

**CHALLENGING THE IMAGE OF TURKISH WOMEN:  
TRAVEL ACCOUNTS OF FEMALE AUTHORS 1762-1935**

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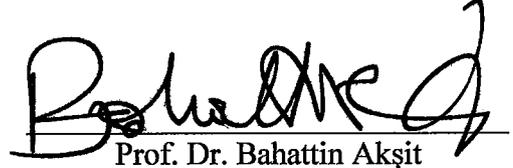
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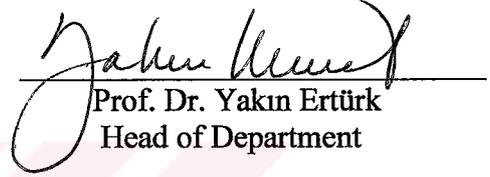
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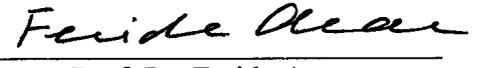
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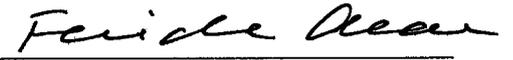
  
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**ABSTRACT**

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This thesis brings to light the image of Turkish women over time as it is depicted mostly in the travel accounts and the memoirs of Western and Turkish women. As such, it attempts to contribute to women's history and to analyse travel writing from a gender-sensitive perspective. The works covered here were written between 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Included are the works of Western female writers (Lady Montagu, Grace Ellison and Marc Hélys) who traveled to Turkey as well as Turkish women who wrote their impressions of the West (Zeyneb Hanoum, Selma Ekrem, and Halide Edib). The contributions to reconstruct the stereotypical image of Turkish women are illustrated in these memoirs and the existence of a distinctive western female voice to the formation of a different Turkish woman image is underlined as well. The work of Pierre Loti is also analysed with the aim of contrasting male and female writers perspectives. To achieve this, the discourses of nationalism and gender are placed in the foreground, while the intricate bonds between cultural differences, language (the expression of exile) and images are interwoven within this analysis where appropriate.

Keywords: Turkish woman, women travelers, image/imagology.

## ÖZ

### KADIN YAZARLARIN GEZİ NOTLARINDAN (1762-1935): TÜRK KADIN İMAJINA KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR KARŞI ÇIKIŞ

Ezer, Özlem

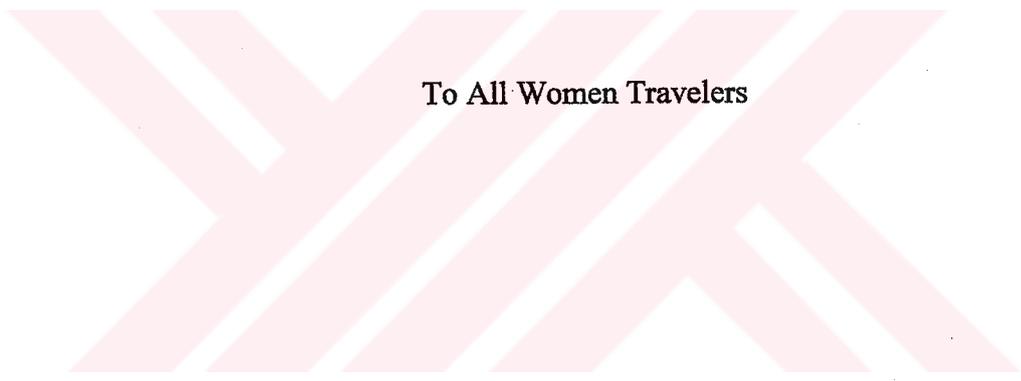
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Bu çalışma tarih boyunca çeşitlilik gösteren ve değişen Türk kadın imajına, batılı ve Türk kadınların gezi notları ve anıları ışığında bakmaktadır. Temelinde Türkiyeli Kadın Tarihine ve olumlu bir imaja katkı amaçlı yazılmış bu tezi ayrıcalıklı kılan, ele alınan eserlerin toplumsal cinsiyete duyarlı bir kadın bakış açısıyla yazılmış olmasıdır. Lady Montagu'den başlayıp Halide Edib'e kadar uzanan eserler onsekizle yirminci yüzyıllar arasında yazılmıştır. Türkiye'ye yolculuk yapmış batılı kadın yazarlar (Grace Ellison, Marc Hélys ve Lady Montagu) ile batı izlenimlerine dair gezi notlarını kaleme almış Zeynep Hanım, Selma Ekrem ve Halide Edib'in eserleri de tezin ana konularındandır. Batılı kadının farklı bir Türk kadını imajının şekillendirilmesine olan olumlu katkısının varlığı kadar Batılı bir erkek gezgin olan Pierre Loti'nin romanı da karşılaştırmalı bir bakış açısı sunması açısından ele alınmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, kültürel farklılıklar, dil, sürgündeki ifade şekli ve imajlar arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiler yeri geldikçe analiz edilmekle beraber özellikle toplumsal cinsiyet ve milliyetçilik söylemleri teorik anlamda ön plana çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk kadını, kadın seyyahlar, imaj çalışmaları.



To All Women Travelers

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ÖZ .....	iv
DEDICATION .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER	
1.THE IMAGE OF TURKISH WOMAN BY TWO ENGLISH WOMEN TRAVELERS .....	7
1.1 Lady Montagu's Contribution to the Image of Turkish Women in the Early 18th Century .....	7
1.2 <i>An English Woman in Ankara</i> and Grace Ellison's Contribution to the Image of Turkish Women .....	15
1.2.1 Grace Ellison's Gender Sensitivity .....	19
2.WESTERN MALE TRAVEL WRITERS' ACCOUNTS OF TURKISH WOMEN .....	30
2.1 Introduction .....	30
2.2 Pierre Loti and the Turkish Woman Image in His Novel <i>Les Désenchantées</i> .....	31
3.A CHALLENGE TO TRAVEL LITERATURE BY TWO TURKISH WOMEN: ZEYNEB HANOUM AND SELMA EKREM .....	47
4.HALIDE EDIB: CONFLICT OF THE EAST AND THE WEST (1884-1964) .....	61

5.A COMPARATIVE APPROACH: HALIDE EDIB, ZEYNEB HANOUM AND SELMA EKREM .....	75
5.1 National Identity, Images and Gender .....	77
5.2 Expression of Exile .....	82
5.3 English: A Form of Liberation? .....	83
5.4 Narrations of Cultural Encounters .....	85
CONCLUSION .....	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	94



## INTRODUCTION

In her analysis of *Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* Sara Mills poses several questions of significant importance which are relevant to the main issues of this study.<sup>1</sup> Dominant among these is Mills' concern about how feminists read women's travel writing, since having a feminist perspective directly influences the decisions a writer makes while writing a thesis. My purpose in writing this thesis is to contribute to a larger project concerned with alternative women's history reading. For purposes of this work, I had to decide if the texts written by women share more features with the works of other female writers than they do with those of men. As I have tried to demonstrate with examples, in several parts of this thesis, texts written by women do share more features with works of other women writers. Although I am aware of Mills' arguments on women's travel writing and analysis of memoirs, and of the claim that women's writing is not single, cohesive object<sup>2</sup>, the similarities found in the texts written by Turkish and European women studied in this thesis are much bigger than their similarities with the works of male writers. What is more, through the inclusion of the analysis of the works of foreign women, which Ayşe Durakbaşı calls as "cultural encounters", such similarities become even more obvious.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Mills, *An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (New York:Routledge, 1991), 36-39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Halide Edib-Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 191.

In the same book, Sara Mills draws attention to an easy trap that feminist scholars seem to be falling into: the tendency to read the texts of the women travel accounts as proto-feminist.<sup>4</sup> She argues that some scholars present the writers of these texts as simple presentations of positive role models. As can be concluded from the women chosen for this thesis, I paid special attention not to present them as exemplary female role models by making use of the criticisms of Yuval-Davis who draws attention to the intricate bonds between the construction of nationalism and the role/integration of women into this construction. Similarly, I stress in my thesis the importance of avoiding the placement of women in an overarching category of “woman”, a practice which tends to overlook the significant differences among them. However, it is my conviction that a common feminist political strategy and effective dialogue among women of different nations and cultures are possible and usable experiences of womanhood. From my reading of the memoirs, travel seems to be the best way to learn about and empower women and it leads to international and intercultural coalitions and even political alliances among women.

In this study, the changing images of Turkish women are analyzed through the memoirs, travel accounts and literary works written by three Turkish women themselves, as well as some male and female western writers who actually visited Turkey and had correspondence with Turkish women. The literary works covered here were written between 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries starting from probably the most well known female writer of the genre, Lady Montagu, and come to as late as the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to Halide Edib, who is also a well know woman writer in the West and in Turkey. Admittedly, one of the purposes of the study is to expose the works of two

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<sup>4</sup> Mills, 38.

writers over time. The seeds of a mutual solidarity between these intellectual women of the West and the East, their use of language as well as their confusions or inconsistencies (at least when interpreted from today's point of view) were discussed in these chapters.

Throughout the thesis, I tried to compare the travel accounts of the western and Turkish women writers (Lady Montagu, Grace Ellison, Halide Edib, Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem) with a special focus on their description of Turkish women. As ironically stated by Fatima Mernissi in her book *Scheherazade Goes West*, to erase the oriental images that the Western mind has had for centuries is not an easy task.<sup>6</sup> Thus, to reconstruct a new Turkish woman image is far beyond the purpose of this thesis. However, a comparative/parallel reading method of these memoirs, travel accounts and literary works is made in order to show the difference between the western male perspective and the women's perspective whether western or Turkish (as well as the differences among women themselves). After underlining this gender-based difference in the works studied with specific examples from the original texts, some critical differences between the Western and oriental women are also problematised in order to avoid some generalizations and present this different language of women as a universal one.

I believe that my thesis, with the examples and evidence derived from the original works mentioned as well as other sources, represents just the beginnings of a comparative analysis of the images drawn in the travel accounts of women. I believe

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<sup>5</sup> Irene L. Szyliowicz, *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Women* (Hong Kong: The Macmillian Press, 1988), 107.

<sup>6</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 31.

the originality of this work, to the extent it exists, is that it brings to light works of the Turkish women who traveled to the West and wrote about their impressions.

Quite a number of reverse studies have already been done especially in relation to the Victorian period, about Western women who traveled to the East and wrote their impressions. The risk of being studied or categorized under the orientalist literature for these Western female writers cannot be denied, but I think that they also deserve a special place in women's history and imagology studies.<sup>7</sup>

Although the attempt at parallel readings and comparisons of the memoirs are spread throughout the thesis, the most intensive focus is in the fifth chapter entitled "Narrations of Cultural Encounters". This chapter is intended to be an overall comparative chapter on the issues of nationalism, images, gender and cultural encounters of women but was limited mostly to the Turkish women writers studied in this thesis.

The texts studied are not different just because they are female-authored, but also differ in their production and reception. For example, the ones written by the Turkish women, Selma Ekrem, Halide Edib and Zeyneb Hanoum are written and published in English. This interesting fact is discussed in the last chapter and significantly enough, it made this study easier for me since the original texts would be in Ottoman script if written in the women's mother tongues which I am not capable of reading.

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<sup>7</sup> The specialization in Comparative Literature which studies intercultural relations in terms of mutual perceptions, images and self-images, was developed in France, where its methodology crystallized in the 1950s under the name *imagology*. While it was rejected by more aesthetically-oriented literary critics, mainly in the US, it maintained a certain following in Europe, leading role was played here by the Belgian comparatist Hugo Dyerinck, working at the university of Aachen.

For a final point, I would like to reiterate my initial fascination with the travel accounts of Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem, the two works that started me on this course of study. The idea is intricately interwoven with the images presented not only in these two women's texts but also in the travel accounts of other women such as Grace Ellison and Halide Edib. The study of the original texts is enriched by the research findings of some contemporary scholars who contributed to the issues of identity formation, orientalism, nationalism and gender.



## CHAPTER I

### THE IMAGE OF TURKISH WOMAN BY TWO ENGLISH WOMEN TRAVELERS

#### 1.1 Lady Montagu's Contribution to the Image of the Turkish Women in the Early 18<sup>th</sup> Century

When one conducts research on the image of Turkish women in the West, one cannot skip the magical key words like “harem” or “The Turkish Bath” and their connotations to a Western mind. As a forerunner, who seemed genuinely concerned to correct the falsehoods spread by previous male travel writers about Turkish women, Lady Montagu should be mentioned first in this thesis although she was writing her accounts in the early eighteenth century. Elizabeth Bohls scrutinizes Lady Montagu's attempts to de-eroticize and de-exoticize the Orientalist stereotypes in her book called *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics* and dwells on Montagu's ingenious strategy while she was comparing Turkish women with some prestigious European works of art in her writings. But before developing Montagu's contribution to the formation of a different Turkish woman image in history any further, a presentation of her unusual life story is necessary in order to obtain a deeper insight into her.

She was born in 1689 in London from a noble family. She was the eldest child. As a young girl she was fascinated by literature. She took Latin grammar books and dictionary from the family library and became competent in Latin. Then she learned Italian, French and later Turkish. She and Wortley Montagu decided to marry in 1712 after seven years of correspondence. Mr. Montagu admired his wife's intellect. In 1714, she wrote a powerful feminist satire. In that year, Queen Anne died and Wortley Montagu's fortunes improved. They moved to London. In 1716, Wortley Montagu was appointed ambassador to Turkey. Lady Montagu enjoyed the experience and kept up a regular correspondence with friends in England. Istanbul was full of wonders which Lady Montagu, unlike so many European wives, set out to explore and understand. She mastered the language, visited mosques and harems which she came to admire. She discovered that the Turks inoculated for smallpox and determined to bring the practice to England.

She died in London of breast cancer after spending twenty years in France and Italy in 1762. Most of her writing was burned and destroyed. Before she died she asked for the publication of her *Embassy Letters*. When her family heard of this manuscript they offered a huge amount of money to get it but another copy was already made. When it was published, an overnight sensation was the result and it went into multiple editions. She had thus overcome the strictures of a society in which publishing one's work was unseemly for a woman, especially one of high rank, and against the objections of her family. She secured a lasting, deserved, literary fame.

My claim is that the attempt for the reconstruction of a different Turkish woman image which defies the stereotype of the period with a support from the Western

female writers had its roots in Montagu's writings. According to Montagu, travelers like Robert Withers, Paul Rycout, Aaron Hill and Jean Dumont wrote in total ignorance and confidence and they presented an Orient which Edward Said described as feminized and sexualized.<sup>1</sup> These travelers unanimously presented Turkish women as wanton or hypersexual. They were accounted the most lascivious and immodest of all women and it was claimed that the custom of segregating women from men sharpens their desires. One of Montagu's letters dated April 1717, describing the women's bath in Sophia, is a very clear response to such rough and crude stereotypes of Turkish women. She carefully attacks the afore mentioned male travelers' accounts with a rhetoric founded on an aesthetic domain to the woman traveler. She narrates her first interaction with the bathers in a manner that affirms the women's independent subjectivity. While doing this, she exposes the delusions of Eurocentrism. She writes that in refined politeness, these women surpass Western aristocrats. They are intelligent and sensitive individuals with whom the visitor may aspire to some kind of harmonious relationship.

