FEMINIST TRADITION IN 18th-19th CENTURY ORIENTALIST LITERATURE: UNVEILING WESTERN WOMEN'S ORIENTALIST TROPES IN THEIR TRAVELOGUES

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For my family and my dear departed grandfather Sebahattin. And for all, who believe in the brotherhood of nations...

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AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has consisted of:

i) A Research Methods course during undergraduate study;

ii) Examination of several thesis guides of particular universities both in Turkey and abroad, as well as a professional book on this subject.

Ceyda BİROL

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ABSTRACT

Ceyda BİROL **June 2015**

Feminist Tradition in 18th-19th Century Orientalist Literature: Unveiling Western Women's Orientalist tropes in their travelogues

Edward Said says in *Culture and Imperialism* that the studies about the Middle East have been dominated by masculism and he shows the significance of women's role in undermining this dominance by demonstrating the "diversity and complexity of experience that works beneath the totalizing discourses of Orientalism and of Middle East (overwhelmingly male) nationalism" (Said 24). In my thesis, I study the certain complicity between Orientalism's imperialist functions and Western feminism. The feminist, orientalist, and imperialist tendencies reflect the very Enlightenment idea of Western European women as the "sole signifier of civilization" (Yeğenoglu 106). Although writers like Wollstonecraft, Evans, and Chevers happen to be the repetitive voice of their male counterparts and of previous generations, other women writers, like Manley Delarivier and Lady Mary Montagu, project their own life experiences into literature that sheds light on the dark corners of the Orient. Lady Mary Montagu with her *Turkish Embassy Letters* is one of the most important contributors for the unbiased portrayal of Ottoman life during the imperial era. She was also praised as "a conscientious ethnographer trying to communicate the humanity of the peoples of another culture" (Fernea 330). She fearlessly deconstructs the common assumptions and claims about the oppression of Muslim women in her Ottoman accounts.

Key Words: Orientalism, Feminist Orientalism, Deconstruction, Muslim women, Lady Mary Montagu, Edward Said

KISA ÖZET

Ceyda BİROL **Haziran 2015**

18. ve 19. Yüzyıl Oryantalist Edebiyatında Feminist Geleneği: Batılı Kadın'ın Gezi Yazılarındaki Oryantalist İzlerin Açığa Çıkarılması

Oryantalizm'in öncülerinden olan Edward Said, "Kültür ve Emperyalizm" kitabında Ortadoğu çalışmalarının maskülizm tarafından kuşatıldığını söyler ve bu egemenliğin Oryantalizm ve Ortadoğu (çoğunlukla erkek) milliyetçiliği söylemlerinin altında yatan tecrübelerin çeşitlilik ve karmaşasını ortaya çıkararak yok edilmesinde kadının önemini gösterir (Said 24). Tezimde, Oryantalizm'in emperyalist işlevi ve Batı feminizmi arasında kesin bir ortaklık oldugunu one surmekteyim. Feminist, oryantalist ve emperyalist eğilimler Batılı Avrupa kadınını "medeniyetin yegane imgesi" olarak kabul eden Aydınlanma Çağı düşüncesini yansıtmaktadır (Yeğenoglu 106). Wollstonecraft, Evans ve Chevers gibi yazarlar erkek çağdaşlarının ve daha önceki dönemlerdeki yazarların tekrarı niteliğinde olsalar da Doğu'nun karanlık köşelerini aydınlatan, edebiyata kendi hayat tecrübelerini katan Manley Delarivier ve Lady Mary Montagu gibi kadın yazarlar da mevcuttur. Lady Mary Montagu da *Turkish Embassy Letters* adlı eseriyle imparatorluk çağında Osmanlı yaşamının tarafsız ve önyargısız portresine katkı sağlayan çok önemli yazarlardandır. İngiliz büyükelçisinin eşi olarak, Lady Mary yaygın varsayımları ve Müslüman kadının ezilmişliği hakkındaki iddiaları Osmanlı notlarında/kayıtlarında korkusuzca yapısöküme uğratmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Oryantalizm, Feminist Oryantalizm, Yapısökümcülük, Muslüman kadınlar, Lady Mary Montagu, Said

CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

To write a full critical account of the Muslim world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would require knowledge of the regions extending from Africa to Indonesia. Instead, my thesis will concern itself chiefly with research produced in Turkey, mainly Adrianople and Constantinople, which is Istanbul at present. I will mainly consider the period between 1700 and 1900, and the previous male and female Western experiences in the Ottoman quarters as well as the post-nineteenth century to reveal the evolution and growth of Orientalist discourse.

I trace changes from the Augustan to the Victorian and Edwardian eras, relating the research made İn the field to Lady Mary's travel accounts. She will be addressed as LM throughout this study to avoid any unnecessary repetition. I will analyze some letters from LM that show how she perceived the fictionalization of Middle East history around subjects such as despotism, the harem, illiteracy, and the idleness of Muslim women in eighteenth-century literature. LM's *Letters* gained the status of an authority after a while on anything Oriental. Writers started to refer to her letters as a model that had great impact on both male and female travellers.

