

# EXILE



**APH PROJECT**

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*Storyteller A.K.*

*Scenarist Mina Leila*



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**APH NO: 2-9-0418EB-CAN**

We dedicate this work, which is based on true stories, to the thousands of people who are deprived of their liberty and who still face persecution in their home country; to those innocent Anatolian people who had to flee their country and are separated from their families; and to those who lost their lives while crossing the Aegean Sea and Evros/Maritsa River.



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## **Editor Note**

After the alleged coup attempt of July 15, 2016, thousands of people lost their jobs and were subjected to court trials and proceedings on the grounds that they were Hizmet Movement members. Hundreds of people, who do not have a hope to survive in this grueling atmosphere in Turkey, are striving to leave the country illegally by venturing into the risk of crossing the border and facing death in order to live freely. There were people who drowned in this difficult and harsh journey.

The account you read is a true story, but the real names and places have been changed for the safety of the victim's family.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this endeavor by preparing the visuals and dealing with the script of the narrative, and during the interview phases. Our sole wish is that the injustice and lawlessness and victimization that many have been suffering from will come to an end as soon as possible by the reestablishment of the rule of law.

## About Hizmet Movement

Hizmet is a transnational civil society initiative that advocates for the ideals of human rights, equal opportunity, democracy, non-violence and the emphatic acceptance of religious and cultural diversity. It began in Turkey as a grassroots community in the 1970s in the context of social challenges being faced at the time: violent conflict among ideologically and politically driven youth, desperate economic conditions and decades of state-imposed ideology of discrimination where the un-elected members of the state penetrated excessively in people's lives and mandated a particular lifestyle.

Over the years, Hizmet has transformed from a grassroots community in Turkey to a wider social effort around the world where participants come from all walks of life — they are culturally, geographically, linguistically and religiously diverse. Their work centers on:

- Promoting philanthropy and community service
- Investing in education for cultivating virtuous individuals
- Organizing intercultural and interfaith dialogue for peaceful coexistence

Hizmet participants are inspired by the ideas, life example and vision of Fethullah Gulen, who advocated for deeper personal spiritual devotion that is expressed in social work through the understanding that serving fellow humans is serving God.

For more information: [www.afsv.org](http://www.afsv.org)

## **Introduction**

(APH Project – The Project of Recording and Archiving Hizmet Movement Persecution)

Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST) is a non-governmental organization that runs its activities on a voluntary basis. The aim of AST is to bring before international public opinion the human rights violations including torture and the unlawful court trials and proceedings, which have been encountered in Turkey for the last two years. After the coup attempt of July 15, 2016, more than 160,000 innocent people lost their jobs in both the public and private sectors, with accusations and unjust convictions of being connected with the coup attempt. When the state of emergency administration, which was announced on July 20, 2016, gave the state unlimited authority to combat the terrorist organizations, the fundamental principles of a democratic society and the most basic principles of universal human rights and values such as freedom of expression and freedom of press were devastatingly damaged. Today in Turkey more than 60,000 people from prestigious careers such as soldiers, members of the judiciary, doctors, teachers, journalists and academics, including 16,000 women and nearly 700 children, have been detained and imprisoned.

As Advocates of Silenced Turkey, we engage in a number of activities in order not to keep silent about the injustices that have been taking place in this long period of suspension of law in Turkey.



The project of recording and archiving the testimonies of victims aims to shed light on the injustices suffered by thousands of people in Turkey. Through the endeavors of our volunteers, the victimizations and hardships that the victims experienced have been recorded both in spoken and written forms. The main purpose of this work is to ensure that the victimizations are recorded in an accurate and impartial manner. Thus future generations may come to learn and comprehend the injustices and the victimizations from firsthand sources. On the other hand, it is a lofty goal to bring the oppressions that the victims in Turkey have been and are exposed to to the attention of academics, media organizations, human rights associations, prominent community leaders and government representatives at the international level.

