and it can be used particularly well to measure the heating-up of governments. We compare the results with other years, with seasonal norms and with annual averages in other countries; we also identify the difference in temperature between what governments do openly during the day and what they do at night while we sleep.

Governments that heat up recognise no law: they plunder public property, bring judges, doctors and police officers into line, abduct people, torture, lie, become arrogant and shameless... When homes begin to be raided, demonstrations dispersed and prisons filled, we know that we have entered a hot season.

It is useless to “blow on” the heat; weather is at least as causal as fascism. In other words, things are this way because the conditions make them so. You do not make requests of fascism; the remedy must be sought elsewhere.

Countries also have a barometer of dignity. As you know, a barometer measures pressure. Just as falling atmospheric pressure can herald weather conditions we may not like, the dignity barometer shows that things are not going well in a country when its intellectuals, artists, trade unionists, opposition politicians, journalists and academics are losing pressure. In short, if the thermometer rises while the pressure falls, we enter a stormy political and social climate in which, individually and collectively, we will suffer destructive, deserved and anticipated damage.

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Now let me come to what I want to say: the Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office at the Court of Cassation has requested that Ayten’s sentence be upheld. I warned you in advance that I was going to make an analogy so that you would not say: “Who on earth is Ayten? Weren’t we talking about the weather?”

Ayten Öztürk is a revolutionary from Hatay. On 28 August 2018, when she was found in a field in Ankara, she was forty-four years old and unable to stand. She had been abducted from Lebanon, secretly brought to Turkey and subjected to severe torture in a counter-guerrilla centre for six months. In the end, that day, they did not kill her but threw her into a field. They told her: “We changed our minds. We are not going to kill you. You will rot in prison and become an example to others...” She had permanent scars, and she still does. She had lost a total of 25 kilograms.

Why? Why would they do that?

Wrong question. It is at least as absurd as asking, “Why is the weather so hot?” None of the countless variables that can be listed under the heading of climate change can answer the question on its own; the same is true of regime change.

“Haven’t we heard things like this before? Please, let them not start doing this to people again!”

Wrong demand. Making a request of fascism is no more serious a precaution than making an offering to the sun and pleading: “Please cool us down.”

That is why the instrument we need to look at is not the thermometer but the barometer. When we first establish, through a medical report, that this revolutionary cadre was abducted and tortured for six months, we will measure what we are capable of doing. The issue is not really about Ayten; she has already passed her test. This is a measurement of our own self-respect and dignity.

I have two very interesting examples, but first we need one short piece of information: why had Ayten been imprisoned? According to the Ankara police who supposedly found her in the field following a tip-off, she was using a false passport. They simply took her away and had her imprisoned. That was all. There was no other

accusation. But how long can you keep someone in prison on an accusation that would not normally result in even three months' imprisonment?

They were aware of this too. While she was in prison, they opened old files and found a case from 2008. Her name was only mentioned in it. To be precise, in an incident in which "a person accused of child abuse was lynched by residents of the child's neighbourhood", one defendant had said: "I saw her too, watching from the pavement." That was all. Ayten was accused of nothing else in the case.

They merged the two cases and continued her imprisonment under the false-passport case. She appeared in court as a prisoner. Since there was no real accusation, she showed the court the 898 - eight hundred and ninety-eight - scars on her body and described in full detail what she had endured for six months. Everyone who listened was horrified. If you have not heard her account, you must read it. Not in order to be horrified - that is what the torturers want. You must read it in order to measure your atmospheric pressure.

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I promised two interesting examples. Here is the first. Whoever carried out the torture, neither the police officers who supposedly detained her following a tip-off, nor the prosecutor who referred her, nor the judge who imprisoned her, nor the doctor who first examined her dared to record that broken body officially.

The admission staff at the prison to which she was supposedly taken after being arrested for using a false passport acted differently and stood their ground: "If you do not take her and have her condition officially recorded, we cannot admit her to the prison."

You may say this was not dignity; perhaps they acted only because they were afraid she would die inside and responsibility would fall upon them. That is possible. But I prefer to think of it this way: they simply looked at the woman and said, "No, we cannot ignore this much." Everyone has a limit. This is how Ayten obtained her first medical report. Let this be our first example of watching the pressure of dignity fall and rise.