Next, using the male travelers' own language, Montagu refutes them by asserting that these women do not represent eroticism. The way she describes them in the baths is very interesting and her ingenious strategy to reverse the previous stereotypes is worth mentioning. She likens the bathers to prestigious European works of art, such as Milton's Eve, the nude paintings of Guido and Titian, and the frequently painted classical motif of the Three Graces. Elizabeth Bohls calls these

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30.

descriptions as the “crux” of Montagu’s strategy.<sup>2</sup> These comparisons reinforce Montagu’s claim that the Turkish women are not “wanton”. According to Bohls, Montagu’s comparisons invoke contemporary aesthetic thought, and in particular the developing concept of aesthetic contemplation. That is why they have the effect of de-eroticising her reader’s gaze and she therefore blocked the fantasies of Withers and Dumont’s lascivious crew. However, Bohls does not claim that Montagu’s use of this aesthetic discourse could totally desexualize the scene. It is also possible that it was not Montagu’s intention to desexualize it. Ironically enough, in the nineteenth century, a French romantic, Ingre, who never set foot in the Orient created a painting based on his reading of Montagu in 1862. It is called as *Le Bain turc (The Turkish Bath)* where more than twenty nude odalisques have been splashing in an intimate palace pool. This painting could reactivate the latent sensuality of the scene and reproduce the Orientalism that was the target of Montagu’s polemic. Montagu, speaking as an aristocrat and a woman primarily dignifies the bathers. They are recast from oversexed houris into Venus, Eve and the Graces, bringing them closer to upper-class European sensibilities. Montagu presented them as human individuals deserving interest and respect rather than essentially non-human others in the Orientalist discourse. However, I agree with Bohls criticism of Montagu in the sense that Montagu’s comparison of Turkish women with European works of art still casts them as objects rather than subjects.<sup>3</sup> Her gaze too risks leaving the women looked at and acted on, despite Montagu’s concern to establish their independent subjectivity. This can be tolerated since I heartily agree with Edward Said’s comment: “Reading

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 35.

and writing texts are never neutral activities: there are interests, powers, passions, pleasures entailed no matter how aesthetic or entertaining the work is.”<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly enough, Mernissi devotes a whole chapter to this specific art work (*Le Bain turc*) along with some others attempts to correct the image in her French male colleague’s mind during a visit together in the Louvre Museum. Her statement is that Ingres’ *The Turkish Bath* depicted a foreign territory to her because of the fact that two of the women were erotically caressing each other. That would be impossible in a *hammam* for the simple reason that it is a public space, often with dozens of noisy children. Although she does not speculate about the relationship between Ingre and Lady Montagu, her mentioning the historical and religious background of this painting offers an alternative explanation about lascivious houris depicted by the Western men: From the start Christianity condemned bathing as a lustful sin, a legacy from the Roman tradition when the baths became a little more than well-conducted brothels. However, this connection between the public baths and promiscuity is totally absent in Muslim culture.<sup>5</sup>

Meyda Yeğenoğlu draws attention to the western men’s frustration with the “forbidden” zones in the Orient. The more orientalist subject (man) tried to know and conquer the zone of darkness and mystery, the more he has realized his distance from “authentic” and “real” knowledge of the Orient and its women. Jean Jacques Ampere once said that oriental life is only found within the houses where male travelers cannot enter. Men’s frustration about the inability to see the interiors is so strong as to compel Gautier to suggest that only women should go to Turkey for what

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 385.

men are able to see is very much marginal when compared to what women can see which is the “real” Turkey.<sup>6</sup> This remark is significant in order to draw similarities between Lady Montagu and Grace Ellison’s travel notes on Turkish women. They both claim to present the “facts” of women’s lives.

Yeğenoğlu admits that there is no question that Montagu uses her access to the interior space of the Orient as a tool to claim that she is the one who has the authentic information of Turkish women. This is a challenge to the authority of her male colleagues. But, this is no refutation of the established topos of the Orientalism according to Yeğenoğlu.

Lisa Lowe’s arguments are also helpful in order to demonstrate further about my claim of the existence of a distinctive western female contribution to the formation of a slightly different Turkish women image. Her book is called *Critical Terrains* and as the title rightly points out it is indeed a critical question whether Orientalism overlaps or contradicts Feminism. Although I disagree, I am well aware of the few counter-arguments which cast Lady Montagu as an Orientalist woman traveler whose writings only helped to fulfill the gap in the Western/masculine subject’s text.

In her reading of Montagu’s *Embassy Letters*, Lowe aims to resist a totalizing and monolithic conception of Orientalism and points out the sites of resistance to it within the Orientalist discourse itself. Lowe makes a distinction between the “rhetoric of difference” and “rhetoric of similarity” and implies that the rhetoric of

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<sup>5</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 100-1

<sup>6</sup> Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75.

similarity does not belong to the Orientalist strategy of knowing the Orient. However, Montagu employs both of them and what she achieves is a rhetoric of identification.<sup>7</sup> This sets her apart from her male counterparts and assures her an advantage as a female writer within the Orientalist tradition over her male predecessors. Montagu emphasizes over and over again that her accounts are faithful to the truth of the Orient and its women. That is her way to dismiss the texts written by men as being merely a distorted and inaccurate representation of the “reality” of the Orient.

I agree with Lisa Lowe’s claim that Montagu’s attempt to authenticate her accounts by renouncing her male predecessors’ Oriental pictures is quite widespread not only in Montagu’s letters but also in other Western women’s writings. This renouncement can be observed in the accounts of all the women travelers mentioned in this thesis. Lowe argues that Montagu’s text unlike those of her male peers occupies a paradoxical and multivalent position within Orientalist tradition.<sup>8</sup> Montagu’s letters explicitly challenge the received representations of the Turkish society by the seventeenth-century travel writers. Lowe’s claim is exemplified in the following chapter of the present thesis, “Western Male Travel Writers’ Accounts of Turkey” and the names of the male authors criticized in her book correspond to the ones I encountered during my research process. Lowe detects the emergence of a feminist discourse which “speaks of common experiences among women of different societies”.<sup>9</sup> As mentioned above Lowe claims that Montagu’s discourse is characterized by a combination of two different rhetorics: the rhetoric of

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<sup>7</sup>Lisa Lowe, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43-45.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

identification and rhetoric of difference. She argues that the rhetoric of comparison differentiates her text from the male western counterparts. She likens the conditions, opportunities and character of Turkish women to Western women. She does that by means of analogy of *gender* and *class* since her comparisons are limited to women of the highest social class and she herself is an ambassador's wife. Lowe considers Montagu's detailed description of herself in Turkish dress as one of the moments where she establishes a synonymy or identity between herself and Turkish women.<sup>10</sup> Montagu's repeated comparisons of English and Turkish women directly contradict the logic of difference that characterized the observation of the male travel writers.

For Lowe, Montagu's interventions in the orientalist tradition are primarily articulated in a feminist rhetoric and take place in the moments when her text refutes the enslavement of Turkish women.<sup>11</sup> This is a challenge to the authority and truth claims of her male "masters" and it helps her to proclaim truth for her representations. This is the point where one should acknowledge the impossibility of a pure and uncontaminated position.

In the Orientalist tradition, male travelers represented Islamic practices as "uncivilized" and "barbaric" and thus construed European women as a sign of civilized culture.<sup>12</sup> Lowe claims that this is where Montagu's discourse diverges from Orientalist tradition and even contests it. In Montagu's accounts Turkish women are represented as more advantaged and superior in comparison to English women. Thus, says Lowe, Montagu not only explicitly refutes the earlier travel

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 40-41.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 51.

writers' representations of the Turkish women as enslaved, but also intervenes against the traditional tropes of Orientalism. Montagu's reference to veil as a tool, which enables Turkish women to enjoy more liberties than English women, contests the predominant idea expressed in men's writings that the Turkish women are enslaved.<sup>13</sup>

Edward Said argued that the Orient is a representation and an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.<sup>14</sup> His claim that Orientalism provided the necessary knowledge for colonial conquest in every sense is a significant point.

## **1.2 *An English Woman in Ankara* and Grace Ellison's Contribution to the Image of Turkish Women**

After explaining the roots and a different approach to Oriental women by Montagu in the eighteenth century, I would like to leap into a recent period closer to our day in order to further analyze, from a comparative feminist perspective, the work of an extraordinary, courageous English women writer, Grace Ellison. Since my claim in this thesis is to indicate a distinctive female language which helped to construct an alternative Turkish women's image through the supportive texts whether intentional or not, I will not hesitate to make such an attempt and highlight this western feminine

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid,39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 1-3.

voice without rejecting some possible tones of colonial or male discourses. In fact, Grace Ellison provides some interesting and contradictory examples and impressions after her days in Turkey in a time of great confusion and transition in 1922-1923.

Generally, there was nothing snobbish in both writers' travel interests. It is essential for both Lady Montagu and Grace Ellison to see during their travels that their western ideas find themselves confronted, not with barbarism or with debased theories of morals, but with an elaborate and ancient civilization which claims their respect and sometimes even admiration. They could live (at least they try) among the oddest people without being either shocked or "charmed" by their un-English ways. According to Argunşah's view, Grace Ellison can be considered as Lady Montagu of the early twentieth century in the way she attempted to reflect and understand the Turkish women's lives and culture as an English woman.<sup>15</sup>

In this thesis, Grace Ellison deserves a combined chapter with Lady Montagu to underline the existence of a tradition of women's travel writing. She can be labeled as a multidimensional person, being the editor of *A Turkish Women's European Impressions* as well as its author's, Zeyneb Hanoum's, ever-supportive friend. She was a female journalist (reporter for the *Morning Post* when she traveled to Turkey) and activist who was one of the first eyewitnesses of the Turkish Independence War, and the National Forces (*Kuvayi Milliye*) Movement during her courageous visits to Turkey. She expressed strong opposition to those who claimed that it would be extremely dangerous for a single-woman to visit Turkey at a time when England was considered the "enemy".

Grace Ellison's admiration and defense of Pierre Loti is also worth mentioning since her description of him sounds quite different than the anti-feminist Loti depiction of the other female scholars mentioned in the present thesis. For example, in her own book, called *An English Woman in Ankara*, she shares her content and happiness to be in a ferry which was named after Pierre Loti in the introduction. Furthermore, the very first chapter is called: "In Pierre Loti Ferry-The debt of Turkey to the Magical Pen of Loti!". In this chapter, Grace Ellison chats with the captain who is also an admirer of Loti about Loti's books. The captain is surprised that Ellison is so well informed about Loti since he thinks the English dislike of anything French is notorious. Ellison reacts by saying:

First comes art, the rest is not important. I don't care where a genius comes from in this world; it is all the same to me. I only wish to display a friendly attitude in your land and I am ready to make friends with anyone who won't rob me!"

The captain warns her saying that she will experience a nationalist atmosphere in Turkey. Her answer reflects her mind and beliefs about Turkish people and is significant since she writes her memoirs under this light:

"If you'll pardon me for saying, I think you are exaggerating things. I always considered the Orientals the most tolerant people I have ever met." She then tells the story of how she met Pierre Loti thanks to the heroines, Zeyneb and Melek, of another book I am analyzing in this thesis, *A Turkish Women's European Impressions*.

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<sup>15</sup> Hülya Argunşah, "Zeynep Hanım", *Kadın/Woman 2000* (December 2001) 113.

Grace Ellison makes a distinction between France and other European countries in terms of the perception of Turkey and the Turkish people which is closely related to the processes of image formation that was discussed in this thesis. She claims that in England, Turkey's connotations merely consist of beautiful houris veiled in the mysteries of the past, grand red Sultan, and the bloody scenes in Armenia whereas for French people, these pictures are Green Mosque in Bursa, *Fantomes d'Orient*, and *Cenan* thanks to Pierre Loti.<sup>16</sup>

According to Grace Ellison, the power of the images which were created by the pen of the magician will not easily surrender to the enmity of the present days. France will not give up the Oriental dream which was depicted by the Loti's pen. Indeed, this is something that neither Turkey nor France can ever repay.

Her oversimplification of the image creation process causes her to make similar comments as one goes further on in the book and reflects her limited yet good-natured intention of an analytical approach which was derived from what she heard and read in/about Turkey so far. However, just to give an example to one of her common mistakes, I would like to mention her use of the words *Turk* and *Muslim* interchangeably throughout the book which confirms the general Westerner's attitude starting from the middle ages in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

One may wonder about the original source of Ellison's admiration and sympathy towards the Orient. In fact, at some point in her book she confesses that it is one of the most frequently asked questions to her. The formation of the "passion" (in her

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<sup>16</sup> Grace Ellison, *Ankara'da Bir İngiliz Kadını* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1999), 17-22.

own words) towards the Orient was initiated while she was a small child when her father used to tell her the stories of his travels to India, Turkey, Japan and China. I would like to draw attention to this basic category in her mind which is formed in a very early stage as a child. It already generates a prejudice which limits her ability to be neutral. She considers people who live there as friends before she even steps into those lands. "The colors, the beauty, the wonderful summers and sunsets, and the kindness, philosophy of its highly spirited and mature peoples are things that I know of whose imagination was awakened as a small child by the loved ones."<sup>18</sup>

She calls the children of India, Persia, Egypt, Arabia, and Turkey as her brothers and sisters and is ready to give anything in order to recompense their contribution to the world culture and civilizations. She underlines the fact that she could never understand the stupidity of seeing the Asian as inferior and considers this not only as an injustice but also a foolish political mistake.<sup>19</sup>

### **1.2.1 Grace Ellison's Gender Sensitivity**

To mention the paragraphs related to her gender and the obstacles, problems, prejudices caused due to her gender by her own people, particularly higher ranked English soldiers, is significant since one of my concerns in writing this thesis is to make a gendered distinction of the male/female perspectives.

As Grace Ellison writes about her preparation for a trip to Turkey, she describes an English officer who is very concerned about ruining the image of the English man if

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 65.

he signs the permission letter for Grace Ellison and sends her all alone as a single-woman among the Turkish people to Ankara. He tries so hard to convince Ellison to give up her decision by using several arguments, one of them being the fact that the Turks are not trustworthy. Ellison answers back saying that she trusts them due to her past experiences with the Turks. Another argument that the officer uses is a very sexist one. Not realizing how angry Grace Ellison is getting, the officer considering his own reputation as a man of honor tells her that the Turks would never let a single Turkish woman travel alone among the Englishmen. That is mainly the reason why as an Englishman, he is also responsible for the protection of English women. Ellison refutes this argument too but then comes the final sentence from the officer in which he says that she is not ugly enough to commence such a journey. This is where Ellison's patience comes to an end. She makes herself very clear with her final sentence: "If anything bad happens, this would completely be my own mistake. The Turks display respect towards the women who have self-respect. I went to the Asia Minor alone ten years ago and I felt an absolute comfort and safety everywhere."<sup>20</sup>

The reason why she is going to visit Ankara as an English woman is to protest the English government's political attitudes and the instigation of the Greeks against Turkey and to support the National War of Independence. She tries to convince the Turks that there will not be another war.

Some of the signs that can be considered as the "relics" of her colonialist and nationalist background which she cannot get rid of also exist in her memoirs. Her searching for an English flag as a sign of luck to carry with her during her travels is

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

one of the examples. At another point, she asks herself if what she does in Turkey can initiate a new career for English women to promote and improve the image of England abroad by giving speeches about the greatness of England.<sup>21</sup> This in fact was not an unusual idea (at least for another Turkish woman) since Selma Ekrem in America practiced it in order to make some money. Ekrem traveled to many cities and lectured on Turkey in several occasions which might have contributed in reconstructing the image of the Turkish women in the United States at the time.<sup>22</sup>

These instances cited above are significant in close relations of nationalism and gender. Although belonging to different nations, they both have deeply internalized their nationalistic mission as women. This is called as “the pitfalls of the identity politics” in Yuval-Davis’ terms. In her extensive gender analysis, Yuval-Davis points out that nationalisms are always gendered and underlines the difference between the terms “nationalist projects” and “nation states”. She explores the contesting relations between feminism and nationalism. Her book *Gender and Nation* illustrates how women reproduce nations biologically, culturally and symbolically. She cites an example to differences among women which in fact fits the women mentioned above as well: The case of elite women serving as “representatives” of women’s interests - not only in terms of privileged western women speaking for all women, but also, of privileged women from less-developed nations speaking for all of the women in their countries, such as Selma Ekrem in the U.S.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>22</sup> Selma Ekrem, *Unveiled* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1930), 316.