‘Exile’ is the product of a long-term endeavor. Each of our works is the compilation of real life stories encountered by real victims. However, their real names and scenes of events have not been revealed for the safety of the victim’s relatives in Turkey. We would like to thank everyone who made tireless and valuable contributions to this work, and we wish the fundamental values such as the rule of law to be established in Turkey again.

**Editor's note on AST and APH Project**



## *I was alienated*

Everyone around me started to disappear. Those who used to smile at me before began to change their ways whenever they saw me. Those who praised my character, my career, and my diligence started to talk behind my back. I was declared an enemy of the state by people to whom I had never done anything evil. They had already chosen their sides, and unfortunately, I was left on the opposite side. What was my mistake? I had spoken out, and I had aligned myself with those who bravely shouted “The emperor has no clothes.”

I was an academic who had built a career in political science at one of the prominent universities in the country. I would call how I was treated “ignorance,” but ignorance can be cured. The treatment that I faced was not something that can be rectified by education; unfortunately, it was an “ignorance” without any remedy.

First, the articles I submitted to the university journal were not being published even though they had already passed the peer-review process. My international conference trips were being investigated. Although approved by the administration, my travel expenses were not being reimbursed. I was facing an intensive campaign of bullying and passive aggression. The university did not want me to speak out against the government. They expected me to play the ostrich and stick my head in the sand, ignoring injustices.

I could have kept my silence as a person, or a citizen, but how was I supposed to remain silent as a political scientist? How would I maintain my self-respect, if I hid the truth while speaking about Turkish foreign policy in conferences?

## *July 15, the so-called coup attempt*

There is a well-known concept in political science: in order to purge the opposing groups, you must create a source of legitimacy. The coup attempt on July 15, 2016 was planned to legitimize the purge, right from the very first few minutes. Three to five hundred people hit the streets in a few cities, and it was very obvious that this was a plot.

On the night of the coup attempt, my wife and I were visiting my wife's grandmother in Istanbul, catching up over a cup of tea. We were all happy, since my brother, who was a police officer in a different city at the time, was also with us during his annual holiday break. After seeing the "coup attempt" rumor on Twitter, we turned on the TV. Although Turkey has a history of coups, I was too young to witness a coup in person, but because of my profession, I had done extensive research about them. From what I had known, curfew was soon to be declared, so we went back home.

Strangely, none of the usual things happened in the following hours. The scapegoat was already pointed out within the first few minutes, and the members of the Gulen movement, who had already been oppressed by the government for several years, were announced as the perpetrators of the coup. We were seriously concerned this time, because it was obvious that the government would blame the coup on us and make us suffer. I, my wife, my mother, my father, and my brother-- we all couldn't fall asleep and watched the news until morning.

We were all exhausted in the morning, getting ready to go to sleep. My brother, who was on his annual leave, was called back on duty before we managed to go to sleep. We were scared, and rightfully so. Since the government oppression had already started, my brother, who was a decorated police officer, had been exiled to provincial areas and had faced intensive bullying by the chief officers; he was even threatened that his kids would be killed. My brother left, and that was the last time we saw him as a healthy person. My brother, who had been using antidepressants for a while because of the bullying he had been exposed to, was going to get sick within a week and get transferred to a mental hospital. His illness was about to get even more mysterious because of the high dose of medication he received during his 35-day treatment there. And while he was still being treated there, on a Saturday, he was going to get arrested by his (former) colleagues.

My dad accompanied my brother Ali during his 35-day hospital stay and had begged the doctors to release him, as he was losing his mind day by day because of the medication. However, like most other people in the country, the doctors were inhumane. When Ali became addicted to the medication, they took him to an undisclosed place, where we wouldn't hear from him for a while.

I received a call from the university where I used to work; I was told that the police were coming for me, and that I had to go and give a statement. I went to do that without hesitation because I did not have anything to hide. Indeed, the police came, searched my home thoroughly, and since they couldn't find anything, they wrote a report and left. I was discharged by the board of the university, so, I went there and pleaded to be reinstated. I then left for the city where my brother was staying. Before I reached my destination, my neighbors called me and told me that the police had come back with a locksmith, broken into my home, and rifled through everything inside. This was despite the fact that they had been there two days before and ended up not finding anything.

