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***Marriage, Family and Gender in Karagöz and in Late Ottoman İstanbul***

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## Marriage, Family and Gender in *Karagöz* and in Late Ottoman İstanbul\*

D. Burcu Eğilmez\*

*In this paper I investigate whether a thematic analysis of twenty-seven classical Karagöz (Black Eye) texts—an important representative of traditional Ottoman-Turkish drama—can provide us with the clues toward a better understanding of marriage, family and gender relations in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Ottoman İstanbul. In this respect, I discuss the following ideas as the prevailing themes of the plays: woman being an “imperfect man,” the burden of morality falling particularly on the shoulders of married women, and the consensus regarding the traditional sexual division of labor within the family. I then trace the contours of everyday gender relations through an examination of those relations (between couples, married women, and parents and children) in terms of the categories of class, equality/inequality, morality and language. I claim that these plays display the variations of care (of the household, of its members and of the self), the emotional and the sexual dimensions of marriage, and reflections of the attempts at modernization in the Empire on the families and marriages of different classes. Finally, they enable us to understand better the tactics employed by married women to create spaces in which to negotiate the traditional norms of gender roles without transforming them.*

*Keywords:* Karagöz, marriage, family, gender, nineteenth century, twentieth century, Ottoman, İstanbul.

### **Karagöz ve Geç Osmanlı İstanbul’unda Evlilik, Aile ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet**

*Bu araştırma, Osmanlı-Türk geleneksel tiyatrosunun önemli bir örneği olan Karagöz oyunlarını evlilik, aile ve toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkileri çerçevesinde analiz etmektedir. Araştırmaya temel teşkil eden metinler, kâr-i kadîm olarak da adlandırılan yirmi yedi klasik metinden oluşmaktadır. Bu metinlerin on dokuzuncu yüzyıl ile yirminci yüzyılın ilk çeyreğine ışık tuttuğu ve çoklukla İstanbul’da geçtiği kabul görmektedir. Bu bilgiler ışığında, öncelikle, aile, evlilik ve toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri söz konusu olduğunda Karagöz’de öne çıkan temaların “eksik erkek olarak kadın” fikri, evli kadınların omuzlarına yüklenen ahlak sorumluluğu ve hane içinde geleneksel cinsiyetçi iş bölümünün sürdürülmesi olduğu tartışılmaktadır. İkinci olarak çiftler, evli kadınlar, ebeveynler ve çocukları arasındaki ilişkiler sınıf, eşitlik/eşitsizlik, ahlak ve dil kategorileri çerçevesinde analiz edilmektedir. Böylelikle hanenin, hane üyelerinin ve kişinin öz bakımının, evliliklerin duygusal ve cinsel boyutlarının ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun söz konusu dönemdeki modernleşme hamlelerinin farklı sınıflardaki aile ve evliliklerde ne şekilde değişim gösterdiği tartışılmaktadır. Son olarak, özellikle evli kadınların, geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini değiştirmeyi amaçlamayan ancak bunlarla pazarlık etmek için uyguladıkları taktikler ortaya konulmaktadır.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Karagöz, evlilik, aile, toplumsal cinsiyet, ondokuzuncu yüzyıl, yirminci yüzyıl, Osmanlı, İstanbul

### **Introduction**

In this article, I analyze the episode (*fasıl*) parts of 27 classical (*kâr-i kadîm*) Karagöz texts in terms of gender within the boundaries of family and marriage.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, firstly I question what Karagöz plays tell us about “family type, the process of family formation ... [and] fertility level” (Timur 1981, 59) particularly in the “nineteenth century Ottoman-İstanbul”.<sup>2</sup> Regarding this point, I argue that Karagöz plays, which may be subject to criticism of reliability as it is originally a product of oral tradition,<sup>3</sup> display considerable parallelisms with the

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Ottoman daily life studies that mostly benefit from “court records, diaries, chronicles, memoirs, images, petitions, census records, novels.”<sup>4</sup> In Karagöz plays, we most commonly encounter “nuclear families,” with an average number of one child or two children. Marriage processes that we witness are all “arranged”. Although we don’t have any evidence about the ages of men, we learn that women marry around the age of “twenty”. There is, moreover, no single sign of “polygamy” in the plays, despite references to extramarital relations frequently exercised by men. The traditional sexual division of labor, which inscribes care of the house, children and husband to woman and role of breadwinner to man, stands out in marriages of all classes in Karagöz plays, as it was the case in nineteenth century İstanbul despite attempts at modernization of the Empire.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, I investigate the details of relations (between couples, married women, parents and children) by taking into account the categories of equality/inequality, morality, class<sup>6</sup> equality/inequality, morality and language. In this respect, I focus on a prevailing idea, namely “woman as imperfect man,” as characterizing the physical, emotional and rational inferiority of woman. Moreover, I present the sexual division of labor, and thus the responsibility for the care of the household (and its members), as another sign of the hierarchy between men and women. I then attempt to display in what ways morality restricts and shapes the lives of married women.<sup>7</sup> Finally, I claim that these plays enable us to better understand the tactics married women employ, especially regarding sexuality and the sexual division of labor, not to challenge the hierarchical relations between men and women, but to provide women with more leverage to negotiate such relations.

### **Woman as Imperfect-Man**

The stereotypical “inadequacy/imperfectness” idea that is instrumentalized to characterize women since Aristotle is not unfamiliar to the Ottoman world. The origins of this discourse are best followed in the elite texts of the Ottoman Empire, in which medical texts hold an important place. According to Ze’evi (2006, 23):

Women...were seen as biologically inferior...in medical treatises women’s sexual organs were indeed to be understood to resemble to those of men, but they were also believed to be an inherently flawed version, manifesting, as it were, the women’s place in the chain of being...this set of ideas should be defined as the “woman as imperfect man” model, or, for short, “imperfect man” model.