Grace Ellison does not miss a chance to talk about the women's issues and the Turkish culture to a Sheikh she meets in order to spend her time more efficiently throughout her trip and shares it with the readers. One of them is about Koran and freedom of women. The Sheikh answers back by saying that the separation of men and women stems from the Byzantine culture and Mustafa Kemal will bring revisions to all these customs.<sup>23</sup> As can be deduced from such comments, Grace Ellison's attempt to acquit Muslim/Turkish culture of conservatism is lacking sufficient knowledge. However, her comments are in accordance with my claim that some of the western female travelers had this special concern and put additional effort to cooperate with their Turkish peers in order to amend the negative images of Turkey. In another instance she makes a statement as such: A european-ized Turk is not the best one.<sup>24</sup> She appears to think that foreign elements contaminate the "good" Turkish/Muslim essence.

To draw attention to Grace Ellison's hidden westerner attitudes, which even she herself may not have been aware of, it is important to examine some key words in her sentences while comparing/commenting on Turkish women: "when Turkish women achieve the chance to *progress*, my wish is to see them on both the *right* and *elegant* path." That is a clear indication that she already has the definition of the terms such as *progress*, a *right path* and they are taken from her Western ideas which she hardly attempts to question skeptically in her memoirs. Another generalization she makes is that the Oriental women are against the *indecent* dresses and the couple-dances with strangers. She makes a reference to Zeyneb Hanoum who told her that

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<sup>23</sup> Ellison, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid,135.

she would much prefer to dance alone or in women-only groups for fun.<sup>25</sup> These details mentioned in the memoirs can be considered as the reflections of her ethnocentric views. Although her attempt to establish a solidarity with Turkish women is to be appreciated, difficulty of getting away with one's internalized nationalist and ethnical seeds of upbringing and education is obvious.

Sheikh tells Grace Ellison that while he and his wife were living in Berlin, his wife felt uncomfortable each time she received/served to male guests. This in fact is a part of daily European practice. However, she considered this not as a sign of progress unlike the younger generation or her "modernized" husband but rather as an indecent and degrading behavior.<sup>26</sup>

I think Grace Ellison's inclusion of these examples is also very important in order to show the difference between the generations and between Turkish men and women. In both incidents it is the women themselves who refuse/dislike the western practices of having men and women together. My question therefore would be who is to decide to *liberate* them by introducing such practices? It is a well-known fact that women are active and diligent producers of the very patriarchal culture and values that oppress them. Often too this is done in their roles as vanguards of traditions, nationalism and religion.

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<sup>25</sup> Ellison, 126.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 125.

In the following chapters of her book Grace Ellison contradicts herself by claiming that new Turkey does not need English advice: "They already chose the path which was better for them. All we can do is to pray for their achievements."<sup>27</sup>

Even a more radical concern is mentioned at some point which may confuse the reader if Grace Ellison's overall attempt to maintain a balance between different discourses is to be overlooked: "If the Turkish women were to follow the western feminists and try to obtain not only men's prestige but also their money, the Orient will get infected by the internal conflicts and by anarchy."<sup>28</sup>

These quotations illustrate her conflict and sways between feminism and ethnocentrism which cannot be resolved throughout the book. Below are a few other examples to these inconsistencies caused by the same conflicts. They present significant evidence to the confusion of the Western woman travelers at the time and their difficulty in balancing colonialist and feminist discourses.

She was asked in which way she could contribute to the women's issues in Turkey. She advised them to study/read English literature which has the world's best works ever.

Turks too just like the others will be inspired and empowered by the English classics. ...Our literature is such a gold mine that it is my main desire to see its contribution in the highest rank to the Turkish women's education and progress.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 215.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 246.

Furthermore, while she was commenting on the French école as being the appropriate method in Turkish education, she claims that the *real* and the *most complete* education system is the English one. (emphasis added)<sup>30</sup>

To take a look at the other side and see how *she* is perceived by the Turkish people (men and women alike) may seem like a detail yet it is an important detail that anywhere she goes she reports she was welcomed in the following fashion: “You cannot be an English woman!” Sometimes she asks the reasons why and the answers vary, for example she is told that English women do not have this genuine smile as she does.<sup>31</sup>

She also makes a few comments on how she perceives herself and how she imagines her image to be like in the eyes of the others. I consider these lines as the most genuine ones in which she makes confessions or questions her identity. When she goes to meetings with Turkish or English military staff and commanders (mostly men-only gatherings) she feels that she is not taken seriously and perceived as an excited activist woman who acts according to her emotions.<sup>32</sup>

Another confession is that when she meets an American man from one of the relief organizations in a train, she calls him almost as her *compatriot* and gets so happy to hear his English. While they were talking about how to “save” the Turks she says

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 251.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 158.

despite the great sympathy she feels towards the Anatolian people and culture she has to accept then that she is a western woman.<sup>33</sup>

In another instance, Grace Ellison is trying to picture herself in the eyes of the English officers who think that she is all alone among a wild, traditional group of Turkish men and she secretly smiles to herself. She is absolutely sure that there seems to be no way to convince these English men that the subject discussed in this Turkish group in the middle of the night was the greatness of God and his grace and she was without any gun and fear. However, her comment on being a *real* Oriental makes a distinction between her and all the Turkish men around her: "Unfortunately despite all the things I could not be a real Oriental yet since my philosophy is not enough to bring sleep into my eyes."<sup>34</sup> One can observe her vigorous attempts to get rid of her "Englishness" by criticizing her country (especially men) with such examples that would otherwise be considered as irrelevant and out of place such as the children's game played in Napoli on the streets. This game has insulting words about English people.<sup>35</sup> It appears to be indeed the most irrelevant detail in the book yet it may be a very indirect sign of cooperation and support in order to justify the Turkish practices in the Independence Struggle. Her complaints about the English Government's policy towards the English women in the most critical manner to a French officer she met is another chance for her to express a kind of alienation from her own nation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 296.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 131.

A direct reference to *A Turkish Women's European Impressions*, by Zeyneb Hanoum, is given in one paragraph which summarized the book as a successful critique of the weaknesses of Western civilization. Ellison says that England was the only country where Zeyneb Hanoum's book was positively received whereas the rest of Europe was furious. It is a rare instance where an English woman gives a reference to a Turkish woman's book in order to obtain support and confirmation to correct a prejudice about English people.<sup>37</sup> This prejudice is that English people do not have a sense of humor, which is disproved by the positive reception of Zeyneb Hanoum's book. This solidarity among women travelers against the stereotypes can therefore work from the Orient to the West as well.

Grace Ellison's observations and conclusion on the women issue in general is a promising one considering the number of inconsistencies that come to surface throughout the book. "I observed that the problem of women was not in fact any different in Anatolia than in the other countries which means that the level of freedom depends on the education, upbringing and social class."<sup>38</sup>

Right after this comment she presents several very different daily practices of the Turkish women who have varying perspectives. Some attend to private dance courses, some reject to use the freedom encouraged by their "modernized" husbands, some very restricted and veiled women are denied the simple daily freedom and attend women-only tea gatherings. This part of the book is extremely important in order to point out the diversity of Turkish women. However, by highlighting this

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 156.

contribution I am not suggesting to deny or to overlook Grace Ellison's comments and advice which carry colonial tones.

Grace Ellison also mentions Mustafa Kemal's statements about the Turkish women and underlines how he wanted to see them in decision-making positions after their contribution during the Independence War. After meeting Atatürk, Ellison makes it clear to the reader that his radical efforts and revolutions in order to change the daily lives of the Turkish women are serious.

Grace Ellison complains about the time she has to spend during the speeches and seminars she attended to share her Turkish impressions. Both in England and the United States she had to answer the most nonsensical questions about the harem life.

One chapter of the book is fully devoted to Halide Edib which plays a crucial role both in representing and disseminating a different image of the Turkish woman in the West. It is significant that Grace Ellison acknowledges and is very supportive of her in her memoirs, which confirms my claim about the solidarity of the western women with the Turkish ones. The first sentence of the chapter starts as such: "The worst generalization about the Turks is the one about the value and the inferior status given to the Turkish women. In order to disapprove this, let us mention Halide Edib."<sup>39</sup>

Grace Ellison successfully maintains her neutrality and suppresses her *Englishness* in this part of the book while commenting on Halide Edib although Edib had an American education background and was supportive of the American system for a while. In the following pages Halide Edib was referred to as the prominent feminist

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 233.

leader of Turkish women. Grace Ellison considers the fact that the Turkish women had the right to own and manage their properties and had the right to sign official documents a long time ago compared to their westerner peers as an embarrassment for the English government.<sup>40</sup> All these details are significant in forming the Turkish women image for the English audience since even today there are hardly any people even in Turkey who know about the women's movement and the journals that were published. Her arguments and presentation of these facts also remind me of Lady Montagu<sup>41</sup>. She also criticized her country occasionally by comparing it to Turkish culture. Both of the English women travelers are in fact resentful to their countries and its policies towards women and have the chance to express it by comparing them to Turkey. Grace Ellison does not forget to mention the encouragement and support from the male members of the Parliament so that Halide Edib can be elected as the first female member.

To conclude this chapter I would like to underline the similarities between Grace Ellison and Lady Montagu despite the time gap. Although they both have the gendered sensitivity and awareness towards the Turkish women and expressed the injustice practiced by the male authors for centuries, one can encounter various ambiguous and contradictory comments in their texts as I tried to demonstrate by several quotations in this chapter. My claim on the distinctive language created by some of the western women travelers which bonds the women of the separate cultures therefore should be read keeping an eye on the colonialist and nationalist discourses which sometimes lie latent or emerge overtly between the lines.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 240-241.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 40.

## CHAPTER II

### WESTERN MALE TRAVEL WRITERS' ACCOUNTS OF TURKISH WOMEN

#### 2.1 Introduction

This part of the chapter will mainly focus on the last novel of Pierre Loti, *Les Désenchantées* and discuss the introduction of a slightly different Turkish woman image as opposed to his earlier novels. I will discuss the significance and different evaluations and criticisms of this novel by several, mostly female, contemporary authors as well as some immediate reactions right after the novel's publication in 1906.

Some of the earlier European writers and travelers such as Montesquieu and Chateaubriand are also mentioned in order to give a better idea of the process of an image creation in a comparative manner.

Pierre Loti was a French author with the pseudonym of Julien Viaud, a playwright, and a naval officer who lived between 1850-1923. His exoticism made him popular in his time and his themes anticipated some of the central preoccupations of French literature between the World Wars. Loti's career as a naval officer took him to the Middle and Far East, thus providing him with the exotic settings of his novels and reminiscences.

After the publication of his first novel, *Aziyadé* (1879), he rapidly developed a parallel literary career, winning the respect of critics and the devotion of a large public. With such successes as *Pêcheur d'Islande* (1886) and *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) to his credit and with the approval of exacting critics, the way was made smooth for his reception into the *Académie Française* in 1891.

Each year there was a new book, sometimes a novel-*Ramuntcho* (1897), *Les Désenchantées* (1906)-often treating objectively the love affairs with which he tried to satisfy his dreams and melancholy at every landfall, and sometimes a volume in which he himself figured-*Le Roman d'un enfant* (1890), *Prime Jeunesse* (1919), *Un Jeune Officier Pauvre* (1923)-which reflected most fully his passionate nature.

An exceptionally gifted observer, he was able to return from his voyages with a rich store of pictorial images and embody them in simple, musical prose. But this literary impressionism served a deeper strain in his nature; death, as much as love, lies at the heart of his work, revealing a profound despair at the passing of sensuous life.<sup>1</sup>

## **2.2 Pierre Loti and the Turkish Woman Image in his novel *Les Désenchantées***

André Lhéry, the main character of the novel *Les Désenchantées*, is introduced as a very famous and talented writer. The first scene in the novel starts his poring over the letters he received from his many admirers. His involvement in these women's lives which get gradually less interesting to the extent of even showing signs of boredom

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<sup>1</sup> Fari Bahi, "Pierre Loti," *Towards Esfahan*, (10 April 2002). <<http://www.Towards-Esfahan.com>>.

towards the end of the novel lasts for two years. He constantly remembers his dead Turkish lover years ago –the heroine of Loti's first novel *Aziyadé*- and this dark atmosphere contrasts with the beauty and the youth of three women he meets. However, just as in most of his other novels, all three heroines die at the end: Two from physical ailments and one from suicide; all as expressions of revolt against forced marriages. Unlike the other new aspects that he brought in this novel, its end is very much like his other works.

The inspiration for the novel was a game that was designed for Loti by three young women.(Loti's fictitious name in the novel is André Lhéry) It was based on Marc Hélys' suggestion to her two Turkish friends whom she introduced later to Loti as her cousins, Zeyneb and Melek. They wrote a letter to Loti and invited him for a meeting in a secluded part of Istanbul. Loti accepted the invitation due to his adventurous nature and went with a friend of his who was also French to the appointed place. While he was waiting to meet one woman he met three of them. They refused to give their names or remove their veils. This first meeting ended with the coming of a few Turkish soldiers and women suddenly ran away and disappeared. But these mysterious women arranged other meetings with him and had many chances to discuss about the situation and the secondary roles of the Turkish women in the society. During those discussions they asked him to write a novel about what they told and voice their plight to the whole world. Sometimes they came together in a private home, sometimes in a mosque, or in the cemetery where *Aziyadé* (Lhéry's first love) was buried. When the writer was done with his business he had to leave for France and then the correspondence continued with the letters

written by Cenan (actually Hélys). The game went on for a while until the last letter he got which announced Cenan's decision to commit suicide. These letters also formed the structure of the novel and she asked him once more to write a novel about them. Afterwards, Loti collected his own observations, plus letters and his impressions of Istanbul and created *Les Désenchantées* (translated into Turkish as *Hayal Kadınlar*, *Mutsuz Kadınlar* and *Naşad Kızlar*<sup>2</sup>). Therefore the readers are faced with a three layered novel: The game that three women played on Loti, realization of the game in the real life, and the final novel of Loti.

Loti's attitude towards oriental women is worth studying for several reasons. Some scholars who dealt with his writings have come to radically different conclusions. Szyliowicz presents two different points. One is by Lefèvre who said that Loti embodied the cult of feminism: "He not only loved *some* women, he loved *woman*." Another conclusion is almost exactly the opposite, by Leguillon who is a more recent critic: "Women exist in Loti's work only to the extent to which they serve to draw out the masculine personality." Since these two views cannot be reconciled, maybe one should try to discuss which one is more valid.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, there are two questions to address concerning the binary oppositions used in his works, such as the Oriental/Occidental and male/female: Was Loti's attitude characteristic of that of 19th century (and earlier) Frenchmen? Did Loti's attitude toward the image of Oriental women he depicted in his novels change over time?

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<sup>2</sup> Alain Quella-Villéger, *Pierre Loti: Gezegen Seyyahı* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2002), 323.

<sup>3</sup> Irene L. Szyliowicz, *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Women* (Hong Kong: The Macmillian Press, 1988), 4.