I had travelled to my brother's city for his court hearing. My brother was finally able to appear in court after he was secretly questioned under torture. At the end of the hearing, my brother and around 100 former police officers who were facing the same charges, except those who had "confessed," were arrested and sent to prison. When I visited him in prison a week later, I was going to find him very miserable, sobbing like a little child.

## *I was arrested, too*

I was arrested when I visited my brother in prison. I was arrested by the soldiers who were hiding in the room where I thought I would see my brother. They were all acting like they had caught a con artist or a serial killer who was on the run for a long time. They were very cruel to me. I was taken to the police station with two other people and made to wait there for hours. I found out that the other two people were both taken in for criminal activity. Not surprisingly, the prosecutor charged me, while letting the other two go.

I had to go to court for the first time in my life. That was where I was going to find out about the indictment against me. A while ago, a friend from the university had called me and made an offer. TMSF (Savings Deposit Insurance Fund) had liquidated the real estates of Bank Asya. We had taken out a loan from that bank and purchased a land and a house. During this process, I had sent my friend some money, and because of this I was charged with “transferring money in support of terrorism” (because the bank we transferred money through was affiliated with the Gulen movement). That friend of mine was also arrested, and tortured. Furthermore, we had bought an apartment from someone who had a completely different worldview (than the movement), they even had arrested him. I explained to the judge that all the transactions were legal and reasonable. There is a Turkish saying “When the wolf is about to eat the lamb, he would ask, why did you muddy the water?”. That was exactly what I was going through. They wouldn’t believe or understand me. Finally, I couldn’t take it anymore, and just smiled.

They took me out of the courtroom in handcuffs. My mother, father, and my wife were **all** crying, and I, on the other hand, was emotionally deadened. My only concern was my daughter. Who knows how long she was going to cry, when she won't be able to see me at home? For the last few years, I had been watching her quietly and getting upset every morning before I would leave her, thinking that it would be the last time I would see her. Thankfully, the soldiers allowed me to take a video to send to her. I smiled at my wife's phone camera, hiding the handcuffs. I told my daughter, "I love you so much! I love you so much, but I have some things to do, and we will be apart for a while. I don't know for how long." I also took a few pictures full of smiles and kisses. We probably looked very tragicomic from outside: A man in handcuffs giving kisses and smiling to a camera held by a crying woman. The last thing I saw, while I was being pushed into the police car, was my father and my wife hugging each other and sobbing.



## *The ward of sick*

The prison was a place where the living conditions were very tough, and where I saw people like Saban and Mustafa who couldn't see the sunlight inside their 4–5 square meter (43–54 square feet) cells, and people like Ahmet, who was beaten until his cheekbone was broken, and thrown into the cell, and on top of that, his wife was thrown into jail along with his 1.5-year-old son. I also saw inmates who were beaten, tortured, and even perished after melting away right in front of my eyes because of lack of medical attention.

It was 11:35 at night. Since I had high blood pressure, they took me to the patients' ward. All of the inmates, who were jailed because of the same alleged crime, woke up and came to me: a professor with heart failure; an old man, who used to work at the district governorship, with liver failure; another old man, who was working as a driver at Zaman Newspaper, with a very serious diabetes; and more than anybody else, medical doctors... All of them were above the age of 60, and very distinguished people. I stepped into the ward, which had a maximum capacity of 4 people, as the 13<sup>th</sup> inmate (and there were going to be 14 of us two days later), and was given a blanket after I told them my story. There were no beds, so I had to sleep on the floor.

It was a cold night. It was so cold in the winters that the windows and the doors of the ward would freeze with 2–3cm (about 1 inch) of ice on them. Although it was mid- September, it was an unbelievably cold night. On my first night, I laid the blanket on the floor and made a pillow out of the prayer rugs

and shivered from cold until the morning. I eventually did see the morning, but how I got through the night was like nothing else.