Previous generations of scholars had poor access to archives and libraries, therefore having difficulty in finding the basic information about Ottoman origins and their relations with Europe. Recent studies, however, come from the bottom up and from the peripheries. With the generation of the 1960s and '70s especially, new studies on the Ottoman economy, shari'a courts, harem life, and Muslim-minority relations appeared. With comparative studies, also, European and Muslim encounters on the Mediterranean frontier, and late in the nineteenth century, the spread of feminist Orientalism over the Islamic lands were researched more deeply and critically. Europe's representation of the Orient was never unified: there were a number of concepts and images drawn for the "other" and the experience of the Orient was merely heterogeneous.

“Words are like onions. The more skins you peel off, the more meanings you encounter. And when you start discovering multiplicities of meanings, then right and wrong becomes irrelevant” (Mernissi 61). A lot of things being said about the Orient and its culture, we come to agree with Mernissi’s grandmother that some strictly drawn concepts turn out to be irrelevant in the end.

Chapter I is a brief history of travels by men in the eastern Mediterranean. It includes some anecdotes from male travellers on their first encounter with the Middle East and veiled women. I will briefly mention these travellers’ positive or negative impressions about the Mediterranean and their written records, followed by their experiences. One book I will analyze is Gerald MacLean’s *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720*. MacLean is trying to understand Englishness and its global connotations. The subjects of his study are Thomas Dallam, William Biddulph, Henry Blount, and the anonymous T.S. These personages have different backgrounds, occupations, motivations for travel, and distinct reactions or attitudes to other cultures. The starting point for all is England, to which all return in the end. The works I briefly analyze mostly forward Englishmen’s attitudes toward its “Others.” While pointing out the different perspectives by English men toward Muslim women, the aim is to dig out the roots of the biased opinions generated centuries ago and to display the influence of their travels on later generations. My study will not only be situated within the field of English, but will include the comparative studies as well.

Chapter II, the longest in my thesis, is devoted to the first secular travel writer, Lady Mary Montagu. My thesis is divided into four sections. Chapter II mainly includes the history of women travellers, their affiliation with LM and their distance from her, LM’s personal life and its reflection on her travels, and lastly various travel accounts by women on the harem. Considering various travels to the East, I emphasize how LM, the first actual feminist traveller to the Orient in the Orientalism of her day, influenced later generations of travellers with her

deconstruction of the misrepresentations of her male counterparts. I begin with the various reasons that direct female travellers into the “world of others.” Then I examine the continuity/ discontinuity with hegemonic attitudes toward the Middle East. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century male/ female representations of the haremlik and their reflection in literature are the focal point of this chapter.

In Chapter III, I analyze the three aspects of the Eastern treatment of women that feminist travel writers specifically emphasized in their travelogues: (1) the belief that women do not have souls, which justifies all other practices in the harem; (2) the inner circle of the harem: the luxury, sexuality, and polygamy; and (3) the confinement of women, thus their inactivity and lack of education. The founder of feminist Orientalism, Mary Wollstonecraft, and her likes associated the practices in the seraglio with Mahometanism and its demanding rules. Women had to comply with anything their men expected of them; they lived in luxury yet had nothing personal or private; they could not interact with men other than family members which was part of their forced confinement. However, LM, Demetra Vaka Brown – being Greek but having lived under the Ottoman rule during her childhood – and Grace Ellison, whether we give it credit or not, appreciated the differences between cultures and saw likenesses between them. Their travel accounts and memoirs displayed a gendered counter-discourse and challenged the stereotypes. They even went further until they found positive aspects of the customs of Muslim women in the East.

CHAPTER I

THE INITIAL TRAVELERS TO THE ORIENT

1.1 Men Travelling to the East and Collecting Data

In an article published in 1982, Leila Ahmed criticized Western feminists for their pursuit of and docility toward previous accounts of Muslim women, namely the “received ideas of their culture” (526). They perpetuated an image of Islam as monolithic and fixed, namely a strict set of rules that prevents Muslims from progressing and that keeps its women in a state of slavery. That image belonged to the ideas generated centuries ago by those male travellers who fantasized and constructed an imaginary East through their literature. Orientalism, presented as a male preserve by Said, was examined by some feminist scholars such as Billie Melman and Reina Lewis so as to enhance the understanding of Orientalism’s complexity. Since the participation of Western women in the construction of Orientalist discourse is essential, Western men’s imperialist tendencies, which affected and motivated women travellers through their experience in Muslim lands, are of utmost importance as well. Starting from the captive narratives to attributing nasty names to the very term “Turk,” Western men’s journeys to the East were significant occasions, co-operative means of interaction between cultures, and most importantly a motivational stance toward “others” for women. This chapter gives a brief introduction to the male travels to the East from the sixteenth century on and thus provides an insight into how the origins of the Oriental travels created the Orientalist tradition.

Ottoman Turks were indeed a big threat to European territories as they carried Islam with them. Thus, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the English deeply felt the Turkish threat to Christendom. The British subjects at the time were being captured and enslaved by “Turkish” privateers in the Mediterranean. The fear of being conquered, captured, and converted was

inscribed by the early modern English writers as demonizing representations of "the Turk." As opposed to LM's tolerant view on Islam and its prophet, Biddulph named Muhammad "a thief," "a seditious souldier," "runnagate" and his followers "light heads" (51). In the seventeenth century, for instance, the expression 'turn Turk' was used by some Jacobean dramatists. In Dekker's *The Honest Whore*, Hippolito tells Bellafront that "'tis damnation / If you *turn Turk* again" (Part I, Act iv, Scene ii). In Massinger's *The Renegado*, Act v, Scene iii, upon Paulina's decision to "turn Turk," Gazet shares his thought about the issue and says, "Most of your tribe do so, / When they begin in whore" (Rice 154).

