

On the Problem of Prostitution

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Abstract

Prostitution is a female's using her body as a merchandise on rent. As such, it is essentially demeaning and immoral, on an individualistic scale. Moreover; this matter is indeed a social wound, which any realistic observer in any society whatsoever would recognize; without ever stooping to denial or ignoring. It is also a subject of the Vice Squad section of the police in many countries. Besides being a moral issue, the topic also involves health matters for the human societies.

Key words: Prostitution; fornication; brothel; vice squad.

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INTRODUCTION

A. A Generally Valid Definition

Strictly speaking, every woman who makes a living of her sex appeal; that is, who offers her body to the first comer for money; is considered a harlot. The poisonous flora of whoredom contains two branches: Public and clandestine. The former involves those admitting their professions. During long epochs they have been subjected to official care and control, whereby they were enrolled in a registry and confined to the custody of the vice squad of the police force (Kahn, 1937, p.234).

B. Some Shady Definitions

Oliven (1955, p.505) affirms that the label “may not be applicable to such upper economical phases as venal [corrupt] *concubinage* (“kept mistress” etc.), to numerous variants of the occasional exploit of opportunity, nor to the isolated grasping at a proffered [proposed] immoral deal in an acute hardship situation”.

In the Venice of the sixteenth century, there were two types of females. The good women living under the protection of men. Those were the privileged and noble ones. Then the bad¹ women, the even more privileged ones, who had preferred to become the sex objects of men. Courtesans,² also known as palace-women, were high-cultured prostitutes sleeping with noble men for money (Aktaş, 1999).

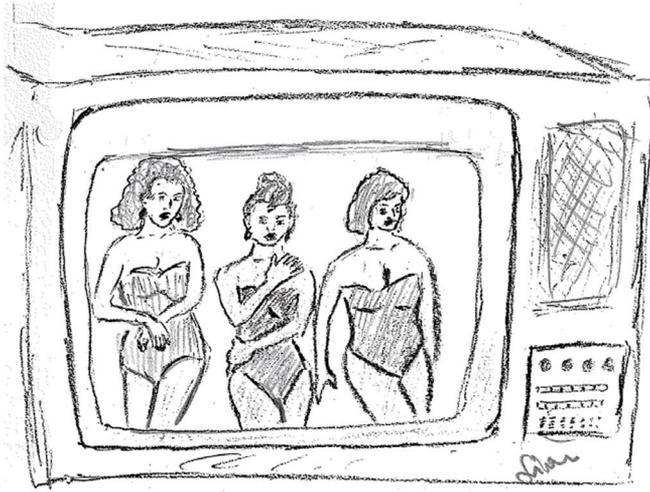


Figure 1
The Definition of Prostitution Is Indeed Shady. For Many Conservative Males, Even Female Models Are Nothing More Than “Luxurious” Prostitutes, in a Sense (Illustration by the Author—S.Ç.)

1. REGULATION VERSUS REPRESSION

The advocates of abolitionism had their say in England, followed by Norway and other developed countries. In France, Italy and some Balkan states regulation application is valid (Kahn, 1937, p.238).

Many authors argue that abolition and repression cause other problems to emerge

¹ A satiric popular song in Turkish was rather famous about a decade ago. The stanzas go as follows: The good girls go to heaven / The bad girls go everywhere / And what about the crispy girls? / Where do they go?

² One of the famous novels of Honoré de Balzac is *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* [The Splendors and Miseries of Courtesans or A Harlot High and Low], which was published in 1847. The work was translated into Turkish by Cemil Meriç in 1946 under the title “Kibar Fahişelerin İhtşam ve Sefâleti”.

(like diverting the male energy towards other targets like the neighbor's wife etc.), on the one hand. Moreover they assert that it is virtually impossible to achieve it in practice, in any case. Many supporting examples are cited:

Since the Shiite-Moslem revolution in Persia was more of religious type than of a bureaucratic type; they solved the sexual problems via a "religious" method: Namely that of temporary (mut'a) wedlock, where the time interval could even be a matter of hours. This abolishes the idea of harlotry completely, in theory. Erstwhile; the Cuban government waged war against fornication. The state claimed to incorporate the prostitutes into the mainstream society by education, training and gaining of crafts and workmanship. But they could not obtain concrete results and nowadays it can be inferred that the social evil is quite common on the island (Alkan, 1998).