I had two apartments that I had purchased with my honest earnings. My wife told me once, "If they ever arrest you, I'll sell both apartments and get you the best lawyer to save you." And my answer was "No need, don't do such a thing." However, my first night on that hard floor made me think twice, and I knew I would give up those two apartments, for which I had worked for years, just to save myself from that place. A dreadful shock! Every day I was waking up to find myself in the same place! I was opening my eyes hoping that it would be a dream every single time.

I hoped that I would get used to it in the following days, but when I thought about it, which I had a lot of time to do, I was feeling worse. The president of the university I used to work at was sentenced to 28 years of jail time, although he was innocent. I had friends who were sentenced to four consecutive life sentences for no legitimate reason. Many of my friends faced terrible punishments. What was going on left no more endurance in me. What was going to happen now?

This uncertainty was testing my sanity. I did not even know what I was being accused of. I thought for days, "If I receive this much sentence, how old will my daughter be, when I am out?. Alright, I can stay in prison, but in the meanwhile couldn't she not grow up? She could grow up when I am out, that way I wouldn't miss it..."

Even as grown-ups, we hadn't understood what was happening. So how could we explain this to a 4-year-old? I was able to see my daughter only once in the next two months. Although it was a two-hour visiting session, they allowed her to stay for only for 20 minutes. She cried; she hugged me and begged me, "Dad, please, let's go home!", but the guards sent me back inside by force. Can you imagine the trauma she went through?

## *I had not seen sunlight for 5 months*

We used to wake up at 3:30 a.m. for the (voluntary) night prayers, and then at 5:00 a.m. for the morning prayers. I was a faithful person who believed in God and never missed my prayers, but the recent issues caused me to question my faith. I was still practicing my religion and performing my prayers, but I couldn't help but think, "I was innocent, so why did my God allow me to be in here?"

I was extremely sensitive about hygiene and noise, and I was having a very hard time in the ward. My friend gave me his bed in the morning because I couldn't sleep during the first night. There was barely a foot of space between my face and the ceiling, which was full of mold, and the whole place was only 30 square meters (about 323 square feet) and contained 13 people; it was like a cave. I was about to go insane!

We could go to the yard between 8:00 a.m. and 4 p.m. By "yard" I don't mean a place with an open ceiling. It was a place that saw no sunlight, with an area of 50 square meters (about 538 square feet) and a height of 10 meters (about 33 feet). There were holes on the walls between adjacent yards through which you could speak to other inmates.

One day, I was in the yard, speaking to a voice from the other side of the wall. I did not know what he looked like; all I knew was that he was an inmate who had been sentenced to solitary confinement. The voice said, "I've been here for 24 years." He was sent to prison because of the Madimak incidents of 1993. I asked him when he would be released: "When I die," he replied, "I got a life sentence." He had 5 children, with whom he did not have a chance

to share anything beautiful. He was a dead man for his children. “I did not do anything,” he said, the only crime (!) that he committed was to protest.

In my previous life, just like the people living outside, I would have thought that he would not have been in prison if he wasn't guilty. However, I came to understand it then, as I had experienced firsthand how the state machine grinds its victims. I hadn't done anything either. If a man who had not done anything had been in prison for 24 years, it was quite possible for me to share the same fate as him. And this fear caused me to tremble. I understood that there were worse things that could happen to people other than death.

## *I cannot take it anymore, God, please take my life!*

On most nights we weren't sleeping but reading books. It was not possible to sleep anyways. There were cells on top of the wards, and the groaning inmates could be heard from our ward. Every single night in the ward, we would hear someone groaning and screaming between the bars, "I cannot take it anymore, God, please take away my life!" He was trying to die in the cell he was thrown into. His friends had been dying through the years, and he was going to die too. He was going to die before he got to laugh, to eat his favorite meal, to love and be loved... There were people among the prisoners who had been sentenced to 150 years. The ones who would be out in 2035 or even 2050... That was, of course, if they survived. There was a young man who used to give us haircuts; he was 28. I was horrified when I heard that he was sentenced to 55 years. What if I ended up like that? Everyone in the ward was using antidepressants because it wasn't bearable otherwise. This was a prison where dreams were destroyed.