Almost every nation that attempted to trade in the Mediterranean faced the terror of the pirates. In the sixteenth century, there was growth of an English empire based on commerce. Thus travels to the Levant gained momentum in this century and piracy became a new fighting ground between Christianity and Islam. Religion was a secondary motivation for the fight which was really based on economy. Once the Barbary states were under the control of the Ottoman emperor, the English turned to piracy against the "satanic other of Christian Europe" (Fuchs 49). Once North African Moors were hindered the licit privateering by the Europeans, they grew hateful to all Christian princes and converted to Islam. They were called "renegadoes" then. At this point, the English ventures to the East involved malnutrition, shipwreck, and enslavement at the hands of Europeans who were positioned in the Mediterrenean as permanently as the Ottomans. This misbehaving of the Europeans was a manifestation of their conflicted desires for empire as compensation to their marginality on theglobal stage.

To see the acceptance of expatriates and freedom provided to them, it would be appropriate to look further back to the sixteenth century. Even then the Orthodox, Jewish and Catholic communities could freely practice their religion, without any interference from the Ottoman ministers. While Ottoman policy permitted the free practice of religion, the chaplains coming from the expatriates'

native lands, especially the arrival of the Protestant English chaplains, made things more difficult among Christians, mainly traders. The Venetian bailo, Girolamo Capello, was one angry man among others who was decisive even to ruin the “perversity” and “impiety” of Calvin (MacLean 67). He claimed to act with the French ambassador and get the support of the Ottomans to destroy the pretentious and perverse English newcomers.

There is no fixed Western view of the East, as the West is not one unique union, nor the East likewise. French and English experiences in the Middle East differed greatly depending on the current political or religious norms of both the subject and the object countries. Let alone the sociological structures of different countries, gender, race, and class had a tremendous effect on once intensive migration to the Ottoman lands. Though being short-term mobility, travels to provinces under Ottoman rule, nevertheless, were influential in collecting data about the Muslim and Christian subjects there. The male observants of Eastern culture were mostly deceptive in their accounts as the range of their comments on Ottoman life was limitless. Those who know, for instance, that there is a stable and strict line between the women’s quarters and men’s would never take these comments into account for they were ungrounded. While LM criticized Dumont in her letters as ignorant and his voyages as “far remov’d from Truth,” she defined Turks as so “proud” that they would not converse with a Stranger they are not assur’d was considerable in his own Country” (368). Though Biddulph differed from LM in his thought, “exposure to foreign cultures corrupts,” he, as did LM, warned readers against those writers who were contaminated by travel (MacLean 53).

Captive narratives need thorough observation and extra attention, for they were never simply individual stories, but “by-products of changing power relations over time” (Colley 98). In an episode of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, “The Captive’s Tale,” we encounter a Moorish woman and a Spaniard sitting in an inn with various guests including Don Quixote. The Spaniard begins telling the story

of the veiled woman after the guests are disturbed by her presence. After assuring the guests that she is Moorish in her dress but a very good Christian in soul, she removes her veil. The Spaniard was a fighter in the battle against the Turks and he was imprisoned in Algeria in the end. A wealthy and beautiful Moorish woman came to his aid and promised to save him in return for her escape to Christian lands. He took her and she converted to Christianity as a result. She is doubly silenced, both by her father and the Spaniard who was speaking for her at the moment. As Islam began losing ground and the West was gaining freedom to produce a silenced Orient, its reflections were also seen in fictional writings such as *Don Quixote.* While the Eastern father assumes his daughter's flight is the result of her seduction by Western immorality, the captive Spaniard reads it in a different way. The commercial alliance between Britain and Turkey could not stop the cultural divide between East and West, but rather increased the gap. The merchants' travel narratives kept "intact the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness" (Said 206).

William Biddulph was an English clergyman who travelled to the Levant at the same time as Dallam, but he stayed longer. There is not much information about Biddulph's personal life, yet his publication of *The Travels* in which he assumes a persona named "Theophilus Lavender" helps us to grasp the purpose of these travels and the making of literature out of his experiences. In comparison with LM, Lavender's nationalist and pious tendencies were loud and clear. LM stated her opinions firmly and confidently on the easiness of the social life in Constantinople, particularly for women. She considered herself the closest witness to the situation of Turkish women. She thought that, "Turkish ladies are freer than any ladies in the universe" and "lead a life of uninterrupted pleasure" (406). Reading through her letter shows that LM did not merely write of the Orient, but she was also brave enough to contest the previous travel writers' accounts of the East. While counting the pleasures of Turkish ladies, she also enjoyed contradicting the false accounts of some Voyage writers such as Mr.

