

# THOSE IN THE BOTTOM: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF AN EX-SEX WORKER

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## ABSTRACT

In an attempt to constitute a mediatory link to understanding the autobiographical narrative of Ayşe Tükrükçü, in this thesis, I tried to show the numerous complex aspects of her narrative. The main argument is that Ayşe Tükrükçü recounts what I call “a narrative of victimhood” to be able to open up “a political, social and personal space” for her to speak up today. The position of victimhood enables her to get –though to a very little extent- access to material and financial sources as well as a certain status in terms of social and political recognition. Yet, in doing this, Ayşe takes the dominant and mainstream ideological tenets and translates them into her personal narrative and vocabulary. In this thesis, I argue that this is not a passive translation. Her ability to highlight the ironies in the sex-gender system in Turkey as well as the political implementation of it despite her use and fluency in being part of this system points out to something: Ayşe’s narrative is a pragmatic as well as political mockery of this sex-gender system in Turkey.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

... insistently focusing on individuals and the particularities of their lives ... suggest[s] that others live as we perceive ourselves living – not as automatons programmed according to ‘cultural’ rules or acting out social roles, but as people going through life wondering what they should do, making mistakes, being opinionated, vacillating, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragic personal losses, enjoying others and finding moments of laughter.<sup>1</sup>

(Abu-Lughod 1993: 27)

A partial compilation of research on prostitution in Turkey uncovers many aspects of the state regulations, legal and illegal forms of prostitution and the present conditions under which sex work is done. (Küntay/Erginsoy 2005, Küntay/Çokar 2007, Zengin 2007, Zeitler 2008) The picture is one of abuse, criminalization, victimization, battering, poverty and, and above all, being trapped in *this life* with almost no ways of resistance or exit as well as one of dealing with poverty if not overcoming it, and in some cases securing a relatively higher economic status with lesser hassle. This study problematizes prostitution in Turkey through one sex worker’s, Ayşe Tükrükçü’s point of view who was involved in a political and judicial struggle both to cancel her registration as a sex worker and to draw attention of the Turkish state to the brothels. She was known widely through her candidateship in the elections. Her story from her own words will be the object of this study. Her story provides a deeper insight to the issue. It does not only make possible to understand a sex worker’s subjective experience but also gives a lot of idea about the possibilities of a transformation in the lives of sex workers in Turkey.

Although there could be as many different accounts about sex work as the number of sex workers involved in prostitution, the story of Ayşe Tükrükçü is one of attention-grabbing

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<sup>1</sup> Abu-Lughod, L.(1993) *Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

as well as contradiction in nature. It is simultaneously both conceivable yet at times incoherent.

Her numerous contradictory identifications within prostitution present a lot of polarities and contradictions and turn into a narrative in which the very reality of having once been involved in prostitution starts to bear a difficulty for her to convey and for the listener to comprehend without adapting to the symbolic world she speaks from. For her, it is not only about being a sex worker once but also about the conditions that led her to get involved in prostitution. It is about her rape at 9 by her uncle that affects her to this day, the familial problems and the domestic violence of her father, her life torn between Germany and Turkey, a miscarriage followed by a divorce, her poncing into prostitution and a time of 30 months in 7 different cities in Turkey as a sex worker and finally a marriage of 5 years as a final solution to get out of the brothels. The endless connections that she draws in her narrative between the causes that *made her a prostitute* (as she expresses it) and her struggles to go out of brothels therefore renders the reality of her subjective experience invisible. This is to say that the contradictions of her participation in prostitution, her paradoxical dependency on her pimp as well as the manner of her relationship with her family, the similarity and the difference she assumes compared to other non-prostitute women simultaneously in her understanding and depiction of herself are all put aside in her narrative. Or rather they find their expression in her account within her representation of prostitution in general and herself in particular in the form of gaps, spaces, conflicts, incoherent or missing information to be able to make her story more plausible and coherent. In my analytical projection, she will inhabit this paradoxical location in which she is both the subject and the object of her past life as a sex worker first because of the strategies that she uses to add plausibility to her story and second because of the fact that the listeners in some way or other find her narrative significant. Drawing on the chronological order that she utters in her

narrative in reference to what came before and after her prostitution, the aim of this thesis will be to constitute a mediatory link to understanding the autobiographical narrative of Ayşe Tükrükçü. This attempt will thus be an analysis of,

- How she makes sense of her engagement in prostitution between 1993-1996 today.
- What are the ways, personal strategies and silent manifestations that she employs to be able to inhabit this position.

Although the initial question(s) that I had in mind before starting this thesis were quite different than the above-mentioned ones, during this whole year, they unavoidably shifted and changed many times as I entered into debates as difficult as the epistemological problems related to the subject-object division, the philosophical explanations about the subject and subjectivity and finally the phenomenological turn on my part. This initial attempt enabled me to understand the complexity of the questions that I started with in the beginning and also to discover the current limits and present scope of my scholarly merits as well as the frames expected from an MA thesis. A better move could have been made by having taken a more critical discourse analysis approach from the very beginning. My hesitations or rather my fear of a narrow theoretical closure in this sense was not helpful at all. This could have brought about many other gaps and in turn reopenings for further discussion though. Therefore the present work bears only the traces of the questions that I wanted to deploy in this thesis in the beginning. Yet, this change of focus required and forced me to think what I really wanted to say about Ayşe Tükrükçü besides taking into consideration a change of literature used in this thesis. The present work at hand thus ended up as an ethnographical account of one ex-sex worker in which I investigate the political and personal implications of Ayşe Tükrükçü's life narrative simultaneously, that is, how she understands her life today, what kind of choices she made under

adverse conditions in her life and what are the strengths and weaknesses of her political speech today. Besides its informant, this project also suggests a partial picture of the structural, social and physical influences that shape the lives of the registered sex workers who work in the state brothels in Turkey.

This thesis is divided into two parts. Part I discloses both the legal construction of prostitutes and prostitution in Turkey from a historical aspect. It clears the way for the development of my arguments by giving a critical account of them. In this part, it is suggested that one of the underlying problems of these legal definitions and regulations on prostitution in Turkey is their seeking to distinguish and set up a difference between a prostitute and a non-prostitute woman, that is, whether and in what ways a sex worker is like or unlike other women. The explication of how sex workers and prostitution have been defined and constituted within the Turkish legal framework will enable me to show the use of the social policies in taking the effect of public inconvenience and the marginalized social representation of prostitute women into consideration in constructing the prostitute identity. This in turn very much determines and shapes the forms of intervention on prostitution and prostitutes today. This chapter argues in overall that the construction of the prostitution in legal discourses as socially dislocated pathological women, criminals and victims of male violence falls short of depicting inner aspects of prostitution essential to understanding sex workers, that is, *the subjects of prostitution* and producing related policies. In this thesis, therefore, I assume and address a difference between the social conditions that led Ayşe to her involvement in prostitution and her interpretation of these conditions. This point can in turn add positive assets to the examination of prostitution not only on its own terms but with regards to considering the many “senses” sex workers make out of prostitution.

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Following these initial arguments, Part II of this thesis aims to investigate how the explanations presented by Ayşe for her involvement in sex work can be made to make sense and in turn conceivable. I have preferred not to split this part into big chapters since this would mean leveling out her account and miss the different features of the contradictions as well as the strategies under scrutiny used by her to inhabit and contain such contradictions in her account. Instead I have divided it into smaller interrelated sections following the chronological order that she recounts her narrative. Hence the principal motive in this part is ‘contradiction’. While this part examines the structural effects that shaped Ayşe’s involvement in prostitution, it also offers an account of her efforts in its entirety to survive both in the economical and social sense, the risks that she came across, the conditions that limited her life, the general structure that these struggles occurred and how these efforts determined her options at hand and her prospects for the future. Therefore this account provides a thorough portrayal of the contradictory stories that Ayşe told. For the participation in prostitution is offered as both a way of survival and a menace to this survival simultaneously, a primary matter in this part is also the issue of plausibility of her story. Therefore, the various ambiguous and conflicting ways in that she identifies and represents herself as a prostitute with regards to the practices, people and conditions around her have been given particular attention. My aim is thus to map these paradoxes and tinges of meanings that reveals and settles her explanations as much as possible. In overall, this part lays bare how and to what extent it might be possible for the contradictory story of an ex-sex worker to make sense within the symbolic world and the social circumstances that she was involved in within prostitution.

A helpful and necessary introductory note would be to clarify that a substantial history of research into prostitution, and even a quick analysis of the many texts in regards to



criminological and sociological frameworks highlight two points. The first one is to recognize the fact that prostitution is not acultural or transhistorical and that any investigation should be understood within its specific location (Scambler, 1997). Secondly, despite the increasing awareness to cultural and historical specificity (Roberts 1992, Scambler 1997, McKeganey and Barnard 1996) the treatment of prostitution still takes its conceptualizations and descriptions as self-evident. This approach reduces sex work to and relates it with simply only selling sex. Thus, for example, O'Neill<sup>2</sup> describes prostitution as 'the exchange of money for sex'. In the same way Hoigard and Finstad<sup>3</sup> describe prostitution as "buying and selling sexual services for cash payment." The simple assumption that prostitution is the same as any other kind of economic activity or rather the commonsensical understanding of "work" as any other kind of salaried employment causes an incomplete analysis of the potential effects that engagement in sex work might have on prostitutes in reference to socially legitimate workers. In my view, the social antagonism of prostitution represented in the narrative of Ayşe Tükrükçü "exceeds the repetitive possibilities opened by a sedimented social framework, overflows the institutionalized frameworks of "society," and [therefore] show [the] inherent contingency of those frameworks [...]"<sup>4</sup>. The kind of social antagonism she went through in this sense enabled her to observe and unfortunately socially and bodily experience the strands of the dominant ideologies that confirm, sustain and marginalize certain women for certain men. This point finds its stark expression in her political voice today. The events covered in this study start from her childhood rape in 1976 and covers throughout today with the cornerstones of her narrative that affect her present course of time today.

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<sup>2</sup> O'Neill, M. (1997). *Prostitute Women Now*. In G. Scambler and A. Scambler (Ed.), *Rethinking Prostitution* London: Routledge. Pp.: 10

<sup>3</sup> Hoigard, C. and L. Finstad . (1992). *Backstreets: Prostitution, Money and Love*. London: Polity. Pp.: 8

<sup>4</sup> Ernesto Laclau. (1994). *The Making of Political Identities* (pp. 1-8). Great Britain: Verso.

## 2. HISTORICAL AND LEGAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

An analysis of the narrative of an ex-sex worker requires a manner of inquiry that gives information about 1) the structural effects working on sex worker women individually and 2) the personal and the symbolic milieu in which the engagement in prostitution is regarded meaningful. To this end, the data I gained was collected through 6 in-depth, semi-structured, life-historical interviews that I conducted with her in July-August 2008 as well as numerous informal meetings between 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008 and 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009. Out of these 6 interviews, one is an audio-record and the other has been edited as a short documentary by me. The other meetings were recorded in the form of field notes.

In general terms, when the research on prostitution starts to analyze and define sex work as given or self-evident, that is, in its actuality, in its occurrence in practice without further questioning, it also starts to lose its generative grounds to see how subjects make sense of their lives, the problems, conflicts and constraints they go through. In the case of Ayşe, this requires calling into question the realism of her story (but yet not accuracy). The classical perception of autobiography –here my interviews about her life history as a form of autobiographical text– would assign authenticity to her story without contextualizing sex work and the interviewee.<sup>5</sup> In that case, this would result in the naturalization of the experience without further questioning. Joan Scott, in her well-known article “Experience” mentions the widespread predisposition to consider experience as mere evidence which reifies the experience of the object of research and in turn naturalizes the experience.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, her semi-fictionalized autobiography by a male journalist, Alper Uruş. (2008). *Hayatsız Kadın Ayşe*. Detay Yayıncılık.