Loti's fictive vision of women conformed to nineteenth-century sexist attitudes. Although he knew a number of well-known, successful women throughout his life, he did not pattern his heroines on them. He wanted no competition, at least in his imaginative production, from anyone who would lessen his or his protagonist's importance. Only in this final novel *Les Désenchantées* he portrays women who are like his women friends, and this was due to a woman's influence. Although he considers himself receptive to new sensations and experiences, Loti in fact was not tolerant of new ideas. He wanted to keep women in their places and to maintain conditions in the countries he visited. This colonialist mentality also reflects prevailing contemporary nineteenth-century attitudes. Yet Loti was not a man who could be stereotyped easily. That is the main reason why I chose him to be the main theme of this chapter among so many other westerner male travel writers. He remained an individualist who was influenced deeply by the cultural prejudices of his age (maybe it is something inevitable for most of us) while embracing unorthodox views in his private and public life. He longed for the traditional but *wanted* to accept ideas which were not in accordance with his previous positions.<sup>4</sup> Now, let us take a look at the some of the earlier European writers in order to have a better idea of the process of an image creation.

The writings and descriptions of Montesquieu, who wrote at a time when Ottoman image was no longer the "threatening power" (mid-18th century), were the first to serve to the construction of a false image of the harem according to Orhan Koloğlu. Koloğlu regrets that it is this prominent scientist of the Enlightenment who was the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 118-121.

“inventor” of this false image about harem women. He also lists the other French intellectuals and writers such as Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo who presented a very distorted image of the East without even having gone there. With Lamartine (1835) the effects of Romanticism appeared, so this passion toward the exotic had by then become a subject of inquiry and his writings were more realistic than the ones written earlier. Théophile Gautier and Gérard de Nerval can be counted among the names that Koloğlu presents rather positively in their descriptions of the Ottoman and the daily life.<sup>5</sup> Edmondo de Amicis in his book *Constantinople* unlike Pierre Loti depicts a different Turkish society:

It is quite surprising to see women everywhere and at every hour just like in any European city in Istanbul especially at a time when the Turkish women’s oppression is so frequently being discussed. These women are liberated. This is such a concrete fact that every foreigner can see it as soon as they step on the city. It would be an exaggeration to claim that they are more liberated than the European women such as Lady Montagu. However, any person who is an inhabitant of Istanbul cannot hold his/her laughter when they hear about the Turkish women’s slavery. They can wander all alone until sunset and they are allowed to be seen not in the Muslim districts of the city but in other parts of the city such as Pera.<sup>6</sup>

To strengthen these impressions which carry almost a tone of confession, I chose to quote another paragraph which was published in *Figaro* (17 February 1906) signed as Helia:

I also arrived in Istanbul with all my prejudices and stereotypes of the Orient in my mind. When I was introduced to Islamic culture, I felt a deep disappointment at first. It was deprived of what I expected. No one was mentioning polygamy. On the contrary, it was considered as a notorious old game.(...) We imagined *harem* as a garden full of flowers and its owner as a man who picks up his wife for the night by throwing a handkerchief to her...<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Orhan Koloğlu, *Loti'nin Kadınları* (Istanbul: Dünya Yayınları, 1999), 8-10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*,57.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*,112.

A resentful criticism about *Les Désenchantées* was published in a journal, *Meşveret* which was owned by the leader of the Young Turks Ahmet Rıza:

*Les Désenchantées* is mistaken not only in its thesis about the abandonment of the veil on the female bodies but also the veils on their minds. Its depiction of the harem is wrong whereas the description of the scenes of Istanbul are successful. We are not overlooking the fact that it is a novel and it is common to make use of imagination and fantasies. However, what about the identity of the heroines?... Aziyade is the first one of these beautiful creatures. But she is incredibly defective, almost fake. Now, it is Cenân, Melek and Zeyneb's turn. Nothing is Turkish in this so-called naturalistic text that claims to reflect the Oriental women's world except these three names.<sup>8</sup>

Sefer Bey also wrote: "No, Mr. Lhéry. (the name of the author in the novel which is undoubtedly Loti's self-image\*) The woman who wrote to you is not the Moslem of year 1332. She can be the product of a very brilliant imagination... She can be French, English, German, or American, but never Turkish!"<sup>9</sup>

Marc Hélyès was a French writer and Loti's plot originator in the novel *Les Désenchantées* which I will present in more detail in the following section. She was also known as a feminist who introduced the Swedish Feminist Movement into the French agenda. Being a devoted feminist throughout her life, she wanted to contribute and support the Turkish Women's Liberation as well.<sup>10</sup> Why did her articles and impressions about Turkish women and their lives not cause greater responses/reactions in the French audience? The answer which I think is the closest to reality is that since they were written in a serious manner, they did not match the image of the harem that French people already created in their minds. An incident cited by Koloğlu in that sense is worth mentioning. One of Marc Hélyès' writings was

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 117.

\*my addition

<sup>9</sup> Irene L. Szyliowicz, *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Women* (Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press, 1988), 114-115.

rejected by the director of the editorial office with the excuse of not having enough oriental elements and he claimed that the readers would not be interested in such harems furnished like the Parisian houses.<sup>11</sup>

Turning back to Loti's novel and its "different" Turkish female characters, *Les Désenchantées* is considered to have a very different tone from Loti's other oriental works, but no satisfactory explanation was given for his new perspective on Oriental women. In his other novels, women characters were dependent, passive and primitive females living in the shadow of their European hero. In *Les Désenchantées*, the three Turkish women were strong, highly educated, intelligent young ladies, very sure of themselves and their mission in life. They articulated their despair and unhappiness caused by men in a male-oriented society. Since this work is so exceptional and since the feminine figures portrayed are unlike any previous heroines in the Oriental works, it is important to question why Loti suddenly created a new image for the Oriental woman. What was his motivation?

Loti depicted Turkish women as victimized by the society and he defended social equality for them. According to Szyliowicz, *Les Désenchantées* is a milestone in feminist thought for the early twentieth century because it argues in favor of equal rights for women at a time when they were regarded as second-class citizens.<sup>12</sup>

There is still a conflict in the text in his attitudes towards women and the actual fate of his heroines. On the one hand, he talks of Cenani as a "little barbarian princess" and on the other; he admits that "three women from the Pera section of Stamboul

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<sup>10</sup> Alain Quella-Villéger, *Pierre Loti: Gezeiten Seyyahı*, (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2002), 327.

<sup>11</sup> Koloğlu, 134.

<sup>12</sup> Szyliowicz, *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Women* (Hong Kong: The Macmillian Press, 1988), 94.

speaking together, would make one think instantly of the cockatoo section in the zoo". All three women either die or want to die-a heavy price to pay for self-assertion in the male world.<sup>13</sup>

Another female critic, Rachilde, objects to this portrayal of the Ottoman women and blames Loti for his sexist position in this novel. In her article published in *Mercure de France*, she wrote in such a reproaching manner to the fictive character Cenan, obviously aiming at Pierre Loti himself for his need to describe women as requiring men in order to exist and be happy:

..Little Djénane ends up by killing herself, so weary of embracing only the wind. Peace to your ashes little silly! In France one is less a doll than you, and we read our great writers without losing our heads!<sup>14</sup>

Another critic of the time, André Chaumeix, was commenting that in this work Pierre Loti depicted his women characters as completely spiritual and he seemed to look for something other than the picturesque and the sensual.

In terms of these comments in conflict whether Loti had a sexist attitude towards women or embodied feminism, Rachilde's reading of the text definitely proves the former one. According to her point of view, one cannot then claim that Loti suddenly changed his sexist attitude in *Les Désenchantées*.<sup>15</sup>

However, for other critics, no such problematic spots existed in the text. Most critics have contented themselves with summarizing the plot and the circumstances surrounding the invention of *Les Désenchantées* or have dismissed it as "tedious"

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 94-95.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 95.

novel without attempting to analyze it. No critic has yet explained why the attitudes Loti expresses in this book toward Oriental women differ from the ones in Loti's previous novels. Many commentators have discussed the influence of a French woman Marie Léra, with a male pseudonym Marc Hélys, who was Loti's plot originator and at the same time cooperated with the other Turkish women and commented on Loti's gullibility. I will make use of Szyliowicz's attempt to explore the reasons why Loti adopted an attitude that she calls a new and different one. She also examines the role that Marc Hélys and her Turkish friends played in this literary work. Hélys was a French writer who came to Istanbul in 1901 and made friends of her upper-class hostesses and described the Turkish women as such: "with about two or three exceptions, none possessed general culture, the polish of varied attainments".<sup>16</sup>

However, two of her friends were different and these "orientals" had been raised in a strange manner. They were multilingual, musical and artistic. They were well-grounded in Muslim studies and in order to understand the Koran, they had been taught Arabic and Persian along with the other six languages they could speak besides Turkish. They have some knowledge on history, literature and philosophy but considered as superficial by Hélys. Three years later, in 1904, Hélys came back to Istanbul and found out that the life styles of these women were unchanged. They were all unhappy, idle and bored. As a diversion of their monotonous existence, two friends and Hélys decided to write a letter and wanted to meet Loti in Tarabya. When they met, none removed their veils. The women initiated the conversation and he was definitely at a disadvantage. Since Loti was very affected by the entire experience,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

they kept on meeting in different places that the women chose. They wanted him to write a book about the plight of Turkish women but they believed that he had a descriptive mind rather than analytical mind. Loti seemed a little more than a marionette in their hands, and he executed the drama very obediently.<sup>17</sup>

In her article “Loti ve *Hayal Kadınlar* Üzerine Bir Değini”, Çiçek Öztekin mentions the speculations that Loti could never learn the “real story” and took pains to plead for more social equality for Turkish women. He depicted them as victimized by their society which was not necessarily the case all the time.<sup>18</sup>

*Les Désenchantées* unites two separate stories—one fabricated and one real—arranged by Hélycs: the actual account of the three women’s relationship with Loti and the narrative which Hélycs developed in her correspondence with him. Therefore Szyliowicz claims that the pro-feminine posture which he articulated was in fact Marc Hélycs’ position. The attention is drawn here to Hélycs’ French background and her ability to communicate with Loti. She pretended that she was Cenani, an oppressed woman with a sad marital history. As Loti always trusted his correspondent, he assumed that her letters contained a truthful account of real experiences. That is why he replicated their content in his finished novel. Szyliowicz quotes some parts of Hélycs’ letter. Among them I chose a passage in order to show how Loti was almost dictated in detail about *his* coming novel *Les Désenchantées* :

One part of your novel will be in letters, the remainder in diary fragments. The empty spots, the side which pertains to Muslim life, we should send to you. You would need only to rewrite it. We would make a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Loti, *Mutsuz Kadınlar*, trans. Nahid Sırrı Örik (Istanbul: İnkilap ve Aka, 1972).

<sup>18</sup> Çiçek Öztekin, “Loti ve *Hayal Kadınlar* Üzerine Bir Değini”, *Toplum ve Bilim* 81 (1999):172.

family live for you... Thus you would have the intimate life of the Orient as recounted by Oriental women.<sup>19</sup>

Hélycs focused almost exclusively on her heroine unlike Loti who was more interested in portraying Turkish society and the physical locale. However, in the final text, the heroines were presented as disillusioned because their intellectual and cultural aspirations remain unfulfilled.<sup>20</sup>

What is surprising about his relationship with the three women in the novel is that he is affected by them unlike all his other novels where women should be attracted to him. Another difference is that Loti avoids any physical relationship and bodily contact in every sense in this novel, whereas in the previous ones, Oriental women were explicitly sexual and satisfying to him.<sup>21</sup>

Although Szyliowicz calls this novel as "Loti's most feminist work" she still criticizes his deep-seated gender distinctions which serve to undermine an otherwise pro-feminine position.<sup>22</sup>

I would like to comment on Zeyneb's bitter letter to Loti at the end of the novel, blaming her friend's death on the Occidental ideas and influence to which she had been exposed:

...It's thinking too much and knowing too much which poisoned her, each day a little more. It is the Occident which killed her, André. If one

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<sup>19</sup> Szyliowicz, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 107.

had left her *primitive* and *ignorant*, only beautiful, I would still see her there near me, and I would still hear her voice.<sup>23</sup> (emphasis added)

One can observe without much difficulty that Loti's deeply embedded prejudices about the Turkish women here: they are primitive and ignorant. Actually, depending on Loti's other female characters in his earlier novels, it can be said that Loti rather prefers them to stay in this primitive stage anyway. As comparison, he was kinder to his female friends in *Les Désenchantées* than he was in any previous Oriental text. There was no language barrier in this novel, French was enough. Loti himself functions differently, he is just a passive observer. In all his previous works Loti's most effective communication was sexual. In this novel, lack of physical contact intensifies the relationship. However, his ego inflation reminds the reader that he does not abandon his old style altogether. One example to that is he shares his intimate thoughts with his Occidental male sailor friend rather than the women who write the letters to him and share private things. Another example from the novel is where he compares the mental capacity of these women with the other Turkish women who did not have the advantages of modern education: "In their brain everything germinated miraculously, as in a virgin territory, the long, rank weeds and the pretty poisonous flowers."<sup>24</sup> I would consider this sentence a bit condescending and this is reflected in the heroines themselves. Especially Zeyneb cannot accept feminine independence and she expresses their need for a man, "someone with whom these poor, forgotten, humiliated creatures could speak, most often fearful and innocent." An ambivalence recurs throughout the novel. On the one hand, some passages where Loti wants to credit his heroines with rationality are found, and on the other hand his long-held convictions expressed women as passive, dependent,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 108.

primitive and simple. I think in some cases, Szyliowicz herself thinks it is difficult and confusing to decide about Loti's attitude and that is why she uses the word "ambivalent" to describe the tone of the novel, *Les Désenchantées*. Finally she claims that one can find a new tone in this work, a tone of a man willing to acknowledge feminine intellectual ability. This is due to Hély's influence upon Loti, both personally and as a representative of the modern Oriental woman. The reader is left with a far more favorable impression of women at the end of this novel than any of Loti's previous "Oriental" works.<sup>25</sup>

In the novel, exotic was erotic precisely because it was unattainable. Not only did Loti describe a different love relationship in this novel, but he had a profound emotional attachment to Cenan/Marc Hély's which he immediately translated into print. Because of this, his sensibilities were more involved. The presence of the real letters reminded him the drama in which he had participated, he truly felt that as a privileged Westerner male, he has to disseminate the information he had.

Loti's impression about upper-class Ottoman women, that they are quite Western-oriented and they regard European culture as the ideal, was not necessarily true according to Szyliowicz. She quotes some passages from Demetra Vaka and Vaka's visit to a Turkish harem which is full of different stories: "Muslim women with the help of Mahomet ought to work out their own salvation and borrow nothing from the West. We are a race apart, with different traditions and associations."<sup>26</sup> Szyliowicz narrates such an account as to show an evidence to think that many Ottoman women

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 112-113.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 114.

resented rather than desired Occidental influence as they did not perceive it to be attractive or beneficial. However, this was a changing attitude over time as described by Edmondo de Amicis:

The Turkish women welcomed the encounters with foreign women whenever possible. They would become more than happy especially if they can have these foreign guests at home and served them. [...] However, this attitude was probably stemmed from more of a curiosity rather than hospitality.<sup>27</sup>

Amicis goes on with his arguments on this changing attitude saying that the foreign women were despised by the Turkish women once mainly because of the distrust to their “different” moral values and cultures. Yet, the observation in his time reveals a lack of confidence in the Turkish women due to a feeling that they were insufficiently educated in comparison to Lady Montagu’s times. In the 1870s, Amicis writes that the Turkish women started to imitate the European women’s dress styles and dream of a life where an active and lively public space was not forbidden to them.<sup>28</sup> Although this is mainly one of the consequences of a great shift in the political power balances, Amicis’ conclusions and comparisons, although simplistic from today’s point of view, related to the Turkish women attitudes towards the foreign women are worth mentioning.

