

ALEAH'S FAKE MAGAZINE



Istiklal Caddesi, Istanbul 11 a.m. 2016

The weather was hot and the sun was shining as Esra Gumrukuler made her way down the street from her hotel to the nearby Starbucks. "Tall vanilla latte with no sweetener please," Gumrukuler said to the barista.

She waited off to the side while her drink was being prepared. Esra watched the locals as they cheerfully interacted with friends and colleagues, drinking their coffees and eating their pastries.

Esra Gumrukuler in New Delhi, spring 2019.

A few moments passed when all of a sudden she heard a loud bang and watched the storefront window shatter into the building. In that moment, she knew exactly what happened. It was a suicide bomber ...

Esra, age 20, was a student on Semester at Sea. She grew up in Izmir, a western city of Turkey. The city differs from the rest of traditional Turkey. "It's one of the safest cities and it's more westernized," Gumrukuler said. "We don't really have the Turkish culture because we're so close to the Greek Islands."

The Turkish government is conservative and in their eyes, religion is one of the most important aspects of life. "The government hates Izmir because we're not very religious and most of the people are leftist," Gumrukuler said. "I don't feel like I live in a place that really represents Turkey."

Esra's mother Nuriye and father Kerim both came from Antalya, a traditional city of Turkey. "Every summer I would live there because my parents had work there," Gumrukuler said. "I've experienced what the more conservative cities are like and even the dialect is different." Although her parents grew up in such a traditional town, they are very much left sided today.

Esra is very close with Ozgen, her 26-year-old brother. Several years ago he told her he was bisexual. He made her promise not to tell her parents or any other family member due to the pure fear of rejection. It took years for him to tell their parents and once he did, they were very accepting of it.

In Turkey, it's mandatory for men to join the military after graduation. If a man refuses, they're thrown into jail. There are only a few ways to get around it. "The economy is so bad and the government always needs money," Gumrukuler said. "The government said that if you can pay enough, you could reduce the time you spend there."



Esra Gumrukuler
Marrakesh, spring
2019.

If a man cannot pay his way out, the only other way he can avoid the military is by proving he is gay. "If a man chooses to do this, there is a strong chance they will never receive a job and will most likely be thrown in jail," Gumrukuler said.

Ezra's brother was set to join the military for three years until his parents agreed to pay the government. "The money my parents paid is more than my college tuition," Gumrukuler said. "The money I'm talking about is equivalent to \$40,000." Ozgen was sent to the military for four weeks.

While Ozgen served in the military, a few members found out about his sexuality and reported it. "My brother's experience was not pleasant, he was beaten for no reason," Gumrukuler said. "They didn't even allow him to shower for over a week."

The government corruption and constant poor treatment angered the citizens of Turkey, it led many people to protest. In 2014 the Gezi Parki protests began. "It started because the government wanted to demolish a national park and turn it into a mall," Gumrukuler said. "It wasn't really about that, it was about the corruption and the democracy that began to fade away."

Each day, millions of people protested in the streets and Esra was one of them. "I was a sophomore in high school when my friends and I became very active in the protests," Gumrukuler said. "It was like how teenagers lie to their parents to go to a party except we would lie to go to the protests."

A fellow student Gemma Valdes speaks highly of Esra's character. "Esra does whatever she can to help others," Valdes said. "She holds herself so well, she's always determined."

When the protests began, they were calm. Many teens would go to the parks and read books that were illegal. "Some of the books that were illegal were the ones about the Armenian genocide, 1984 and even Animal Farm," Gumrukuler said.

The protests later became violent and police brutality was on the rise. People were dying and many were seriously injured. "We started doing bad stuff like spray painting on the windows of government owned banks," Gumrukuler said. "It was done to prove a point."

Esra never faced punishment for the spray paint but she found herself in trouble not long after that. "I got arrested one time because I was carrying milk in my bag," Gumrukuler said. Many believed that milk was good for the eyes after being pepper sprayed. "The police said that proved I was in the protest so they arrested me."

The violence escalated and lasted roughly two years. "The government would set up suicide bombings to put an end to the protests," Gumrukuler said. "People became too afraid to go out and protest anymore."

Because of the chaos, Esra wanted to move away from Turkey. In 2016, she applied to her dream school, Parsons School of Design in New York City. "There were places in Istanbul that were helping with the applications and portfolios," Gumrukuler said. "I would fly there every weekend to do art and get help with my portfolio."

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Istiklal Caddesi, Istanbul 11:10 a.m. 2016

The bomb went off and the glass shattered. People began screaming and shouting in fear. A barista pulled Esra behind the Starbucks counter. "We waited there for what felt like an hour but was probably only 5 minutes," Gumrukuler said. "I heard screams from outside and I began to hear sirens."

It was another government organized suicide bomber. "We knew what had happened," Gumrukuler said. "We didn't know if there would be a second one or not." They kept waiting until help arrived.

Ambulances arrived to the catastrophic scene and began getting people out of the store. "Once I got out of there I saw a lot of blood on the ground," Gumrukuler said. "I tried not to look but I saw so many bodies on the ground. I didn't know if they were dead or alive."

Esra was put into an ambulance and checked for internal bleeding. Once she was cleared, she returned to her hotel. "I called my parents from the hotel phone. They knew I was there and I knew they were panicking," Gumrukuler said. "My mother answered the phone and was crying because she thought I was dead."

Al Jazeera reported on the incident shortly after. According to their sources, there were five fatalities and 36 people were wounded. Some individuals were severally injured and some were minor.

Close friend Brooke Ortmayer respects Esra and her approach to difficult situations. "Esra handles life so gracefully," Ortmayer said. "She's aware of the hardship life can bring and moves on in such a remarkable way."

That evening Esra decided to go to the studio and work on her portfolio. "I was scared because attacks usually happen one after the other," Gumrukuler said. "I knew I had to finish my work because life goes on."