Hill. What these male writers called the “miserable confinement” of Turkish ladies LM regarded as most agreeable and pleasant. For LM, the Turkish women who spend their whole time visiting friends or bathing and socializing live a life incomparably freer than Western women. Even a man who sold stuff on his back did not hesitate to give his all to his wife. She wore furs and jewels and travels wherever she desires. However, Lavender believed that the English would find much to appreciate about their country after they read his accounts in the “ungodly places” he travelled. He insists that “the English will learn to appreciate having a ‘good and gratious King’ (...); women will learn ‘to love their husbands, when they shal read in what slavery women live in other Countries’; servants will learn duty to their benevolent masters” (MacLean 53).

Dallam was a skilled musician who enjoyed his journey to Istanbul, unlike many others in his time who hated it. The close relationship and the intimacy between Valide Sultan Safiye, the Sultan’s mother, and Queen Elizabeth in 1599 created an opportunity for Dallam to be sent to the Ottoman court as an organ player. He, as a young musician and metalworker, became the most prominent Englishman at the Ottoman court in Istanbul (Maclean 3). During his stay in Istanbul, Dallam was offered many privileges to stay longer. He was even claimed to be the first Englishman ever to see the harem women. In his accounts, he claims to have seen “thirtie of the Grand Siyor’s Concobines that weare playing with a bale in another courte” (74). Though the privileges were tempting enough for his stay and performing his music, “the eroticism of the gaze” did not lead to his total departure of his company at home (46). For him, company meant more than money and women, which is why he decided to return to his homeland. To emphasize his fear for a longer stay in this foreign land, Dallam mentions Christian company whom he would familiarize with. He felt anxious over Lord Lello’s efforts to persuade him to stay, which manifested his unchanged views after some experience. Besides, distrust was inserted into his mind such that he wrote, “[...] he in the end would betray me, and turne me

over into the Turkes hands, whear I should Live a slavish Life, and never companie againe with Christians, with many other suche-like words" (76). Not knowing enough about Dallam's experience in the Turkish quarters with his Turkish acquaintances, we could however conceive his desire to return to his home. Different customs and not being able to get used to the Islamic life in Turkey, he could have seen himself as a slave in their hands.

We can adapt Jennifer Robinson's arguments in her book on urban sociology (2006) to men travellers' experience in the East. "The diverse experience and multiple social forms of the periphery are a stronger base for social science than generalization from the metropole" (Connell 118). Dallam, for instance, had his first encounter and experience with veiled women in Algiers. His comment on the hearsay about these women gives us a foresight for his future generalizations. "The Turkishe, and Morishe, weomen, do goo all ways in the streets with there facis covered, and the common reporte Goethe thare that they believe, or thinke that the weomen have no souls. And I doe thinke, that it weare well for them if they had none, for they never goo to churche, or other prayers, as the men dothe (15, 16). The readily accepted views of the well-known authors in the field, like Dallam's acceptance of Goethe's report on Muslim women, and his logical justification reduces his experience to a monolithic one, like a wall painted with the same colour again and again. Unlike those writers, Ellison and her likes reflected their own experience into writing:

> [the] Turkish home in which I am staying at present has little in common with the harem described by most Western writers, and no doubt those readers accustomed to the *usual* notions of harem life will consider my surroundings disappointingly Western. (Ellison 19)

Ellison put her signature as a female eye-witness to the scenes she took part in. Since Western men were not allowed into these segregated spaces, women's reports on the harem were accepted as authentic. Yet there was surely a

disadvantage to having this privilege that is the difficulty of distancing oneself from the object of her study. Western women travellers and writers, with their very presence in their object of space, had the risk of being unable to own detached objectivity by having such closeness to their segregated subject.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN AND THE ORIENT

2.1 Lady Mary Montagu and Her Letters

In 1717, LM Montagu travelled to the Ottoman Empire with her husband, Edward Wortley, who was appointed British ambassador in the empire. During their stay in the empire, Edward tried to negotiate peace between Ottomans and Austrians to protect English interests on maritime commerce. Meanwhile, LM wrote her embassy letters on Turkish culture and habits. The letters were published one year after her death in 1763. The letters became so popular that they received reviews from famous figures like Dr. Johnson, Voltaire, and Gibbon.

Recent analyses of the letters largely focus on the credibility of LM's narrative as a feminist text. Does it contribute to or resist the Orientalism of her male and female counterparts? Lisa Lowe, Professor of English and American studies and the writer of such influential books as *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* and *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, claims that LM's work employs a feminist discourse to resist the Orientalist tropes so far found in the travel accounts of the male writers such as George Sandys, Jean Dumont, and Aaron Hill. Meyda Yeğenoğlu, a Professor of cultural studies, on the other hand, suggests that LM disguises herself as a female yet she assumes a masculine role and complements the work of the male colonist rather than objecting to it. There are various comments on LM's vision and mission during her stay in Turkish Ottoman quarters: While it is possible to accept all suggestions, it seems also impossible to interfere in the issue without any clues from LM's background or her personal life, which deeply affected her view of Turkish women. It is also undeniable that unlike Western diplomats, whose visits were limited to the palaces of Istanbul, far from the events and people of everyday life, both LM and missionary women had access to the inner quarters

of ordinary Turkish women. There is a difference, though, between the initial aims of those women. The missionaries saw oriental women as a prime target for missionary work because the Orientalist discourse imposed the idea of Muslim women having a woeful status.

