

France fights forced marriages

By Julio Godoy

Special to Sentinel-Voice

PARIS (NNPA) - Fatia was in love, but months earlier she had been forced into marriage with another man.

"When my mother realized I did not want to marry the man she had chosen for me, she warned me, 'Either you marry him, or you are not my daughter any more,'" Fatia, 23, said. "I went to the town hall to my marriage as if I was going to my own execution, but nobody cared there about my feelings. I just got married to a man I had hardly met — and whom I did not love."

In time, she came to love someone else.

"I thought I was going mad," she said. "I was falling in love with this wonderful guy, and at home I had to go to bed with another man, whom I feared, and with whom I did not have anything to do, least of all any intimate life. It was terrible."

This conflict continued for several months, until Fatia's mother agreed to do her bit now to help end the marriage. She spoke to Fatia's husband and after a

long dispute he accepted dissolution of the marriage.

Today, Fatia shares her life with the man she loves. Not a perfect partnership, but at least this is what she wanted.

"It is my life, whatever mistakes I commit, I have to come to terms with them," she said.

Fatia is not alone.

According to official estimates, up to 100,000 young French women, mostly adolescents from families of immigrant origin, risk marriages forced by their families, regardless of the girls' feelings.

The French parliament unanimously passed a new law this month forbidding marriage of girls under 18 years of age. It provided for a probation period of two years after the marriage ceremony to allow spouses to demand annulment of a marriage.

The law provides for counseling, proof of consent, education in schools against such marriages, and for protection for women fleeing forced marriages.

"With this text we want to

improve the measures preventing violence in the family as well as the violation of women's rights," minister for justice Pascal Clement said during the parliament debate. But not everyone is convinced that the new law can end such practices.

"We are satisfied with the law itself," Clotilde Lepetit, law counselor for the women's rights groups 'Ni putes ni soumises' (Neither whores nor slaves) said. "But now we wait for the results."

Khadija Aram, president of the association 'Women from Trappes and from Elsewhere' based in Trappes city on the outskirts of southern Paris says it will take mothers, not the law to stop forced marriages.

"Either elder women in

the families realize that forcing a girl to marry a man she does not love is wrong, or the law will remain dead letter," she said.

Aram said forcing girls into marriage arranged by the families is traditional in the Maghrib countries, but also in other societies in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia.

"Our mothers and grandmothers were forced by their own families to marry men they hardly had met before, and despite the sometimes unpleasant experiences they had to go through in such marriages, many women still believe that such a tradition is suitable for their own daughters and granddaughters," she said. "Many of them still believe that love will come with the daily routine of living with someone."

Franklin

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Outreach to a younger generation of Christians may be so important to Franklin because he came to Christ at a young age — 15. As a mature Christian, he has learned to go beyond the "surface level" of his walk with God, he said.

Not doing so kept him from moving past his own personal problems, he adds.

"I think the biggest challenge with church faith is that we can be more emotional than we are grounded in Christ," he said. "Not going further will make your Christian walk surface-level." That will keep a person from not fully having God in their lives, he said.

Perhaps that closer walk with God is what allowed him to be so open with his wife, Tammy, when it came time for him to move beyond his addiction.

He's been pornography-free for almost five years now, and he advises more people to be real with themselves about their problems.

Since she didn't have to "bust" him by finding magazines tucked under his bed or finding weird links on his personal computer, being real with his wife allowed her to be real with him, too.

That's one of the reasons they have stayed together.

And, "yes, dawg," he believes more men need to be real that way, too.

Andre Coe and Kay Baggett write for the Dallas Examiner.

Clingman

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portunities that accrue to these symbolic sites of freedom and civil rights.

We have Martin Luther King Jr. streets all over this country, many of which have no Black-owned businesses on either side of them. Do you think MLK would trade his name on a street sign for the economic empowerment of his people? How about Sister Rosa? They did not fight to get their names on things; they fought to get our names on things, to get our names on things such as deeds, mortgages, business plans, and development contracts.

Again, this is not an either-or scenario; it is a both-and scenario. We abandoned our own economic base in the 1960s and chose to pursue political offices, we cannot afford in the 2000s to abdicate our quest for substantive economic accomplishments and be content with symbolic, feel good, warm and fuzzy gestures that are grounded in civil rights only.

The best tribute to Rosa, Martin, Marcus, and other brothers and sisters that taught us the value of economic empowerment is to take what they did to a higher level. They did their parts; I am sad to say, we are not. We have resigned ourselves to soft and cushy Kumbaya-type celebrations; and we have shied away from pragmatic, sacrificial, and vital initiatives that will lead us to collective economic empowerment. We have accepted and settled for symbolism over substance.