<sup>6</sup> Scott, J. W., & Butler, J. (Eds.). (1992). Experience. In *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York and London:

Although we all as social actors narrate stories about our lives that are either plausible or implausible or at times even both and sometimes have contradictory material and social circumstances, the contradictory aspect of her narrative brings up the question of authenticity or rather the plausibility of her narrative. In studies structured by with the conventional understanding of autobiographies, the supposed duty of the researcher would be simply to refine from the interviews all the matters, the aspects and processes which are narrated as bringing about final and sustained participation in prostitution. An analysis of her “autobiographical narrative” thus requires a deconstructive approach since Ayşe takes full credit for the authenticity of her story and relies to a great extent on her experience’ validity as an ex-sex worker. One simple example is, at the end of one of our meetings, having finished her sentence, she had signed under the notes I was taking in a gesture to show that she was the owner of all the experience that she told to me. This aspect of her narrative calls for two questions in reference to an authentic narrative.

- Whether, if so, to what extent can we consider her life narrative as an autobiographical text within a linearity developing and progressively unfolding a story that tells what really occurred to her?
- And, how or to what extent can we consider Ayşe -as well as any other social actor- as a self-consistent and self-present individual capable of giving and analyzing the reality of her life within an unmediated account?

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Routledge.

The researcher’s preference of his/her object of the research here is also acutely based on his/her choices. This choice itself has a lot to do with personal judgments, ethical and political values.

Studies on the genre of autobiography<sup>7</sup> presents a redefinition of autobiography in which it is analyzed as tricky social products constructed by the rules of the genre. Autobiographical narratives have been drastically reconceptualized with the ‘biographical turn in social sciences.’<sup>8</sup> Above all, the accommodation of contradictions within narratives as an issue has been reconsidered and paid more attention to. This move in turn enables this point to be analyzed further, deconstructed and opened in different ways. Such approaches as that autobiographies are the mirror representations of the ‘life as lived’ and that the autobiographical description is a linear process are of specific significance to this turn for the critiques of these assumptions. These critiques have been so established that Roos defines them as bringing about a ‘Fall from the Paradise of True Autobiographies.’<sup>9</sup> Thus, all aspects of the commonsensical notions of the autobiographical narratives as spoken or written by their authors as texts about their lives is doubted and brought into inspection for further analysis. The quote below from Roos illustrates this point:

“Upon leaving the Paradise of True Autobiographies, it was seen (revealed) that no text is innocent, independent of certain theoretical, conceptual and textual frames. Nothing we describe or see in the world we just see: it comes to us and through us always mediated by the current way of seeing things.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, although Ayşe treats her autobiography as though it is the plain representation or a mirror reflection of herself, considering that every storytelling is a remembering of what went by and therefore a renarration of the instance in question, in an

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<sup>7</sup> Julia Swindells. (1995). *The Uses of Autobiography*. London : Taylor and Francis. See, Unsworth, Joannou, Jolly and Swindells inside.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Rustin. (n.d.). Reflections on the Biographical Turn in Social Science. In *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples* (pp. 33-53). London: Routledge.

<sup>9</sup> Roos, J. (1994) ‘The true life revisited: autobiography and referentiality after the “posts”’, *Lives and Works: Auto/biographical Occasions*, vol. 3, nos 1–2, pp. 1–16.

Also at <http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/staff/jproos/context.htm> (Downloaded on 6.6.2008)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.:3

attempt to move beyond a realistic approach to her autobiography in this thesis, I will follow an intersubjective approach.<sup>11</sup> By intersubjective, I mean that in Ayşe's case, it is most of the time a set of her personal experiences in relation to some other people. This approach is in place as in her representation of herself, she is not necessarily the center of the accounts that she conveys and also she constantly assumes an object position in her stories. That is to say, in her autobiographical narrative, Ayşe constructs herself always in relation to others: her family, clients, *vekils*,<sup>12</sup> the brothel owners, cops, friends etc. but above all *normal women*<sup>13</sup> (as she calls non-prostitute women) who are a significant dynamic for comparison for Ayşe in her own assessment of herself.

The next section is a historical and legal background of prostitution in Turkey. This part will set the stage for the above-mentioned analysis in question.

## 2.2. Historical Background

A definite point for the beginning of sex work in Turkey is hard to be marked. Within the range of this thesis, firstly I will seek to provide a short overview. My investigation begins from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire.

Today's modern Turkey originated in 1923 after the World War I. Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prostitution was concentrated in Istanbul in particular. In the districts called Galata and Taksim<sup>14</sup> today, the crime rates related to sex work were very high. At the time, a substantial amount of the sex workers were acknowledged to be "non-Muslim." Thus regular

<sup>11</sup> For a philosophical account on intersubjectivity, See, Hans-Georg Gadamer. (2000). Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity, Subject and Person. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 33, 275-87.

<sup>12</sup> *Vekil* is the second authority in a brothel who helps the brothel owner.

<sup>13</sup> See, Appendix. The transcription of the interview.

<sup>14</sup> On the European side of the Bosphorus, Galata and Taksim are districts of Istanbul situated in Beyoğlu and have always been the prosperous center for entertaining in Istanbul.

police raids were held to prevent their activities.<sup>15</sup> The Istanbul Vice Force<sup>16</sup> was established in 1845 and sex work was formally acknowledged an illicit activity. In the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prostitution was legalized in the brothels called “general houses”, which meant the legal state brothels. When syphilis began to spread in Istanbul around the same time, the Bylaw for the Prevention of Veneral Diseases<sup>17</sup> was approved and a special establishment for the fight against sexually transmitted diseases (STD) was set up in 1915. Together with this act, the marginalization of prostitutes began in a systematic way, stigmatizing them as the main disease carriers. When the occupying countries present at the time pushed increasingly more and more Soviet women as well as local women into sex work with the First World I, things started to alter. While in fact spreading poverty and booming the entertainment sector particularly in the districts of Beyoğlu and Galata in Istanbul,<sup>18</sup> the war was the main reason in this initial stage.

Sex work currently flourishes in touristic neighborhoods close to stopping locations for truck drivers on highways or armed regiments as well as big cities.<sup>19</sup> The probable number of local sex workers, according to Küntay and Çokar, together with women and transgendered people is approximately about 30.000 in Istanbul and 100.000 in Turkey correspondingly.<sup>20</sup> Excluding foreign sex workers<sup>21</sup> and men, an estimated number of 85.000<sup>22</sup> work illicitly. Only 15.000 work legally. In the 56 general houses, there are 3000 registered sex workers. And about 12.000 work as prostitutes who are under the article “women to which medical requirements are

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<sup>15</sup> Scognamillo, G. (1994). *Beyoğlu'nda Fuhuş [Sex in Beyoğlu]*. Istanbul.

<sup>16</sup> İstanbul Ahlak Zabitası.

<sup>17</sup> Emraz-i Zühreviyenin Men-i Sirayeti Nizamnamesi

<sup>18</sup> Küntay, E., & Çokar, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Seks Ticareti [Sex Trade]* (Cinsel Eğitim Tedavi ve Araştırma Derneği. Bilgilendirme Dosyası., Vol. 8). İstanbul. Pp: 12, 23

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Pp.: 12, 27.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Pp.: 29.

<sup>21</sup> Of these estimated 3,000, 132 work in Istanbul.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

applied.”<sup>23</sup>

Most of unlawful work places consist of personal apartments, “dating houses”,<sup>24</sup> bars, massage-parlors, forests, clubs, hotels, cars, or the streets for prostitutes,<sup>25</sup> since only a small number of women are permitted to work in the “general houses.” Affected by the global changes with regards to new technologies, a rising number of sex workers now consist of the so-called “tele-girls.”<sup>26</sup> These sex workers are contacted by mobile their phones by the customers in order to fix a time and place for dating.<sup>27</sup>

The estimated statistics presented pointed to differences between officially employed and illicit local sex workers. Thus, before the material working and living circumstances of the sex workers in the state brothels can be outlined, the legal framework regarding prostitution in Turkey will be scrutinized.

Henceforth, I will endeavor to make clear the cruel practices that are structured by the exchanges between prostitutes in the state brothels and numerous state institutions as well as official actors such as the brothel owners, and the police. I will mostly concentrate on the functions of the institutional acts and actors in generating exceptional lives of the sex workers in the state brothels. Therefore, I attempt to put the legal framework relating to prostitution into the focus and examine the gendered violence rooted in this framework as a starting point.

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<sup>23</sup> Sağlık tedbirleri uygulanacak kadınlar. (Article 23, General Houses Act)

<sup>24</sup> Randevu Evleri

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Pp: 29

<sup>26</sup> Tele-Kiz in Turkish

<sup>27</sup> Scognamiglio, G. (1994). *Beyoğlu'nda Fuhuş* [Sex in Beyoğlu]. Istanbul. Pp.: 68

### 2.3. The Legal Framework

The following account will determine and make clear the set of rules and regulations regarding prostitution which have been functional in Turkey. The Law Against the Spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases Through Prostitution and the Conditions Regulating Prostitutes and General Houses,<sup>28</sup> (as called in the following, the General Houses Act) have been the chief regulation on sex work today in Turkey. With the establishment of the new Turkish Republic in 1923, the procedures the Ottoman Empire regarding the sex work regulations<sup>29</sup> were adopted without any change. This meant the forcing of acknowledged “prostitutes” into the legal “general houses” and the deployment of the obligatory registration processes. In this regulation, when a woman is given a “license”<sup>30</sup> as a sex worker, her standard official ID card is taken away and substituted by another detailed ID card special for sex workers. This new ID card states the woman’s name, date and place of birth, her work place fake name, and her address of dwelling and of work.<sup>31</sup>

To be more specific, the vital point about this license called *vesika* is to a great extent the spatial limitations of sex work as well as sex workers. The *vesika* is given to sex workers by the police department following the decisions made by a commission called Fight against Prostitution (CFAP)<sup>32</sup>. In the consequence of this process, women get legally registered and formally and legally get allowed to work as prostitutes. These IDs do not only connect woman sex workers to the brothels, but also set up the relationships between these women and a

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<sup>28</sup> Genel Kadınlar ve Genelevlerin Tabi Olacakları Hukuklar ve Fuhuş Yuzunden Bulaşan Zuhrevi Hastalıklarla Mücadele Tüzüğü  
[www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/5189.html](http://www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/5189.html) (downloaded on 05.06.2009)

<sup>29</sup> In the legal framework not 'sex work' (seks işçiliği) but 'prostitution'

<sup>30</sup> *Vesika*

<sup>31</sup> Apparently, this practice has been widely abolished in Istanbul, while it is still common in other cities (Conversation with Ayşe Tükrükçü 5/2008)

<sup>32</sup> Fuhuşla Mücadele Komisyonu



group of state authorities assigned by this commission. One of the relations established and enforced, for example, is the obligatory health checks with doctors. The results of these consultations are registered on the women's IDs. Once they are licensed, twice a week for the regular health check, the sex workers have to visit the hospital as well as once in every three months take blood tests. If the doctors detect a venereal disease, they seize the ID and keep it till the woman gets well. During this duration, she is not permitted to work and she is not allowed to enter the brothel as she does not have her ID. If a woman does not have an ID, since at every entry to the brothel, each woman's ID is checked, she is not allowed the right to get into a brothel. This regulation is valid for not only the woman sex workers whose IDs are taken away for a while but also includes all women. The law firmly asserts that:

Article 62 – It is prohibited for brothel owners to consent to women or girls to their brothels who are under the “women who have not been approved by the commission” or under twenty-one years old.<sup>33</sup>

The main aim of the regulations has been to manage and restrain sex work considered a moral and health issue. As in the Law of the Struggle with Prostitution<sup>34</sup> of 1930 or the Law of the Struggle with Prostitution and Venereal Diseases Spread through Prostitution of 1933.<sup>35</sup> The second one was in effect until 1961, when the General Houses Act came into use. This law was adjusted in 1973 and has been the main regulation for the control of prostitution in Turkey until today.<sup>36</sup>

The General Houses Act initially agrees on a special commission for its

<sup>33</sup> Article – 62 Genel ev sahiplerinin yirmibir yaşını bitirmemiş olan kadın veya kızlarla, komisyonca tescil edilmemiş kadınları her ne suretle olursa olsun evlerine kabul etmeleri yasaktır

<sup>34</sup> Fuhuşla Mücadele Hakkında Tamim

<sup>35</sup> Küntay, E., & Çokar, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Seks Ticareti* [Sex Trade] (Cinsel Eğitim Tedavi ve Araştırma Derneği. Bilgilendirme Dosyası., Vol. 8). İstanbul. Pp: 12

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Pp.: 12, 28

management: the Commission for the Fight against Prostitution.<sup>37</sup> This commission is in charge of the control of the sex work and fight systematically against the spread of STDs and any menaces to the public order from article 1 to 14.<sup>38</sup> For the most part, the Commission is in charge of the decisions regarding the sex workers' registration (article 22), the beginning of regular health checks (article 25-41), and the cases of the closing of illicit brothels as well as the opening and giving permission to the opening of the places where sex work is allowed. These places are composed of the following: "general houses" (article 16) and "places of union" (article 17). "Flats where one is involved in prostitution alone"<sup>39</sup> (article 18) can form an alternative only in theory. This alternative has not been in practice until now.<sup>40</sup> The alcohol consumption, drugs, betting, noise and amusement are banned in legal places (Article 83, General houses Act). Aside from the management of official places, in article number 227 of the Turkish Penal Code,<sup>41</sup> any form of helping or facilitation of sex work or pawning is illegal.