• • •

The second is even more interesting. After listening to Ayten for months and telling her, "If you wish, file a criminal complaint about what was done to you," the court, without a single new piece of evidence, imposed not one but two aggravated life sentences in a case that had continued for nearly fifteen years without detention.

This happened despite there being no act, no weapon, not even a substantive accusation. The pressure had fallen; the government had heated the judiciary until it was too hot to touch. But that is not the interesting part. The same court, together with its decision, **RELEASED AYTEN!**

I have been practising law for almost thirty years. In my entire professional life, this is the first time I have heard of someone being sentenced to two aggravated life

sentences - the equivalent of the old death penalty - and being released at the same time as the judgement. I doubt anyone else has heard of such a thing either.

What is this? What could have happened? Some said they must have released her so that “she would try to escape and they could kill her”. Possible. But I prefer to think of it this way: despite its absurd judgement, the court could not persuade itself to send this cruelly battered woman back to prison. Everyone has a limit. The pressure rose a little. There is no other explanation.

Now we come to the news I gave you earlier. At the end of Ayten’s two and a half years under house arrest, the Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office at the Court of Cassation, without ever seeing her, without hearing her story and, as usual, apparently without even properly examining the file, requested that the judgement be upheld. The brake pads had overheated, heated the disc and the brakes clearly failed. The temperature was so high that the dignity barometer could not rise enough to overcome the government’s influence over the judiciary.

• • •

We have reached the final and most difficult part.

What are our self-respect, our ideology, our political programme, our dignity, our intellectual capacity and our imagination? What is our atmospheric pressure? We know the prison guard’s limit and the judge’s limit - but do we have a limit too? Where is the point at which you will say: “No. I will not tolerate this much”?

Will we allow them, quietly and before our eyes, to do this to this woman? Or have they succeeded, as they intended, in making what was done to her an example to frighten us? What more important task or agenda could justify turning our faces away while this is being done to a human being?

If you think things cannot possibly be as I have described and that there must be something else, please do not content yourself with my account. Go and listen to what she has to say. She is at home; she is already under house arrest. The case file, the evidence, the decisions and Ayten’s statements are available in open internet sources. Check them.

If things are as I say and we are prepared to accept this - if we will not raise our voices even against this - then stop complaining about the weather. You are sweating; Ayten was scorched.

If the thermometer is rising and the barometer is falling, your own problems will soon seem small. What is coming may be a hurricane. Ayten is its harbinger.

What can we do? You may think we do not have enough power. Let us try. If our power is not enough, revolutionaries are already prepared to pay the price for their efforts. If it is enough, then it is no longer merely a matter of dignity; it becomes a matter of history.

We Will Win.

AYTEN ÖZTÜRK LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN SAYING “I WANT JUSTICE”: WHAT LIES BEHIND THE TORTURE ALLEGATIONS AND THE YEARS-LONG CASE?

FURKAN KARABAY - GERÇEK GÜNDEM - 27 APRIL 2022

Ayten Öztürk, who had been sentenced to two aggravated life sentences and released, was fitted with an electronic tag 303 days later, with police telling her: “We did not have enough tags; we are fitting them in turn.” Behind Öztürk’s case lay allegations of torture and a court file stretching back years.

As reactions continued to the Gezi trial, in which aggravated life and long prison sentences were imposed, similar contradictions and severe judgements had also appeared in many other cases. One example was the case in which Ayten Öztürk was sentenced to two aggravated life terms.

Years earlier, Öztürk had been detained at Beirut Airport and then disappeared for months, during which time she said she was tortured. After 303 days of house arrest, an electronic tag was fitted to her.

Öztürk, who had received two aggravated life sentences, had been released on the grounds that “the expected benefit from detention has been achieved”. The court placed her under house arrest. However, the judgement contained no provision ordering the fitting of an electronic tag.

Demanding justice through her social media accounts, Öztürk said: “I was tortured for six months, imprisoned for three and a half years, and they left 898 wounds on my body! Two days ago they also imposed an electronic tag with a range of no more than ten metres! What is the objective?” Sharing photographs relating to her torture allegations, Öztürk launched a petition on Change.org under the words: “I want justice.”

At the same time, what happened during Ayten Öztürk’s prosecution remained clouded in uncertainty.