While Ze’evi (2006, 22-23) points out the place of women as “imperfect man” in the medical discourse, the Muslim Hanafî tradition indicates a similar hierarchy by reducing the rights and worth of women to half of that of men in particular domains:

[...] a woman has half of the value of a man. Thus, in the laws of succession, for example, the value of a daughter’s share of the inheritance is half the value of a son’s; in compensation for injury, a woman receives half the sum of due to a man for the equivalent injury; in the laws of evidence, the testimony of two women is worth the testimony of a single man (Imber 1997, 82).<sup>8</sup>

The biological inferiority of women that we observe in the normative medical and legal texts is also evinced in empirical domains, to which the complaint letters of women sent to the journals of early twentieth century is just one example (Çakır 2013, 210, 217-218, 266).

Karagöz texts, as a microcosm of nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, are not exceptions to this old idea. In the play called *Bahçe*, when Karagöz criticizes the wife of Hacivat for some reason, Hacivat states that women are ignorant and dumb so he should not take their every word seriously.<sup>9</sup> In the same play, Karagöz also complains about the lack of understanding of his wife.<sup>10</sup> The character named Çelebi in the play entitled *Cazular* repeats the statement that women are fools.<sup>11</sup> The men who question the intelligence and comprehension of women in the plays, sometimes leave their questions unanswered, sometimes avoid giving them information, and at other times attempt to fool them.

The emphasis on women’s lack of reason is further enhanced by underlining their physical and emotional weakness. The play *Tahir and Zühre* is a good example in this sense. In the scene where Zühre’s father gives advice to his daughter and her potential groom makes the following statements. To his daughter he says “Zühre, my daughter, you are a woman, thus you are weak” (Kudret 2004, 1019) and to her prospective groom he says “you are a man, so you are from the great species...You should always try to please your mother, wife and the ones weak as they are. Because the hearts of women are weak...” (Ibid. 1020). Thus, women are

characterized as rationally, emotionally and physically weak. And yet, as we shall shortly see, they carry the burden of morality.

### **Morality for Women: Honor, Chastity and Virginity**

In Karagöz plays, the burden of morality is best observed in the case of married women and their daughters, although the married man who is involved in love affairs or flirts with other women is a frequent theme. As far as married women are concerned, L. Pierce notes that “the ideal quality... was honor...Honor for women was defined as chastity and modesty...” (1997, 184). It is not hard to find reflections of this understanding in Karagöz texts.

Married women’s primary moral obligation is loyalty to their husbands. Loyalty as the basic requirement of “chastity and modesty” is not simply demanded by man, but the idea is also shared by other women. For example in the play *Çeşme*, we hear that Hacivat’s wife forbids his husband to talk to Karagöz and his wife, as she thinks both have illicit relations with others (Kudret 2004, 327). Moreover we see the link between loyalty and honor when Hacivat’s wife argues that the relationship with Karagöz and his wife would harm the honor of their daughter who is at the age of marriage (Ibid.:328). However, a closer look at Karagöz texts makes us realize that the question of honor of unmarried daughters is more complicated, despite Hacivat’s wife’s emphasis on the honor of her bridal daughter and the labeling of the daughter as “the precious of the household” (Ibid.: 1019) and “virgin”(Ibid.: 1017).

The relationship between “honor, virginity, and pureness” and the emphasis on their protection, particularly regarding unmarried daughters, is obscured by the dialogues that imply the possibility of sexual relations before marriage. In the play *Tahir ve Zühre*, we learn that Tahir and Zühre had already fallen in love and we learn that their relationship may also include sex as her father asks whether her daughter is a virgin (Kudret 2004, 1017). Similarly in the play *Çeşme*, we learn that Hacivat’s daughter is mad at Çelebi as he stops seeing her after they have sexual intercourse (Ibid.: 346). How can we explain the existence of young women in the Karagöz plays who appear to be free in their sexual relationship, and how can we explain its possible toleration by their fathers, as we observe in the case of Zühre? Is it because of Karagöz’s obscenity or is it a common practice in the Ottoman context? The history of gender relations in the Ottoman Empire provides us with the answers.

Leslie Pierce (1997, 181, 183) notes that although there are different names used for married, unmarried and old women (such as *hatun/avrat*, *kız* and *yaşlı kadın/kocakarı*) which are based on life-cycles, it would be misleading to identify “virginity” with “unmarried woman” or “girl”. According to Pierce, although ideally virginity is expected to be an ingredient of non-married young women, there are court records in which we witness young unmarried women who have sexual relationship with their partners before marriage (Ibid.). Similarly Annelies Moors (1999, 146) draws our attention to fatwas which “[take] a highly flexible position in respect to illicit sexual intercourse” and she points out the validity of women’s testimony on their virginity in the constitution of marriage to argue toleration of illicit sex before marriage. Leslie Pierce (1997, 184) offers the following legal and cultural explanation for this ostensibly contradictory situation:

That chastity should be associated with married women rather than with virgins may at first glance seem surprising. The emphasis on married woman was linked to a concern for purity of the male lineage, in other words, for assuring that no child born to a marriage might have been fathered by someone other than the husband. An unmarried woman’s pregnancy, while undesirable, threatened no man’s lineage (the father whether married or not, had the option of acknowledging or denying paternity), and was therefore a lesser social disruption than a married woman’s adultery.