For the registration of prostitutes who want to work in the mentioned places, there are a number of limitations as well as requirements determined by the law. One has to be a woman, older than 21, single and of Turkish citizenship to become an authorized sex worker.<sup>42</sup> (Article 21) The legal alternative particularly for women between the age of 18 to 21 is to register under the article "women to whom medical requirements are applied."<sup>43</sup> However, this article

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<sup>37</sup> Fuhuşla Mucadele Komisyonu

<sup>38</sup> Küntay, E., & Çokar, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Seks Ticareti* [Sex Trade] (Cinsel Eğitim Tedavi ve Araştırma Derneği. Bilgilendirme Dosyası., Vol. 8). İstanbul. Pp.: 28 (Article 4, General Houses Act)

<sup>39</sup> Tek başına fuhuş yapılan evler; definition: "Places that women, who engage in prostitution alone, make their residence and use for the engagement in prostitution are called (House where one engages in prostitution alone)." ("Fuhuşu tek başına yapan kadınların ikametgah ediniş içinde fuhuş yapmayı itiyat ettikleri yerlere (Tek başına fuhuş yapılan ev) denir." (Article 18, General Houses Act)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Pp.: 28,30

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k5237.html> (downloaded on 06.06.2009)

<sup>42</sup> Küntay, E., & Çokar, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Seks Ticareti* [Sex Trade] (Cinsel Eğitim Tedavi ve Araştırma Derneği. Bilgilendirme Dosyası., Vol. 8). İstanbul. Pp.: 28

<sup>43</sup> Sağlık tedbirleri uygulanacak kadınlar

does not consent to work in “general houses.”<sup>44</sup> (Article 23, General Houses Act)

“Women to whom medical requirements are applied” and all the recorded sex workers are dependent on compulsory health checks two times a week, or once in every ten days correspondingly. The tests of sex workers in employment at “general houses” in Istanbul are carried out at the City Health Authorities.<sup>45</sup> The tests of those “women to whom medical requirements are applied” are made together with illicitly employed sex workers at the Istanbul Dermatology and Venereal Disease Hospital.<sup>46</sup> This hospital is governed under the Ministry of Health. If the inspection shows that a sex worker is infected, she is not allowed to work until the infection has recovered.<sup>47</sup> (Article 35, General Houses Act) For the authorities to be able to verify their health checks, the sex workers obtain a certificate of examination as well as their special identification card in which they obtain a stamp for each inspection (Article 26, General Houses Act). The police may check a sex worker’s documents at any time and take her to the health check authorities if the inspections made every two weeks are missed.

The position of sex workers who are unregistered is made illegal, yet not criminalized. Women when caught working as sex workers illicitly are banned from performing sex work and usually taken to the Istanbul Dermatology and Venereal Disease Hospital for the mandatory tests, but since it is not regarded a crime, they are not punished judicially. To be brief, the legislation confines legal sex work spatially to “general houses” and provides preventive prerequisites for the legal registration of prostitutes. These set of laws have managed to curb sex work so far. However, the biggest part of sex work is by this means illegalized.

The above presentation of the Turkish legal framework has illustrated that the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Büyükşehir Belediyesi Sağlık İşleri Dairesi

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Pp.: 22, İstanbul Lepra Deri ve Zuhrevi Hastalıklar Hastanesi

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Pp.: 28

citizenship rights of the registered sex workers in Turkey vary drastically from those of other citizens. Cultural structures of prejudice related to sex workers and dominant images of the sex workers as “bad woman”<sup>48</sup> play an active part in further stigmatization, institutionalized discrimination and overall condemnation of sex workers. This cultural theme is built on the representation of the “honorless”<sup>49</sup> prostitute who has once and for ever broken with the all morals and virtues of decency and chastity by losing her virginity.<sup>50</sup> The exchange of the identity card with a “license” therefore has heavy cultural connotations on the part of Ayşe as well as in the Turkish context related to the indecent image of the fallen and trapped prostitute. The institutionalized discrimination against sex workers is thus unavoidably turning her into this image and victimized prostitute.

Being “labeled for life”<sup>51</sup> (*damga* in Turkish) is also another dominant theme in Ayşe’s narrative since she is denied most of her citizenship rights, and prohibited from numerous official rights as simple as the opening of a bank account or even marrying. In addition to the stigmatization and social marginalization, the registration also brings along unjust processes for the whole family of a sex worker, for example the kids of a sex worker may not become a professional soldier or a police.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the police registration might be exploited against their close relatives, for instance their siblings or children as well as the women themselves when they apply for employment in the official state service.<sup>53</sup> Although it is an official right in theory that prostitutes may get their license deleted, the criminal lawyer Abdurrahman Tanrıverdi, who

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<sup>48</sup> Küntay, E., & Çokar, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Seks Ticareti [Sex Trade]* (Cinsel Eğitim Tedavi ve Araştırma Derneği. Bilgilendirme Dosyası., Vol. 8). İstanbul. Pp.: 29

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 29

<sup>50</sup> Küntay, E., & Erginsoy, G. (2005). İstanbul’da On Sekiz Yaşından Küçük Ticari ‘Seks İşçisi’ Kız Çocuklar. İstanbul. Pp.: 21

<sup>51</sup> [www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3240](http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3240)

<sup>52</sup> Küntay, E., & Çokar, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Seks Ticareti [Sex Trade]* (Cinsel Eğitim Tedavi ve Araştırma Derneği. Bilgilendirme Dosyası., Vol. 8). İstanbul. Pp.: 30

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

has represented around ten sex workers since 1995, mentions that his attempts at having the registrations deleted has been unsuccessful.<sup>54</sup> Ayşe also mentions that she lost a number of jobs since she dropped out of sex work when her employers found out as regards her previous engagement. (conversation with Tükrükçü 26.8.2008). Hence, it gets remarkably difficult to enter the outside world to follow another employment again as soon as a sex worker gets employed within the brothel system.

Additionally, except for Istanbul, the registered sex workers' freedom of movement is to a great extent limited. Ayşe recounts that sex workers in Istanbul can go home at night. Yet in Anatolian cities, for a permission, the sex workers still have to apply at the police station when they want not only to leave the city, but also to leave the brothel as well.

The evident aim then is not only to veil prostitution from the public sight in the brothels but also to prevent prostitutes from entering the public space unrestrained as well.<sup>55</sup> In Turkey as well as in most other nationwide contexts, therefore, stigmatization shows itself both in victimizing and isolating approaches towards sex workers.

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## ***2.4.Entering the Field***

My initial access to Ayşe was through my participation in her election campaign in July 2007, before the general election of July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007. Basically, she was going to make a speech before the main brothel in Istanbul with another independent candidate Saliha Ermez, who

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<sup>54</sup> [www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3240](http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3240) (downloaded on 9.6.2009)

<sup>55</sup> Küntay, E., & Çokar, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Seks Ticareti [Sex Trade]* (Cinsel Eğitim Tedavi ve Araştırma Derneği. Bilgilendirme Dosyası., Vol. 8). İstanbul. Pp.: 30

was also an ex-sex worker.<sup>56</sup> She had worked 11 years as a sex worker including the one being visited that day, the Karaköy Brothel. This brothel is very much known as the only official brothel in Istanbul. Especially in the national and religious holidays, big soccer games between Istanbul teams, during times of big scale military personnel transportations, weekends and especially on Sundays by soldiers who are off their duties, this brothel attracts hundreds of men every day. This brothel is also famous because one of its past owners who owned many of these brothels in Karakoy, an Armenian descent Turkish citizen woman called Matild Manukyan. For 5 respective years during the 1990's, Matild Manukyan was the top tax payer in Istanbul.<sup>57</sup> She was given an award by the revenue authority.

That year, these two candidates had gathered the support of various feminist groups. The same year, there were a big number of other independent candidates to run in the elections. For there is a 10 % quota to enter the parliament for the political parties and a big percentage of the political representation is thus pushed and kept outside the parliament, these candidates in general were running as independent candidates in the election. Thus the political initiation of Ayşe and Saliha could be considered part of a bigger political attempt. Ayşe and Saliha were also independent candidates from two different election parts of the city of Istanbul so that they would not take votes from each other. This was the first time in the history of modern Turkey that two female sex workers were taking part in the general elections as independent candidates. Because of her sex work registration, it was only after Ayşe Tükrükçü had pleaded to the High Election Court that her application to take part in the election was accepted. In the group With Ayşe were some feminist women. We had gathered at the election bureau of Ayşe Tükrükçü. This was normally the office of the NGO Ayşe has taken part since she quit sex work that helps mainly

<sup>56</sup> [http://www.hurhaber.com/news\\_detail.php?id=62570&uniq\\_id=1228463914](http://www.hurhaber.com/news_detail.php?id=62570&uniq_id=1228463914) (downloaded on 6.6.2009)

<sup>57</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matild\\_Manukyan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matild_Manukyan) (downloaded on 6.6.2009)

homeless women as well as sex workers who want to quit prostitution. I had been invited by a friend of mine who was with the group. The group consisted of around 10 women and two foreign female journalists. When everybody arrived and the time came for the speech, we started to walk towards the brothel. We had the leaflets of the campaign of Ayşe and her colleague in our hands that said on them:

“We are independent candidates neither from the right nor the left. We are the independent candidates of those who are at the bottom. [...] No young girl says, ‘I will be a prostitute when I grow up!’ She says, ‘I will be a doctor, a teacher, an engineer’ etc. Every young girl dreams of wearing a white wedding gown. As long as the modern slavery is not abolished, the new victims in the future will be from among our little kids. Do not let other lives be stolen.”<sup>58</sup>

The street the election bureau was in is the downtown area of Istanbul with a lot of night clubs, cafes and bars. Therefore it is also one of the most crowded streets of Istanbul. On our way to the brothel, we were handing out the pamphlets to bypassers on this street. For Ayşe was carrying a real-size baby doll in her arms and both of the candidates were wearing T-shirts with their slogans and pictures on them,<sup>59</sup> this was quite a scene for the curious bypassers who were already used to the various types of the campaigns of the political parties at the time. The baby-doll in Ayşe’s arms was given to her years ago as a present. Since then, Ayşe has kept it buying dresses and taking good care of this baby-doll. To her, this baby-doll symbolizes her 8 abortions, after the last of which her womb had to be removed. To her again, this is “the theft of her rights to motherhood by the state.” When we came to the brothel, a narrow street paved with

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<sup>58</sup> See, Appendix.

<sup>59</sup> See, Appendix.

stones and old houses, with men crowding in and out of the door to the brothels pretty much disappeared. Some stayed to watch the scene. The journalists were already waiting there before the brothel. While Ayşe and Saliha were standing before this huge grey door, the door got closed by the police. This is the only entrance&exit to this police controlled street with its more than 10 blocks of flats with sex workers waiting before and inside their doors. Ayşe and Saliha insisted to enter from the door.