THEY ATTACKED HIM SHOUTING “RAPIST”

Fourteen years ago, on 5 November 2008, according to some witnesses, a large number of people attacked S.C. in Okmeydanı with iron bars. It was stated that the attackers shouted “He is a rapist” and struck S.C. with iron bars for several minutes. According to the allegations, S.C. had sexually harassed children in the neighbourhood and kept images of them on his telephone.

S.C., who gave a statement to police at the hospital to which he was taken, said he did not wish to complain about those who had attacked him. He died two days later.

DETENTIONS BEGIN: DOCUMENTS BEAR THE SIGNATURE OF A POLICE OFFICER LATER PROSECUTED OVER FETÖ CONSPIRACY CASES¹¹

Following S.C.'s death, three people were detained in Okmeydanı. One of them was Mesut P. Mesut P. allegedly signed a police report prepared by officers. Police then detained ten more people in Okmeydanı, and they were imprisoned.

One year after the incident, on 2 January 2009, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office prepared an indictment against four defendants. On 2 December 2009 another indictment was prepared against fifteen defendants.

During the investigation, the official who signed requests by law-enforcement authorities for the defendants' telephone communications to be intercepted, transcribed and destroyed, as well as for house searches, detention, seizure, arrest and the taking of blood, hair and saliva samples, was Mutlu Ekizoğlu, the head of the Counter-Terror Department.

Mutlu Ekizoğlu was a police officer involved in a number of cases later described as FETÖ conspiracies, including Poyrazköy. After the 15 July coup attempt, police chief Ekizoğlu was dismissed for "abusing his authority or influence for the purpose of obtaining an advantage for himself or another person, or because of hostility or friendship". He was subsequently prosecuted over his role in conspiracy cases.

In the indictment prepared after S.C.'s death, based on documents bearing Ekizoğlu's signature, although the incident was an ordinary criminal matter, the defendants were charged with "attempting to overthrow the constitutional order, premeditated murder, establishing or leading an armed terrorist organisation, and damaging property".

The indictment alleged that the defendants were DHKP-C militants and that the incident had been organised. Statements from secret witnesses were particularly noteworthy.¹²

SECRET WITNESSES APPEAR

Secret-witness statements alleged that the attack had been carried out by the Okmeydanı Rights and Freedoms Association. A secret witness called "Adalet" said that two people, one wearing a black mask and the other a red mask, attacked S.C. with iron bars and that there were around fifty people in the area.

The secret witness "Adalet" also claimed that the people he identified among those fifty individuals regularly entered and left the Okmeydanı Basic Rights and Freedoms

¹¹FETÖ: acronym used by the Turkish authorities for "Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation", their designation for the Gülen movement.

¹²DHKP-C: Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front).

Association. Referring to the Basic Rights and Freedoms Association, the prosecution stated that, “according to documents seized in operations, the Rights and Freedoms Front (HÖC) carried out activities such as sending statements of the DHKP-C terrorist organisation to requested addresses, organising the funerals of deceased terrorists, organising actions and events on significant days and weeks, organising the sale of organisation publications, and providing support to the organisation”.

Families of the defendants who were being tried in custody drew attention to what they described as the political nature of the case, asking: “If this incident had taken place in Fatih rather than in Okmeydanı, where revolutionary youth are concentrated, how would the prosecution have proceeded?”

WITNESS STATEMENTS TREATED AS FUNDAMENTAL EVIDENCE: CAMERA RECORDINGS WERE NOT PLACED IN THE FILE AND NO SITE INSPECTION WAS CARRIED OUT

The investigation file included statements by defendants Mesut P. and Burak A., who said they had identified people who were in the area while S.C. was being beaten. These statements were treated as fundamental evidence.

Lawyers for the imprisoned defendants also drew attention to the absence of any camera footage from the case file. Six months after the incident, Istanbul 10th Assize Court wrote to the Istanbul Police Department requesting an investigation into whether any camera footage of the incident existed, but the response was negative. It was also stated that no judicial inspection of the scene was carried out.

The only evidence against the defendants being tried in custody consisted of statements. A “secret witness”, a method frequently used by FETÖ in conspiracy cases, had also been added to the file.