In addition to the emphasis placed on the morality of women, though complicated in the case of unmarried daughters, another nineteenth century Ottoman consensus concerned the necessary character of marriage, which is also visible in Karagöz texts (Duben&Behar 1996, 138; Faroqhi 1997, 116). Our evidence regarding the importance given to marriage in Karagöz plays are varied. Among them the following are worth noting: The main characters (Karagöz and Hacivat) of the plays are married; some plays basically revolve around the theme of marriage (*Tahir ile Zühre*, *Ferhad ile Şirin*); and finally, Karagöz’s words, after having been recently abandoned by his wife, offer us clues about the sex-neutral stance in considering the importance of marriage:

Karagöz: Hey man, the wife left, I am now single. What do I do now, alone, in the house? I got used to marriage.<sup>12</sup>

Marriage, in this respect, is an important part of the plays' universe independently of a character's gender. However, three points govern sexual morality: women are expected to be loyal, and chaste wives are honored; daughters' pre-marital relations are tolerated, with the expectation of marriage; in the case of men, morality and honor have nothing to do with loyalty.

### Continuity of Traditions and Negotiations in the Household

#### Division of Labor

The plays include many stereotypical traditional gender norms that stem from Islamic legal texts and/or the "press of the nineteenth century Ottoman world" such as inscribing care of the house, children and husband to woman and role of breadwinner to man (Duber and Behar, 1996; Çakır, 2013). To follow the similarities and discrepancies between them, the following quotation, in which Zühre's father gives important advice to her daughter, who is on the verge of marriage, is a good starting point:

Zühre my daughter!...Your husband should always find happiness in you. You should always comfort each other. You should be joyful as far as possible as joy may replace sorrow to a certain extent. As the nurturing of the child and the works of the house are your responsibility, you should exercise them without any delay. Obey your husband but don't get defeated by him.<sup>13</sup>

The advice of Zühre's father indicates the primary gender roles expected from women in their marriage such as care of the child, works of the house, and a balanced obedience; but it also draws attention to the importance of "happiness and joy" in a marriage. At this point, it is important to observe the similarities with the Islamic understanding of marriage, which sees it as the basic source of comfort and pleasure (Tucker 2008, 38), and with particular authors who emphasize the importance of affection in marriage in the nineteenth century press (Duber and Behar 1996, 119).

In a similar vein, Zühre's father primarily emphasizes "happiness and joy" for a successful marriage. However, we also learn that the key to success is woman's fulfillment of the requirement of sexual division of labor in the household. The evidence for the sexual division of labor is also visible in other plays. In *Sahte Esirci*, for example, Kasım Bey asks the following questions to Karagöz in order to understand if he is married or not: "Who opens the door to you?...Who makes the bed for you?...Who cooks for you? (Kudret 2004, 870). Thus we learn that domestic works such as cooking, making the bed or opening the door are duties expected from women. The declaration of man as "bread-winner" and woman as "obedient and dependent in the household" (Tucker 2008, 25); or man as the "buyer/provider" and woman as the "spender/consumer" (Tucker 1994, 288; Exertzoglu 2003, 86) give us the clues of parallelisms between secondary literature and Karagöz texts in terms of sustaining traditional gender norms. The assumption of obedience and dependency stems primarily from the "buyer/spender" dichotomy and displays itself in the identification of child-care, domestic work and consumption of needs of household with women.

The continuity of the traditional sexual division of labor has a critical importance as it displays the fact that modernization attempts (particularly regarding women) –mainly started with *Tanzimat* period (1839-1876) and accelerated between 1908-1914 in the Empire– seem to have no material reflection in the plays. In fact, not only is there no challenge to these traditional gender roles, there is also no presence of what Palmira Brummet (2007, 285) calls their "rearticulation" between 1876 and 1908: "new technologies, like the automobile, telephone, and airplane, which were associated with new types of gender entertainment and dress; a direct confrontation with the issue of mixed-sex social activities (like skating and going to the theatre)" are invisible in Karagöz plays. One explanation for the absence of reflections of reforms in the plays and in the daily lives of ordinary women could be the idea of "Ottoman exceptionalism" or the "morality of women", which basically refer to a desire to preserve the morality of women in the Empire despite the reforms (Brummet 2007, 284). Moreover, we can invoke the argument that the transformation of gender roles concerning women was a "class-based phenomenon," which did affect all classes but "did not affect them in the same way"(Ibid., 284). Both are explanatory as far as the content of Karagöz plays are concerned. The burden of the traditional sexual division of labor and morality crosscuts all the married women of different classes in Karagöz. What we observe as the

effects of reforms, however, are “civilized” manners and ostentatious consumption among upper class women – that I discuss in the next sections– which do not pose a challenge to the traditional gender roles.

### **Ideal Wife: Well-Cared!**

The woman, who is responsible for the care of the house and children, is also responsible for taking care of her husband and herself. In the play, *Ters Evlenme*, Karagöz, in order to deter a family, who is paying a visit to see a prospective bride named Kartopu, mentions that Kartopu is not an ideal candidate for marriage: “She is beautiful, yet Kartopu Hanım [*she*] is too lazy: she makes her bed once in six months, she hardly washes her face once a month, never washes her hands when she cooks, does not sweep the house, does not change her underwear, smells bad” (Kudret, 2004: 1081). The emphasis on the characteristics of the ideal woman by stating the opposite is also visible in the play *Bahçe*. Cross-dressed Karagöz is criticized by Oyuncubaşı as she “never cuts her nails, washes her face, sweeps a place, cares for her husband.”(Ibid.: 146). In other words, the ideal woman should wash her hands and face often, cut her nails, change her underwear, smell good and, moreover, take care of her husband.