The police at the door rejected them, saying that only the *registered* (“vesikali” in Turkish) women can enter inside. The two responded saying they had a *vesika* and that they had worked there before. (Karaköy is not one of the brothels she worked in. I regard that Ayşe made this up to be able to enter the brothel) Still the answer was negative. They were planning to do that day was to go inside the brothel and visit the sex workers there and ask for their votes.<sup>60</sup> Although the official candidates in the elections are granted to campaign anywhere they wish to campaign until the election day, they were not let inside the brothel. After an argument with the police officer, they decided to make their speech before the door of the brothel. Without an excerpt from that day, it would be difficult to do justice to Ayşe’s narrative in general. The following excerpt shows the political aspects of her narrative:

“We encounter another obstacle again. They want us to forget these people. We have not forgotten the people who hear our voice behind this iron door now. I will tell them that they have a right to choose and that they should go to the poll box. Is it regarded as fine when they give us the registration IDs (*vesika*) but as unthinkable when we ask for our rights? I am allowed to get in here now when I say I have my *vesika*, but why not when I say I am an

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<sup>60</sup> A thing that Ayşe tells about the registered sex workers inside the state brothels is that they either do not get their addresses registered to be able to vote in the elections or they can not go out of the police checkpoint as they wish. Yet, for the reasons of this, other interviews into the lives of these women would be more accurate to make generalizations.



independent candidate? We are trying to reveal one of the wounds of Turkey and they bring another obstacle before us.”<sup>61</sup>

The following excerpt from the same day by Saliha Ermez is also important to show the context of their political speech as well as how she felt there before the brothel.<sup>62</sup>

“I worked in brothels for 11 years and at the moment even trying to get in here to see our voters exhausts me. The state allows us to get in here with our *vesika* but we can not go in now to ask how they are doing. Their support is very important for us.”<sup>63</sup>

With them were also the head of the NGO (Sefkat-Der) that Ayşe has worked in. The head of the NGO, Hayrettin Bulan was the first person to offer her help and shelter when Ayşe took part in a women’s television show speaking about her past and her life in brothels. This NGO is known for its conservative and religious worldviews and politically shares and supports Ayşe and Saliha’s words. His words were underlying the difference in theory and practice of the laws exercised in the brothels.

“Independent MP candidates Ayşe Tükrükçü and Saliha Ermez, whose names are on the ballots

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<sup>61</sup> “Bize yeniden bir engel çıkarılıyor. Bu insanları unutmamız isteniyor. Şu anda bu demir kapıların ardında bizim sesimizi duyanları biz unutmadık. Onlara seçim hakları olduğunu, sandığa gidip oy kullanmaları gerektiğini söyleyeceğim. Bize vesika verirken iyi de, hakkımızı ararken kötü mü? Ben şimdi buraya vesikayla giriş yapacağım desem alınırım da, adayım derken neden alınmıyorum? Türkiye’nin bir yarasını göz önüne sermeye çalışıyoruz ve yine bize engel çıkarıyorlar.”

See, also my documentary on Ayşe. (Min. 10:00)

<sup>62</sup> Saliha Ermez’s son was turned down in his application to be a police because of Saliha Ermez’s involvement in prostitution.

<sup>63</sup> “Ben 11 sene genelevde çalıştım, ve şu anda seçmenimizle buluşmak için bile buraya girmek beni yıpratıyor. Buraya devlet vesikayla girmeye izin veriyor, ama şu anda girip hatırlarını soramıyoruz. Onların destekleri bizim için çok önemli.”

are officially allowed to do campaigning and hand out flyers wherever they want. As a member of the Committee of Human Rights Consultation under the Prime Ministry, I think that this is against and over the laws.”<sup>64</sup>

Finally, the statements of one of the feminists who were there that day underline the difficulty of the deletion of the official registration of a sex worker.

“We have seen today that the brothels are really places like prisons. Although rich or poor, old or young many men can enter this place, these women who have *vesika*, and who want to give them back do not have the chance to meet their voters.”<sup>65</sup>

When they were standing before the door, I was pretty impressed by the sudden change on Ayşe’s face, which was from a strong and demanding face to an anxious and intimidated one. The regulations starting from this door tell a lot about the nature of the state’s power on women’s bodies by its acts in use as the official ponce. This door is practically named the “point”<sup>66</sup> by the sex workers according to Ayşe. With this door, potential unlawful entrances as well as escapes are prevented. 24 hours a day, a police officer keeps this door on day and night shifts. While she is entering the brothel, a woman therefore has to show her license. When she is leaving the building at night, she should show her home card. A woman does not get allowed to go outside the building if she does not hold a home card, but has to remain inside. The police at

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<sup>64</sup> “Bağımsız milletvekili adayları olan, oy pusulalarında resmen isimleri yazılan Ayşe Tükrükcü ve Saliha Ermez istediği her yerde seçim propagandası yapma ve el ilanı dağıtma hakkına sahip. Ben Başbakanlık İnsan Hakları Danışma Kurulu üyesi olarak, hukuka uyulmadığını, hukukun üzerine çıkıldığını düşünüyorum.”

<sup>65</sup> “Bugün gördük ki genelev gerçekten cezaevi gibi bir yer. Zengin-fakir, genç-yaşlı, oraya bir çok erkek girebiliyorken, vesikalı olan ve vesikalarını geri vermek istedikleri halde geri veremeyen kadınlar, kendi seçmenleriyle buluşmak imkanına sahip değiller. Biz Lambda, Morçatı, Filmor, Van Kadın Derneği’nin de içinde bulunduğu gruplar ve kişiler olarak Ayşe ve Saliha’ya destek veriyoruz.”

<sup>66</sup> *Nokta*

the *point* check not only the women's access and exits, but also those of the punters. A male person under the age of eighteen is illegal to visit a brothel. Hence the police check the punters' ID cards at the door. Likewise, non-woman prostitutes are also not allowed to enter a brothel. Conversely, for their daily practical needs, sex workers are allowed to go outside. But the question of going outside depends on to a registration mechanism and control at the door again. The legality of whole all this process paradoxically testifies how prostitutes loosen up their claims over their bodies and turn into the properties of the state in consequence of the license they once officially take. All together, when they become licensed sex workers, their bodies are altered into the "possessions" of the state. They are put under a strict control mechanism by the authorities through a multifaceted regulation process as well a spatial reassignment. My empathetic attachment to this preliminary and initial moment of interest in my acquaintance with Ayşe was in this sense a motivating factor in my overall analysis of her till the latest phase of my research and writing.

The next time that I encountered Ayşe was on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008 when her semi-fictionalized autobiographical book written by a journalist was published and she was invited to my ex-school for a talk about her life. This was an activity organized by the students and by the means of this gathering; her book would be introduced to the students. In this talk, I got to learn more about the details of her life as an ex-sex worker. After the talk, I had decided to write my thesis on her.

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### 3. IN THE FIELD

This chapter examines the climactic events that shaped Ayşe's life. But the aim here is not to determine which ones particularly led to her involvement in prostitution. But it rather focuses on them for two reasons; one is to analyze how the conflicting material aspects of engagement in prostitution are accommodated and the other one is to examine thoroughly the paradoxical and indeterminably incoherent explanations brought up by Ayşe for her engagement in prostitution.

Hence, by analyzing the circumstances that shaped her life, the coherence of her narrative will be called into question. The endless connections that she draws in these narratives between poverty and struggling for freedom as well as violence and the material realities of lack of power and participation in prostitution on its own will be examined as separately in the analytical projection of this thesis. An investigation of the risks experienced by her suggests that the paradoxes and contradictions of her participation in prostitution are repressed in her efforts to render her accounts related to her past plausible as an ex-sex worker. The inconsistencies are never explicitly approved or formulated in her narrative. Yet, instead they are accommodated and depicted plausible.

This part scrutinizes the events that stand out in her narrative in a chronological order. I will divide her narrative into 3 phases in relation to her involvement in sex work: these are prior to, during and after her engagement in prostitution. It is suggested in this part that engagement in prostitution was seen by her as the outcome of her rape, the indifference of her parents especially of her father, and lastly the disguised plan of her fiancée which resulted in her registration as a sex worker and start in Mersin brothel as a prostitute. She recounts these stories as one of survival. This is how she understands her past and depicts it today. It is very much characterized by lack of possibilities, good fortune and choices starting with her account of her

official registration for the first time. Hence, the inevitable paradox in her narrative is that prostitution once both supported and menaced Ayşe's social and material survival. Thus, at times, a deep-seated discontinuity exists between her engagement in prostitution that she recollects and the stories she tells about her engagement. But in her memories, narratives and explanations she pointed out that, she could see no alternative to her falling into this life and that she was the victim rather than the agent of the events.

Throughout the following chapters, it will be noticeable that authorial intrusion becomes a painful issue for the researcher at times since to give the account of her life the way as she does today is a crucial part of the analytical projection in this thesis, that is, to show the narrative of victimhood. Ayşe's narrative is laden with strict as well as contradictory tales of an emotional, personal and political economy on her part. It is argued and will be shown in this part that the most remarkable aspect of her story is that it is "a narrative of victimhood" that tells the story of how she was victimized throughout her life starting with her rape. The main argument is that this aspect of her narrative enables Ayşe to open up "a political, social and personal space" for her to speak today. The position of victimhood enables her to get –though to a very little extent- access to material and financial sources. This position also gives her a certain status in terms of social and political recognition as well.

Yet, the contradictory quality of this narrative that she draws today stems from her reliance on the currently legitimate tenets of the mainstream politics and dominant cultural codes to be able to open up this space. In the case of Turkey, by the mainstream politics, I mean both the paternal state tradition coming from the early years of the republic as well as the current liberal Islamic government of Turkey that seconds –if not literally avoid- the political representation of women as well as maintains and supports the traditional place of the women in

the home. And by the dominant cultural codes, I mean the cultural repercussions of this dominant political domain particularly in the form of overvalorizing family as an institution before the individual and women defined in conjugal terms and in the case of unmarried women, out of extramarital relationships.<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, to start with, it would be in place to delineate the specific sex-gender system in Turkey that enables Ayşe to perform her life narrative as “a narrative of victimhood.” “Sex-gender system” is “a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society.”<sup>68</sup> In the Turkish cultural, social and political milieu, patriarchal relations of power are important in determining this sex-gender system. The so-called “honor code” is a fundamental or rather the most significant element of this sex-gender system. The word “honor” (*namus*) as a cultural concept in Turkey “connotes the ability of the person to live up to the standards of masculinity and femininity as set by the society.”<sup>69</sup> Not only in direct relation to the society in its entirety in terms of determining the culturally particular behaviors of sexuality, but also on the individual level, honor and the standards it imposes on the individual play a major role. Inherent in this code of behavior is a strong distinction between certain types of sexual behaviors over others especially for the women. For men, *honor* is mostly understood as proper social behavior rather than a matter of sexuality. This brings in the morally encoded borderline between socially proper and improper way of sexual behavior in the context of Turkey.

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<sup>67</sup> For a detailed account, See, Akkoç 2004, Arat 1997, Kadioğlu 2001.

<sup>68</sup> De Lauretis, T. (1987). *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (p. 5). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>69</sup> Sirman N. (2004). Kinship, Politics and Love: Honour in Post-Colonial Contexts – The Case of Turkey. In S. Mojab & N. Abdo (Ed.), *Violence in the Name of Honour: Theoretical and Political Challenges* (pp. 44). Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Press.

In the specific case of Ayşe Tükrükçü, this borderline between the socially legitimized distinctions of proper and improper woman finds its concrete example. Therefore, what Ayşe claims is that she did not want to go over this borderline herself but that starting from her early childhood; she got into a set of unfortunate circumstances which eventually brought about her involvement in prostitution. The narrative of victimhood as a prevalent theme in her narrative therefore results in a chain of acts of so-called properness as well as her narrative representation of herself as the object rather than the subject of the culturally stigmatized profession of prostitution.