This is also mentioned in Grace Ellison’s book in the previous chapter of this thesis. Therefore Loti’s portrayal of the women as idle pleasure-seekers is not valid. Unfortunately, this stereotypical view was widespread but in fact it had little basis. Szyliowicz refers to Halide Edib, a frequently referred, prominent Turkish female

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<sup>27</sup> Evren, Burçak et al., *Yabancı Gezginler ve Osmanlı Kadınları* (Istanbul: AD Press, 1997) 191.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

author (also by Grace Ellison who is already mentioned in this thesis) and quotes from Edib's book *Turkey Faces West*:

The laziness attributed to Turkish women in the West is applicable to much smaller minority in Turkey than elsewhere. They have all the times been hard workers. Both in the fields and in their homes, and in the earlier arts and crafts, Turkish women have always been much more hard-working, responsible, and well-balanced than men.<sup>29</sup>

As a conclusion, Szyliowicz considers the novel *Les Désenchantées* as a nostalgic return to a once-beloved foreign culture which contained nice memories for the hero. Just as Marc Hélys duped Loti with her highly romanticized but not unbelievable tale, Loti in return deceived his many readers into believing what Edward Said would term as another "Orientalist" fiction. Although it was not Pierre Loti's intentional attempt, the novel served to reinforce western preconceptions about Turkey and the Turkish women rather than to provide an accurate introduction to Ottoman life.

Marc Hélys gave Loti due credit for his poetic powers, but she also wrote her memoirs so that the world should know that this romance was as much her achievement as Loti's. This finally explains the unique position of *Les Désenchantées* in Loti's oeuvre and why it is so feminist in orientation. The reason why this novel is so different from all the other "Oriental" novels is because it was essentially created and written by a woman.<sup>30</sup>

Loti certainly deserves credit for his willingness to accept Marc Hélys' arguments related to reforms in the position of Turkish women. Even though the information which he received from her and her Turkish friends was misleading, his willingness to convert actively to a feminist cause is impressive according to Szyliowicz. One of

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<sup>29</sup> Szyliowicz, 114.

Loti's positive contributions to French literature was that he articulated towards the end of his life, a sympathetic attitude toward Oriental women which was quite unusual in France at that time.<sup>31</sup>



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<sup>30</sup> Ibid,116.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid,121.

### CHAPTER III

#### A CHALLENGE TO TRAVEL LITERATURE BY TWO TURKISH WOMEN: ZEYNEB HANOUM AND SELMA EKREM

This chapter has a crucially important role in the present thesis. The reason for this is that what has been presented until now was the impressions, images, evaluations and criticisms of Turkish women as found in the texts of three Western travelers.

(Although some basic differences of two women writers are underlined in comparison to Loti's perspectives related to Turkish women.) These travel accounts were not the most common ones referred to in the western travel literature on the subject yet they were not too difficult to obtain. In this chapter, however, the two Turkish women travelers' accounts are handled with detail which makes this thesis unique in this sense. This part is also the crux of the arguments and images related to orientalist women discourse. Both travel accounts are first-hand texts written by the Turkish women themselves in English so no translation is needed. Both texts are (although easy to read in terms of English and structure like many other travelogues) full of complicated signs related to these two upper-class Turkish women's self-definition, the language constructed for the Western audience, the expression/evaluation of the Turkish family life, customs and traditions and their western woman image. That is where the theories and illustrations of image/identity formation as well as the most recent alternative criticism to orientalist discourse will be presented. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion of what I refer as the

“dangerous waters” or a marginal positioning both in the West and in one’s own society and transformations. While doing this, both sides of the coin will be presented, not just the orientalist products but also the Turkish women’s own prejudices and partial comments towards the West as well. They can easily be labeled as an Oriental’s “othering” without overlooking the fact that despite all the different misinterpretations and aspects from both sides, a common feminine language can be put forward after analyzing the texts written by the women in the present thesis. The question of the existence of a “bilateral” agreement between the women from different continents is also put forward.

Inspired by Irvin C. Schick’s argument, it is important to state the obvious reciprocal question which lies in the background of this discussion: Could not other societies including those of the West, be viewed equally as exotic and engendered by the people, writers and the elite of the Middle East? Western power and its self-appointed duty to speak on behalf of other cultures have some indirect claims such as knowing the “truth” about them and also some justifications on Western expansions.<sup>1</sup> What I will try to achieve in this chapter by presenting two Turkish women’s impressions is in a way applying Schick’s theory in their writings since the West was the “exotic” for these Turkish women. This will be exemplified by several quotations from the texts. Before going further with these analyses, it is useful to include the summaries of the travel accounts and life stories of the two women which are inextricably together.

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<sup>1</sup> Pelin Başçı, “The Erotic Margin”, *The Turkish Studies Association* 24 (2000):140.

The first book is called *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions* is written by Zeyneb Hanoum, a woman without even a family name, who was an expatriate with her sister between the years 1906-1912. The book was written in English and printed in 1913 in London when she was probably still in her twenties. The other book is called *Unveiled-The Autobiography of A Turkish Girl* written again originally in English by Selma Ekrem and printed in 1930 in New York. The book covers the years between 1902-1923 and it had four prints successively from 1930 to 1936 in the United States and was highly praised by the critics at the time. Developing from a child's point of view into a young girl's perspective, Selma Ekrem presents us with some vivid observations and impression of a sinking empire and the accounts of a series of compulsory journeys caused by his father's political position and her family past. She was the grandchild of Namık Kemal who wrote articles criticizing the government's policies in the 1860s and was a prominent member of the New Ottomans Society that was established against the regime. Namık Kemal was also a poet and is still a familiar name to many Turkish citizens today. His son Ali Ekrem is pretty well known too, with his thoughts of freedom inherited from his father. However, Selma Ekrem, granddaughter to Namık Kemal and the daughter of Ali Ekrem was totally a foreign name to most. One of the main purposes of the present thesis is to make her more visible to both the Turkish and the Western readers so that her name can also become familiar at least to an audience who is interested in Women's History.

Selma Ekrem, with her modest style, writes of the collapsing years of the Ottoman Empire, Abdulhamit's oppression throughout the country and in particular against her father due to her grandfather's identity. Her father, a high-ranking civil servant was

sent to Jerusalem in the first years of the century, a time when Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities were in turmoil during the last years of Ottoman rule.

As another "punishment" he was later sent to the island of Lesbos (Midilli) where the Ekrem family's life was restricted after the island fell to the Greeks. The book also describes her father's talks with Venizelos, the occupation of Istanbul and the First World War, all from the naive yet strong view point of a young girl.

Selma Ekrem has moved to the United States in 1923, although her book *Unveiled* ends with her coming back to a new "modern" Turkey after a period of a deep longing. She lived in Connecticut and Massachusetts until she died in 1986. She completed her autobiography seven years after she moved to the United States, when she was only 28, when her memories were still fresh. *Unveiled* received much remarkable praise from *Current Literature*, *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Chicago Tribune* and other papers when it was first published.<sup>2</sup>

Zeyneb Hanoum's book is written in epistolary form, namely composed of the letters written to an English journalist woman, Grace Ellison who is also the editor of the book and enriched the text by adding her own comments or explaining the incidents very shortly in between the letters. Zeyneb Hanoum who was a grown up, single, young woman shares her impressions of Europe very openly with her. She writes her impressions about the countries such as France, England, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy while at the same time sharing with Grace Ellison her experiences in Turkish culture, customs and the family traditions, and making numerous comparisons. The initial point for both of the journeys (Zeyneb and Selma's) is due to the political reasons and the milieu, namely the oppression and paranoia of the period during Abdulhamid

the Second's reign (1842-1918). However, in Selma's case, it was her father who was charged of minor, but exaggerated offences because of the paranoia that reigned in the court trials. In Zeyneb Hanoum's case, she herself was accused because of her criticism of the sultan in her writings. A short description by Lord Kinross presents an impression of the sultan and the general atmosphere of Abdulhamid's period during which he ruined hundreds of lives due to his personal obsessions about his safety:

Abdulhamid was an unhappy man and an inhuman sultan. After he lost his mother at the age of seven, it was said of him that "he never loved anyone, least of all himself." Yıldız Palace was a center of fear, the irrational fear of Abdulhamid himself for his personal safety generated through an innate distrust of all men and their motives and in turn generating a spirit of apprehension in all those around him.<sup>3</sup>

As one of the political results of Zeyneb Hanoum's rebellious character, her organization of the young-girls-only white dinner parties already drew suspicion on her. Therefore her awareness and aggressiveness is fully expressed in her letters as opposed to the more simple and naïve impressions of Selma Ekrem. However, by the time Selma reached puberty and was forced to wear her first tsharshaf, her tone in the book suddenly changes into a very negative and obsessive resistance. Zeyneb Hanoum describes the Orient as such: "The Orient is like a beautiful poem which is always sad, even its very joy is sadness".<sup>4</sup> I would like to question her descriptions too since I think that some of her passages carry a tone of her westerner peers. The content of the book enables me to evaluate the text in both ways. While she is traveling in Europe, she comments on the countries' traditions, the details of daily

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<sup>2</sup> "Book Review: *Unveiled*" *Turkish Daily News*, 20 December 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1977), 533.

life and the different values. Zeyneb Hanoum's comparisons of Turkey to Europe become more and more biased towards Turkey as she starts justifying almost each and every Turkish custom and the Turkish life style. I am planning to speculate on what might be the possible reasons behind her disappointments since she did not encounter any particular negative or racist treatment that she relates in her book. Towards the end of the book she mentions a "total lack of hospitality" in the west and concludes by saying that "it is in the west that I appreciate my country"<sup>5</sup>. Another question she poses is if women are really free in the west or not. She even names one chapter with this title. This also is one of the questions that Mernissi asks and argues in her latest book *Scheherazade Goes West*. On the other hand, the images that the westerners have about a Turkish woman and their comments, questions and responses to Zeyneb Hanoum are also present in the book including the female editor, Grace Ellison. This will help to see the different images and impressions of the "foreigner" from both sides.

Julia Kristeva claims that there are two kinds of foreigners, and this separates uprooted people of all countries into two uncompromising categories. On the one hand, there are those who waste away in an agonizing struggle between what no longer is and what will never be. They are not necessarily defeatists; they often become the best of ironists. On the other hand, there are those who transcend: living neither before nor now but beyond, they are bent with a passion that will remain

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<sup>4</sup> Zeynep Hanoum, *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions* (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd. 1913), 117.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 238.

forever unsatisfied. This is a passion for another land, always a promised one. These foreigners are believers, and they sometimes ripen into skeptics.<sup>6</sup>

Kristeva's ideas contributed a great deal to explain the growing bitterness and extreme negativism of the tones two Turkish women's travel accounts, especially in Zeyneb Hanoum's case. At some point in her memoirs, she was asked the reason for her journeys while she was chatting with an English woman who thought that Zeyneb Hanoum was French without even asking her. Zeyneb Hanoum likens herself to Diogenes who tried to find a man. Instead she has been trying to find a free woman but has not been successful.<sup>7</sup> Even the change in the chapters' titles presents enough clues that reflect her mind: "Is this Really Freedom?", "Dreams and Realities", "Freedom's Doubtful Enchantment", "The End of the Dream". In another instance, she acknowledges this illusion she created before she started her journeys and shares an anecdote told by her Koran teacher, which perfectly fits the Kristeva's classification of the Foreigner(s):

There was a little girl in a country of Asia Minor who believed all she heard. One day she saw a chain of mountains blue in the distance. Is that really their color she asked? Yes, they answered. She was so delighted with the answer so goes out to get a nearer view of the blue mountains. After days of walking she got to the summit of the blue mountains. Only to find grass just as can be found anywhere else. But she would not give up. A shepherd there pointed her another chain of mountains higher and farther away, and she went there until the peak, and found the same grass. She went on and on until the evening of her life. She then understood that it was the distance that lent the mountains their hue. But it was too late to go back and she perished in the cold, biting snow.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1991), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Hanoum, 200.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 228.

This anecdote can be considered as a key story, which in fact combines many theories of Otherness and perceptions of the foreigner in one paragraph. When I reflect on the travel accounts I read so far (all of which are not included in this thesis) one element is quite common among them: the emergence of disappointment from both sides, both western and eastern. Since the traveler acts on the knowledge obtained from the images and the secondary sources of the past, disappointment with the place or the people are almost inevitable.

For example, Zeyneb Hanoum writes: “What a disappointment the West has been. Yes, taking it all around I must own that I am a *désenchantée*” (referring to herself as Pierre Loti did in his novel which is perfectly well known to Grace Ellison).<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, the last sentence of Zeyneb’s travel accounts is also in accordance with Kristeva’s theory: Since Zeyneb Hanoum wastes herself away in “an agonizing struggle between what no longer is and will never be”, she will remain forever unsatisfied: “*Désenchantée* I left Turkey, *désenchantée* I have left Europe. Is that role to be mine till the end of my days?”<sup>10</sup>

Selma Ekrem presents a different attitude than Zeynep Hanoum does probably due to the fact that starting from her childhood she had to travel to different countries and live there in longer time periods than Zeynep Hanoum did. She explains for instance that the main reason why she went to the States as such: “... to be able to wear a hat in peace.”<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, Zeynep Hanoum does not like the hat at all and calls it an “absurd fashion”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hanoum, 239.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>11</sup> Selma Ekrem, *Unveiled* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1930), 290.

<sup>12</sup> Hanoum, 66.

A western reader who reads Selma Ekrem's accounts would be very surprised with the multicultural household and the family relationships she experienced. Several languages can be heard at home since they have Greek servants and French teachers. In addition, the children attend to the Koran courses in order to get an appropriate religious background. Therefore, it can be inferred that their education is a very cosmopolitan and sophisticated one. (Of course the French admiration is at a high level) At some point in their accounts both of the writers complain about this strange mixture and are aware that the great confusion they have in their minds and daily life practices are due to this type of education. Wine is always served in Ekrem's family every night and interestingly she compares her aunts' responses when sitting next to each other at the table. The fact that one of her aunts is playing cards and drinking wine, whereas the other abstains from a single drop of alcohol due her religious interpretations is a perfect example to this confusion in a small scale of the Turkish society if the family is taken as the reflection of that society. The existence of a very dominant grandmother figure is worth mentioning especially when Selma Ekrem cannot believe/imagine the fact that the grandmother accepted the veil: "With all her greatness and her wit, she too had bowed to all restrictions and had worn and was still wearing her black tscharshaf."<sup>13</sup>

Another striking point to mention in a study of images in Selma Ekrem's account is her confusion in Jerusalem where they had *selamlık* and *harem* for the first time: "we had never lived in such a house before, never had known a divided home."<sup>14</sup> It is significant to note this detail when one talks about the construction of a Turkish woman image. Ekrem's immediate explanations after her comment on *harem*

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<sup>13</sup> Ekrem, 190.

maintains her impartiality as a writer and does not mislead the reader during a potential reconstruction of the new image about Turkey:

In Constantinople we had not needed a harem for my father allowed mother appear before any friend of his whom she wanted to see. She had not been brought up in that narrow atmosphere where it was considered a sin to show one's face to men and to expose one's hair to casual glances in the streets. Her father was extremely liberal and she had brought to her home these liberal ideas which revolted the old heads.<sup>15</sup>

As it is quite clear from this paragraph, Selma Ekrem is not denying the facts of the Ottoman culture and practices other than her own family. However, what she is doing in her memoirs is new in the way that it challenges the stereotypical narration of the centuries. Irvin C. Schick's presentation is deserved to be underlined here:

Western power including its literature appointed itself to speak on behalf of other cultures which produced "truths" about them. One of these "truths" is *harem*. One of the women writers who is also having serious difficulties in understanding the obsession of the West with *harem* is Fatema Mernissi. Her contribution in corrections/reconstructions of Oriental images is not only about Turkish women but women of the Muslim societies in general and it is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, a striking example from her book related to Matisse and not to mention Picasso's harem sketches so late as 1955 fits here as a reminder to the Western reader:

In the 1920s, when Matisse was painting Turkish women as harem slaves in his paintings such as *Odalisque with Red Trousers*, Kemal Atatürk was promulgating feminist laws that granted Turkish women the right to education, the right to vote, and the right to hold public office.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid,57.