The good news is that we can have both. In order to win economic freedom and be inspired to look back and celebrate our proud history of civil rights victories, we must have healthy doses of both symbolism and substance. Currently, we are overdosing on symbolism and have a substance deficiency. We must change that. We cannot allow the likes of George Bush to co-opt our past in order to move his economic and political agenda forward. Haven't you had enough? We cannot allow our local and national leaders, and politicians, to continuously put forth initiatives that only make us feel good, but seldom bring initiatives that make us do "good" - and do well at the same time.

Enough of the symbolism; bring on some substance!

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Your Horoscope Says... Jan. 5-Jan.11

ARIES

Travel the road of life only with those who see your true value this week. Encouragement and an extended hand is what you need to accomplish your goals. Release the grudge that you have for someone who betrayed you. You will find liberation and lightheartedness in forgiving. Follow your heart when it comes to a love interest.

Soul Affirmation: Everywhere I am this week there is a quiet or noisy party going on.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 46, 55

TAURUS

This week might be a good week to window shop for a dream vacation or luxury purchase. You can even window shop in your imagination for the best possible dream! Deep inside you know what you want. Let your desire come to the surface.

Soul Affirmation: I try to see the best in all situations this week.

Lucky Numbers: 31, 43, 47

GEMINI

This week you'll find yourself in many interesting conversations with friends. Heed. Look forward to financial good news in the near future. Wow! It's about time. Yeah, you've worked hard enough. Don't volunteer. Hide. Steal a lot of time for yourself.

Soul Affirmation: I allow good to flow into my life.

Lucky Numbers: 19, 30, 48

CANCER

This week is one of those weeks when you could easily be all over the mental landscape, so this week is a good week to see how much discipline you can muster. Focus on one thing all week. Close your mind to other possibilities. See if you can do it. It's not so important now, but you'll need to have the ability to do it soon.

Soul Affirmation: I let the universe

handle problem people this week.

Lucky Numbers: 20, 34, 36

LEO

Think about travel. Think about "far away places with strange sounding names," as the song says. Map out a trip plan this week. Your mind is keen to what you need to make your season lighter and more satisfying. The trip contains the key.

Soul Affirmation: My physical appearance makes my entire life happier.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 20, 50

VIRGO

Just start talking. What you need to say next will come to you. You've got some explaining to do and silence will get you nowhere. Love can come easy for the next few weeks but you're going to have to use your gift for gab to get it.

Soul Affirmation: I send up a prayer for those I love this week

Lucky Numbers: 7, 12, 34

LIBRA

This week is excellent for getting in touch with your sense of what people really want. You can gain knowledge that they do not have yet themselves. Make preparations to give it to them. When they express their need and find that you already have it prepared; they'll love you for being so thoughtful.

Soul Affirmation: I give thanks for the opportunity to make evident my seriousness.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 39, 55

SCORPIO

People say you're less emotional than you really are. Your emotions are in control this week so don't be ashamed to show how you feel even if your logical mind tells you otherwise. Thinking is not the only way to get answers or come to good conclusions. Follow your heart.

Soul Affirmation: I love seeing things and people from many different

angles.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 50, 52

SAGITTARIUS

The matter that you want your partner to understand is not as easy for them as it is for you. You'll have a hard time communicating to them that their best interest is being respected because it's not. What you want is strictly for yourself. You're going to have to give up something to get it.

Soul Affirmation: I love the chance to prove how tireless I can be.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 30, 37

CAPRICORN

You need to make the effort to improve your love life. Be nice. Sell your program as only you can. Let your lover enjoy the advantages of loving you, a person who can cause compliments to pop up like flowers in springtime.

Soul Affirmation: Idealism and realism are wedded pair this week.

Lucky Numbers: 7, 26, 35

AQUARIUS

Go with the flow, an unexpected change at the office will work out well for you in the future. Don't try to stop it. Sit back and take time to discover the advantage in it. Rely on your own good judgment about your ideas.

Soul Affirmation: My smile is bright as sunlight itself.

Lucky Numbers: 17, 19, 26

PISCES

Some business of yours will be delayed, but have fun while you wait. Take your mind off it. Have faith. Go out on the town Have a ball! You may even want to schedule a short getaway. Enjoy!

Soul Affirmation: While I relax time is working for me.

Lucky Numbers: 40, 43, 44