Since there was no space, I was sleeping on a mattress on the floor in that cold weather; what I called a mattress was about 1-inch high. I was putting newspapers, books and whatnot underneath it to keep the cold away. The skin of my hands would dry and crack because I had to hand wash my laundry. I would hide my hands to keep them away from my mother's eyes when she visited me. People used to step on me to go to the toilet at night; sewage was dripping on me from the cells above...

There was only one restroom for 35 people. And there was hot water for only half an hour per day. While we were trying to figure out how to share this hot water, water shortages, each lasting up 5–6 hours, started happening at least three days a week. Of course, it was all intentional to make it harder on us. They were even cutting the strings that we dried our clothes on.

The people they pestered were mostly sick and elderly. There was a former employee of a district governorship with a severe liver disease (Hepatitis B). The man needed medical attention, but they only released him just before he died.

Another prisoner was a well-known professor who had leg surgery. Think about it-- the man has screws and stitches in his leg! In addition to cuffing his injured leg, they sent him back to the ward from the hospital only after one and a half days, whereas he needed to have stayed at the hospital for at least a month. He was an old man who couldn't do anything for himself; he couldn't even go to the restroom. For months, other inmates took turns to clean his bed. I personally witnessed when the poor man prayed to God, asking for his death. His leg was getting thinner day by day, developed an abscess, and eventually became permanently disabled.

While witnessing all of this, you just cannot feel sad about yourself. In fact, you forget about yourself sometimes and feel sad about others even more because you are not alone, and there are people who are in worse condition than you.

We had a young (former) police officer, whose story had media coverage. He was very young and healthy and a very bright police officer. Because of the so-called coup attempt, he was sent to the same prison with us. He was tortured physically (his cheekbone was broken with an ashtray) and emotionally (his wife was arrested along with their baby). The poor guy became sick because of the torture and the psychological pressure, and all of his petitions for release were swept under the mat. In the end, he got out of the prison, where he had entered in perfect health, unconscious. And after a short time, he passed away.

There you go... These unbelievable events we have seen, heard, and gone through were a tragedy that you would only see in movies or novels.

## *Reunited with my brother!*

Winter had arrived. It was very cold. The door of the ward was 5–6cm (about 2 inches) frozen on the inside, and we were huddling together to not freeze in that 20 square meter (about 215 square feet) ward. It was like there was literally nothing good in our lives... until, one day, my brother was sent to our ward at 2 o'clock.

It was so nice to see him, even in this place. We cried and hugged each other for a long time. In the coming days, he was going to make me cry even more. He was given a lot of medication and had put on a lot of weight. Since there was no space to sleep, I started sharing my floor mattress with him. His closest friend and spiritual mentor ("older brother") had testified against him. Ali couldn't take what he was going through anymore and became depressed. He was just like a child; his hands and feet were shaking uncontrollably; he was waking up in the middle of the night screaming for mom and hugging me. Although seeing him like that was devastating for me, it makes me forget about my own problems, and I tried to make him feel better.

Despite being depressed and all his other troubles, he tried to help others starting from the very moment he arrived. Since he knew a good deal about the petitioning process, he wrote petitions of objection for unjust imprisonment on behalf of everybody, one by one. Even for my imprisonment, he sent petitions of objection several times. And even though I was facing the continuation of my detention, I was released on a cold February day, with the help of one of the petitions that he wrote!

## *I was released!*

Normally, an inmate would be ecstatic after he/she gets released; I was not! What good was it to be free when I had to leave my brother (and other people I considered my brothers) in that vile place? I can say that it was the most miserable day of my life. They released me one evening after sunset. I floundered -in knee-high snow, crying, and got on a bus to go to the city center. I knocked on the door of my home, not with excitement, but with shame. I was carrying the guilt of leaving my brother behind. And my mother's first question was, "Where is your brother?" I bowed my head and couldn't answer.