Self-care of women in Karagöz plays is not limited to hygiene per se, and women should also take care of their clothing and adornment. It is in this respect that Zühre’s mother looks for her “blue bead, powder and blusher” before she meets her husband (Kudret, 2004: 1023). Moreover, her husband already asks her “to comb and cover her hair, to darken her eyelids with kohl, wear her ostentatious green dress, her earrings, gold bracelet, single stone ring and yellow belt” when they meet (Ibid.: 1021-22). Although Zühre’s mother and father belong to the upper class in the text, we see that self-care and adornment are also important in the lower classes. In *Tahmis*, while Karagöz’s wife asks Karagöz to go shopping for the household needs such as rice and bean, she also demands “cloth for dress, kohl and powder” (Ibid.: 1044-1046). At this point it is necessary to note that in Islam a marriage contract orders the payment of *nafaka* (support) by the man that covers not only subsistence, such as “food, clothing and lodging”, but also “cosmetics like kohl to line her eyes, and henna and creams for her skin and hair” (Tucker 2008, 50-51, 53). Karagöz is full of examples confirming this fact. Man as the breadwinner/buyer/provider should also be responsible for providing for the self-care of the woman regardless of her class position.

### **Clumsy and Decision-Maker Fathers**

After stressing the gender norms in marriage, particularly regarding the care of the house, self and husband, we can now focus on the relationship between the parents and the children. It is again women who are primarily responsible for the care of the children. In those texts in which we see interactions between the fathers and children, the father is involved either to make a decision for the future of the child (i.e. her marriage) (*Tahir ile Zühre*), or to go shopping for him/her (*Tahmis*), or entertaining him/her upon the demand of the wife (*Sünnet*). The relationship between the father and the child is mostly narrated in the framework of material support. In many scenes, instead of an emotion or care-based one, the father-child relationship is defined in terms of the former’s status as breadwinner. Yet, the scenes in which fathers appear as more active agents are the ones in which they make decisions regarding the marriage or circumcision of their children. It also confirms the continuity of the gendered nature of Islamic rights (of divorce, child custody, etc.) in favor of the male (Tucker 2008, 27). As the children belong to the paternal line of descent (Imber, 1997: 82) and as the father is recognized as the legal guardian of the child (Tucker 1997, 240), the mother is responsible for child-care yet she cannot “manage her child’s property, arrange his or her marriage, etc.” (Tucker 1997, 240). Thus, it is not surprising to see fathers as breadwinners or decision-makers regarding their children, rather than their representation as emotional caregivers.

Finally, those rare cases, where one sees fathers and children in other contexts, are mostly initiated or enforced by women. Typically, Karagöz is the one who takes care of the child due to his wife’s persistence. Yet it is made evident for the viewer how clumsy, apathetic and awkward Karagöz is. *Sünnet* is a good example that displays how women take responsibility over from their husbands because of their clumsiness:

Karagöz - Now, how will I stop him?  
 Karagöz’s wife - (From inside) Man, sing a lullaby!  
 Karagöz - I don’t know any.

.....

Baby - (Cries) Uve uve uve!

Karagöz- I take this home, he does not stop crying. (He goes.)<sup>14</sup>

### Unperformed Duties

The gendered division of labor regarding child-care is in fact unquestionably accepted by women in the plays and it does not lead to a major problem among couples. Yet, when the husband has difficulties in satisfying the material needs of the child or the role of breadwinner/*nafaka* provider/buyer, it becomes a problem. When Karagöz cannot afford for circumcision of his son and wants to join a charity event in which many boys will be circumcised along with the son of a wealthy man, Karagöz's wife becomes mad at him (Kudret 2004, 923). In other plays such as *Kanlı Nigar*, *Balık/Balıkçılar*, *Büyük Evlenme*, *Şairlik/Aşıklık* and *Meyhane*, we again see that Karagöz's wife criticizes her husband as he cannot bring bread and provide for the needs of the house. In this respect, "empty kitchen, hungry children, unemployment and laziness of Karagöz" are frequently emphasized as criticism of Karagöz.

Failure in the fulfillment of the sexual division of labor, particularly the role of bread-winner, helps us to observe the moments when women develop tactics to negotiate their status in the household. Housework is one of the domains that women negotiate their position when their husbands cannot fulfill their expected duties. Although domestic works such as cooking, making the bed or opening the door are duties expected of women and despite regulations in the Islamic law that prevent free men to take part in household work, as "it may harm the hierarchies between man and woman," we see Karagöz performing domestic work, for example in the play *Tahmis* (Tucker 2008, 55). As he is mostly unemployed and has problems with providing for the financial needs, he is forced by his wife.

Men who cannot satisfy their primary gender role of breadwinner/ spender/ provider and the attitude of women towards them thus provide us with more clues about the relationship between marriage, material support and sexuality. In addition to the definition of marriage as a "material-support relationship" in Islamic laws, its "sexual" characteristic should also be considered (Tucker 2008; 1997, 1994; Imber, 1997; Moore 1999). This relationship between sex and material support is aptly explained by C. Imber. He states that "by the payment of mahr the husband acquires ownership of his wife's sexual parts; by the payment of the nafaqa he acquires the right to keep her in confinement for the purpose, the jurist texts strongly imply, of sexual enjoyment" (Imber 1997, 88). In this respect, in exchange for mahr and nafaqa, the man earns the "right to wife's body" (Tucker 2008, 53). Thus, if the husband fails to provide maintenance, "he does not have the right to her sexual services, and some legal schools also allowed her to seek divorce" (Ibid.:55). The reflection of this normative dimension of marriage can also be conveyed in Karagöz texts. Sexuality is used as a means of blackmailing and as threat by the woman, if her husband fails to fulfill the role of breadwinner. Karagöz's wife frequently threatens her husband with refusal of sex and divorce, if he does not find a job. The following quotations from the play *Şairlik/Aşıklık* are good examples for both:

Karagöz's wife: Man, don't complain! I don't let you approach me anymore.<sup>15</sup>

...