Sirman in her articles<sup>70</sup> mentions how the categories of honorable and dishonorable find their roots in particular imaginaries of the Turkish nation-state as well as of certain communities. The myth of the honorable and decent Turkish woman as the mother of the nation, a theme from the early republican days of modern Turkey finds its repercussions in her speech. Therefore, it is very striking to see how Ayşe applies this myth of the honorable and decent Turkish woman as the mother of the nation in one her accounts. She once asserted that the war of independence was given to protect the girls and the mothers of the nation. But today it was themselves who were raping their women (those in the brothels). On the surface level, this statement can be regarded as a valorization of war and the mentality behind it, that is, the so-called protection of the women of the nation. Yet, this point she underlines deconstructs the political construction of the states, the male heroism today and illustrates the hypocrisy and the lies of the present day politics and opens up the politically legitimate ground for Ayşe to criticize the sex work in Turkey in general and herself in particular.

In this context of the honor code, a proper woman is also mainly conceived in a

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. and Sirman, N. (2002). Kadınların Milliyeti [Women's Nation]. In T. Bora (Ed.), *Milliyetçilik: Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce* (pp. 226-244). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

marital relationship or as a single yet virgin woman. Prostitute women are regarded therefore as wanting in terms of ethical standards to set up a family life as well as presenting a peril to the order of the entire society. Hence, for example, Ayşe in her narrative accuses of her first husband as well as her father for not protecting her or not paying enough care and attention to her and remarks that these instances had eventually made her into prostitution. Honor as a social concept prevalent in everyday life of Turkey and as a significant constituent of the existing sex-gender system also determines the father or in certain cases older brothers as the protective head of the individuals in the family. Lack of familial protection, as Ayşe claims in her case, is therefore a culturally legitimate excuse to make her case plausible. Ayşe's employment of this honor code in legitimizing her involvement in prostitution is what is meant by the opening of the space by her narrative of victimhood. By asserting the particular details of the circumstances in her childhood as well as before, during and after her prostitution; Ayşe develops, what I call, a narrative of victimhood. She narrates this story in relation to the honor code and the sex-gender system in Turkey.

This space that Ayşe employs throughout her narrative is enabled and legitimized by the social texture of the Turkish society. She uses the same space to generate another discourse out of it. In my view, this is where the analysis related to Ayşe lies. The following account of her life will illustrate how Ayşe creates this narrative of victimhood today.

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### ***3.1. Family Issues***

The beginning of Ayşe's story is about certain familial circumstances. Ayşe recalls and asserts them as circumstances that gradually funneled her away from her options and



opportunities towards prostitution. They start with her father's going to Germany in 1969.<sup>71</sup> Initially, he takes only his wife and two male kids to Germany and leaves Ayşe and her sister back in Turkey. The first unfortunate account that she tells of about this period is the drowning of her brother who was 5 years older than her while playing in a water channel at the age of 9 in Germany in 1971. In her narrative, she recounts this event saying that if he had not died then, he would not have allowed things to turn out bad and that he would have protected her. Her father takes her and her sister to Germany in 1974. The second incidence she gives an account of is her return to Turkey after 2 years' stay and schooling in Germany to help and stay with her aging grandmother upon her grandmother's request. During this stay with her grandmother, Ayşe was raped by her uncle. She was at the age of 9 at that time. She describes this occurrence of rape by her uncle not only as an instance of sheer victimhood that has still had deep emotional effects, but in the same time as radically affecting her hopes for the future by turning her into a victim whose life was stolen from her. The rest of her story is deeply affected by this event. Therefore, being the prior to this rape case, the happiest period that she speaks about in her narrative today is the time she spent with her grandmother. She gives accounts of the memories of the things that she and her grandmother used to do. One striking issue is that her uncle was the son of her grandmother. That is to say, her grandmother did not bring out this rape issue at all as she had to. According to the account she gives, her uncle took her and his daughter to another town in a car. In this car, her uncle had a friend who was wounded by a gunshot. He was taking the girls with him as they would cook and help them in the house they would stay for some time. It was during their stay in this house that she was raped by her 48-year-old uncle several times. It is not clear from her accounts whether, when they were back, her grandmother did not feel or did not want to

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<sup>71</sup> Ayşe was born in February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1967 in Gaziantep, Turkey. Many Turkish workers migrated to Germany to work there in those years.

bring up the change in Ayşe. Because Ayşe wanted to go and stay with her aunt for a while when they were back. The contradictions such as her longing memorial of her grandmother thus start from the beginning in her narrative. If we are to find a moment in her narrative to intrude and *correct* things, it would be her grandmother's choice for Ayşe to voice her rape over her married son and his family. It is therefore possible to say that Ayşe romanticizes and presents the period before her rape as sort of the unified image of herself, that is, the image that she alludes to today and that she regards and depicts as if she has lost. Her rape marks therefore a before and an after for her. She makes herself the protagonist of this afterwards, who she wants to claim for herself as well as declare to her parents and to people as the same Ayşe that she was before her rape.

The aftermath of this rape remains quite vague and at times incoherent in the rest of her narrative. In her accounts, she and her cousin were in the same room during the rape and she saw what had happened yet remained quiet during and after for years. In 1976, the same year of her rape, she went back to Germany with her parents. The years between 1976 when she went to Germany to 1990 when she went back to Turkey to marry are marked by continuous familial conflicts, fights and her father's violence to Ayşe in the form of battering. This period is also important in showing how her relationship with her family came to the current stage. This issue will be examined in the aftermath of her involvement in prostitution. One of the events worth mentioning is that during this time, Ayşe used to visit an elderly German couple. As she did not let her parents know her stays with this couple whom she called Oma (Grandma) and Opa (Grandpa) but said to this couple that her parents knew where she was, it was not until after the couple saw in the newspaper that Ayşe was missing and searched by her parents. This example points out to the severity of the matter of domestic conflicts and fights that she recounts today.

She also reports physical violence from her father at the time. One of these instances

was while she was going to school. Her teacher had seen the black marks out of her father's beating. When the school administration informed of the authorities about this beating and Ayşe acknowledged the violence, she was put in a children's shelter when she was around 11. Until 16, Ayşe stayed in children's shelters. In this time, her rape case came into light and the shelter pressed a charge against her parents. As her parents did not accept the rape and accused of the shelter for the event, her wardship was taken from her parents. When 16, she accepted to leave the shelter upon her parent's request. Yet, as the violence at home continued, she recounts that she escaped from home and started to work in pubs and restaurants.

The Turkish families that went to Germany in those years are known for problems related to the cultural change they had to undergo<sup>72</sup> and the problems of adaptation, which have repercussions to date. Whether it was her struggle to be free at her teenage years that she decided to leave home or it was her father's beatings that made her keep away from home; it is in place to assert from her accounts that the role of her family and these initial family conflicts play an important in her narrative starting from her childhood years.

In Ayşe's accounts, Ayşe narrates this period away from home as a time of many difficulties to lead her life. She asserts that she worked in restaurants, pubs and so on. Yet, she adds, she did not get into any sexual relationship. She remembers and recounts only a single relationship. She explains it as a relationship in which the two did not have sex but still loved each other. Ayşe asserts that her virginity had become a problem for her boyfriend's family for the two to marry. Starting from here on, sexual cleanliness, chastity, honor as well as decency becomes a matter in her narrative.

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<sup>72</sup> David Horrocks , & Eva Kolinsky (Eds.). (1996). *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*. Berghahn Books. Also, Germany's Second Doubts About Its Turkish Immigrants, <http://hnn.us/articles/12640.html> (downloaded on 9.6.2009)

In her accounts, her continuing relations with her family are suppressed or ignored. The only account one can understand that her ties to her parents continued is when her parents asked her to go to Turkey and open up the proposal of her brother to her cousin. This instance shows the present valid and strong relationship with her and her parents still going on despite all the ups and downs in her life since Ayşe recounts that there were times during this while that she had stayed in the streets.

Surprisingly enough, this cousin she was asked to propose for her brother was Şengül, the daughter of her uncle. The present kinship ties can be seen clearly in these accounts. It is hard to avoid the question of how the rape issue had been handled or rather whether it had been much of an issue the way that Ayşe depicts it. Strikingly in 1989 Ayşe went to Turkey and did the proposal. Her uncle had died two years ago. It was not until after 13 years that in 1989 that the two talked about the rape. Ayşe says that her cousin Şengül's excuse was that she had feared that her father would do the same to her. Yet, Ayşe avoided her from coming to Germany by making mistakes on purpose in the documents that would enable Şengül to come to Germany while filling them in the German embassy. It is only throughout these instances that we can trace Ayşe's active participation, preferences and choices she made in her past.

During her stay in Turkey, Ayşe met her first husband. The two kept their contact and decided to marry in April 1990 when she came to Turkey. The narrative of victimization is remarkable again in this part of her story. In this marriage, as her husband was away for work all the time. Thus there was much pressure on her. She narrates this marriage as one marked by her cultural difference being very noticeable in her mother-in-law's home and her miscarriage from her falling during a dispute in the family. During this dispute when her husband was away, the reason was her wish to call her husband and that her brother-in-law and mother-in-law did not let

her call her husband. It is not still clear how this marriage ended in her narrative. This was partly because of her miscarriage, fights in her husband's family, his husband's absence for work and again his absence following his mandatory military service. By the time her husband came back, she had found some work and was working. The two decided to divorce after a while in February 1993. Her account on this divorce is one of not being protected by her husband and his lack of attention. When it comes to her miscarriage, this event is still a major theme in her story. The family dispute that caused her to fall from the stairs was over "plums". That is to say, she had felt like eating something sour. The cultural implication here is that during pregnancy, the pregnant women are known for craving to eat unusual tastes like the sour plum. So, she had attempted to call her husband to ask him to bring some plums and that her brother-in-law had not allowed her to call him. And it is during this dispute that she had fallen from the stairs. She still calls her lost baby with this name "Esat Kutlay" and says in her accounts that she can not eat plums any more. The implied naturalness of the craving of a mother candidate in her account and the underlying accusation that nobody allowed this natural wish and even caused her to lose her baby is her depiction of her victimization. Her miscarriage and her later abortions during her sex work all end up as stories of victimization in Ayşe's accounts. The nature of this victimization in her accounts will be examined more in detail in the coming sections of this study.

The time when her marriage started to come to an end was also the time when she met Bahri, who would be her future pimp and *sell* her into sex work in the future. The two started flirting. As she puts it, in the following 8 months, Bahri made everything to make her believe that he was genuinely interested in her. The two got engaged when he visited Ayşe's aunt with his parents, which meant that a proposal was to follow.

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### 3.2. Inside the Brothels

What does Ayşe tell about her life inside the brothels? How does she narrate her life in 7 state brothels and some inner city transfers within a 30-month-duration today? Is what she narrates today actually what she lived or to what extent? Does what she remembers correspond exactly to what she experienced? Now that she was in some way or other in, she had to survive it. This meant bargaining for the price, protecting herself from dangerous punters, avoiding physical and mental dangers, sitting and calculating the shares<sup>73</sup> –*hesaba oturmak*- with the brothel owner and her pimp Bahri and therefore maximizing the benefits and minimizing the expenses as well as protecting her humanity and self-perception as she meant to from the very beginning. One of the first things that the owner of the brothel in Mersin when she refused to work was, “Whether you work or not, now you are a prostitute!”

Her tale inside the brothels is an account of how she behaved differently than other sex workers who were there, how she protected herself, how she avoided accepting her situation and manage a difference within herself between her body that was reachable and her soul which only she owned. Some of the dialogues with her punters were in this line. She said, “You do not fk me, you fk your money!”<sup>74</sup> or “If I am a prostitute, you are a ponce!”<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, the only period that she mentions about herself as accepting her circumstances and involvement in prostitution is worth mentioning. This period was when she was working in Mersin in her 7<sup>th</sup> month in Gülseren’s<sup>76</sup> house. She says that what she thought at the time was that this would be her way of life from then on and also that it was hard to change her fate. This period coincides with one of the interesting occasions she once recounted. In this

<sup>73</sup> From Ayşe’s accounts. *Hesaba Oturmak*: To calculate the shares at a table.

<sup>74</sup> Sen beni değil parayı sikiyosun!