I thought things would be better outside, but it was nothing like that. My daughter had become depressed after I was arrested. She began collecting pebbles from the street, and when asked the reason, she would reply "so that they wouldn't get lost."

My wife was five months pregnant at the time I went to prison, and she had a miscarriage because of the stress she went through. I felt like nothing would ever be the same. No one was talking to me anymore, except for a few friends, who called but couldn't speak because of crying and then hung up. I went to the university to pick up my belongings, but the dean did not even let me in. I was stubborn, I resisted, I did not leave and waited, and finally, I was able to get my personal belongings. However, unsurprisingly, I was going to find out that they filed a complaint about this later on.



## *Another arrest warrant!*

It was one and a half months after my release. My lawyer told me that there was another arrest warrant for me. The really difficult days were yet to start. They imposed an interim injunction over all of my properties. My close friends and relatives wouldn't even acknowledge me. I did not have any place to stay because the police would always raid the apartments of my mother and my mother-in-law. I was hiding in the apartment of my wife's grandmother, living a fugitive life. I managed to tolerate this situation for 15 days.

I couldn't stay in this country anymore! My passport was already canceled a while ago, and as a last resort, I decided to leave the country illegally. I did not know how to do that, however. I was like in a thriller movie, because all the entries and exits of the cities, subways, everywhere, literally everywhere, were full of police officers. Finally, a friend of mine, who is a lawyer, managed to arrange a meeting, and we hit the road to Aksaray to meet with the smugglers. My wife and my daughter were with me. When I kissed my daughter goodbye for the last time, it was almost like she was aware of everything and was crying continuously. My poor daughter, who became acquainted with that pain, at the age of four...

The smugglers made me get into a car in the evening. There were four other people inside. None of us knew the other three and nobody said a word. But our facial expressions said it all. Tension was extremely high. There was a

police checkpoint in the entrance to Edirne, and they had stopped the car right behind us. We had dodged a bullet there.

We arrived at a border village. The Evros River was visible just ahead. The smugglers left us right after sunset and ran away. We were left alone with our backpacks. Supposedly, someone would pick us up, but no one showed. The smugglers had run away leaving a large bag behind, which apparently had an inflatable boat in it; but it was so heavy that we decided to leave it behind and move on.

## *Villagers report us to the police*

Four people, who did not know each other and could not say a word to each other, but unavoidably sharing the same fate... While we were walking with our backpacks, we were suddenly surrounded by villagers. They were asking questions one after the other: "Who are you, what are you doing here, where are you from, where are you going?"

The smugglers had warned us firmly, "If you encounter anybody, do not speak in Turkish. Act like you are from Syria, otherwise they will report you to the police to receive bounty rewards!" We did not say a word; we wanted to express ourselves through body language and tried to convince them to let us through, but they were not humane. They attacked us with sickles and looted our backpacks. They also seized our money and then called the police. At that point, one of us ran away after he managed to untie himself. I summoned my courage and started running after him.

I ran... I ran... And then, I ran more... It did not matter what direction. I was just running into the darkness. I waded in the swamps, tripped on rocks and fell down; my knees started bleeding, but nevertheless I did not stop. I don't remember for how long I ran without taking a break. Finally, I remember tumbling down in a wheat field after I couldn't manage to take another step. I laid down and watched the sky for 30 minutes. What was I supposed to do now? It did not take long for the police forces to arrive.

Apparently, they were looking for me. While they were searching for me in the field--and I am not exaggerating--I felt like I aged ten years. "Did they have a thermal camera? Did they bring their search dogs? If yes, I would be caught right away!" I did not get caught, however.

That gave me hope. That meant, I still had a chance to run away. But I was soaked to the skin, my shoes were full of water, and I was freezing! I had a mobile phone with me, and I inserted a sim card in it, trembling. I called the only number I memorized, my father's, by covering the phone to hide the lights it was emitting. I had not told my parents about my journey because they were old, and I did not want them to worry about me. I just asked my father to call my wife and tell her to call that number. When my wife called me, I asked her to call the middleman and let him know about my situation. During those phone conversations, I ran out of credit!