At the fourth hearing before Istanbul 10th Assize Court, the secret witness “Ada” said that he had made no statement as to whether officials of the association, or the association itself, had any involvement in the incident. However, in a statement taken from secret witness Ada by officers attached to the Counter-Terror Branch on 7 November 2008, there had been an assessment describing the incident as an organised activity.

THE COURT CHANGED HANDS: SENTENCES IMPOSED NINE YEARS LATER

Two years after the proceedings reached that stage, a change in the law resulted in the case being transferred to another court. The case then remained effectively suspended for nine years.

Istanbul 3rd Assize Court, which took over the case, issued its judgement on 10 June 2021. The defendants were convicted of offences including “attempting to overthrow the constitutional order, premeditated murder, establishing or leading an

armed terrorist organisation, and damaging property”. Aggravated life sentences were imposed.

Ayten Öztürk was among those who received two aggravated life sentences. She was said to have attempted to overthrow the constitutional order and to have committed premeditated murder.

CONVICTED OF “ATTEMPTING TO OVERTHROW THE CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER” FOR WATCHING THE LYNCHING FROM THE PAVEMENT

However, the only evidence against Ayten Öztürk in the case was the statement of Mesut P.

The reasoned judgement of Istanbul 3rd Assize Court stated that “during identifications carried out in the investigation, Mesut P. identified Ayten Öztürk as a person who attended a meeting on drugs and gambling at the Okmeydanı Rights and Freedoms Association and who watched the incident while S.C. was being lynched.” There was, however, no camera footage showing Öztürk watching S.C. being beaten.

Another statement concerning Ayten Öztürk belonged to Burak Altundal. Altundal said that he had seen Öztürk in the building of the Okmeydanı Rights and Freedoms Association.

In other words, Ayten Öztürk was sentenced to two aggravated life terms on the basis of statements that she had watched S.C. being beaten from the pavement and that she had been seen inside the association building.

AYTEN ÖZTÜRK “DISAPPEARED”: TORTURE ALLEGATIONS AND HUNDREDS OF SCARS

Öztürk, who had been imprisoned since 2018, was released in 2021 on the grounds that “the expected benefit from detention has been achieved” and was placed under house arrest.

But the irregularities in the case file did not end there. At the 18th hearing on 23 January 2018, the court ordered “the arrest of Ayten Öztürk for the purpose of taking her defence”. At the 14th hearing on 24 April 2018, it ordered the continuation of that arrest warrant for the purpose of obtaining her defence.

Before that decision, however, Öztürk had already been detained at Beirut Airport on 8 March 2018. She was held there for five days. On 13 March 2018, while being handed over by Beirut police to Turkish officials, she was allegedly hooded and taken to an unknown location.

According to Öztürk’s lawyers, their client was tortured there for months. There were also medical reports relating to the torture. The lawyers said that Öztürk was subjected to practices including being held naked in a padded cell, twenty-four-hour camera surveillance, hot air, cold air and cigarette smoke being pumped into the cell,

suspension, electric shocks applied through her fingertips, falaka and sexual harassment. They also said that an unknown chemical substance was injected into her with a needle.

LEFT IN AN EMPTY FIELD: DETAINED AND IMPRISONED MINUTES LATER

Öztürk, who was said to have 898 scars on her body, was allegedly left in a field in Yapraklı, Ankara, on 28 August 2018, after the torture, together with two suitcases and a backpack. After she was left in the field, officers from the Ankara Counter-Terror Branch detained her. Three days later, on 31 August 2018, she was brought to the courthouse and imprisoned.

Ayten Öztürk described what she experienced during this period in the following words:

“I was brought to a torture centre in Turkey. I was stripped completely naked. I was thrown into a padded cell. For days I was kept with my eyes covered and my hands bound. I was offered collaboration. They suspended me by my wrists from rings in the wall. They applied electricity all over my body for minutes at a time while shouting, ‘Talk!’ Burn marks appeared all over me. They attached electricity to my fingertips. While sexually assaulting me with a truncheon, they told me how they had raped others. There were other people being tortured there; I was the only woman. It was a place without air, without water, without sunlight, a place they themselves called ‘the bottom of hell’. I lost 25 kilos under that torture. A total of 898 wounds and scars were identified on my body. The wounds on my body have healed, but the wounds inside me will never heal until this injustice is ended.”