<sup>16</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 109.

Selma Ekrem's America experience, which takes place towards the end of the book, is an intensive part full of images where she was asked so many questions about Turkish women. The ignorance of Americans about Turkey brings her very close to Zeyneb Hanoum's cynical attitude in her book. In one occasion where Selma meets some young girls in her friend's house such a conversation takes place:

"I would simply adore to be in a harem" one of the girls broke my cup of thoughts.

"And lie on silken cushions and eat sweets and watch the dancing of the slave girls," another laughed. (...)

"A paradise indeed," I sighed. "Could you tell me what is a harem? I never saw one."

"You never saw a harem!" the girls burst out. "And you come from Turkey?"

"Yes, I come from Turkey," I added firmly, "but I did not live in a marble palace, I did not have slaves, I did not lie on silken cushions. This harem you speak about exists only in your imagination."<sup>17</sup>

As can be observed from Selma's straightforward attitude towards these young American girls she meets for the first time, an ironical tone like Zeyneb Hanoum's becomes obvious. Immediately after, she intentionally explains further how much she loves to play basketball and compares America's women-only hotels and clubs to the harems in Turkey, a misleading comparison since one is a public space and the other private. She leaves her listeners disappointed since she crushes their imaginary picture of an exotic land decorated with the soft mystery of silks, perfumes and music.

She soon begins to express her criticism against America in a more professional way and starts making money by lecturing about Turkey to Americans. This experience actually becomes an example to my initial claim that there is a support and cooperation between the women of the West and Selma no matter how hard she may

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<sup>17</sup> Ekrem, 311-312.

criticize them in several occasions. Ironically enough, the suggestion of giving lectures comes from an American friend of hers since there were no such practices in Turkey at that time yet. By lecturing in different states about the Turkish women, their daily lives and traditions, Selma Ekrem certainly contributes to a positive Turkish women image and makes money as well. One and a half years later, she misses Turkey, gets homesick and describes the feeling in this way: “The American tonic had become too strong for my Eastern nerves.”<sup>18</sup> However, my quotations might be misleading without mentioning the gap between the classes of the Turkish society at that time. It is not claimed here that the constructions of the Turkish images in the west are fictive overall. There were actually *harem* and *selamlık* sections in many houses in different regions of Turkey when Selma was taken aback with the sight of a house where men and women were to sit separately in Jerusalem. I am however calling attention to the existence of such Turkish families in Turkey. Although they constitute a different class and have different background, they *are* still Turkish.

Unlike Zeynep Hanoum, Selma Ekrem becomes so happy to find that the Kemalist revolutions are put in practice and it is normal to wear a hat now on the streets for women when she comes back to Turkey. She actually writes, “Turkey was a bit of America tamed and softened by the East”<sup>19</sup>. This analogy is something mostly used in a pejorative sense today whereas she meant it in a very positive way.

In the midst of this criticism of the oriental discourses by both of the Turkish writers, an example needs to be given in order to prove how innocently or discreetly the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 317.

process of “exoticizing” countries and images can mingle with the narration. Selma Ekrem herself exoticizes a place and culture that is indeed in an “east-er” direction than Turkey, namely Jerusalem. Her language here has a strong fairy-tale tone. In one occasion, she cannot figure out how Arab women carry jugs filled with water on top of their heads and her attempt to do so ends with disastrous results: “I did not try again to acquire the magic of these women. It was their secret and their glory.”<sup>20</sup> On another page she describes the ceremony on one Easter as such:

The sky seemed to lie heavily on the earth and the air had grown thin with the breathing of thousands. It was like wild dream, a world of beauty and richness true only in *fairy tales* and over this endless chain of solemnity came the long tortured peals of the bells.<sup>21</sup> (emphasis added)

Some similar examples can also be picked up from the text. The reason why it is mentioned here is to justify or create some tolerance towards the Western women travelers mentioned in this thesis who are trying to support a new formation of the women image in the Orient. They should not be as easily discarded as some scholars do because some traces of colonialism are found in them despite of their good intentions. As Sara Mills points out talking about the “self” is not problematised enough in the analysis of women’s travel writing and that Self is not a coherent entity. Transformation of the Self during traveling and its transcription into a text cannot always result as it is aimed.<sup>22</sup> That is why/how my claim of a distinctive and supportive language among women travelers can still be maintained despite of some complexities in the texts that may easily be labeled as “flaws”. This genre’s covert complexity should not prevent its recognition and some contemporary debates.

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<sup>19</sup> Ekrem, 319.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Ekrem, 86-87.

<sup>22</sup> Sara Mills, *An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (New York:Routledge, 1991), 36

Zeynep Hanoum is very disappointed with her western experience. At the time when she decided to turn back to Turkey, she still feels out of place in Turkish society and ends up her journey referring herself as a “disenchanted” woman everywhere. The term “disenchanted” was also chosen to describe the two unhappy young sisters by Pierre Loti. He was already a well-known author when he met Zeyneb Hanoum and her sister in Istanbul. As stated in detail in *Chapter Two*, his total oeuvre was influenced by the Oriental women and his treatment of women was a significant element in his works.

Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem’s disappointments and ironical criticisms about the Westerners’ prejudices are mostly reasonable. These preconceptions are the products of Western men, not the women since women are already silenced by the same system and mentality. Besides the examples presented here, several interesting ones can be provided from Mernissi’s book about this subject. It is difficult not to agree with her when she finds it strange that in the 1920s an Oriental military man like Atatürk was dreaming of liberated women, while a man like Matisse, bred in a democracy, was dreaming of odalisques and an Islamic civilization that he confused with women’s passivity.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mernissi, 200.

## CHAPTER IV

### **HALIDE EDIB: Conflict of The East and The West (1884-1964)**

Halide Edib stands as a unique female figure in Turkish women's history providing a seemingly unending source of study for researchers and scholars. With her life story, novels, and memoirs, scholars and students have discovered a distinctive window from which to study and understand Turkish women's issues from the time of the foundation of the Turkish Republic to the early stages of the western women's movements during the 1960's. In this chapter, I will mainly deal with Halide Edib's memoirs, which are the most relevant to my thesis, but I will also discuss the images created for her by others, as well as the self-image(s) she created for the rest of the world. In doing so I will introduce and comment upon Ayşe Durakbaşa's extensive analysis of Halide Edib's autobiography, particularly those passages in Durakbaşa that are relevant to identity formation and alternative history formation. But before going into details, a short biography of Halide Edib will be helpful in providing basic fundamental information about her life.

Halide Edib was born in Istanbul in 1884, into a traditional family. Her mother died when she was a very young child, and at home in the care of her grandmother she received a traditional Islamic upbringing. However, her father was a man of modern outlook, and was determined that she should receive a western education. Halide Edib first attended a nursery school run by a Greek woman, Kyria Eleni. Despite her western education, she remained deeply moved by the mysticism of the Islamic faith,

as embodied by mosques, tombs and religious observance at home. In 1901, after graduating from the American College for Girls at Üsküdar (Scutari), the first Muslim Turkish graduate, she worked in lyceés as an inspector and teacher. She married the scholar Salih Zeki Bey in 1901. She was distraught when, nine years later, he took a second wife, and she divorced him in 1910. The reverberations of this distressing experience can be seen in her novels, which frequently treat the emotional and social conflicts women face arising from traditional attitudes towards them. Involved in the formative years of the nationalist struggle, she wrote for the liberal paper *Tanin*. Her articles on women's emancipation, especially those advocating education, were met with bitter opposition by the conservatives so that when the Unionists (*İttihat ve Terakki Fırkası*) were out of power in 1909 Halide Edib had to flee for her life.

After a short self exile she returned to Turkey and began a busy career lecturing and campaigning for the education of women. In 1912 she was the only woman to be elected to the *Ocak*, the Turkish nationalist club, with countrywide organizations. In the same year she won fame with *Handan*, the love story of a young woman dominated by a socialist intellectual, and *Yeni Turan* which proclaimed her nationalist feelings. In 1918 she was elected to the *Ocak* council. During World War I, she worked in Syria and Lebanon. She married a fellow activist, Dr Adnan Adıvar, in 1917. Halide Edib had two sons from her first marriage, and with the help of American friends arranged for them to attend schools in the United States.

Following the occupation of Istanbul by the Allies her life was in danger, and together with her husband Adnan Adıvar she fled to Ankara to join Mustafa Kemal

and the other nationalists in 1919. They made significant contributions to the emergence of the new Turkey. She was one of the principal writers and translators attached to Mustafa Kemal's nationalist forces, first as a non-combative private and then as a corporal. After the war of independence the Adivars broke with Atatürk, retired from public life, and Halide Edib dedicated herself to writing. Her *Memoirs* of her early life were published in English in 1926. Halide and her husband lived in England and France and did not return to Turkey until after Atatürk's death in 1938. She then became a Professor of English at the University of Istanbul and translated her memoirs and other books into Turkish. She abandoned politics after a brief and unremarkable spell as member of parliament (1950-1954), and devoted herself entirely to writing until her death in 1964. Above all she wanted to be remembered for her writing, which was of central importance in her life:

I began to write when my children were very young. They would continually ask me questions, and I would answer, but without lifting my pen from the paper. The ideas were so forcefully impressed in my mind that no external sound could distract me. But now I long for solitude and silence. I write my novels in a place where there is no one else around, and I am extremely fussy and tensed up. I must have a plentiful supply of coffee and cigarettes. Unless there are several packets of cigarettes piled up I cannot concentrate. My writing paper must all be exactly the same size. I always write on long, narrow sheets. I can only write in the place to which I am accustomed, with my table, my inkwell, my pen and so on.<sup>1</sup>

Halide Edib is usually considered to be the first important woman writer of Turkey in the early decades of the twentieth century. In her two-volume autobiography, *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (1926-1928), she writes that she discovered her vocation as a writer during the constitutional reform movement of 1908 led by the Young Turks. She was involved in national events from 1908 to 1922, a period of wars and

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<sup>1</sup>Jennifer S. Uglow, *The Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography*, 1999 (15 March 2002) <<http://www.xrefer.com/entry/359136/>>.

revolutions, both as an activist and an author publishing articles and giving speeches about women's emancipation.

Halide Edib's publications include eighteen novels, many short stories, essays, plays, and translations (mostly of Shakespeare). Her heroines are endowed with intellectual and spiritual power and many of her early novels were about the personal and moral conflicts of women in love somewhat isolated from the social and political milieu. The heroines of all her novels are women with strong personalities, capable of defending their moral values against the weaknesses of the male characters, and combining the traits of both western and Turkish women. Her many faceted examination of women, their roles, rights and dilemmas, maintains its validity today. In the 1920s she depicted fighting woman patriots in *Shirt of Flame* (1922) and *Strike the Whore* (1926) which are about exceptional young women who dedicate themselves to the nationalist cause and die heroically. Both novels depict the liberation of women from the narrow confines of a life defined by tradition.

Halide Edib's autobiography is more important than her novels for this thesis because it mainly deals with her very personal conflicts with the culture and values of the West and the East. Not only are Edib's encounters with women from different cultures mentioned, such as Grace Ellison, but also it is in this autobiography, according to Ayşe Durakbaşı, that Halide Edib's cross-cultural feminism and feminist identity are revealed.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Halide Edib-Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 33.

In her book, *Halide Edib-Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm (Halide Edib-Turkish Modernization and Feminism)* based on her dissertation entitled “Reappraisal of Halide Edib for A Critique of Turkish Modernization,” Ayşe Durakbaşa writes that her intention is to “evaluate the life story of a vanguard woman in order to compose an alternative history of Turkish modernization”.<sup>3</sup> She also argues that the formation of Edib’s own identity is based on tackling her cultural inheritance in a comparative way. In doing so Durakbaşa uses a feminist reading of women’s autobiographies and theories to present and define her theory of an alternative history which the writings of Edib support. The texts I am dealing with are also obvious illustrations of tensions between modernity and tradition among the intellectual Turkish women. The image/language discourse inevitably contains discussions related to self-perceptions and definitions of these women which can only be concluded from an analysis of their biographies and autobiographies, an analysis which helps to identify personal tensions in identity formation within the periods in which they were living. My readings of Halide Edib’s *The Turkish Ordeal* (second volume of her memoirs published in 1928) and *Conflict of East and West in Turkey* (a compilation of her lecture notes published in 1935) will be referred as well from their first prints in relation to the Turkish women issues and her self-definition of an identity formation.

Durakbaşa mentions the few favorable images of the Turkish people Halide Edib attempted (together with the other intellectuals of her time) to create, among which was the “primitive Turkish villager” who had been always looked down upon in the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 22.

Ottoman society.<sup>4</sup> Now the attributions of hard-work and honesty were added to the description of “primitive peasant Turk”. Among this newly created image of the Turkish people was included that of the new Turkish woman. This image can also be traced in Grace Ellison’s<sup>5</sup> and Zeyneb Hanoum’s writings.<sup>6</sup>

Durakbaşa describes Halide Edib as a *persona medium* at the beginning of the twentieth century whose identity harbors both Turkish and English identities in a complicated manner. Existence of multi-identities (at least two identities) within Halide Edib -one who writes in English and the other expresses herself in Turkish- and the splits and cleavages between them is where the production of knowledge becomes possible.<sup>7</sup>

In Durakbaşa’s terms “cultural encounter” is a tool in order to expose the dynamics of the cultural formation which produces diverse feminisms. It is significant to note that these cultural encounters play important roles which cause the women’s intellectual developments to go beyond the gender descriptions and roles their societies ascribed to them.<sup>8</sup> Without “cultural encounters” to establish a solidarity and an empathy between women, such solidarity across different cultures and continents become impossible. Traveling prepares the perfect possibility to enable these “cultural encounters,” although, as I have demonstrated, such encounters are hardly without problems.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Grace Ellison, *Ankara’da Bir İngiliz Kadını* (Ankara: Bilgi Yaynevi, 1999), 97.

<sup>6</sup> Zeyneb Hanoum, *A Turkish Woman’s European Impressions* (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd., 1913), 171-172.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 46.

Education of women seems to be the one and only key solution to the progress of Turkish women in every aspect of life. This is agreed upon by observers of both sexes and reflected especially in the narratives of Halide Edib and Grace Ellison. Edib states that the sphere of Turkish women's social service in which they can display the most passionate concern was also education. Most of the higher schools in Turkey were founded by women and richly donated.<sup>9</sup> Yet, a gender-based difference of attitude is worth mentioning among the Western writers but not among the Turkish ones. Pierre Loti considers Turkish women's education as poisoning of their minds especially if the origin of the education is the West. He describes the Turkish women as primitive and ignorant. In his novel *Les Désenchantées*, he depicts the development of mental capacity of his heroines who have the "advantages" of a modern/western education in the following way: "In their brain everything germinated miraculously, as in a virgin territory, the long, rank weeds and the pretty *poisonous* flowers."<sup>10</sup>

This difference between Pierre Loti's approach and some intellectual Turkish men such as Atatürk and his followers as well as their intellectual predecessor Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924) can be due to the fact that the image of the Turkish woman was intended to be built upon the Republican/nation state model which was already designed by these Turkish men. In order to achieve the nation state model, the Ottoman woman image had to be replaced by a new modern Turkish woman image. By adopting the "scientific" language of her time Halide Edib also refers to Ziya

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>9</sup> Halide Edib, *Conflict of East and West in Turkey* (Delhi: Jamia Millia, 1935), 191.