Minutes passed, and nobody called me. Maybe I did not have service, I did not know. After a while, I decided to stand up and walk towards the river. After I got close, I started to hear dogs barking, which made me freak out. Just at that moment, the middleman called and told me, "We will pick you up, tell me your location." I was pleased, but as the time passed, nobody came, and I was facing the risk of freezing. Eventually, they called again just to tell me, "You are on your own." I begged, crying, "I will die here if you don't show up, please help!" Of course, they did not show mercy, I wasn't worth anything to them.

Finally, a friend of mine and my father-in-law rented a car and headed towards me. I tried to move forward by crawling and to warm up by tucking pieces of grass inside my pants, trying not to freeze. I received a call again, around 5am. They were about to arrive, and I passed through a forest full of thorns to reach the meeting point. My whole body would be splintered and every part of me would be pricked, but I didn't care because I wanted to survive!

We finally managed to meet up around 7:30 a.m. I was all covered with mud and horns.

When I returned home, they would remove thorns from my body for an entire week, and more importantly, I would lay sick in bed like a corpse for three months. I wasn't getting better, but I couldn't go to the hospital either. I wished to die, so many times!

## *We were like caught in a trap*

My wife's grandparents where we were staying started to feel uncomfortable about our presence because they feared getting caught. Our properties were confiscated, our credit cards were canceled, and my father had run out of money because of our legal and living expenses.

A friend of mine, who was a doctor and knew about the situation, risked it all and rented an apartment for me in those huge buildings where nobody knew each other. He furnished the apartment, took care of the utilities, gave us some money, and left.

A tiny apartment... My daughter was getting bored, and I did not have a chance to take her to the park. I lived a prison life all day long in that tiny apartment for seven months. We were turning the lights off at night not to draw attention, and we even put napkins in the peep-hole of the door. We were detached from the rest of the world, reading books all day long and following the news on Twitter. Since I had a lot of free time, I was checking every statistic about how many smugglers were arrested and where.

After seven months, I received a call from an unknown number. An unknown voice on the other side said that my doctor friend sent his greetings, and hung up. I got what that meant, right away. Apparently, my friend (who had rented the apartment for us) was arrested and was warning us to relocate. We couldn't stay there any longer. I had attempted to cross the border a few more times, but because of my past experience, I changed my mind every time and couldn't do it. I was unhinged, doing things unintentionally, and I was constantly getting sick. My father couldn't take the stress anymore, and he had an angiography and bypass surgery. I couldn't even visit him. He needed blood, and I couldn't give him any of mine! I was so miserable!

## *The only way was to leave!*

All the doors were closed already. I would either leave or go to prison. However, my previous experience was preventing me from taking a step forward. I summoned my courage by taking medication.

The smugglers took me again on a Saturday. There were two families and myself. I had heard and read a lot of stories: the ones who were robbed and murdered by the smugglers, the ones who drowned in the river, the ones who got caught, the ones who managed to escape but got extradited...

I was afraid, but I did not have any other option. I found myself near the river, trying to inflate a boat with people who had been suffering from the same fate as me. I had crazy questions in my mind. The soldiers could show up, the propeller of the boat could not work, the current could be too strong...

Finally, we started our journey. Our boat was wobbling and hit the Turkish shore twice! Everybody was nervous and without hope. It was obvious that we would get caught without being able to complete the journey. A woman in our boat couldn't take the stress anymore and tried to jump into the river!

## *Finally, Greece*

Finally, after a five-hour long gruesome journey, ten of us on the same boat managed to reach Greece. There were children among us. Can you imagine the terrifying experience they witnessed just in the beginning of their lives? Unfortunately, they also walked the five-hour walk, just like we did.