THE CASE IN WHICH SHE WAS IMPRISONED WAS REJECTED: THE MONTHS IN WHICH SHE SAYS SHE WAS TORTURED REMAINED OBSCURE

In the investigation opened on the grounds that Öztürk had been “caught with a false passport”, an indictment prepared by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office charging her with “membership of an armed terrorist organisation” was merged with the file in the Istanbul lynching case.

The indictment, prepared by prosecutor Yarcın Mutlu, included material concerning DHKP-C and its actions. It referred to posts by civil-society organisations concerning Ayten Öztürk and accused her of membership of a terrorist organisation.

In the Istanbul lynching case, however, the court ruled that the case opened through the indictment prepared by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office should be rejected. In the lynching case, Öztürk was nevertheless given two aggravated life sentences.

In the case that lasted thirteen years, neither guilt nor the basis of the eventual decision became clear. Aggravated life sentences were imposed on the basis of statements by secret witnesses and informers.

“WE DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH TAGS; NOW IT IS HER TURN”

On the 303rd day of Ayten Öztürk’s house arrest, police arrived at her home without warning and fitted her with an electronic tag. When Öztürk asked, “Why did you come after more than 300 days?”, officers replied: “We did not have enough tags. We are fitting them one by one. Now it is your turn.”

Öztürk’s lawyer Seda Şaraldı said: “There was no court order whatsoever for an electronic tag to be applied. Until now this had not been imposed either. Such a decision is made by a court, not by the police. The Probation Directorate implemented this measure on its own initiative.”

According to her lawyers, Öztürk’s allegations of torture and the hundreds of wounds on her body were never clarified, and there was an attempt to cover them up.

TWO AYTENS, ONE STATE!

GÖKÇER TAHİNCİOĞLU - T24 - 16 JUNE 2019

The path to becoming a genuinely just country does not lie through grand words. It lies in ending torture and holding those responsible to account.

Continuity in the state is important.

The statements are similar in every period:

“There is no torture.” “It is an isolated incident.” “No one can cast aspersions on us.” “Zero tolerance for torture.”

There is no field more terrible - and more revealing - than torture when it comes to explaining the dreadful institution known as “impunity”.

You say, “Torture cannot be used,” and the answer comes back: “Should they have given terrorists flowers?”

You say, “Torture is a crime,” and in response leaked stories appear about actions in which those who were tortured are alleged to have participated.

You say, “It is a crime against humanity. Even if someone is guilty, you cannot torture them,” and the reaction comes: “What if they know that a bomb attack is about to take place?”

It comes... Without fail, in every period, allegations and realities of torture are answered with the “culture of impunity”.

And a large crowd applauds all these answers.

Only later does it become clear how far the consequences of that culture of impunity can spread.

When your home is raided at midnight and people say, “What were you doing there at that hour?”; when they say, “You should not have worn those clothes”; when a child is shot and the response is, “But he was throwing stones too,” you understand how this culture can envelop an entire life.

• • •

There is a memorial grave in Başakçı village in Tunceli.

From the gravestone, the hand of Ayten Öztürk seems to reach out - perhaps in one final plea for help. Her body was found by stray dogs in the earth where she had been buried.

Ayten Öztürk was still a child when her elder sister Aysel was detained and imprisoned during a road search in 1979; when Aysel was tried after the 12 September coup on allegations of membership of an organisation; when she became ill because of severe torture; and when she went on a 49-day hunger strike to protest the torture.

Nor, when her sister was found innocent and released in 1986 after all that torture and accusation, did Ayten know what everything that had happened would eventually mean.

When her released sister was detained again from her sickbed and then released once more, and finally went to the mountains and never returned, Ayten of course did not know how this would affect her own life.

Her father, Hıdır Öztürk, was a civil servant and worked as a supervisor.

In 1992, when he went to the gendarmerie station to exchange holiday greetings, the commander made statements showing that he believed the real crime lay with the family and left Hıdır Öztürk’s hand hanging in the air:

“I will not exchange holiday greetings with you until your daughter’s body arrives.”

Hıdır Öztürk’s other three daughters were still beside him.

Ayten was working in a factory. One of his other daughters had become an engineer; another worked as a nurse.