2.2 Lady Mary's "Rhetoric of Difference" and "Rhetoric of Likeness"

Cultures certainly have structures, and they must be analyzed within these structures. We as human beings perceive things in pairs or oppositions, which need one another for a just definition. As Levi-Strauss put it, it is thanks to the voyages that human behaviour began to change from egoist, self-centred one to the analytical and experimental one.

> ... that crucial moment in modern thought when, thanks to the great voyages of discovery, a human community which had believed itself to be complete and in its final form suddenly learned ... that it was not alone, that it was part of a greater whole, and that, in order to achieve self-knowledge, it must first of all contemplate its recognisable image in this mirror. (Melman 59)

Falling into the Orientalist "rhetoric of difference" at times, LM mostly deployed a feminist discourse that is a "rhetoric of likeness," as Lowe has noted. LM namely identified herself with the Turkish women rather than searching for humiliating differences between two cultures. However, her resentment over her financial dependence on Wortley and his failure in gaining economic and political success changed LM, who would once "prefer liberty to a chain of diamonds" (LM 246). Seeing the liberty of Turkish women who spent their time exempt from any cares, LM desired the same. In the Ottoman quarters, "A Husband would be thought mad that exacted any degree of Economy from his wife, whose expenses are no way limited but by her own fancy" (406). She is not simply comparing her own life with that of the Turkish ladies, but she is drawing

a visible line between the miserable, suppressed Turkish women in the West's imagination and the wealthy, free, and happy Turkish women in reality.

While LM searched for ways to better and further represent Turkish women to the West, Said asserted that travel literature further manifested the differences between people of two distant spheres. For Said, English or French people create their identity by constructing another antagonistic people, the "Others." Oriental travelers "essentialized" the East and followed the East from "afar and, so to speak, from above" (Said 333). Whether LM had hidden implications behind her gaze or not cannot be judged narrowly or strictly in our day, yet from her travel accounts it is obvious that her visit to the Levant was truly exploratory. It is also undeniable that her curiosity was an upper-class woman's wonder about the outer world that automatically put her in a higher rank. Kabbani writes, "The Orient becomes a pretext for self-dramatization and differentness; it is the malleable theatrical space in which can be played out the egocentric fantasies of Romanticism" (II). Some writers even claim that the bath scenes or women's private quarters displayed by LM's letters stimulate the desire of her male readers. Her descriptions are claimed to be "notoriously orientalist themselves" and "the forgeries of male authors" (Çevik 466). LM, as she intended in her letters, emphasized the commonalities between peoples, not their differences. At one point, LM seems to have missed the point of her visit to the bath, which turned out to be an erotic adventure for some. According to Campbell, LM "fantasizes herself replaced in the baths by an invisible male artist" and thus the aesthetic is interwoven with the erotic (80). LM established a close link between her body and the ladies', yet she could not avoid the male gaze constructed by her Englishness.

In a letter to Lady Bute, however, LM undermined the differences between peoples saying that "Mankind is everywhere the same: like Cherries or Apples, they may differ in size, shape colour, from different soils, climates, or culture, but are still essentially the same species" (vol. III 15). Not considering

the homoerotic fantasies or the shows that she was claimed to generate, LM simply made an effort to find the same human nature in Islamic lands. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea sees Montagu as “remarkably free of ethnocentricism and reinforcing the enlightenment ideals of empiricism, egalitarianism, and objectivity” (331). She was not a mere gazer; she was at the same time able to adopt the Muslim women’s point of view. She went even further praising Muslim women for the path they chose in terms of the financial and spiritual freedom. Montagu’s appreciation of Turkish ways reminds one of Demetra Vaka and her view on the issue. “And since internationalism can save our civilization, each nation should learn the better qualities of the others” (Vaka 26). One can also recall David Hume’s aphorism from the Enlightenment period: “Mankind are so much the same in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature” (83).

As LM set up rhetoric of likeness in her observations of the Eastern life, Emelia Bithynia Hornby also established identification between Western and Turkish women:

> I had seen how sweetly gentle and kind the Turkish women are, and lifted up the charmed curtain with much more confidence and pleasure than I should have entered an assembly of Englishwomen [...]. We were in the midst of a vast apartment, with lofty, dome-like roof [...]. An immense staircase was on the other side, lighted by a window which reached from roof to floor, and in the projecting half-moon of the balusters was a beautiful white-marble fountain. The whole was covered with the same gold-colored matting. Rich crimson divans under each enormous window at either end, and raised three steps. (238)

It is quite hard to witness a male traveller establishing such close connections with the object of his curiosity. Their approach to observing and writing about

Eastern women was more disconnected from the target group, while women tended to be involved in the family circles and formed their perceptions, likes and dislikes, accordingly. The interiors were depicted in such detail that one could visualize it easily. Women travelers had more authentic views of oriental spaces and people than their male counterparts although they still remained thrilled “outsiders” to the exotic “other” partly because it was inaccessible to male travelers.

2.3 The Aim of Travels to Muslim Lands

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was an intense interest from Christian countries, especially England, France, and Italy to trade in sundry countries. Taking any woman of the country they sojourned in was called “Cut Cabine” (MacLean 63). Among them, only Turkish women were not likely to be taken by the Christian merchants as it meant death for a Christian to mix with Turkish women. Their privacy and exemption remained valid and important in every period under Ottoman rule. Therefore, claims to have entered a harem or any private female quarter in Constantinople are misguided and automatically rejected.