<sup>75</sup> Ben orospuyşam sen de pezevenksin! Ponce or pimp, in Turkish “Pezevenk”, are two words as strong as calling a woman prostitute that one can use to humiliate a man in Turkish.

<sup>76</sup> Gülseren is a woman’s name.

brothel that she was working in, the owner once said in a demeaning manner that they (the sex workers there) were not even able to buy “panties for their bottom.”<sup>77</sup> This meant that the owner did not regard the sex workers highly or rather responsible enough for their lives, health, and as persons in general. She explains this instance as one of coming to an awareness that she could and should be able to try hard to be unlike other sex workers and be able to make it out of the brothels. She asserts that years later she visited this owner, reminding him what he had once said and that she had achieved what he said they could not and made it out.

One of the differences she thought about herself was also that she could speak German. This meant that she could attract foreign punters and those Turkish immigrants easily. In her accounts, Ayşe does not only mention the things that she herself experienced. She recounts the most touching events that she saw as well like suicides or murders. These stories add in overall to the effect of her story. One of these stories is that of Aynur, a mother of five, who were sold by her husband to the brothel. Ayşe recounts Aynur’s story as she was forced to have only anal sex with her punters.

In Ayşe’s narrative yet, prostitution is never suggested as an assurance or as a way of ceasing or bettering the economic failure of her life unless it enables or opens up the way to a circumstance to get out of brothels on her part. She underlines this irreconciliation with prostitution about her time in brothels in every chance. In her relations inside the brothels with other sex workers, house keepers, nightwatches and other social actors, this aspect is quite distinct. She speaks of an incidence as a sex worker in her third city Gaziantep—also her hometown—about the housekeeper of the house, a 54-year-old sex worker called Nuran. This woman continued to work in brothels after she quit sex work. In an account about Nuran, Ayşe

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<sup>77</sup> “Siz kıçınıza don bile alamazsınız!”

asserted that when she arrived in this brothel, taken by her pimp from Eskişehir to this city to be sold, she had asked for some traditional trousers to wear from Nuran. These trousers (“Şalvar” in Turkish) are overtly loose and made of thick cotton fabric, simply far from being suggestive unlike the swimming suits or transparent lingerie they wear inside the brothels. When she sat in the lounge where the prostitutes waited for the clients in these trousers, the *vekil* of the brothel Alaattin phoned back Ayşe’s pimp Bahri, who had just brought her there<sup>78</sup> and told him that she was wearing a şalvar in the lounge. As soon as Bahri arrived, he battered her before the other girls and continued the beating and the persuasion in the room allotted for Ayşe to get the clients. Ayşe remembers that when Nuran came to the room to help her with washing her face, she told her that she was in the brothels for 35 years and had tried to escape twice and added “If I knew that they would beat you so hard, I would not have brought you the şalvar.” Upon hearing this sentence, Ayşe remembers saying, “You have escaped twice but you have forgotten your soul inside Nuran Ana.”<sup>79</sup> After this incidence, she apologized from Nuran for what she had said. Ayşe tells this story both to show her resistance inside the brothels and also to underline her difference from other sex workers or actors who worked with her and her conscious rejection of the prostitute identity.

An incidence that occurred around this time constitutes another example in point. Ayşe speaks of one of her long-term clients. In one of his visits, this client offered to use the larger bed in her room. This bed was her own bed in which she slept at night. Ayşe responded saying that he was not *strong enough* to get into that bed. This client would be her future husband Ahmet. Implied distinction in this gesture lies between paying for her body and having her soul

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<sup>78</sup> This *vekil* called Bahri *enişte*. *Enişte* (“Uncle” in English) is one of the words used inside brothels to name the type of relationship in question- here between the *vekil* and the pimp. This word suggests that Bahri is older than Alaattin and that there is mutual respect and trust between the two as in the form of kinship. The other words used are *oğlum*, *damat*, *mama* etc.

<sup>79</sup> *Ana* means “mother” in English.



as she recounts in her narrative. Ayşe also tells in detail the amount of the extra money Ahmet paid each time to stay longer with her in his frequent visits. In one of his visits, the amount he paid at the cashier of the brothel was so high that it had caused a lot of sensation in the nearby cities' brothels.

In her portrayal of prostitution, only once she implied prostitution as a way of earning “easy money” but still not on her own part but on a friend of hers’: “She was a friend who liked easy money” (Quotation from the documentary) but adding that it was out of financial necessities for sure. The friend she mentioned was one of her acquaintance sex workers who returned back to the brothels not being able to finance herself on her own. Yet, her account conflicts with 1) her own current financial situation and her lack of social insurance 2) her accounts of the difficulty of finding a regular job just because of her own sex worker employment. Ayşe herself remarks that she has lost numerous jobs since she quit sex work, immediately after her employers got to learn about her previous involvement. She recounts her experience at the registration office when she went there to get a criminal report of how the officer looked at her curiously and needed to confirm that the address she was registered was right.

During this time, she attempted to escape from the brothels as well. Of these, the first one was in Mersin, the first brothel she worked in. One of the punters who visited Ayşe helped her escape. But it did not take her long to be caught and brought back to the brothel. As sort of a punishment, the owner of the hotel took her out of the city in the wilderness and there 3 police officers raped her.<sup>80</sup> Ayşe accuses one of these police officers of being the first officer who registered her for the first time as a sex worker. Therefore police violence plays an important role

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<sup>80</sup> See, the documentary on Ayşe Tukrukcu

in her political speech today. Because of her escape and the punter who had helped her with it, a short while later, she was sent to her second brothel in Eskişehir. In all the brothels she had worked by then, Bahri was her pimp. Bahri was pimping some other sex workers in different cities as well. Whenever he provided a brothel owner, he would take some money or other material benefits like a car in return for enabling the brothel owner with a new sex worker. The money he took would be paid back by the sex worker. Although Ayşe knew the amount of the money each time he took from the owner of the brothel and signed a paper confirming that she is the holder of the loan, she does never recount much information about this relationship between her and Bahri. Every time, Ayşe started to have regular clients, Bahri would intrude. As in Mersin, whenever she attempted an escape, he would batter her and transfer her to another city. This was the reason of her transfer from Mersin to Eskişehir. Each time, her transfer was related to the decision of her pimp. The third place Ayşe went to work was her hometown, Gaziantep. Ayşe recounts that this transfer was because Bahri had wanted to keep Ayşe near himself and avoid her from escaping.

Her pivotal fear during this time and in all the brothels she worked in was to meet a friend or a relative. Therefore, as soon as she started in Gaziantep brothel, she had her hair cut in order not to get recognized. In her accounts today, Ayşe still underlines this point that she is anxious about meeting or being recognized by somebody that she had sex with.

Ayşe's next brothel was Bursa. Bahri took her registration from Gaziantep because of her regular client Ahmet so that the two would not be able to see each other. At each brothel, Bahri was taking a substantial amount of money from the owner. Here Ahmet and Ayşe continued to see each other as well. Ayşe managed to escape from here with the help of Ahmet. The two stayed together for a while. In her accounts, Ayşe asserts that as Ahmet did not seriously

take marriage as an option at the time, she started to work in Ereğli, Adana and finally Kütahya brothels. Having managed to get rid of Bahri and the constant loans he took from the brothel owners after the Bursa brothel, Ayşe had planned to marry Ahmet. The two decided to marry while Ayşe was working in Kütahya. The ceremony took place inside the Kütahya brothel.

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### ***3.3.After the Brothels***

The aftermath of Ayşe's working in brothels is marked by her struggles to get her registration as a sex worker deleted. Ayşe Tükrükçü quit sex work on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1996 when she married her long term client Ahmet. This was not an official marriage but a religious one not recognized by the state. When she quit sex work, to be able to get rid of her official registration, she had been told that she had to remain married for 5 years. Starting from the early on in this marriage, she gives accounts of physical abuse by her husband. On August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1996 Ayşe had an official marriage with her husband. Ayşe defines the violence during her marriage as worse than the one in the brothels.

This part of her narrative is marked by her accounts about the TV shows she took part in. Her life started to take a new shape when she called a TV show saying that she did not want to return to the brothels. This is how Ayşe met Hayrettin Bulan, who runs the NGO that she is part of today. He offered her help and shelter. For the sake of getting rid of her registration, she says she bore up with her marriage until April 16<sup>th</sup> 2001. From then on, she started to take an active part in this NGO. She took any chance to make her situation and the sex workers' conditions known by means of this NGO and any other chance in the media. The prime minister who is still in the government told one of his ministers to take care her demands. From 2002 till 2007 she started to get paid a monthly salary by a minister called Mehmet Ali Şahin. In 2007,

when Ayşe declared her candidacy in the general elections, this minister stopped paying Ayşe this money. This minister was part of the current liberal Islamic government in Turkey. He covered up this monthly salary from his own pocket. Therefore it was not based on an official welfare payment. Considering the political and religious views of the government, this move can be read as protecting the fallen prostitute and holding out a fatherly hand to this woman. During our meetings, she was complaining about the end of this payment and faxed this minister. She did not get an answer for her fax. The strong correlation between the cut on this money and Ayşe's candidacy reveals an important point. As long as Ayşe plays her part of victimization and the fallen prostitute, she has some financial means available for her to have access to. Yet, as soon as she continues her critique and changes her role to taking action against her political and social marginalization and voicing up her demands (lack of social benefits, health insurance, the official registration/*vesika* that follows a sex worker all through her life, the working conditions and violence inside the state brothels etc.) she is prevented from the political space. This suggests the resistance to open up the space for a sex worker to speak up in the domain of active politics.

One of the TV shows that she took part in called "Esra Ceyhan Show" provided Ayşe with some money and help as well as the NGO she works for. In these programs, as long as she talked about how she was victimized and what were the things she experienced inside brothels, the bad events that occurred, the program continued. In her accounts, she says that when she started to talk about the police control, her rape by some police officers,<sup>81</sup> the political silencing of sex workers and her political activities, the program presenter interrupted her and asked her to shift to another incidence rather than keeping on. She is in some way demanded to keep her victimized position as well as depiction.

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<sup>81</sup> See, the documentary on Ayşe Tükrükçü.

Both Ayşe's experience in TV shows and the cutting of the monthly money given by a minister shows the denied political space that accepts Ayşe as the subject of her experience. These two instances are only some examples of the ongoing objectification of Ayşe Tükrükçü in her claims to her exploited experience from a subject position and exemplify best the hindrances before the expression of the exploiting practices in the state brothels in Turkey in case they are asserted from a subject position.

Such strong disidentification from the prostitute identity enables Ayşe to be able to produce a strong political speech about the issues related to prostitute identity and the state policies. Yet the contradictions of her narrative that she gives today show the implausibility and the incoherence of her current identifications with the political project they have initiated. Her current identifications with family, the state and honor weaken the potential of her political speech in general against the state policies in relation to prostitutes, prostitution and in Turkey.

Her political fight against the official as well as the social stigmatization of prostitution conflicts with her depictions of herself as being different than other prostitute women in terms of her struggles to be able to get out of the brothels. This implied difference relies on an underlying assumption or value attached to sexual purity, having decency, chastity, honor and family. The contradictions in her narrative that were underlined in this thesis stem from this discontinuity between this conflicting character of her speech. This *personal mythos* that Ayşe constructs out of herself exhausts the plausibility of her speech. Yet, at this point, her political voice is also criticized among some feminists in Istanbul as it constructs the conventional family and keeps up a moral discourse. She is criticized for not being a feminist in this sense. Thus, some feminist groups did not support her in the election. For example, in her speeches, Ayşe justifies the state authority in the sense that while coming up with a severe criticism against the

state regulations and the state's silent complicity with sex work, the kind of help she assumes from the state authorities and her requests are daily and pragmatic in nature. Or rather she does not decide what kind of help to assume from the state on a politically charged feminist agenda. An instance in point was a flat rented for her by the same minister mentioned above. It is not clear from her account why she had to close this flat. However, she says that when she left the flat to attend a relative's funeral for a while in another city, the flat was closed when she came back. This instance illustrates two things. One is that Ayşe aims for any kind of help including those of material ones. They do not necessarily have to be politically correct in their nature. Yet, secondly and more interestingly, the assumed help from the state do not last long enough to secure a stable life for Ayşe as she might think they will. Just like the monthly money that was cut once she was a candidate in the elections, the flat was also somehow closed upon her leave for a longer while than usual. The act of renting a flat for a single sex worker upon her participation in TV shows as opposed to a general regulation that would cover all sex workers who demand some kind of social protection from the state because of the bad working conditions in the legal state brothels shows the paternal nature of the state and its actions mentioned in the beginning of Part II. Considering the political vision of the current government, this act also shows and can be read as the short term nature of the state's fatherly help to protect its woman sex worker -a single one though- from her *fallenness* and restore her back to the honorable life of the typical decent Turkish woman. Ayşe is therefore criticized for accepting the state's help on indifferent conditions as well as showing up in unpleasant women's shows by the feminists.