One day in 1992, Hıdır Öztürk and his three daughters received a strange invitation. The commander had summoned them.

There they were met by a bearded man introduced as “Mahmut”.

He took the addresses of the daughters one by one and sent the Öztürk family away.

Only much later would Hıdır Öztürk realise that the man introduced as “Mahmut”, who had taken all their information, was Mahmut Yıldırım, known by the codename “Yeşil”.

A short time after that meeting, Öztürk's daughter who worked as a nurse was suddenly transferred to Kars.

His daughter who was an engineer was somehow assigned to Çankırı.

Only Ayten and her mother and father were left at home.

On 27 July 1992, Ayten Öztürk was abducted in a white Toros car.

No trace of her was found until 8 August.

On 8 August, near a cemetery in Elazığ, stray dogs had disturbed the earth and exposed the partly buried body of Ayten Öztürk, whose face had been made impossible to recognise.

Öztürk's body was found eleven days after she disappeared, yet the autopsy report stated that the missing parts of her body resulted from having remained in the ground for nearly two months.

Before he himself was killed, JİTEM commander Cem Ersever said that Öztürk had been abducted by Yeşil, but nothing came of it.¹³

Years passed. In 2011, Hıdır Öztürk was invited to the Human Rights Commission of the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

"I am here as the father of a daughter whose eyes were gouged out, whose ears were cut off and whose body was dismembered," he said. Every member of the commission fell silent.

The commission chair at the time listened to all the allegations and filed a criminal complaint. The file was reopened.

Further search and arrest orders were issued for Mahmut Yıldırım, in addition to the many that already existed.

Some people serving in the gendarmerie at the time described, one by one, the structure of JİTEM in the region and who was involved.

Those who had turned a blind eye to the actions, those who had taken no action and those who had written the reports were all identifiable.

Witnesses described how Ayten Öztürk had been abducted by Yeşil and these individuals, taken to Diyarbakır, interrogated and killed; her eyes were removed, her skin was flayed and her body was buried.

Statements were taken from some public officials as suspects.

And twenty-seven years later, a case was opened. After all, "Yeşil" was no longer around. What harm could one more case against him do?

13JİTEM: commonly used acronym for Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism), associated with clandestine gendarmerie/intelligence operations.



Another Ayten Öztürk gave evidence in Istanbul last week for the first time in the case in which she is being tried while imprisoned.

Her statement was important because Öztürk, who had been living abroad, was allegedly handed over from Lebanon to Turkey but, instead of being officially detained, was interrogated for six months in a place where an official state office was above and a torture centre below.

For six months, her relatives and human-rights defenders asked where Ayten Öztürk was and received no answer.

Öztürk provided the answer:

“I was held unofficially for six months in a secret place by people who said, ‘We are the state,’ and I was tortured. After six months, in accordance with a scenario, I was taken in a minibus and left in a deserted place. My eyes were covered and I had headphones on. The lights of Ankara could be seen in the distance. Officers from the Counter-Terror Branch appeared. 28 August is the date I was taken out of the ‘unknown centre’. The date on the detention record is false. At the place where I was held, I was taken into a padded room and forcibly stripped completely naked. My hands were cuffed behind my back and my eyes were covered. They said: ‘If you do not talk, we will keep you here for years. We will not damage the integrity of your body. We have the facilities even to perform organ transplants. The state trained us. You will beg to die. We are professionals; this place is unlike anywhere else’... They said: ‘There is no honour, decency or morality here. This is the bottom of hell. There is no God, no lawyers and no court here. There is only us.’...”

According to Öztürk’s account, she was tortured with electricity, truncheons and suspension. She lived with a sack over her head. Whenever her condition deteriorated, she was treated and then taken back to be tortured again. She was even taken to the toilet with the door left open.

For almost the past five years, a “black Transporter” has been travelling around the streets of Ankara.

After all, the white Toros - praised to the skies on social media by people against whom no action is taken despite openly committing offences - has grown old...

Since there can be no economising on prestige, more modern vehicles with darkened windows must be used for such work.

And that is what is done.

Dozens of students, leftists, rightists and members of religious communities give similar accounts, but there is no answer.