Miser (July 30, 2000) writes that when the conservative mayor of Ankara seriously considered closing down the public houses, *the women working there announced their resistance³ decision in case the project gets realized. They said they would take all necessary action, including committing suicide. They explained that a total of five thousand people had their subsistence from those houses and the houses were present since sixty years.*

One interesting comment on the good of allowing brothel type establishments is given as follows, by medical doctor Oliven (1955, p.507): "This served to maintain a fair number of bisexual and latent homosexual men sufficiently attracted and potent with the prostitutes, to make them qualify narrowly for the label 'normal'".

2. SOME BRIEF HISTORY

Historically; there were many brothels (lupanars / whorehouse) in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. In the fifteenth century, Strasbourg had around sixty brothels. In the beginning of the twentieth century, London had one thousand and five hundred of them while Rome hosted twenty regulated and two hundred and fifty unrestricted (libre) ones. Tokyo is well-known for a district called Yoshiwara, where around five thousand geishas offer their services in about four hundred centers. In fact, in Japan almost every town has its own "yoshiwara" section. Just as it was the case in France in the Middle Ages; in today's Japan, no man is ashamed to visit a brothel (Kahn, 1937, p.238).

³ Another revolt in brothels which is at least equally rightful and meaningful, has to do with keeping pets and involves another big Turkish city, İzmir: *The women expect to be supported by animal-friendly societies. The effort to take the ban back actually contains a lesson of humanity. "The animals are the only beings in whom we can find some love and they are forbidding us to keep animals", the women explained (Hürriyet Newspaper-February 8, 2000).*

3. MORAL MEANINGS ASSOCIATED

Let alone this shame-feeling;⁴ in some eastern cultures, some prostitutes are even regarded as holy beings:

“Among the Naiks, an important but low-status community in Bombay, the woman wears the pants [is the master] in the house. She is the breadwinner and the men live off her earnings from temple prostitution” (Ross, 1969, pp.128-129).

There are many incidences where the concepts of sexuality and mysticism do go together (like the active sexual behavior patterns of some new cult leaders). Willner (1984, pp.130-135) specifies that *in Hinduist-Buddhist comprehension the sacred man is either a sexual “diet” holder (Gandhi) or else one who is extremely active (Sukarno); in accordance with pre-Islamic, 13th-century-tradition of Javanese kings, associated with temple nuns, holy virgins and goddesses to acquire the supernatural imperial cult.*

Historian-and-journalist Murat Bardakçı writes in an article that when Indonesian president Ahmad Sukarno visited Turkey in 1959; one of the girls of the well-known mama, Luxurious Nermin, was offered to this distinguished guest as a tactful arrangement. However; it turned out that upon his return a venereal disease (gonorrhoea) broke out in his body, which got associated with this event and caused a diplomatic scandal (Çaya, 2013).

4. THE PRECISE ROLE OF THE STATE

“The Japanese war effort in China intensified during the 1930s. In this context, the military, in conjunction with the colonial government in Korea, organized divisions of ‘comforters’ for the sexual gratification of military officers and soldiers within and outside of Japan. The “comfort divisions” followed Japanese soldiers deployed across much of Asia and the western Pacific” (Lie, 1997, p.253).

Indeed, historically, soldiers were always attracting the members of the “oldest profession”. In former times, camp followers (*Mitläufers*) consisted of peddlers, artisans and whores going after the armies at a certain distance. In Bertolt Brecht’s

⁴ A humorous columnist remembers his brothel-visits as a pleasant youth memory and relates it as follows: *First came one man with a wireless at hand, then a second. Then the place got filled with them. “Identification cards!” said one. My hand went to my hip pocket. In former days, that was the way to visit brothels: The money into the socks, and the ID card into the hip pocket. Keeping a wallet or a handbag was troublesome. The watchman at the main gate would search through it for a knife. The women would ask what it contained. What was I saying? My hand went to my hip pocket instinctively. But the very hand, who realized that it belongs to a prestigious columnist now; changed its direction on to the inside pocket of the jacket (Hakki, October 9, 1998).*

Author Nedim Gürsel in his autobiographic novel *La première femme* [The First Woman] relates a fairly romantic version of his first teenager experience in a brothel, also. Nobel Winner Orhan Pamuk is more realistic in the sense that in one of his works he says that those women would never kiss a customer.

unforgettable play, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (*Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*) those camp followers are depicted continuously. {The plot enrolls during the Thirty Year Wars (1618-1648). Mother Courage is a canteen-woman with the Swedish army}.