Clear from her accounts so far, her involvement in prostitution constitute a distinct memory on its own terms within her overall memory of her life. This is also distinguishable from her representation of the prostitute identity. That is to say, her involvement in the state brothels

for 30 months divides her narrative into two separate phases and also two different identities: that of a prostitute Ayşe and of the non-prostitute Ayşe. I argue that from the beginning of her narrative, what I called before a narrative of victimhood; her involvement in prostitution stands out not as an ultimate, gradual, unexpected and linear ending (up) in the brothels but as a starting point for her story. Therefore, Ayşe's story starts with her prostitution today. All her life experience prior to her prostitution is rewritten in relation to her life in the brothels. Crying for Tükrükçü is also in one sense the opening up of the discussion or how she can start to tell the things that she experienced. The moment of crying becomes a step into the future, the construction, a declaration of this united self or a reconstruction of a self.

In terms of showing the political *excess* in her narrative, the following account about the police officer who registered her for the first time is important. Ayşe went to the police stations in the cities she had worked years after she had dropped out of sex work in an attempt to get her registration deleted. In one of these occasions, Ayşe recounts seeing the police officer who had registered her years ago. When the officer called her "Mrs. Ayşe", her answer to the same police was one of angry and agitated one in tone as a response. She cried and shouted as well as swore to this police at that time and still asks today, "Why did they call me "a prostitute" when I was made into this work years ago? Now they are calling me Mrs. Ayşe" This shows that her attempt in general is rather than only a matter of retrieval of the respect and the social position she was once assumed for, that is, of the honorable, respected women before her prostitution by being called Mrs. Ayşe; for her, this shows how unfair it was once to have labeled and turn her into a prostitute years ago. Her stance does not only show her personal apprehension of her registration but of this procedure in general that makes some women expendable for some other men. Her valorization of family, motherhood, the state as a protector, the police as a shield

before social vices are therefore simply more than a validation of populist or mainstream social and moral values as well as the politics. It is rather the opening up the space in which she can ask the why's of her life today.

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#### 4. CONCLUSION

In an attempt to constitute a mediatory link to understanding the autobiographical narrative of Ayşe Tükrükçü, in this thesis, I tried to show the various and complex aspects of her narrative. Initially giving an historical and legal account of sex work in Turkey, I set the ground for further analysis. Being a study on a single person, this thesis has required a challenging methodological and theoretical approach on my part.

To start with an overall account, firstly, in a calculation of the material, psychological and social loss exerted on her by and during her involvement in sex work by the state regulations that opened the way to this exploiting, Ayşe reacts and opposes to these social factors in her accusation of them in resulting in her prostitution today. Interestingly enough, not only the state, Ayşe also puts her pimp, punters, her husbands, all the related social actors and above all her family in this equation. This is where Ayşe puts personal factors and subjective part in her narrative aside and it is this personal stance that makes her narrative bear the discrepancies or incoherencies.

Secondly, the political space opened up by her use of her own victimization has offered two contradictory stories on her part. That is, while this space has enabled Ayşe to speak up the structural violence inside the state brothels as the subject of the very experience as an ex-sex worker, her claim for this position to speak from a subject's voice whose life space was narrowed by the state has been hindered and attempted to be contained by the mainstream media and the current politics to make her or rather to depict her in an object position again.

The unique aspect of the issue is her way of presenting her past to her family as well as other people. Ayşe also addresses her own family in her critique of what happened to her. (her involvement in prostitution) She asked her father who did not talk to her for years because of her

involvement such questions as whether he had ever repented going to Germany, or whether he had ever felt that he was not careful enough for her children etc. Although her sister told Ayşe that she thought she found it enough for her to have expressed her past on various chances, TV shows, interviews, women's gatherings and in a book, Ayşe prefers being remembered by her past.

This is where Ayşe puts personal factors and subjective part in her narrative aside. This also shows the difficulty of opening herself up to a new life. This has material conditions as well as personal issues. She does not have a social security today since she works mainly in part-time jobs without her insurance being paid by the employer. She somehow does not bring up these issues in her narrative without relating them to her past and refreshing all the symbolic world of the life in the state brothels. But this specific interpretation in the form of generalization of this experience to all the constituents and the social actors of sex work life of women implies her use of her past as a symbolic capital. The interpretation of her narrative of her sex work experience in this thesis neither adds nor steals from the material realities or the facticity of her experience.

The three instances below show how some first-hand accounts about her life offer details related to how she goes through her past experience today.

In one of our informal meetings, she had asserted that if the woman friend who was with me at that moment and I went out together arm in arm, it would not be a problem. But if she went out with a man the same way, she would have problems with the police who already knew her face.

Again in another meeting when we came together, I was also with the woman friend who had introduced me to Ayşe for the first time during her election campaign. We invited her

first to have dinner together and then go to the cinema. While we were walking towards the cinema, she said that it was her first time that she was stepping on this street since her campaign, which was more than a year ago.

And lastly, in one of our talks once, she underlined the fact that the person whom I talked to there was not the prostitute Ayşe, but it was Ayşe, who turned into a prostitute once yet managed to get out of the brothels by her own means.

These instances imply “some stopping points” in the Bordosian sense<sup>82</sup> that would in my view add to the sheer critical analysis of what Ayşe is doing today. Rather than drawing out some kind of meaning in the form of some sort of value to these assertions, the implication therefore is of a more keen analytical focus on interpretation than simple collection and refinement of her narrative.

Therefore, the narrative of prostitution that she yields today plays the part of the culturally given set of meanings in terms of making sense of her life narrative as a whole. In the aftermath of her time in the state brothels, despite her identifications, Ayşe’s mere words, “I was not born a prostitute!” has value on its own. Today Ayşe takes the dominant and mainstream ideological tenets and translates them into her personal narrative and vocabulary. Yet, this is not a passive translation. Her fluency in being part of this sex-gender system despite her simultaneous ability to catch the ironies in the sex-gender system as well as the political implementation of this system in Turkey points out to something: Ayşe’s narrative is a pragmatist as well as political mockery of this sex-gender system in Turkey.

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<sup>82</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-epistemology/>

See, Bordo, S. (1999). Bringing Body to Theory. In *Body and Flesh* (pp. 173-192). University of California Press.

This thesis has also showed that the case of Ayşe Tükrükçü offers a limited account of the prostitution in the state brothels of Turkey since her narrative is determined and shaped by her personal issues that come before her story related to her prostitution. Her life narrative still matters and has value for analysis on its own. But to be able to manage this, the researcher should be adept at her personal manners and traits as well as be skillful at character analysis. In the case of not being cautious about these crucial factors fundamental for the content of the research; the research quality, the preciseness and the intended academic nature of the work gets hindered and blurred by these very facts. The prostitution has become a side matter in her narrative within a period of 16 years in the aftermath of her work as a sex worker. Her attachment to this issue has to do with her choices in her life. In her second marriage, which she made, she explains in her accounts, to get out of the brothels, the basic problem with her husband was his reminding her her past as a sex worker. Her husband tried to find a means of prostituting her in the Turkish part of Cyprus as she was not allowed to work in Turkey since she was married.

Ayşe Tükrükçü represents a good example in her struggle to a good extent because of her faith, struggle and conscious management of her time inside the brothels in order not simply to accommodate the symbolic world of prostitution and the identity in her subject. Yet the paradox lies in this very fact that this symbolic resistance is also about an intricate web of calculations of survival as well as forms of creative techniques to adapt to this risky environment to minimize risk and maximize personal, physical and social assets on her part. The refutation or deconstruction of this symbolic world with its complex political, economic and emotional economy leads to the missing parts or under expressed parts related inevitably to her personal participation.

.....

It is my hope that this thesis has been able to leave a few potential theoretical gaps to follow further in the research on prostitution. Finally, this is a quote from one of my interviews with her. Talking about who would normally go to the Karaköy, she once said:

“Why would I go to that street? The registered prostitutes go there to see the brothel patrons to talk about the entry, money etc. She goes there to say she will work in the flesh market. Why would a woman go there otherwise? Do normal women go there? She wouldn’t. It’s infamous there! An indecent street! But the highest decency is there nobody knows it though. That’s a different matter.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> The interview dated 24.11.2008. See, Appendix

**APPENDIX 1**  
The Interview Dated 24.11.2008  
(As Edited In The Video Shot During This Interview)  
Transcription

Ayşe Tükrükçü: A

Volkan Sarıtaş: V

Özgül Akıncı: Ö (Camera)

Scene One

A: There is a blue building of bastards in the corner. Down where the lights are. Not the first but the second lights. You'll make a left from there. After right, on the left, it's the place of our girls.

Scene Two

A: This is when they promised us a flat. They had rented us a flat, remember? It was on the news saying they quit sex work and got the flat!

Scene Three

A: I said to the lawyer: "I know which life I'm coming from and who I am. I know the things I have to struggle with in Istanbul." I said, "Google it. He did it and was shocked." I had a book with me I had signed for my sister. She didn't take it. I said, "I have a book, too. What is it just for? I said, "it is just to make people aware of it, to teach them a true word and make people accept it." Standing before him is a man's daughter whom he never expects this from. They know my father very well there. He is an authority with good-standing. They know what kind of man he is. It is his daughter saying that she is an ex-sex worker.

Scene Four

A: I wanted to confront my dad very much. I used to print out the new from newspapers. I don't know whether he read them.

.....

V: Did you used to send him the news?

A: No no. I used to tell mom when I would be on TV. She watched them. The acquaintance in Germany also watched. He knew what my struggle was. See that's why he gave me that gun, as he knew I wasn't on the bad way. Take it like, you don't give your horse, woman and gun, it's said so with us. A gun is their honor for them.

#### Scene Five

A: My father said, "bring that brat here!"

V: How long did you not meet? It was 7 years. He wouldn't speak to me on the phone. He had so many operations. I used to call him to wish fast recovery. He would hang up, wouldn't talk to me.

.....  
One day we were at dinner sitting. They are used to sitting at a table, not on the ground. I

prepared the meal and put it on the table.

V: So, you were staying together?

A: Yes yes. And I said to my dad, we ended up talking again. I asked, "Have you ever said 'I wish I hadn't?'"

A: "Wish I had hugged my kids more? Wish I hadn't gone to Germany? Wish I was a better dad to my kids?" Sure I had more to ask whether he had ever repented. And I'm 41, almost 42. I saw my dad crying. I said a dad can also cry. I was crying at one side of the table. He was crying on the other. So, he had regrets.

#### Scene Six

A: When he was here, I couldn't see him. When I did, I couldn't touch. Since I didn't know how fathers would care, you know you talk to your mom every day, you know her stance. I know very

well the mother's approach to her children. I had so many difficulties. Yes, she was with me psychologically, financially too when I needed. Her coming to Bursa etc.

V: Did she come to Bursa when you were working there? Did you meet?

A: Well, she took me out but she didn't look back. That's why I escaped from Bursa. (brothel)

#### Scene Seven

A: She came with the pimp who sold me. But what struck me at mom's home was that when I first entered Mersin (brothel), I had sent some of my hair home. That hair is still at dad's home. The hair is still there.

#### Scene Eight

A: There is rape. God sees it. Why isn't it prevented? This is also in people's hand to an extent. If that cop had prevented, I wouldn't have gone in.

V: You mean the first cop who got you in?