Karagöz's wife: Man, I am saying it to you: If you won't be a proper man, divorce me.<sup>16</sup>

These acts of the women, however, are not in fact a criticism of sexual division of labor. On the contrary, these women do ask for the proper exercise of the expected duties. In this respect, neither temporary involvement of men in the housework nor negotiations of sexuality are deconstruction of settled gender norms.

### Domestic violence?

Lastly we can give an ear again to Zühre's father to summarize the aforementioned points and mark another interesting theme in the plays. It is the following quotation in which we hear his advice to his prospective groom: Tahir, my son! Be careful so that you do not lose your authority. ...Be cheerful when you enter your house...As women are weak they get sad when they realize even a small sign of grief in you. So the smallest consolation of their husband eliminates their largest sorrow. Rule your house. Order but don't persecute.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the ideas in this speech were observed in different texts of Karagöz previously. Yet we once again encounter the mentality that defines women as imperfect-man and therefore the stress on their emotional

weakness. Secondly, we again see that man is identified as the head of the house so he is endowed with authority and given the responsibility of breadwinning. Finally, joy and cheer as important ingredients of a good marriage are once again stressed. However, in this quotation we also observe that, although Zühre's father suggests to the groom to rule the house and give orders, he forbids him from persecution. Similarly in the play *Bahçe* when Hacivat beats cross-dressed Karagöz, Karagöz shouts as follows: "Oh dear, oh dear! Can men ever raise hand to women?"<sup>18</sup> Lack of physical or sexual violence by men, although fighting is an ordinary part of the plays as far as the relations between men are considered, and the advice of non-persecution are thus important themes to mention. Realistically, it can be interpreted as a message that is aimed at the audience as persecution and physical violence by men were a reality of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Ottoman world, as letters to women's journals affirm (Çakır 2013, 287-289).<sup>19</sup>

### **Class and Gender: New Hierarchies**

Traditional gender roles in marriage and family are considerably similar in both higher and lower classes in Karagöz plays. Men are buyers and women are consumers. Women are mainly responsible for the care of the house, husbands, children and themselves. However, the so-called class differences represented via the main characters of the plays, Karagöz and Hacivat, are fruitful to observe the gender and class relationship in further detail.

Although women are depicted as consumers, what they consume differs according to their class, which is not surprising. It is in this respect that Hacivat's wife does not hesitate to ask for conspicuous consumption such as expensive jewelries (diamonds) in addition to her demand for cosmetics.<sup>20</sup> We also observe that self-care – its existence in the form of make-up and adornment, as well as its shortage in the case of hygiene – becomes an item for demoralizing and disdaining lower-class women. Make-up and adornment are used to blame lower class women with immorality. In *Çeşme* for example Hacivat's wife mentions that Karagöz's wife puts on her make-up, goes out and engages in immoral acts (Kudret 2004, 328). Another play gives us sources of criticism that are not restricted to make-up and adornment. This time, lack of hygiene and improper clothing are added to the list of criticism. Hacivat's wife displays her contempt for Karagöz's wife because she wears "an old coat, a dirty headscarf and shabby shoes," "puts on no socks," "has dirty feet" and "as she did not cut her nails, they are filled with dirt" (Ibid.: 49,51). And finally lack of civilized manners of Karagöz's wife emerges as another domain, which enables Hacivat's wife to present her discontent. Hacivat's wife dislikes that Karagöz's wife visits her at unexpected, non-scheduled, random times (Ibid.: 49). She similarly treats Karagöz's wife eating pickles at the bath as a sign of lacking manners (Ibid: 50-51). In these respects, it is interesting to observe the identification of self-care of women from the lower classes with unchastity, although all women from different classes are eager about self-care, particularly about make-up and adornment. It seems that upper class women's desire for reservation of self-care for themselves (particularly make-up and adornment) is regarded as a serious marker of their class position. So, in order to differentiate their class they simply expect hygiene and plain clothing from the lower classes, whereas reserve make-up and adornment for themselves. The other marker of class based on the binary terms of civilized and uncivilized, is also easy to comprehend. As a member of elite upper-class, Hacivat's wife this time distinguishes herself and her class with manners and etiquette, such as "pre-arranged visiting times", which they have and the lower classes lack (Çakır 2013, 242). The desire of higher classes for marking their class position according to conspicuous consumption, self-care (including hygiene) and manners can be read as a reflection, and maybe a criticism, of Westernization attempts of the Ottoman Empire.

As a second point we can deal with child-care, house-care and their possible variations in different classes. Child-care is also on the shoulders of upper class women. We frequently see Hacivat's wife with her daughter both in and out of their house. Yet, additionally, we observe an emotional dimension in the relationship between fathers and particularly their daughters. Emotional dimension implying a closeness and warmth between fathers and their adult daughters is mostly perceived in the language used. Hacivat addresses her daughter as "my fair Lady", and Zühre's father addresses her as "my pure daughter" and "precious of the household" (Kudret 2004, 50, 1019). Although they are not strong statements to argue for a strong emotional bond or emotional-care of the children by the upper-class fathers, lack of even these small signs in dialogues and events that include Karagöz and his children is helpful for making such a conclusion. Moreover, in two different plays we encounter the hints that Hacivat's daughter and Zühre were involved in pre-marital sexual relations. Moreover we do not see any sign that these fathers were intolerant. Thus we can firstly assume the daughters of upper classes were freer to meet the man that they are likely to marry. Secondly, we can assume, with the



expectation of marriage, their parents could have been more tolerant for such relations. However, as we do not have enough evidence regarding the daughters of lower class families, it is unrealistic to confine freedom and free pre-marital sex to upper class daughters.