<sup>10</sup> Irene L.Szylowicz, *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Women* (Hong Kong: The Macmillian Press, 1988), 108-111.

Gökalp who “proved” in a large number of works that the Turks gave equal rights to women in their pre-Islamic stage.<sup>11</sup>

Education was the key element in the nationalist project. Also, in the writings of the above mentioned male Turkish intelligentsia the new portrait of Turkish women had to be underlined and repeated regardless of the genre. For the Western writers and travelers of the time such a concern was irrelevant. They could go on with the stereotypes that strengthened the existing images of the Turkish women without any genuine attempt to change them.

When Atatürk praised the Turkish women, the model he decided to present was the “Anatolian woman” image which can easily be combined with the “civilized” woman as opposed to the degenerate, urban women. Another point Atatürk wanted to underline and demystify is the “myth of the harem” that existed in the West about the Turkish women. In some of his speeches he related anecdotes of hard-working village women. He also mentioned how clever, diligent and broad-minded they were. He added that the harem existed only in city life. By adopting this view he was not only attempting to legitimize his own ideological stand but also working to gain a nation-wide support in favor of women’s issues.<sup>12</sup>

Halide Edib also wrote several articles on Turkish history which Durakbaşa described as emphasizing declarations of the national identity to the Western

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<sup>11</sup>Edib, 196.

<sup>12</sup> Ayşe Durakbaşa, *Halide Edib-Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 122.

countries.<sup>13</sup> Edib marks the Turkish identity as the opposite of Ottoman identity. The Turks had the modesty and the simple rural life style originating from Central Asia whereas all the characteristics of imperialism and corruption are embedded in the Ottoman culture. That is why she would definitely frown upon Grace Ellison's regular confusions of the terms Muslim, Ottoman and Turk in her travel notes.<sup>14</sup>

In her book entitled *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*, Halide Edib devotes a whole chapter to the Turkish women from historical and cultural aspects but mainly from a defensive perspective. Her arguments sound simplistic yet carry some significant seeds for future debates on women and nationalism: "Nature endowed women with two seemingly incompatible characteristics, extreme conservatism and revolutionism."<sup>15</sup> She then goes on explaining the family unit with a cell metaphor which should break, re-form or multiply in order to live. This is how women whose conservative sides are dominant while keeping their values intact can turn into great revolutionaries. Her view justifies these seemingly conflicting attributes of Turkish women in a comparison with women who got involved in the French and Russian revolutions. However, she also cites from the Koran and explains how property and economic rights were given to women and how these rights released them from the guardianship of their men.

In Halide Edib's opinion, the recognition of woman as a free, responsible human being existed in Central Asia twelve centuries before the West. Durakbaşa argues about Halide Edib's promotion of the Turkish image all the way from Central Asia,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>14</sup> Ellison, 194.

<sup>15</sup> Edib, 175.

in *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*. Yet, Halide Edib strongly praises Islam as a superior religion too. This emphasis distinguishes itself from the texts of the other women studied in this thesis since the woman rights and images in Islam was not reflected in a positive way in the other memoirs. Another emphasis is the praise and superiority of the motherhood which cannot be found in the memoirs of Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem. Halide Edib describes the Turkish women's motherhood instinct as a very deep-rooted, more than that of the women of other countries.<sup>16</sup>

Halide Edib has two images in opposition: The first one is the exemplary, leading Turkish woman figure, Halide the Corporal; the other one is the demonic image: an egoist, and an extremely ambitious woman who rebelled against Atatürk's decisions occasionally. If Halide Edib represents the positive image of Jeanne d'Arc, as stated in Grace Elison's memoirs with praise, Durakbaşa reminds us the negative side of the very same image which is also attributed to Jeanne d'Arc, a negative, supernatural and almost "witch-like" woman image.<sup>17</sup> She narrates one of her ex-acquaintance's reactions and negative treatment towards her in the war where they met as the "soldiers" and served in the same front. This man who was actually a history teacher talked behind her and called her a "witch" and truly believed that Halide Edib was practicing magic and witchcraft. He continuously refused Halide Edib's friendly attitude and finally left because he could not stand her as a woman-soldier.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 87-188.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>18</sup> Halide Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street W. 1928), 312.

Halide Edib herself is very well aware of these images and does not hesitate to share them with the readers in her memoirs:

Corporal Halide is almost a stranger to me now. Where did she find the patience to go through that drab misery? Where did she find the strength to endure the sights of so much human suffering? Yet dogged, dull patience throughout an endless stretch of days for the sake of the supreme moment was characteristic of the psychology of the Sakarian Army.<sup>19</sup>

In another paragraph, the co-existence of the sentences with the subjects of “I” and “Halide, the Corporal” are the most extreme examples to the complicated multi-identities within herself almost to a point where it may cause a confusion or a possible misreading of the text.<sup>20</sup>

The self-presentation in Halide Edib’s memoirs is also significant for a better understanding of her complicated persona depicted in her works. Mostly she mentions a few instances of peasant women where one can see the exemplary woman figure which indirectly reveals herself. For example, she realizes the diversity and disagreements between the women groups from Ankara and Istanbul, yet Halide Edib strongly believes in the Turkish women’s solidarity. In order to convince the reader the examples she presents is quite striking: An old woman from a village of Ankara whose eyes are almost blind wants to talk to Halide Edib after she completes her speech addressed to a mixed group of Turkish women from different cities and classes. This woman donates some money she collected for the injured Turkish soldiers and also tells Halide Edib that she is working as a laundress so that her only daughter can become a teacher. When her daughter becomes a teacher, she will

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<sup>19</sup> Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal*, 311.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 261.

contribute to peace and give speeches to women like Halide Edib.<sup>21</sup> This is an example in the memoirs where Halide Edib not only presents herself as the exemplary Turkish woman image for the future of the country but also underlines her belief in the solidarity of Turkish women regardless of the disagreements of the factionalism she mentioned earlier. At the same time, this chapter in the book carries the resonance of Yuval Davis' arguments on the intricate connections between the construction of nationalism and the women's role in it.<sup>22</sup>

The narration of one of the few private/personal accounts of her life such as her courageous handling of an angry mob in the village whose rage was directed towards a "slut" also demonstrates her self-representation in the memoirs. Halide Edib uses the word "slut" since it is how this woman is referred in the whole village. This story which is later transformed into a famous novel by Halide Edib is mentioned here since the way it is narrated reflects the assertion of Halide Edib herself as an outsider/strong woman who oscillates between her moral values and the protection of an ostracized village woman.<sup>23</sup>

The metaphors she uses while describing the war and referring to all the important commanders including Mustafa Kemal are worth mentioning in order to reflect her conscious alienation of herself from the war as a woman. She likens Mustafa Kemal and his fellow commanders to small children who are enjoying themselves while

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<sup>21</sup> Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal*, 251.

<sup>22</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 115-124.

<sup>23</sup> Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal*, 258-260.

playing their favorite games. In another sentence, she says that the war was like the fighting of the giant ants to protect their nests.<sup>24</sup>

Halide Edib was never in favor of an active fighting during the war. That is one of the reasons why she underlines the importance and respect for the women rather than men in terms of the tasks they undertook in the war. She considers the peasant women's service during the War of Independence as the most essential part of the services. She quotes a memory of a transport unit which was composed entirely of women whose leader was an old woman of seventy called Sergeant Fatma: "The women worked in silence and dignity, leading their carts not only through mud and mire but also up to the firing line [...] I will not multiply instances of women's sacrifice in those days. They are beyond number."<sup>25</sup>

A similar tone in favor of Turkish women is also dominant in *The Turkish Ordeal*. It is significant that Halide Edib is careful about writing the names of the women she mentions in order to be able to record them into history with a name. In her memoirs, very interesting women figures are described such a Turkish woman photographer and a weird looking woman called Gül Hanoum whose dreams at nights took her to the battle field to fight like a "knight from the Middle Ages"<sup>26</sup>. İsmet İnönü who was the commander of the western front did not like Gül Hanoum's image and ambition for real combat and asked Halide Edib to convince her to serve as a nurse in the tents. This is a typical example to the narrowly defined tasks of the women during the wars assigned by men of the society. However, Gül Hanoum refused this offer.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 302.

<sup>25</sup> Halide Edib, *Conflict of East and West in Turkey* (Delhi: Jamia Millia, 1935), 119-200.

<sup>26</sup> Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal*, 340.

Durakbaşı points out an important and unfortunate reality that women's behaviors are always controlled for the salvation of the society in nationalist movements. This set of moral values and consciousness is something that even the most radical modernist cannot raise his voice against.<sup>27</sup> A similar disappointment was experienced by Selma Ekrem when her mother and other relatives, even though they were modern and "liberated", forced her to put on *tcharshaf* claiming her own protection and safety.<sup>28</sup> But this is just one of many intertextual and biographical comparisons that can be made between these writers.



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<sup>27</sup> Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Halide Edib-Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 153.

<sup>28</sup> Ekrem, 289.

## CHAPTER V

### A COMPARATIVE APPROACH: HALIDE EDIB, ZEYNEB HANOUM AND SELMA EKREM

You and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in a while, but you may also be me, while remaining what you are and what I am not. The differences made *between* entities comprehended as absolute presences--hence the notions of *pure origin* and *true self*--are an outgrowth of a dualistic system of thought peculiar to the Occident...<sup>1</sup>

--Trinh, T. Minh-Ha. *Woman, Native, Other*.

It is in this chapter that the comparison and intertwining of biographies, the method and content of self expression, the political feminist positioning and the identity forging struggles between east and west of Zeyneb Hanoum, Halide Edib and Selma Ekrem are used in support of a new assessment of the Turkish woman image. Several illustrations of the interactions between these women writers (focusing on the solidarity they developed among each other) will be presented as a means to complete the composition and add strength to my argument.

Zeyneb Hanoum, Halide Edib and Selma Ekrem all received private education at home. Halide Edib and Selma Ekrem attended the American College for Girls at Üsküdar in Istanbul. The dynamics of a disintegrating empire and the witnessing of some fundamental reforms, which aimed to transform the lives of Turkish women, affected Halide Edib's personality deeply as well as Selma Ekrem and Zeyneb Hanoum. They all used English in their works as a foreign language. In what follows,

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<sup>1</sup> T. Minh-Ha Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1989), 90.

their use of English will be discussed and Halide Edib's memoirs will be contrasted with her Turkish versions of them. My research so far showed that no originally-Turkish books were published by Selma Ekrem and Zeyneb Hanoum.

It is remarkable that they all preferred to express themselves in English. This could be because they found it easier to describe their plight and problems in a foreign language rather than their mother tongue. The shift between different languages might have served to provide them with an alternative zone of writing and thinking, where they do not belong to either culture (Western/Turkish). Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem were most probably thinking in Turkish and writing in English and communicating in several other European languages during their travels. Halide Edib, on the other hand wrote her years and experiences during the War of Independence in Turkey first in English and in England. However, interestingly enough one cannot find any trace of memoirs related to the years spent and her life in England. In this sense, her choice to express her experiences of the Turkish War of Independence from exile can be considered as the reverse case of Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem who wrote their memoirs of the "exile" in exile.

This physical and lingual alienation in certain time periods of their lives of these women might have helped create the unique language I claim they have. The memoirs studied here are Zeyneb Hanoum's *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions*, Selma Ekrem's *Unveiled* and Halide Edib's *The Turkish Ordeal*.

## 5.1 National Identity, Gender and Images

Madan Sarup, an English thinker and lecturer of Indian origin, formulates significant theories on the issues of identity and belonging. According to his views, national identity is an ideology. It is like social cement, an effective form of ideological binding and social control. Like all successful ideologies it works by **image**, symbol, habit, ritual and mythology. National identity is emotional and experimental, and entwines itself with the deepest unconscious roots of the human subject.<sup>2</sup> This argument can be used to trace the intricate multi-identities within the writings of Halide Edib, Grace Ellison, Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem.

According to Sarup, one needs to remember that the definition of national identity is not something that happens at once, but is a constant process of ideological struggle.<sup>3</sup> This ideological struggle is a key concept that should remain in focus while examining the similar inconsistencies of these women whose works are studied here. What are meant by inconsistencies are the women writers' deviations between the discourses of nationalism, colonialism and feminism in their memoirs. Turkish women such as Halide Edib, Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem had to endure the formation of their national identities challenged by a diversity of cultural encounters with foreign elements such as education, friends, books and governesses. These challenges can be traced and criticized in the works they created as well as their own life stories.

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<sup>2</sup>Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 136.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 144.

World experience in general suggests that the development of nationalism coincides with the bourgeoisie undertaking the mission of transforming traditional society and fighting in two fronts: against the pre-capitalist structures and feudal order of the patriarchal families in the society as well as against the economic and cultural the hegemony of the West. Such attempts are observed in the writings of all three of the Turkish women writers studied here. They all belonged to the upper-class families but also clearly exposed in their writings the aspects of both missions depicted in the two-sided fight of the bourgeoisie that Durakbaşa draws attention to.<sup>4</sup>

Women's liberation movements are often an indispensable part of national resistance movements. In Turkey, it was placed almost in the center of the nationalist ideology in the process of creating a new national and cultural identity. This "new woman" image was not only an indicator of cultural authenticity but also at the same time a symbol of "being civilized" as a nation. Therefore the reformist Turkish men defended the rights of Turkish women for the sake of creating this new image of the *modern* and the *civilized* woman. This nationalist alliance between men and women allowed a permanent alliance between nationalism and patriarchy as well.<sup>5</sup> I do not think that the women like Halide Edib, Selma Ekrem and Zeyneb Hanoum who were in one way or another, involved in this nationalist project were fully aware of this second alliance. It is also feasible that they were simply unable to interfere and thus opted to ignore it.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 89.

In her extensive gender analysis, Yuval-Davis points out that nationalisms are always gendered and underlines the difference between the terms “nationalist projects” and “nation states”. She explores the contesting relations between feminism and nationalism. Her book *Gender and Nation* illustrates how women reproduce nations biologically, culturally and symbolically. According to Yuval-Davis, the construction of nationhood involves specific notions of both 'manhood' and 'womanhood' which then results in the production of different images. I think these images can be far behind the realities of the nation.

For example, Yuval-Davis warns of the fallacy of viewing the groups (or women) as homogenous entities because this fallacy produces a “representative” of the collectivity that denies different positionings within it. She cites an example of differences among women: the case of elite women serving as "representatives" of women's interests - not only in terms of privileged western women speaking for all women, but also, of privileged women from less-developed nations speaking for all of the women in their countries.<sup>6</sup> This last comment constitutes the backbone of the problematic side of the Turkish women travelers and authors mentioned in this study. They are all elite and privileged women of the society. That is why the memoirs of Zeyneb Hanoum, Selma Ekrem and Halide Edib do not reflect the total “truth” about women in Turkey and do not show the “real face” of the society, since they cannot be accepted as the "representatives" of Turkish women's interests or problems according to Yuval Davis' argument. Durakbaşa draws attention to the same fact while explaining Halide Edib's background, she makes it clear that a “modernist education” could only be received by the daughters of, at least, the semi-aristocratic

rich families in Istanbul. Mostly they were the ones who participated in the process of creating a new image for Turkish women.<sup>7</sup> Halide Edib herself mentions the big gap between herself and the village women she helped in Ankara and her feeling of alienation.