Billie Melman reminds her reader of something very significant about the aim of travels. Although it holds some truth, travel cannot be labelled as merely a form of domination; instead it has another crucial aspect which is the “comparison between ‘self’ and ‘other’” (Melman 9). The explorers, missionaries, ethnographers are all protagonists in their own drama. It would be unjust to write them out from their own story and impersonalize their accounts. Labelling them as only serving kingdom, religion, etc. distances ourselves from the mere fact of individual experience. The women’s experience of the Orient, for example, was more private than public, more individual and a-political. Yet as Melman points out, it would be ignoring the fact of imperialism to thoroughly de-politicize that experience (12). We as readers should not allow some trendy points to alienate us from the less debatable issues. Comparison between cultures and social

behavior is an important quality in the perception and reception of the travel accounts by its audience. Lavender, for example, believed that the English would find much to appreciate about their country after they read his accounts in the "ungodly places" he travelled. He insisted that "the English will learn to appreciate having a 'good and gratious King' (...); women will learn 'to love their husbands, when they shal read in what slavery women live in other Countries'; servants will learn duty to their benevolent masters" (MacLean 53). This invites us to inquire into the cause of this statement by Lavender. What might really have happened during Lavender's stay in Istanbul that he thought too negative about the situation of women in the East?

Contrary to Melman's belief, the Syrian historian Rana Kabbani, a disciple in comparative literature, believes that LM and such travelers might be serving a dangerous end though they may seem innocent with their writings. For Kabbani, "To write a literature of travel cannot but imply a colonial relationship. The claim is that one travels to learn, but really one travels to exercise power over land, women, peoples" (10). Applying Kabbani's thesis on LM's position as a Western gazer in the Turkish bath, it is easily deduced that LM held power in her eyes through observing the half naked Turkish women while they were sharing their most special and self-defining practices among each other. Displaying it before a stranger was already the manifestation and thus the collapse of the "unknown."

Western women writers uncovered their domestic problems or limitations through displacing it onto their Eastern counterparts. Namely, they unveiled their privacy for the sake of discovering the others'. Neither the Western women travellers nor the writers could draw parallels between the oppression and limitation of women in their own society and that of women in the Orient. In terms of mobility and travelling, European women of the nineteenth century, for instance, were more restricted than their Oriental counterparts, a situation they repeatedly complained about. Western women travellers often referred to the

boredom of Oriental women's lives. It often escaped from one's attention that in many cases it was specifically the boredom of the domestic life that had been a powerful and influential force behind many Western women's travels to the Orient.

2.4 The Credibility of Lady Mary and of Her Travel Accounts

LM's firm statements about the customs, the people, and the places in Istanbul were not unique to the East, Istanbul here regarded as belonging to the Eastern part of the world, but she, also elaborated her views for anywhere she visited on the way to Istanbul, whose system of life was foreign to her. After a tiresome waiting for her husband who was out of the city for quite some time, LM set off for Istanbul with him and their little son. On their way to Istanbul, they were taken by a storm after which LM determined to go by boat to Rotterdam. The physical perfection of Rotterdam was the first aspect that charmed her during her visit. The streets paved with broad stones that facilitated easy movement and convenience in her walk, no "one spot of Dirt" over the Town, fine and cheap merchandise, no "loathsome Cripples" on the streets were strongly opposite of what she was used to in England (LM 249).

LM held uniqueness in high esteem so that her encounter with things or people did not eliminate her desire to be and to see everyone as one-of-a-kind. When she compared English ladies to the women in Rotterdam, she realized that even the common servants there were more nicely dressed and that "every Woman dressing her Head after her own Fashion," she stated in parenthesis (LM 249). Being so much careful about the unique experience herself, LM called those writers stupid with no first-hand knowledge and giving accounts of Turkish women. In her letters, she "remarks upon cultural differences, as all travellers do; and at the same time, she contests the normative masculine vision of her Western predecessors, noticing different phenomena, and correcting previous misrepresentations from her perspective as a woman" (Aravamudan 73).

LM certainly wanted to stand out with her travel accounts which she knew were original. There were very few records of English women who had visited the Ottoman Empire before her. Except from the captivity narratives of Katherine Evans and Sarah Chevers, it is not so possible to encounter any women travel writers' account in English about visiting the Ottoman Empire before LM. She was not the first wife of an ambassador who was assigned to Constantinople; however she was the first to write about it.