Erich Maria Remarque (1972, p.196) in the French version of the book) refers to the same issue through the mouth of the narrator-hero. It can be inferred that only officers had the prerogative then and there. (The novel is about the French frontier of the Germans during World War One. On a certain occasion a bombarded village is evacuated and the platoon has some good times there): *We are given the task of protecting a full warehouse. We have our feasts. We smoke cigars and cigarettes for officers. We drink the coffee again intended for the officers. Then brandy and rum! If you ask Tjaden, the only thing that we can miss at the moment, would be the women of the officer-brothels.*

Duman (with his humorous style) says that *during the Crimean War [1856, Ottomans and its allies against Tsarist Russia], the number of "frivolous" females tracking the allied British and French soldiers was far exceeding today's Natasha invasions; a fact which brought venereal diseases into the Ottoman lands for the first time thus urging the Sultan (Abdülhâmid the Second) to emulate the European states in regulating the vice through official control techniques.*

Ceylân (1998) records (with some reference to the unpublished thesis of Dr. Meltem Sevim) that long before that date, *in 1570 a decree was released forbidding the females to wash the laundry of bachelors, based on the grounds that the situation could be ripe to start fornication-favoring actions.*

5. THE VISCOUS CIRCLE OF BEING "FALLEN"

[In India] "Nambudri girls are shut up in strict purdah. If a man happens to see one of them, she automatically becomes 'polluted'; she is then thrown out of her house. Any man, then, is free to take her away and do what he wishes with her. When he is through with her, he usually sells her into prostitution" (Ross, 1969, p.128).

In Bangladesh the females of a family make a living by prostitution since three generations. Marzina, who works at a brothel in Daulatdia-district (95 kilometers away from the capitol-Dakka) is practicing the task of her mother and grandmother. The 35-year-old woman states that she was born in the brothels just like her own mother. She does not know who her father was (Milliyet Newspaper-Foreign News Section, 1999).

6. A RENEWED TURKISH COVENANT DEALING WITH THE ISSUE

Bilâ (2000) notifies the readers that *a new covenant (Satzung) regarding the control of fornication and diseases transmitted with coitus is to commence by altering the*

employed terms, above all. Instead of “public woman” the term “sex worker” will be adopted. This is a term reflecting more respect towards the labor in question. The mere terminology will facilitate the organization of labor and social security issues. The employees will have their insurance and the profession shall be converted into a profession in the literal sense of the world.

Let us point out that in 2007 and 2011 general elections in Turkey some ex-prostitutes were independent deputy-candidates, a fact which proves their emerging organization knowledge and their determination to work for a cause.

7. EXCEPTIONAL FINDINGS REGARDING THE LOCATION OF THE VICE

Even though classical understanding associates this vice / *Laster* with the so-called *deterioration zone* of a city, which is imprinted with characteristics of poverty; in the specific case of Zeytinburnu⁵ district of Istanbul it is just the opposite: Prostitution seems to flourish in the rich, new sections of the named district. The new constructions are meant to be well-protected against burglary; but they are also fairly impenetrable for the vice squad of the police.

The social setting with loss of neighbor relations and replacement of it full alienation; thick wallets of clients; the safety of seclusion against moral norms and advanced alarm possibilities like cameras all contribute in the same direction and make those places prosperous for prostitution (summarized from Kafaoglu et al., 2014).

8. IS SALVATION POSSIBLE?

Many authors in literature refer to the unfortunate difficulty of reformation of a prostitute.

In the South African novel, *Cried the Beloved Country*, written by Alan Paton; as a sub-theme; we encounter the reformation trial of Gertrude, the sister of a provincial black priest, who comes to Johannesburg for a short stay. Gertrude has taken up a life as a street-walker and became alcoholic. For a time she tries to pull herself together with the suggestion power of her big brother. But Gertrude disappears before the priest's departure back to town, leaving her child behind.