A: When I got trapped to be registered in Islahiye, my rapist is the man, the pimp who registered me. The one who registered me became my rapist when I came to Mersin.

#### Scene Nine

A: Doesn't the commissary see this? A sex worker who works on the streets gets caught in Antalya. They have group sex in the detention room. Does the woman ask you to sleep with her?



If you were a decent, honorable officer, you wouldn't do it. And I know it well that that woman wouldn't say that. It's group sex. The woman is charged with 15 years. The officers were transfered. Why weren't they charged? Why weren't they jailed? Because you know that if they are put in jail, they wouldn't live 3 minutes. They wouldn't let them live for 3 minutes.

V: The cops?

A: It is said in prison that, "Don't f... my mom, or I f... your mom." This is how the saying goes in the prison. Even a judge said this, "You can kill someone, I would let you stand for it. But don't come before me charged with rape, theft, or procuring." Rape, theft and procuring. Because these are shameful crimes. Cops rape our rights everyday!

### Scene Ten

A: Look Volkan! Last year, the election time. Come over. We are having an interview with a newspaper. That interview over there. "The state owes us an apology!"

While we were having the interview, there in that flat in black with bars on the balcony, it's literally a bed for prostitution.

V: Now, too?

A: Still... The cops were there. The girl was trying to jump off. Her slippers all fell down. It's not me who only says this, there were reporters here. The girl was about to jump.

All these empty flats are bed of prostitution.

We have our mosques, don't we? Christians have churches. I respect it.

V: Yea, over there.

A: That street at the back is a bed of prostitution. There are bawdyhouses.

They get the clients here. They talk the price.

V: Women?

A: Women. Who is it who puts that woman in that situation? The state's men. The state's laws don't protect that woman. Come here after 10 in the evening. On this side transexuals, on the other women. Do you see the flat with the blue balcony? The whole building was a bed of prostitution. It lasted for years. A guy called Zeki ran it.

V: It wasn't registered, was it?

A: It was illegal.

While we were having the interview, we saw the women having clients from here. These reporters aren't blind, right. Excuse my language. They see this.

Look there is a cop over there. And one is here. These places are beds of prostitution. They don't do a shit. You are the state's officer. I shit on that duty. You see my dear.

You should see these places when it is the celebration time. It gets full of soldiers. (clients)

My heart really hurts. It costs 50 liras in the brothel. But they get a woman for 20 liras here. They pay 30 less.

The woman gives 10 for the flat and takes the 10 for herself.

This is simply done in those flat in the back. This place is all a bed of prostitution.

There is the big police headquarters down there.

Ö: There is always an armored vehicle before it.

A: There is the huge Taksim area. Here is Atatürk's monument. In the time of the Republican festival, the sports festival they go and put flower crowns before Atatürk's monument.

The one is the monument. The other is the headquarters. Below is the prostitution. Who does this then is the state. Two plus two is four.

God avoids if I do it. I could be selling my flesh right at the moment. I could be leading the same life. Look, I have chinchies in my flat. That's why I didn't meet you at home.

## Scene Eleven

A: Why would I go to that street? The registered prostitutes go there to see the brothel patrons to talk about the entry, money etc.

She goes there to say she will work in the flesh market. Why would a woman go there otherwise?

Do normal women go there? She wouldn't. It is infamous there. An indecent street!

But the highest decency is there nobody knows it though. That's a different matter.

(Subtitles enter, Speaking continues)

A: But after my official entry (to the brothels) was blocked, the cops laugh at me. You shouldn't come here! The cop said I couldn't go in last summer.

I said "Ok, Sir." I didn't say "Sir." I said something else from inside!

The End



## APPENDIX 2

**NE MERKEZİN NE SAĞIN NE SOLUN ADAYIYIZ, DİPTEKİLERİN BAĞIMSIZ ADAYIYIZ.**

MODERN KÖLELİĞİN KALKMASI İÇİN, TÜM ŞİDDET GÖRENLER, HOR GÖRÜLENLER, İTİLEN KAKILAN İNSAN YERİNE BİLE KONULMAYAN TÜM EZİLENLER İÇİN YOKSUL ÖTESİ İNSANLARIMIZ İÇİN BAĞIMSIZ MİLLETVEKİLİ ADAYLARIYIZ.



**Ayşe TÜKRÜKÇÜ**  
İstanbul 2. Bölge  
Bağımsız Milletvekili Adayı

[illegible]

**Ayşe TÜKRÜKÇÜ 2. Bölge İlçeleri :**  
Beyoğlu, Beşiktaş, Şişli, Sarıyer.  
Eminönü, Kağıthane, Bayrampaşa,  
Fatih, Gazi Osman Paşa, Eyüp.



**Saliha ERMEZ**  
İstanbul 1. Bölge  
Bağımsız Milletvekili Adayı

Evlilik vaadleriyle öncek ve bankaları zorla  
Genelleme yaptım. Genelleme 11 yıl köle olarak  
çalıştım, Çocuklarım için ölüm güce al  
genellerden kaçtım. Vazım yarımdan ben  
ve çocuklarım halle etti geliyoruz. Hiçbir çocuk  
anemisin genel evde çalışmasını istemez. Hiçbir  
kız çocuğuda genel evde çalıştırılmak için  
dünyaya gelmedi. Bütün çocuklar büyüyen  
doktor ağrısın mühendis olmak isterdi.  
Beyaz gelmiş giye sevdiyle evlenmek isterdi.  
Kırmızı köle pazarlarını düğünlerini istiyoruz.  
Köle pazarları kaldırılın istiyoruz.

**Saliha ERMEZ** 1. Bölge İççeleri :  
Kadıköy, Maltepe, Kartal, Pendik,  
Üsküdar, Ümraniye, Tuzla, Şile,  
Sultanbeyli, Adalar, Beykoz.

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Seçim Tarihinde Bir İlk Olarak; Hayatın Çalınarak Gencileveride Zorla Çalıştırılmış Kölelik Hayatı Yaşadın. 2. esde Genel Kadın Olarak, Tüm zorlu engelleri aşarak Kölelik gibi bir hayatın yasa koyuculuk gibi bir görevi olan TBMM'ye girmek için,

**ARTIK YÜKSEK SEÇİM KURULU KARARIYLA RESMEN  
MİLLETMEKÇİSİ ADAYIYIZ**

MİLLETVEKİLİ ADAYIYIZ  
NE MERKEZİN NE SAĞIN NE SOLUN ADAYIYIZ.

**DIPTEKİLERİN ADAYIYIZ.**  
**MODERN KÖLELİĞİN KALKIMASI İÇİN MÜCADELE EDİYORUZ**

Kamuyuunda yurtiçinde ve yurt dışında adaylağımızla ilgili genelde olumsuz olmak üzere çok şeyler söylendi. Kimi insanlar da bize kadın kadın dediler, kadın kadın dedi, herat kadını dedi, bize

buze kızı kadın dedi,gerne kadın dedi,ruyası kadın dedi,buze yargısız infaz yapılar,kimi bizi medise yakıştıramayacak kadar kötü gördü kimi de bunlar medistek birçok vakiden daha onurlu dedi Neficede 23 Temmuz günü halkın tercihi belli olacak

**“Fakat ne olursa olsun bizim gibi birlerim Hayatları Çalınarak Geçenlerde Zorla Çalınlarını, Kölelik Hayatı Yaşatlarını, Ama ruhumuzu, vatanımızı, milletimizi satmayan, dulun yetimin**

hakkını yemeyen, onurlu, 2. eski Genel Kadın Olarak, Tüm zorlukları engelleyi aşarak,  
Kötelik gibi bir hayattan yasa koyuculuk gibi bir görevi olan

İBMM'ye girmek için mücadele etmemizin, diptekilere, ezilenlere, hor görülenlere, hayata çalınanlara, yeni hayat hakkı için, özgürlük için, onur için, adalet

İçin, dıştekilerle HAYATIMIZI ÇALAN üsttekileri yüzleştirmek için, genelev gibi köle hanelere giden tüm yolların

#### İKİNCİ KÖLELİĞİN KALDIRILMASI GENELEVLERİN KURULMASI

**KAPATILMASI:** gereksiz ve dârsdeki tüm cinsel kurbanlardan ÖZÜRDLENMESİ doğrudur verilmesi yeri hayal hakkı verilmesi tazminat ödemesi vesikaların iptali kötü niyetli bir davranışın işlenişi farklılığı sonucu mülk zararının meydana gelmesi

vicillerin tamamen imha edilmesinin insan gibi yaşam sunumları için, çaba sarf etmemizin anlamının çok büyük olduğunu farkındayız.

çatıdaki çığlıklarla anımsı düşkünlere yitirdiklerine göre kaba bir nehirde, baka çıkılmayan büyük vahşi hayvanların önüne çarışan sümülme kurbânlarını 2000' li yıllardaki modernize edilmiş versiyonunuz. Biz her ödemler için bir arada derisi

Bağkalarından özgürlük verilmesini beklemek kibirliğe razı olmak demektir. Direnenek, mücadele ederek kazanacağız..

Arık biz köleler kendimiz özgürük mücadelesi vereceğiz. Hiç yılmayacağız. Bilyonlar ki arkamızda bizim mücadelede başarılmamız için dua eden onbinlerce hayati çalışmamız.

Hıyabız kadın köle arkadaşlarımız var,mücadelemizi anlayan  
garkatlı yürekler var...  
Bizi kurtan etiker Başka çocuklar kurban olmasın diyunuz.

Başka aileler dağılsın, kimse bizim çektiğimiz acıyı çekmesin diyoruz.  
Bizim hayatımız çalındı başkalarının hayalleri çalınmasın.

Bizler vesikali olarak gömülmek istemiyoruz.  
Biz birçok engelli ailek jandı sıra oy vererek seçmenlerde Biz  
60'ar bin oy gerekiyor.

gerekıyor.Bir benim oyumdan ne çıkar demeyin.Bir kez de biz

**KÖLE ARKADAŞLARIMIZ GÜYERCİN GİSİ ÖZGÜR OLSUN**  
Maalesef, Türkiye'de adı konmamış bir kölelik düzeni vardır.  
Bu kölelik düzeninde en az 50 bin kölelikte, köle de var, köleci de var.

Bu kölelik düzeninin en acı örneklerinden biri de göçmenlerde görülmektedir. Artık bu acı gerçeğe yüzleşilmelidir. Bu zincirleri hep beraber kıralım. Kilitleri açalım. Köleliği kaldıralım.

Başka çariler köleleştirilmesin diye mücadele ediyoruz.

Hiçbir kız oğru ben büyüyünce gençler kadın hayat kadın olacağım demez Doktor, öğretmen, mühendis olacağım vb.der. Her genç kızın hayalinde beyaz gelinlik giymek

vardır. Kölelik düzeni kalmamıştır. Müddetge ilerideki yeni kurbanlar yeni köleler şu andaki minik yavrucağlarımız içerisinden çıkacaktır. Başka hayatlar çıkmaması.

Türkiye'deki Geneler ve benzer yerlerdeki köle gibi yaşam süren, mal gibi satılan, el pazarlarında kurban edilen, GENEL KADIN HAYAT KADINI GİBİ İSİMLERLE ANILAN HAYATI

ÇALINMIŞ HAYATSIZ KADIN ARIKADAŞLARIMIZIN  
öğünleştirilmesi,kele gibi hayata zorlanan kadınlardan özür  
dilenmesi,insanlık ayıbına son verilmesi,vesikaların iptal

edilip, sicillerin tömizdenip, bu kölelere tazminatı ödenip, masrafları bağlanıp yeni hayat hakkı sunulması gibi sosyal haklar verilmesi mücadelemize destek olun diyoruz. **Eğilim milletvekili seğirlersek bu**

**İRTİBAT TELEFONLARI:** 0212 244 85 97 - 98 Cep: 0536 733 77 13 **Ayşe TÜKRÜKÇÜ** İstanbul 2. Bölge Bağımsız Aday **Saliha ERMEZ** İstanbul 1. Bölge Bağımsız Aday

### A.) The Election Handout



B.) The Election Time in Istiklal Street

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