Some modern feminists such as Anita Desai, Cynthia Lowenthal, Srinivas Aravamudan and Jill Campbell view LM as one who was ignorant of the reality that the Muslim women were exposed to. Desai thinks that LM was "poisoned and distorted by the society in which she moved" (93). As it happens to all who cannot negotiate with their own cultural practices, the ones in other places seem more attractive than theirs. LM's likening or praising the Eastern ways might also be attributed to her dislike of European cultural norms. Lowenthal objects to LM's accounts in that LM didn't reflect the vulnerability of Turkish women (109). When LM witnessed a bleeding body of a young woman lying naked on the street, she said for the woman:

> Beautifull that there were very few men in Pera that did not go to look upon her, but it was not possible for any body to know her, no woman's face being known. [...] One would imagine this defect in their Government should make such Tragedys very frequent, yet they are extremely rare, which is enough to prove the people not naturally cruel, neither do I think in many other particulars they deserve the barbarous character we give them. (LM 407)

Lowenthal calls LM "ambivalent" based on her comments about the woman lying in blood on the street (108). LM intended to deny the general truth held by the Europeans that Turks are "naturally cruel" and "barbarous" in their attitudes toward women. Both the splendid bride presented to her women friends naked and the beautiful dead woman – who became the object for the male gaze –

served to display the miserable situation of women in Turkey according to Lowenthal. She views LM as one who wanted to see Turkey all in positive terms. Women might be murdered or tortured, yet they will be “saved by heroic virtue and acts of will that secure them moral independence” (111).

LM was as interested in the current situation and the position of commerce as her fellow travellers. In her Rotterdam tour, she specified that there were seven large Canals which showed the magnificence of Commerce. In Istanbul, as well, she observed carefully how commerce was carried out. In a letter to Abbé Conti, she depicted a bazaar in Constantinople: “It holds three hundred and sixty-five shops, furnished with all sorts of rich goods, exposed to sale in the same manner as at the New Exchange in London” (LM 354). She walked around the bazaar in her Turkish disguise not to gather attention from the public. Desai claims that LM aestheticized the scene more than she analyzed it. It is true that LM made skilful descriptions of both the private female quarters and the commercial areas. It is wrong, however, to ignore some cultural and commercial points she made throughout her journey. She said about commerce in Turkey that, “Jews have drawn the whole trade of the empire in their hands” (LM 355). She agreed that the Ottomans were in a static position at that time both politically and militarily. They were on the defense. Though LM seemed to be ignorant of political or commercial issues, she preferred to note them in an aesthetic mode.

Besides picturing the scenes and recording them to her mind, LM was much distanced from the picturesque movement of her day which was the late eighteenth century. The Enlightenment ideas, that allowed people to make “comparative judgments,” freed her from looking at Turkish people from a one-sided Western perspective. Instead of “demonizing the Turks,” she saw herself when she looked at the “other” (Weitzman 357).

She had consideration for the social or historical matters that showed itself in her appreciation for landscape. As Weitzman pointed out, LM’s “is not

the ruthless search for picturesque beauty to the exclusion of every other social or historical consideration" (356). In her Turkish dress, she rowed across the Bosphorus and wrote down the beautiful prospects in a letter to the Countess of Bristol:

> The Asian side is covered with fruit trees, villages and the most delightful landscapes in nature; on the European, stands Constantinople situated on seven hills. The unequal heights make it seem as large again as it is (though one of the largest cities in the world), shewing an agreeable mixture of gardens, pines and cypress-trees, palaces, mosques, and public buildings [...]. (397)

Mixing the cityscape with aestheticism, LM set out the Bosphorus scene mostly with details and the pleasure she took from being there at the moment. She also likened the scene to the one in "a cabinet adorned by the most skilful hands" where you see jars, cannisters and candlesticks. By this comparison, she thought she gave the exact image of the thing itself. On the way back home, she also gave nice descriptions of ruins, monuments, and ancient structures. She searched for geographic analogues as this "comparison" or "rhetoric of likeness" was placed upon all walks of life in Turkey.

During the course of her life, LM sought to bring pleasure to her intimates and desired to be rewarded with the same kind of attention as well. Her letters to Wortley before and after their marriage always contained some element of utilitarianism. The mere perfection in intelligence and charm did not diminish her desire to be pleasing to her lover; otherwise she would be "very Miserable" (LM 81). She held Wortley in such high esteem that she never wanted to be the instrument of making him unhappy (LM 25). Anne Justice, daughter of William Justice, an attorney, was also a good friend of LM's as we see one letter directed to her by LM. The one letter written in 1711 to Anne Justice begins with an affirmation of LM that she did not forget her friend. Almost one third of the letter tells Anne how hard it was for LM to get pen, ink, and paper (70). That was

in short not to disturb their friendship and to prove she was still a good, pleasurable company. Anne Wortley, the second daughter of the honourable Sidney Wortley (1650-1727), was one main receiver of LM's letters. Apart from the news in England and some serious talks they conversed, the letters exchanged between Anne Wortley and LM display mostly agreeable nature on both sides, including the great happiness the letters brought to them and LM's "vast desire of pleasing" Anne (4).

Like everyone else, LM also had priorities in her life where frankness outweighed bringing happiness and pleasure to her social circle. If there was anything not "justifiable," she would not hesitate or hold back; rather, she gave voice to her thoughts. Claiming that Wortley had "no faults but what are grounded upon mistakes," she believed that her inclinations would soon be understood by him. At the end of her letter, dated 10 February 1711, she declared her affection for him which she considered was an act of "sincerity" (LM 73). She was also very straightforward about her husband's political engagement and placement in parliament. Spending money extravagantly for a position in parliament and exposing his wife and little son to live far below standards, Wortley was criticized by LM for his incompetence. While "so many insignif[icant] creatures came in without any opposition," it sounded ridiculous for Wortley to stay away from his family without being sure of a place (224). The period of separation for this couple caused some misunderstanding or negligence to stand out more as it became more irritating. Even when her letters were full of compromises at times, LM was persistent enough to remind Wortley of their child at the end of each letter and that the child was well though he did not ask after it (228). She did not keep silent for the sake of others' peace of mind as she firmly objected to "dissimulation" and "inconstancy."