⁵ This district is one of the oldest slums (*bidonvilles / Elendsvierteln*) of the city. With time such old settlements obtain municipal services in more and more abundance and infra-structure is also improved; resulting in their eventual incorporation into the mainstream sections. Elsewhere new slums emerge instead. This at least used to be the cycle until recent times and improper constructions definitely can not be realized any more. Moreover; a prospective earthquake threat inspired re-constructions all over the city. Nowadays Zeytinburnu district is undergoing a re-building process, as well.

Heinz Günther Konsalik in his novel, *Mädchen im Moor*, describe young street-walker girls among other kinds of convicts like thieves and violent-actors of some sort; in a softened, avant-garde girls' prison in Germany in 1960s. The director is an idealistic man of jurisprudence who believes in the prospective success of his new establishment. But those young ex-whores are so cynical and so insistent in falling back to their old ways (like attempting to seduce the male officials).

For all the moral discipline, at a certain time it may be a physiological necessity at least for certain kinds of men, to go pay a visit to a brothel sometimes. While in the military service (as an Air Force sub-lieutenant) I was once strolling in Istanbul on a free day. At the Karaköy (literally "Black Village") underpass a troubled-looking middle aged man approached me and with a bitter voice and with a very polite manner addressed to me with a rhetorical formula convenient for a police officer or a municipal office-bearer. (Obviously he confused the blue uniform of mine with those other two services, as it occurred to me a few other times with other interlocutors).

The man was not an İstanbulite although he looked like city-dweller elsewhere. He said that he would like to go to the "Black Village". (The name of the district is commonly employed as a mere synonym for the brothels, there being many of them collectively located at a section of that *quartier*). It is definitely a clever thing on his part to ask the address from a government *fonctionnaire*, rather than an unknown civilian; who could be offended and retort back brutally or who could ask for a dramatically high tip or resort to a similar abuse of some kind.

Even though I instantly grasped the whole situation; with some mischievous hidden pleasure (*Shadenfreude*) I deliberately said to him with a straight face that this place is the "Black Village" and passed on without further lingering. Later I were to regret it many a times. After all, as a saying dictates; everybody should have the liberty to commit sins (if not crimes) and head for the blazes of the inferno, if he chooses to do so.

9. THE VICE SQUAD

It is the vice squad of the police force which is responsible for the fight with and the prevention of prostitution. The realistic ex-policeman Wambaugh gives a description of the Los Angeles vice squad in one of his unforgettable works. The most prominent feature of a member of the squad is to look like anything besides a policeman.

One of the characters of the novel is a delicate-looking cop, *Harold Bloomguard*, who had passed the physical tests for admission into the force only with difficulty. His looks eventually make him enter the squad as a tentative agent.

"The office was open but empty when Harold arrived. [on the map] certain streets were covered with green pins signifying prostitution activity. Then sergeant

Scuz, his new boss enters and the following dialogues take place:

Harold— “I ‘ve seen you around, but I always thought you were....”

Scuz— “A janitor? I don’t mind. You look good. Here. Scuz pulled open the drawer of his desk and said, “Try them on.”

Harold picked up the horned rimmed glasses, held them to his eyes and said, “They’re clear glass.”

Scuz— “Sure. Makes you look even less like a cop.”

Then two other transfers, patrol colleagues of Harold come in for the two-week-long assignment, also. The sergeant tells them that they will be working for the regular back up team. [After all, catching the bookmakers and gamblers is part of the vice squad’s affairs, too]. Those other two can not be employed as incognito men. They have cop written all over their appearance. (Paraphrased from Wambaugh, 1975, p.191, 223, 227-228).

CONCLUSION

Commercializing one’s flesh for sexual purposes of males is a horrible occupation for women. But some women unfortunately find themselves drifted into hard circumstances and accept that solution for survival; there being no other immediate remedy at sight. Ironically; the society is harsh and vindictive towards such females, who, nevertheless, render directly or indirectly a most difficult service for this very same society. Poor scapegoats they are of the hypocritical “good citizens”!

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APPENDIX: VISUAL SUPPLEMENT

The following pictures are chosen from among many others; which were re-drawn with some adaptations from French comic-strips; on the backs of scratch papers; by the author himself (S.Ç.); while intensively studying that language, in previous years.