A type of Turkish moral Puritanism was predominant in her relationships with her male and female colleagues in comparison to the peasants of Anatolian villages. For instance, in order to entertain Halide Edib, the women of the village called Kalaba call a “slut” from the notorious street where prostitutes wander. In contrast to Halide Edib’s feelings of disgust and pity, all they wanted was to pay to this woman so that she dances in the wedding ceremonies. Although Halide Edib notices the women’s disappointment with herself, she cannot stand the sight of a dancing prostitute and leaves the ceremony. It is also interesting that the “slut” also gets upset and considers this a matter of pride. Some of the so called “love stories” told to Halide Edib are full with elements of deceit, passion, jealousy and violence. Occasionally, her confusion can be understood through her memoirs when she realizes that another set of moral values exist in the rural areas and villages which are considered to be “backward” or traditional by her milieu.<sup>8</sup> She compares the life in the headquarter she regularly visits in Ankara to that of a monastery which is a significant metaphor in contrast to the village life she observes as an outsider.<sup>9</sup> The moral Puritanism she mentions seems no longer to be valid in these lands.

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<sup>6</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 115-124.

<sup>7</sup> Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Halide Edib-Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 128.

<sup>8</sup> Halide Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street W. 1928), 140-141.

The Turkish “lady” image which was represented by Halide Edib is in fact a new womanhood model. It became a distinguished characteristic of Kemalist women and drew a line between them and the traditional Ottoman woman image. When compared to the other two Turkish women travelers, one can observe the radically different Kemalist “modern” woman image that Selma Ekrem put up with as a young girl in 1915. Although the model was not yet as clear to her as it was to Halide Edib, Selma Ekrem states very straightforwardly in her memoirs that she left her country in order to keep this modern image.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Zeyneb Hanoum presents a more traditional Ottoman woman image especially after her travels to Europe. However, to do better justice to the comparison, the difference between the time periods within which these women writers lived should be taken into consideration.

Zeyneb Hanoum experiences a severe state of indecision in her life style too. She was the oldest of the three Turkish women and witnessed slightly different historical events than Halide Edib and Selma Ekrem. As an “objectified” sign of Zeyneb Hanoum’s confusion, the following example can be given: She hated the veil but she never got used to the hats of the European women either. She calls it an absurd fashion.<sup>11</sup>

The idealization of the woman image in pre-Islamic Central Asian society is put forward by Atatürk and originally by Ziya Gökalp. It is also claimed that the reason of women’s regression to a secondary position in Turkish society has been due to the effects of Persian and Byzantine cultures. Therefore with the help of *revitalization* of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>10</sup> Selma Ekrem, *Unveiled* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1930), 288-289.

national culture and ideals, the *resurrection* of feminism would be possible (emphasis mine). They claim that such ideals are already seeded in the Turkish culture.<sup>12</sup>

Grace Ellison's conversation with a Sheikh whom she meets during one of her train voyages in the heart of Anatolia can be cited to illustrate the claim above (as also mentioned in *Chapter One*). She narrates with a convinced mind that, as the Sheikh states, the separation of Turkish men and women stems from the Byzantine culture and Mustafa Kemal will soon revise this. Grace Ellison<sup>13</sup> shares her impressions with the reader and thinks that foreign elements contaminate the "good" Turkish/Muslim essence. Her argument is strikingly similar to the arguments which are put forward to realize the Turkish nationalist project.

## 5.2 Expression of Exile

Halide Edib and Zeyneb Hanoum have at least one thing in common if nothing else: political exile. Selma Ekrem is also indirectly connected to this "unfortunate" state through her father who was in political exile for years. After giving a basic definition of exile as "to expel a person from his/her country or home by law or decree"

Durakbaşı analyzes the memoirs of Halide Edib composed during her four years of exile in England. According to Durakbaşı, being in political exile also means the loss

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<sup>11</sup>Zeyneb Hanoum, *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions* (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd. 1913), 66.

<sup>12</sup>Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Halide Edib-Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 120-121.

<sup>13</sup>Grace Ellison, *Ankara'da Bir İngiliz Kadını* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1999), 103.

of a belief or mission, so the intellectual with no country often formulates some defense mechanisms in order to overcome this loss.<sup>14</sup>

Madan Sarup claims that exile can be deadening, but also very creative. In the transformation to or from exile every step forward can be a step back. It can be a transfiguration and a resource.<sup>15</sup> Sarup quotes from Edward Said's lines on exile that when some people think of exiles they only think of those famous American and British writers who sought a change in their creative surroundings. The orient is laden with associations of irrationality and arbitrariness. Mentioning Edward Said's remarks on exile contributes to the importance of three Turkish women's (Halide Edib, Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem) writings from exile. It draws attention and praise for their challenges to the common attitudes and literature on exile. Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem, especially, are examples of Turkish women whose voices are ignored and remained buried in the history. Yet, they managed to write and publish their experiences of exile and travel. According to Sarup there are many sorts of travelers, some live on the "borderline", the border between two states. The borderline is always ambivalent, sometimes it is seen as an inherent part of the inside, at other times it is seen as part of the chaotic wilderness outside.<sup>16</sup> The claim that creative knowledge is formed in this ambivalent borderline brings Sarup and Durakbaşı closer in this regard.

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<sup>14</sup> Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Halide Edib-Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 170.

<sup>15</sup> Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

### 5.3 English: A Form of Liberation?

The act of writing itself is a liberating process in case of three Turkish women.

According to Durakbaşa, writing in a foreign language and using the singular third person (in Halide Edib's case) is a narration strategy which enables them to create a distance between themselves and the outside world.<sup>17</sup> It unlocks a space as a writer. Durakbaşa makes a parallel reading of Halide Edib's English, and later her memoirs published in Turkish, and determines that she expresses herself more freely in English. She thinks the reason for this might be her release from the clamps of a defined Turkish womanhood while using English.<sup>18</sup> Probably due to her political concerns, an auto-censorship is observed in the Turkish version of the memoirs. Moreover, a psychoanalytic approach in the English volumes is replaced with a pedagogical language in the Turkish ones.<sup>19</sup>

My conclusion from these comments is that the images that Halide Edib casts for herself is not alike in different languages. It would be more than an entertaining attempt to speculate on the outcomes of the possible Turkish versions of Zeyneb Hanoum and Selma Ekrem's memoirs and travel notes. The auto-censorship is already much stronger than these Turkish women writers can imagine even in their English texts. Not a single mentioning or even an indirect reference to sexual matters or relationships can be encountered in the texts I studied. No matter how "feminist" and "alternative" these women can be labeled, the images presented about themselves and the Turkish women in general is an honorable, and "chaste" one. I

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<sup>17</sup> Durakbaşa, 174.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 179.

can define their images and their languages as almost asexual. Only occasional disapproval related to Western women's culture and relations with men can be observed in the writings of these women with "Western" education.

#### 5.4 Narrations of Cultural Encounters

Halide Edib presents one of the most appropriate female models in this thesis, since her definition of women's solidarity and support includes foreign-western women as well. She writes a letter to an English journal called *The Nation* right after the second constitutional reform movement of 1908. The editor of the journal happens to be a woman whose name is Isabel Fry. Halide Edib is asking for advice and assistance for establishing education models for Turkish women. This is the beginning of a life-long friendship between two women who belong to different nationalities. Halide Edib's hesitation to adopt a completely English educational model is clear in her letters. She writes in one of her letters that Muslim women would like to keep the veil as an authentic sign, and makes it clear that having the veil is not an obstacle in receiving proper education.<sup>20</sup> She takes a defensive position against the Western attitudes towards the veil and states that she is well-aware of the prejudices of the West about the Turkish women.

Halide Edib's first solo-travel to England to visit Isabel Fry has a very unique place in her memoirs. Perhaps because of her lack of self-confidence and the feeling of alienation, which is aggravated by her uncomfortable new hat, she is enchanted with Ms. Fry's special program prepared for her only. By Halide Edib's own words, this cultural encounter "liberates her from the childlike shyness she had and contributes

to her formation of a Turkish woman image who defends Turkish nationalism”<sup>21</sup>.

Despite her attempts to combine her experiences with her political ideology, I still find it difficult to analyze how she can build a bridge between her meetings with English intellectuals and a strengthened Turkish nationalism in herself.

Halide Edib compares Isabel Fry’s simple and modest life style (in a Quaker commune) to the excessively luxurious lives of the upper-class Ottoman women which she describes as “parasite-like”.<sup>22</sup> An authentic Turkish woman **image** which Halide Edib dreams of in her utopia is one of a hard-working woman and she definitely wants to change the harem life itself and the image already created in the minds of westerners. She claims that the misleading Ottoman woman image which is disseminated by the Orientalist discourse should be replaced with a hard-working Turkish woman image. According to Durakbaşa, Halide Edib’s imposition is not only a defense against the West but also a new model against the already existent traditional femininity forms and images in the society.<sup>23</sup>

A common conflicting reaction against the English suffragettes, after a direct visit to the Parliament in London, occurs both in Halide Edib’s and Zeyneb Hanoum’s memoirs. Although the initial motivation for their visits was to receive advice and support from the western feminists, they do not approve of the Suffragettes’ movement which, according to them, ruins the original “ladyhood” of the English women.<sup>24</sup> However, it is worth noting that the English women they established

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<sup>20</sup> Durakbaşa, 192.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>22</sup> Durakbaşa, 194.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 195.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 197-198.

contacts with are also searching for new models for the development of women's positions in their societies and they themselves are disappointed with the Suffragettes' movement in England. The reason why they were eager to have further correspondence with the women from other nations may also be interpreted differently. Maybe it was not necessarily a desire for helping and supporting the Muslim/Turkish women (although it is part of it) but building a consensus and analyzing the Turkish women's way of dealing with women's issues.

To illustrate this, Grace Ellison's other book entitled *Disadvantages of Being A Woman* can be useful. This book reflects the deep disappointments that Ellison experienced after the English feminist movement and describes a traditional attitude which grows gradually in her as a reaction to it. She sounds almost envious of Turkish women in some of the paragraphs in which she expresses her admiration to Atatürk:

It feels strange to observe how Turkish women gain their legal rights without really demanding them thanks to Atatürk who is in charge of the government, whereas in England the women's target is the government itself if any revisions and reforms related to English women were to be made.<sup>25</sup>

Durakbaşa underlines the importance of studying Grace Ellison's connection to Halide Edib since this encounter helps each of them to define their position as women and how each used the differences in their cultural histories while acting in these positions.<sup>26</sup>

Grace Ellison identifies herself more with the Ottoman feminist women's attitudes and approves their sneer against the militant English suffragettes. Durakbaşa

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<sup>25</sup> Durakbaşa, 213-214.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 34.

underlines this modest and non-militant tact that the Ottoman feminists adopted.

They emphasized over and over again the importance of providing education facilities to the women. This ideological stand fit Grace Ellison's ideas more than her English counterparts.

In spite of the colonialist/imperialist tone in some of her advice towards the Turkish women, as discussed in detail in an earlier chapter, Grace Ellison does not hesitate to share her intimate appreciation and praise for Turkish female "patriots":

These women's love for their country is gorgeous! There is also a strong patriotism among the men as well but still incomparable to Jeanne D'arc(s) grown in Turkish women themselves.<sup>27</sup>

The similarity between Grace Ellison's self-presented image in her memoirs to the image Halide Edib wanted to create for herself calls for attention. Both women share images as a female figure of historical importance that has liaisons and feels effective in political arena. Among these self-attributions; the patriot, the witness to significant historical and political events of the time can also be counted. Durakbaşa considers Grace Ellison's memoirs as reflections of a western woman's fantasies of an identity which has an almost ego-centered tone.<sup>28</sup> This illusionary identity could not be formulated in England. I agree with Durakbaşa's careful -maybe partly cruel- analysis: that travel for Grace Ellison is an escape from the concerns and expectations of her own society from a single woman including the label of a "spinster". A general tone of "the heroine who wanders in the lands of the Orient" is dominant in her memoirs.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Durakbaşa, 218.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 219.

An interesting difference between the two cultures in relation to the images of women involved in war affairs is worth mentioning in this comparative study. The repeated concerns of the public opinion in England about the issue was that the women would become man-like creatures in the case they were active in the war. This complaint was hardly ever expressed by the Ottoman press or intellectuals. In none of Halide Edib's works, was this presented as a problem either. She only mentions the physical difficulties women may have encountered occasionally and that being a "married" woman would ease the relationship with the other soldiers and help her to keep her "chastity".<sup>30</sup>

The image of the unmarried women in both cultures was also quite different according to Durakbaşa. Although a certain rise in numbers and the respectable status of the unmarried women in different professions are possible in the early decades of the Turkish Republic, one cannot talk of an "individually liberated" woman like in the West. The image of the unmarried Turkish woman in the early republican period was the obedient daughter who defined her identity in the limits of her family and the Republic. Being a part of the "endogamous marriages" among the Turkish élite, Halide Edib also represented the new image of the modern wife and mother.<sup>31</sup>

In case of Zeyneb Hanoum, and Selma Ekrem who preferred to stay single, their description of struggle for the women's rights seemed more troublesome. They could

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 219-222.

<sup>30</sup> Durakbaşa, 225.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 229.

not realize themselves and lead the life they wanted without regard to the moral standards the society demanded.

The works of the women studied here are rebellious female declarations of their times which not only defied the existing roles of the womanhood but also stayed as significant records of the Turkish women's history during the critical transition periods of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods.



## CONCLUSION

Based on my research and the evidence presented in this thesis I can conclude that the Turkish woman images created in books written by Western male travelers are far beyond the reality of the time although they were the images which were (and perhaps still are) the most widely disseminated. In short, the books written by women travelers reflected a different view, perhaps closer to reality of the Turkish women. The exercise of revealing and analyzing these books written by women was itself important in order to expose the existence of a group of educated, intelligent Turkish women who have to be considered as “individuals” and not as the reflections of the stereotypical images of Turkish women often as it exists in the description in the male written orientalist texts. In a way, this thesis can be classified as an attempt to falsify the orientalist image of the Turkish women and bring an alternative perspective with specific examples to the light.

This thesis also reveals that inconsistencies found in the texts of the female Turkish travelers are critical and striking. They are often due to the conflicts and the deep consciousness experienced by these women writers as discussed in *Chapter Five*. My assumption is that it was not easy to build a bridge between the West and the East once the women were already out of their own cultures. The same is true for the Western women writers whose works are mentioned in the thesis. They were also very critical of the practices and laws of their countries and tried to find a moderate way in between where women can be content with their legal and social lives. As

was shown in my thesis, this similarity of purpose between the Western and Turkish women writers contributed to a language which carries a tone of solidarity and dialogue among Western and Turkish women.

An additional conclusion arising mainly from *Chapter Five* is a mission-like responsibility both in the West and the East that is given to the women by their state and culture, for example the responsibility to disseminate and promote the benefits and greatness of their nations, cultural biases and social structures. All the texts studied prepare a common ground for the traveler women of the East and West and put them in a special place with regard to their contemporary male peers. This, in turn, leads to a common inconsistency in their writings. On the one hand they praise their culture-specific practices and consider them as superior to those of other nations and on the other hand they sincerely criticize their governments and societies in regard to women's rights and status.

I hope this study will inspire students of gender and women's studies for further and more profound research on the Turkish travelers who wrote their impressions of the West and of the "other" women. I take pride in the fact that to the best of my knowledge, this is the first comparative study of the Turkish women travelers accounts, a neglected subject to date.

On my attempt to help uncover different experiences of strategies and efforts to reinforce women's solidarity and to construct a common language among women of different cultures in history, the travel accounts of women writers were discovered as an untapped resource. I found this resource to very promising in shedding more light

on Turkish women's history and in contributing to alternative history reading. I can only hope that others share my enthusiasm.



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