Finally, regarding the domestic works and their fulfillment by women, we can make a few statements. In contrast to dialogues which represent the complaints of Karagöz's wife regarding housework or the ones which include the expectations of lower class men characterizing ideal woman doing the housework, we do not see upper class women doing or mentioning any housework. This does not mean that they do not deal with them; but the existence of slaves in the plays, and in the play *Abdal Bekçi*, Karagöz's wife carrying their goods when Hacivat's wife and her daughter go to the market and the bath, may imply that they are helped by other women as there is also evidence in Ottoman social life studies confirming such situations (Faroqhi 1995, 121).

Finally, I would like to focus on the relationship between husbands and wives in different classes. The language employed gives us important insights concerning the differences. The main characteristic of the language between Karagöz and his wife is vulgarity which does not include any sign of respect or affection. Karagöz frequently addresses her wife as "bitch, monkey, ingrate and son of a dog",<sup>21</sup> whereas his wife usually calls him as "bastard, scabby, mad, dick, squat"<sup>22</sup> or as "goosey, fool, savage, thickheaded".<sup>23</sup> Although Karagöz's vulgarity appears to be a response to that of his wife, hers is more grounded. In addition to Karagöz's wife's accusation of his husband of being "ignorant," his failure as a bread-winner is another reason for her vulgar language (Kudret 2004, 246). Whenever Karagöz finds a job and brings bread to his house, his wife's language completely changes. She says: "My dear husband! My top bearded husband!.. My Sir, give me your orders my dear husband! What would you like? ...Aye Sir!..Ready Sir!"<sup>24</sup> Thus, it seems that education and job are keys to respect and maybe to love in lower class marriages. The language between upper class couples is neither degrading nor sarcastic or vulgar. While Hacivat's wife usually calls her husband "Sir", Hacivat appeals to his wife as "my coquette, my coy."<sup>25</sup> Although the adjectives of "coquet and coy" imply a certain degree of affection, love and flirtation, we do not observe any further references to sexuality between Hacivat and his wife (in contrast to Karagöz's marriage, where sexuality is openly referred to). The silencing of sexuality as an outcome of civilization can be one possible explanation for lack of references to sexuality in upper class marriages (Ze'evi 2006).

## Conclusion

In the Karagöz plays what we firstly find is a parallelism between empirical knowledge (collected, for example, from court records, census records, novels and press) and normative knowledge (gathered from elite texts such as medical treatises and Islamic laws) regarding marriage, family and gender roles:

1. Marriage, which was almost an imperative of the Ottoman world, was materialized as arranged and it was typically monogamous. Moreover, families were mostly nuclear with few children. The marriage patterns in Karagöz texts do not display a considerable break from this well-discussed framework.
2. Hierarchies established between man and woman in elite texts, ranging from the idea of "woman as imperfect man" to "sexual division of labor" and to "morality", also have a considerable place in the Karagöz texts.

These parallelisms, I think, first and foremost, help us to argue that although Karagöz is originally an oral text, what we find in terms of marriage, family and gender displays an overlap between empirical and normative knowledge, and thus makes these plays a reliable source for studying the nineteenth and early twentieth century Ottoman daily life.

Secondly, the above-mentioned parallelisms, especially the reflection of preservation of hierarchies between man and woman in Karagöz texts, necessitate a questioning of the satirical/critical character of Karagöz, if not its obscenity. I argue that, when it comes to family and marriage, Karagöz is not critical at all:

1. I do not take women's negotiations of sexuality, the rare involvement of Karagöz in housework and men's exceptional relationships with their children as attempts for deconstruction of traditional gender roles. On the contrary, I think that they are signs of power struggles that give women temporary privileges when the traditional role of bread winning is not fulfilled by men.

2. The opposite, the nonfulfillment of expected gender roles by women, such as avoiding the care of the house and the self, similarly does not liberate women or give Karagöz plays a critical identity. We observe that these acts are used to degrade women further. When all women are imperfect men, those women who resist their traditional role of “care-giver” are additionally labeled as imperfect woman.

Thus, neither the tactics of women regarding sexuality or the sexual division of labor, nor the women who do not conform to their expected gender roles, are in fact critical and transformative. The logic governing them is a strict call for the proper exercise of expected gender roles. In this sense, I argue that, as far as marriage, family and gender roles are concerned; Karagöz plays function like a microcosm of the Empire and therefore conform to Ottoman “exceptionalism” and the moral world that surrounds it.

Finally, the overlapping worlds of Ottoman society and Karagöz plays provide us with the details of daily gender relations within family and marriage:

1. Through texts of Karagöz, we firstly seize a chance to observe the crucial importance of care (of the household, of its members and of the self), its variations in different classes and its perception by men and women of different classes to mark femininity and class position.
2. We trace the reflections of emotional and sexual dimension of marriage in different classes. Accordingly, we observe how different class positions contribute to proper/improper exercise of expected gender norms and how that leads to differences in levels and talks regarding affection, love and sexuality between couples.
3. Class differences in Karagöz plays also help us to observe how the process of modernization of the Empire finds itself a place in upper class married women’s life (conspicuous consumption and manners) and how it becomes a marker of class hierarchy among women.
4. Finally, we witness the tactics adopted by married women to create spaces in which to negotiate but not to change the traditional norms of gender roles.

In short, I think, Karagöz texts do more than simply enhance our understanding of late Ottoman İstanbul; they carry a strong political potential. However, this link with the political is ambivalent: on the one hand, the general plot lines of the stories preserve, and thereby justify, the traditional world of marriage, family and gender; on the other hand, the content of the plays enables contemporary readers to see the values, knowledge and mechanisms that led to those traditional gender roles and morality and, thereby, to recognize the ways in which the latter continue to hold sway.