For example, Önder Asan, accused of “FETÖ” membership, gives an account similar to that of Öztürk, who is accused of belonging to a left-wing organisation. The

two could have had no opportunity to meet anywhere. It is established that Asan was abducted in a Transporter in 2017 and left beside Lake Eymir thirty days later.

“I was tortured for thirty days. When they released me, they told me to call the police and say, ‘I am surrendering.’ The police came and took me.”

Another person is released 130 days after being abducted, and the police arrive and take him.

In three years, the number of people said to have been abducted for long periods is twenty-six. There are still allegations that six people remain missing. They are nowhere to be found.

During the period when they are missing, it is easy to say: “They are FETÖ members; they must have fled abroad.”

But what about those who are found, what they describe and the marks on their bodies?

Evidence of torture, people describing their abduction, torture during detention, journalists beaten in the street...

It is clear that for a long time “the gloves have been off”.

• • •

Although twenty-seven years separate the Ayten Öztürk who was abducted by JİTEM and killed under torture from the Öztürk who says she was put into a Transporter and taken to a secret centre, one practice remains unchanged.

At that time, the JİTEM torture centre in Diyarbakır, whose address everybody knew, was not investigated. Today, the alleged torture centres said to have been established at two separate locations in the heart of Ankara are not being investigated either.

Manipulation, saving the day and shouting slogans in the name of the state are easy.

But the road to becoming a truly just country lies not through grand words, but through ending torture and holding those responsible to account.

COURT OF CASSATION UPHOLDS AGGRAVATED LIFE SENTENCES AGAINST AYTEN ÖZTÜRK

AYÇA SÖYLEMEZ - BİANET - 22 JULY 2024

The decision stated that Ayten Öztürk “was present at the scene while the deceased was being beaten with iron bars and watched the lynching from the roadside”.

The two aggravated life sentences imposed on Ayten Öztürk for “attempting to overthrow the constitutional order, aiding premeditated murder, and premeditated

murder” were upheld by the 3rd Criminal Chamber of the Court of Cassation. Öztürk had been detained and imprisoned while under house arrest.

After spending two and a half years under house arrest, Öztürk was detained at her home and imprisoned on 6 February 2024.

“THE MASK OF FIGHTING DRUGS”

The Court of Cassation decision stated that Ayten Öztürk had watched the lynching of a person in Okmeydanı from the pavement.

The Court of Cassation said that, on the basis of open and secret witness statements, the following conclusions had been reached regarding Öztürk:

“Through activities carried out under the mask of combating prostitution, gambling and drugs, the Okmeydanı Rights and Freedoms Association organised young people; people within the Okmeydanı Rights and Freedoms Association had for a long period conducted a campaign in the neighbourhood under the name ‘No to Prostitution, Drugs and Degeneration’; in relation to this campaign they distributed leaflets in the streets and wrote slogans on walls; and there had previously been incidents of beatings in connection with the campaign;

“Defendant B.Ö. was the person responsible for the Okmeydanı Rights and Freedoms Association and participated as a speaker in a youth meeting organised under the name of combating drugs, where he spoke about prostitution and gambling;

“Defendant Ayten Öztürk also attended the meeting; before the incident, B.Ö. met at the association with the child drawn into crime in order to obtain information about the deceased, and defendant Ayten Öztürk was also present in the association building during that meeting;

“On the day of the incident, defendant B.Ö. asked the child drawn into crime to bring the deceased to the location he had described, and it was established that defendants Ayten Öztürk and B.Ö. were present at the scene while the deceased was being beaten with iron bars and watched the lynching from the roadside...”

“SEEING THE POWER TO JUDGE AS THEIR OWN”

The Court of Cassation gave the following reasoning for rejecting Öztürk’s appeal against the decisions of Istanbul 3rd Assize Court and the 27th Criminal Chamber of the Istanbul Regional Court of Appeal:

“In view of the trial conducted, the evidence collected and set out in the judgement, the assessment and discretion formed by the court in accordance with the results of the proceedings, and the contents of the file examined, the

other grounds of appeal put forward in the appeal petitions of the defence counsel for the defendants, which were not found to be valid, are rejected; however;

“For the purpose of establishing the Marxist-Leninist order of the DHKP-C terrorist organisation, seeing in themselves the power to judge that belongs to the Republic of Turkey and the Turkish Nation as a legal personality, the defendants Ayten Öztürk and B.Ö., who took part in the planning and organisational stages in order to ensure that the deceased Selahaddin Cirit, whom they had declared guilty, was punished in the name of the organisation, who were personally present at the scene and watched the lynching from the roadside within the same criminal intent, and who through planning and instruction caused the deceased to be killed by the other defendants...”