I was going to continue the journey with my friend. A friend of mine, who lives abroad, guided us by following us through satellite. We tried to avoid the villages and the residential areas with his help. I am not even mentioning our exhaustion, but all I can say is that our shoes were torn into pieces because of walking.

And finally, we made it to a small city. After that, we decided to go to another city by bus, but the police stopped our bus on the road. I was scared, because in my last, unsuccessful attempt to flee, the smugglers had stamped a fake seal on my passport, and I would be sent back if the police recognized it. The police approached us and wanted to see our passports. Since we were fugitives, we were not walking around with our passports in our hands. We had hidden our passports in our socks, wrapped in plastic bags. They realized something was wrong after we took out our passports from where we hid them, feeling the eyes of everyone on us. The police told us to get out of the bus and started interrogating us. My friend immediately told them “We are running away from Tayyip (Erdogan)!” The police officer was a bit angry, but he gave our passports back and told us to leave.



We were reborn. It was the first time we felt a bit relieved and realized that we had not been eating anything for a long time. First, we bought some tickets to travel ahead, and then we went to eat pizza. I was thinking about my family, especially my father. He had just had heart surgery, and in order to not get him worried, we had not let him know about our journey. I forgot about myself for a second and prayed to God for his health. I hoped that he was okay. I had a chance to say goodbye to only my wife and daughter. After a five to six hour long journey, we reached another city, and then we continued on to Athens. We needed to stay there for two days. We found a two-room apartment, where eight to nine refugees were staying, and decided to stay there.

## *The U.S. really is full of adventures*

We have a song which goes like “America is full of adventures...” Our journey to the U.S. would be full of adventures, indeed. We had our visas, but they arrested us right on the spot after we arrived at the airport, because we had entered the country illegally. We were scared, but thank God, our fears did not come true.

We were on a plane that was headed to the U.S.! In the end, we had struggled against adversity just for this. If you ask me what I felt--if I was happy--I was not. After everything I had been through, I felt like I had lost my sense of joy and happiness.

We were about to get interrogated once again, after we set foot in the U.S. They did not want to allow us in. I then told them I was not a dangerous person, and that I had visited their country for at least twenty times in the past. They allowed me in after I told them all of this.

## *And, Canada...*

I've been in Canada now for only six months, and I am trying to build a new life for myself, away from my family and loved ones. Despite these hardships, my only motivation to survive is my family. I came to this country without a penny in my pocket and first rented an apartment with my friend. A Turkish family sold me a car with a 9-month payment plan. Now, I deliver pizza with that car.

After I came here, I had another baby girl. Even though I cannot support my wife in her difficult days, and I don't get to experience the pleasure of holding my daughter, we talk over the phone every day. Both of my daughters are growing up, and I have to watch these beauties from the other side of a phone. If you ask me what the most meaningful thing I am doing in my life is, I would say: talking to my daughter over the phone at least three hours a day, no matter how tired I am.

I have applied for asylum, and I am waiting for the date of the hearing.

I am trying to hang on to life both financially and emotionally. The climate and the living conditions here are very difficult. I am waiting for a miracle, even though I am not very hopeful. I hope to reunite with my family one day, improve my language skills so that I can work at a university here, even without pay. After all, life has given us things beyond our imagination, hasn't it? Why not this?

I have learned to collect little hopes for survival in this process and to attach these hopes to make a strong rope to cling to life.

# EXILE

After the alleged coup attempt of July 15, 2016, thousands of people suspended from and lost their profession and were subjected to court trials and proceedings on the grounds that they were Hizmet Movement members. Hundreds of people, who do not have a hope to survive in this grueling atmosphere in Turkey, are striving to leave the country illegally by venturing into the risk and face up to death in order to live freely. As a matter of fact, there were also people who drowned in this difficult and harsh journey.

The book “**Exile**” is based on the true story of A.K. who was a successful academician in one of the most respectable universities, but his life turns upside down after the “alleged” coup attempt. The book shares the story of him embarking on a journey with the hope of gaining back his freedom.

**APH PROJECT**