<sup>1</sup> Cevdet Kudret categorizes Karagöz texts as classical (kâr-i kadîm) and modern (nev-icâd). Classical are the ones that we encounter in different historical texts recorded before the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “Abdal Bekçi, Ağalık, Bahçe, Balık, Büyük Evlenme, Canbazlar, Câzûlar, Çeşme, Ferhad ile Şirin, Hamam, Kanlı Kavak, Kanlı Nigâr, Kayık, Kırgınlar, Mandıra, Meyhâne, Orman, Ödüllü (Pehlivanlar), Salıncak, Sünnet, Şairlik, Tahir ile Zühre, Tahmis, Ters Evlenme, Timarhâne, Yalova Safâsı, Yazıcı”, Kudret (2004). *Karagöz*, I. Cilt: 18-19. Moreover, Karagöz plays are composed of four sections named as Prologue (*Giriş*), Dialogue (*Muhâver*), Episode (*Fasıl*) and Epilog (*Bitiş*). It is the Episode (*Fasıl*) part where the event takes place. Ibid.: 15-18.

<sup>2</sup>For the transcription process of Karagöz and the historical time and space that Karagöz plays may shed a light to please see D. Ze’evi (2006), *Producing Desire*: 131, 133-134. For space, also see: S.E.Siyavuşgil (2005/1938). İstanbul’da Karagöz, Karagöz’de İstanbul. Sevgül Sönmez (Haz.). *Karagöz Kitabı*: 104-118. I am also grateful to Petra de Bruijn and Eric Jan Zürcher for sharing their knowledge about the subject.

<sup>3</sup> Karagöz plays were subject to change during performances as they were sensitive to the expectations of the audience. Moreover, as Karagöz plays were famous for their “satiric” and “grotesque” character, they faced political censorship. [M. And (2005/1963), Karagöz Siyasal Bir Taşlamaydı da. Sevgül Sönmez (eds.). *Karagöz Kitabı* : 55-59; N. Erdoğan (1998), Popüler Anlatılar ve Kemalist Pedagoji, *Birikim* 105-106: 117-125.] Finally, the oral texts probably changed also in the process of transcription not only due to external factors but also due to “self-censorship” of the authors. L. Cantek (1998), Alt-Kültür Popüler Direniş Yöntemleri, *Birikim* 105-106: 126-133. As it is impossible to track these changes, I follow C. Kudret’s (2004) edition of the plays.

<sup>4</sup> For an article that discusses the approaches to the study of daily life in the Ottoman Empire see: Freitag, U. and Nora Lafi (2011). Daily life and family in an Ottoman urban context. *The History of Family*, 16 (2): 80-87.

<sup>5</sup> This general empirical knowledge on marriage, family, women and gender are discussed in a considerable number of studies. Yet, A. Duben and C.Behar (2004). *İstanbul Haneleri*; S. Çakır (2013). *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* and S.Faroqi (1997). *Osmanlı Kültürü ve Gündelik Yaşam* should be privileged regarding their holistic approaches. For the general consensus upon acceptance of traditional sexual division of labor, see also: Besim Yıldırım and Salih Seyhan (2015), “1914 Yılında Yayınlanan Kadın Gazetlerinden Kadınlık’a Göre Kadın,” *İleti-ş-im* 3: 39-65; Pelin Başçı (2003), “Love, Marriage, and Motherhood: Changing Expectations of Women in Late Ottoman İstanbul,” *Turkish Studies* 4 (3): 145-177.

<sup>6</sup> It is commonly accepted that two main characters of Karagöz plays, Karagöz and Hacivat, represent different classes of the Empire. While the former is a representative of the lower class, the latter is representing the upper class. Thus, their families and marriages enable us to observe class differences in gender relations.

<sup>7</sup> The observation of traditional gender roles and burden of morality in the Karagöz texts, deem necessary to question the impact of Islamic law in lives of woman. Although patriarchy, thus concomitant traditional gender roles, does not necessarily stem from Islam [Kandiyoti (1991), *Women, Islam and the State*: 72, 144-45], the Islamic law (as a reflection of the consensus of religion and politics), that has been influential in the Ottoman lands until late nineteenth century, should be regarded as an influential mechanism on the legal and social life of the Ottoman woman [B. S.Toprak (1981), Religion and Turkish Women, *Women in Turkish Society*: 286]. In this respect, within the text, the secondary literature relating to Islamic laws and court records will also be incorporated into the analysis for a better comprehension of the content analysis of Karagöz texts. At this point it is necessary to note that, although I take Karagöz texts as shedding a light to late nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century, regarding Islamic laws and court records I extend my time interval to seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, in order to present the normative inspirations of particular ideas that we observe in Karagöz texts, I recourse to secondary literature on the elite texts of the Empire (such as medical texts) without a time limitation.

<sup>8</sup> There are varying court records on the different parts of the Empire which display the active and publicly visible women who own property, sue man on the court, take place in property transactions. Göcek and Baer, (1997). “Social Boundaries of Ottoman Women’s Experience in the Eighteenth-Century Galata Court Records,” in *Women in the Ottoman Empire*. M. C. Zilfi (eds.). Moreover the rights of women particularly in the marital arrangements are also emphasized. For example: C. Imber (1997). “Women, Marriage and Property,” in *Women in the Ottoman Empire*. M. C. Zilfi (eds.). These points are brought forward by the literature which opposes the arguments such as “weakness of women, their lack of economic autonomy and confinement to house” and argues for the opposite. M.L. Meriwether (1997). “Women and Waqf Revisited,” in *Women in the Ottoman Empire*. M. C. Zilfi (ed.), pp. 129-130. Yet “laws of succession, compensation for injury and laws of evidence” that Imber mentions are important in terms of displaying gendered nature of laws on behalf of men in addition to “gendered language” used by the courts. Göcek and Baer (1997). “Social Boundaries of Ottoman Women’s Experience in the Eighteenth-Century Galata Court Records,” in *Women in the Ottoman Empire*. M. C. Zilfi (ed.).