THANK YOU!

**TOGETHER, WE WILL BRING JUSTICE INTO
BEING!**

Text of the advertisement published in BirGün newspaper on 31 August 2024.



İŞKENCEYE SON, AYTEN'E ÖZGÜRLÜK!

AYTEN ÖZTÜRK İÇİN ADALET KOMİTESİ



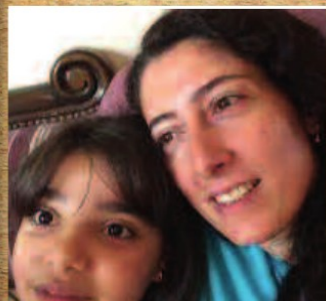
AYTEN ÖZTÜRK KİMDİR?
Ayten Öztürk; 2018'de kaçırılarak gizli bir işkencehanede 6 ay boyunca elektrik, askı, falaka, baskı, azarlar, hasta bırakma, istatileri dahil olarak

6 AY İŞKENCE, 898 YARAYI ANLATTIĞI İÇİN "ÖRGÜT PROPAGANDASI" DAVASI AÇILDI!



Ayten'in hakkında, görüldüğü işkenceleri anlattığı kitap sebebiyle "örgüt propagandası" iddiasıyla dava açılmıştır.

AYTEN'E YAPILAN İŞKENCE, EV HAPSI VE HÜKÜKSÜZ CEZALARLA DEVAM EDİYOR!



END TORTURE - FREEDOM FOR AYTEN!

JUSTICE COMMITTEE FOR AYTEN ÖZTÜRK

6 MONTHS OF TORTURE - 898 WOUNDS

TWO AGGRAVATED LIFE SENTENCES

MORE THAN TWO YEARS UNDER HOUSE ARREST

İşkenceye maruz kalan Ayten Öztürk, İstanbul'da gizli bir işkencehanede 6 ay boyunca elektrik, askı, falaka, baskı, azarlar, hasta bırakma, istatileri dahil olarak

AYTEN ÖZTÜRK'E 2 YIL





AYTEN ÖZTÜRK - IMPRISONED IN TURKEY

DOCUMENTARY PRESENTATION: THE REVOLUTION OF AYTEN - WITH DIRECTOR ELIANA RIVA - SATURDAY 29/3,
18:00 - VIA DEI SABELLI 23



FREEDOM FOR AYTEN ÖZTÜRK - SOLIDARITY IS A WEAPON!

Ayten Öztürk is a revolutionary prisoner held in Kandira F-Type Prison. She was tortured for six months in a secret torture centre in Turkey. She is a flower of resistance!

"I was able to appear at my first court hearing only by holding on to my lawyers. I was subjected to attempted rape, electric shocks, suspension, hot and cold air pumped into my cell, and many other forms of torture. I have 898 wounds on my body."

hücreye sıcak-soğuk hava vermek gibi birçok işkence gördüm.
Vücudumda 898 yara var"

ABOUT AYTEN ÖZTÜRK TWO AGGRAVATED LIFE SENTENCES

Based on an informer's claim that she "watched the lynching". The sentence was upheld by the Court of Cassation.

- 6 months of torture
- 898 wounds and scars
- 3.5 years imprisoned
- 2.5 years under house arrest
- One book, one legal struggle
- Two aggravated life sentences

**JUSTICE COMMITTEE FOR AYTEN
ÖZTÜRK**



898 IS NOT JUST A NUMBER!

In 898 days:

- A sapling becomes a tree,
- A baby begins to walk,
- And... injustices multiply.

**898 WOUNDS!
898 DAYS OF HOUSE
ARREST!
898 INJUSTICES!**

898 YARA!

898 GÜN EV HAPSI!

898 ADALETSİZLİK!

"Anything can happen to my body, but never to my soul or my ideas."

**AYTEN ÖZTÜRK
FREEDOM**

AYTEN ÖZTÜRK

FREEDOM