<sup>9</sup> As many statements in Karagöz texts are highly idiomatic and it is hard to find their cultural references in English, I choose to explain their literal meanings. Yet I will mention the Turkish originals in such cases. (I am grateful to Dr. Nihal Taner and Dr. Özgür Gürsoy for this important suggestion after we worked for a while on the translation of those idiomatic expressions which did not cover the cultural and linguistic context of Turkish.) “Hacivat: Aman bilâder, hiddet etme, onlar saçı uzun, aklı kısa cahildirler, her söyledikleri söze ehemmiyet verilmez.” C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz*, Cilt I, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> “Karagöz: ...Bizim karı da hiç lakırdı anlamaz.” C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz*, Cilt I, p. 140.

<sup>11</sup> “Çelebi: O “tâife-i nisâ nâkısât-ül-akıl/kadın kısmının aklı eksiktir.” C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz*, Cilt I, p. 297.

<sup>12</sup> “Karagöz: Ulan, karı gitti, biz kaldık bekâr! Ben şimdi evde yalnız ne yapabilirim. Evliliğe alışmışım.” C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz*, Cilt I, p. 247.

<sup>13</sup> “Zühre’nin babası-Zühre, kızım! ... Zevcin dâimâ sende letâfet bulmalıdır. Birbirinizi teselli etmelisiniz. Elden geldiğince mesrûr olmağa gayret etmeli, çünkü sürûr bir dereceye kadar kederi izâle edebilir. Evlâdın terbiyesi, hâne işi senden suâl olduğundan, bu vazâifî hüsn-i ifâda kusur etmemelisin. Zevcine itâat et, elinde mağlûb olma! Hadi bakayım, her zaman için birbirinizin olunuz.” C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz*, Cilt III, p. 1019.

<sup>14</sup> “Karagöz-Şimdi bunu nasıl susturmalı Karagöz’ün Karısı- (İçeriden.) Herif, ninni söyle! Karagöz-Ben ninni bilmem. ....Kundaklı Çocuk-(Ağlar.) Uve uve uve! Karagöz- Ben bunu eve götürüyorum, bu durmuyor. (Gider.)” C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz*, Cilt III, p. 923.

<sup>15</sup> “Karagöz’ün karısı: “Herif, çok dırlanma! Bir daha seni yanıma yanaştırma.” C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz*, Cilt III, p.958.

<sup>16</sup> “Karagöz’ün Karısı-(İçeriden.) Herif, buraya bak! Yine ellerini sallaya sallaya mı geldin? Karagöz-Hayır! Ellerimi cebime soktum da geldim. Karagöz’ün Karısı-Herif ne olacaksa olsun, artık senin kahrımı çekmeğe tâb ü tüvân kalmadı bıktım usandım. Karagöz-Ne oldu sanki? Ne istiyorsun? Karagöz’ün Karısı-Ne isteyeceğim, herif! Bir kere şu çocukların haline bak. Ne üstlerinde var, ne başlarında var” and in the same play: “Karagöz’ün Karısı: Herif, sana söylüyorum: Adam olmayacaksan benim ayağımın bağı çöz!”

C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz, Cilt III*, p. 957, 959.

<sup>17</sup> Tahir, oğlum! ... İyice dikkat et ki hâiz olduğun iktidar senden zâil olmasın... Hânenize girerken yine gülerek şen girmeli... kadınların kalpleri zayıf olduğu için erkeklerde cüz'-î bir alâmet-i hüznün görseler kanlı yaş dökmekten kendilerini alamazlar. Erkeğin en ufak bir tesellisi kadınların en büyük hüznlerini izâleye kâfidir. Sen evinin sahibi ol. Emr et, fakat zulm etme. C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz, Cilt III*, p.1020.

<sup>18</sup> "Karagöz: Abû, canım, abû! Hiç erkek kadına el kaldırır mı?" C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz, Cilt I*, p. 148.

<sup>19</sup> J. Tucker's (1994) statement should be noted about persecution of men. In her analysis of gender and Islamic laws in the Ottoman Syria and Palestine, she mentions that "the muftis were mostly silent...on the question of the rules governing a husband's physical abuse of his wife" with few exceptions. "Muftis and Matrimony: Islamic law and Gender in Ottoman Syria and Palestine", p. 290.

<sup>20</sup> S.Faroqhi (1997) argues that they are mostly gold bracelets, silver and pearl earrings that are popular jewelries used by the Ottoman woman. *Osmanlı Kültürü ve Gündelik Yaşam*, p.123. In this respect, we can regard the demand for diamond as an exaggeration to emphasize luxury consumption or we can speculate about the rare consumption of diamond.

<sup>21</sup> "Düzgün kuklası kaltak, maymun karı, nankör karı, köpoğlu." C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz, Cilt I*, p. 245.

<sup>22</sup> "Mendebur, uyuz, kuduz herif, bastıbacak."C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz, Cilt II*, p. 630.

<sup>23</sup> "Kaz kafalı, budala, yabani, kalın kafalı herif." C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz, Cilt II*, pp. 637-38.

<sup>24</sup> Karagöz'ün Karısı: "Ah kocacığım da kocacığım! Benim top sakallı kocacığım!(...)Efendim, emret kocacığım! Ne istersin?(...) Bâşüstüne kocacığım!(...)Bâşüstüne efendim!(...)Hazır Efendim." C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz, Cilt I*, p.84.

<sup>25</sup> "İşvebazım, nazeninim" C.Kudret (2004), *Karagöz, Cilt I*, p.50.

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