As she was close and a good company for her intimates, so was she ignorant of and judgmental towards those who chose to live upon their foolish upper class ideals. In one of her letters to Gilbert Burnet, the famous Bishop

(1643-1715), she expressed her uneasiness with the Customs that forced the ladies to adopt the same attitudes in Consort. As for the public, “it was a thing altogether criminal not to play the fool in Consort with other Women of Quality” (LM 45). By their superior race as English and their position in the society as upper-class, these women’s “Birth” and “Leisure” presented them only as “the most useless and most worthless part of the creation” (45).

Though it was a pleasure for most of the women of her class and race to hold onto Titles and Estates, it was merely a folly for LM. The English customs that used to be implemented in and before marriage frustrated her to the degree that she avoided living up to the English ideals as much as possible. She designated the Great Estates and Titles as blessings only to be given to Fools (LM 24). Her disinterest in the power of status and money took yet another form after she married Wortley. The need for placement in the parliament, which would determine their status in the society, and money which meant a permanent mansion and the end of loneliness for LM emerged as significant as liberty and virtue. In this case, the deduction to be made is things gain meaning only when you are exposed to a position where you need them. To the contrary of the women in her society who identified themselves with charming dresses, great inheritance and the company of men, LM chose to use her wit and piety. Yet this stage of spiritual dedication was interrupted at times when she was so much in solitude and in need of money. Desiring her husband to have a place in the Parliament, she stated in one of her letters to Wortley in 1714, “[...] tis is necessary for the common good, for an honest man to endeavour to be powerfull, when he can be the one without loseing the first more valuable title; and remember that Money is the source of Power” (214). The change in her attitude toward money and title proves that her views were basically rooted in her upbringing and were apt to shift in time.

In Blount’s terms, LM was a “passenger.” Wearing local costume, avoiding other Christians, travelling with local traders over the routes which he

had no control of made Blount, as it did LM, a simple but intelligent passenger. LM was aware of their short stay in Constantinople so she mixed with as many Turkish people as she could. Yet her social rank and position made a difference from other travel writers in terms of her accessibility or desire to communicate with other people. As a wife of the ambassador, her acquaintances did not go far beyond Fatima Hanim, Achmet Bey and Reşat Bey. Their being the very representative of Turkish morals and Islam pleased LM to the degree that she claimed Achmet Bey acknowledged her "in a more particular manner than perhaps any Christian ever did" (317). Thus her experience of people's lives in the Ottoman land was limited to only upper class standards. Nevertheless, even this experience seems to be necessary for a comparative inquiry into the Ottoman Empire that would be free from previous prejudices of both male and female writers.

LM challenged the common view of the day that separated the two sexes as of superior and inferior ranks. The separatist approach between the sexes started long before. Let alone giving women the fundamental rights they deserved, they were even denied the means to religion. For instance, the culture war launched by the Protestants between monastics and secular clergy in the 1500s ended up with the abolishment of nunneries (Griffith 404). The decision of the Protestant Augsburg town council to close down these sites, which were the only means for women to invest themselves in leadership, was justified in 1534:

> How should it come to any good when women join themselves in a separate life, contrary to the ordinance of God, yes, against nature, they give themselves to obedience to a woman, who has neither reason nor the understanding to govern whether in spiritual or temporal matters, who ought not to govern but be governed? (Griffith 404)

Despite the changes in women's cultural codes such as the shift in women's dress from the self-effacing style to a more glittering one, that female

humility was considered to be religious pride never disappeared. However, there were some dissident voices like LM's, who challenged the male monopoly in the 1700s. As they recovered their voices, women were also likely to defend their personal interests, as did their male counterparts. LM's letter to Gilbert Brunet, so influential an instructor in her studies, was a clear indication of her feminist tendencies that she felt compelled to manifest.

> My Sex is usually forbid studys of this Nature, and Folly reckon'd so much our proper Sphere, we are sooner pardon'd any excesses of that, than the least pretensions to reading or good Sense. We are permitted no Books but such as tend to the weakening and Effeminateing the Mind, our Natural Deffects are every way indulg'd, and tis look'd upon as in a degree Criminal to improve our Reason, or fancy we have any. We are taught to place all our Art in adorning our Outward Forms, and permitted, without reproach, to carry that Custom to Extravagancy, while our Minds are entirely neglected, and by disuse of Refflections, fill'd with nothing but the Triffling objects our Eyes are daily entertain'd with. (LM 45)

LM's criticism of the fixed definition of a woman's place in society was subverted by some other writers upon their mentioning woman's position under Ottoman rule. Grace Ellison was determined to challenge the displacement of all the negativities in European women's conditions to the Eastern women. She emphasized the philanthropic and educational activities of Turkish women arguing that the "Turkish woman is not what Europe generally imagines her to be" (16). Vaka Brown's admiration for the rights that Turkish women possessed before and after marriage and their awareness of this also gained her admiration. The revelation of their intellectual capacities through various gatherings inside or outside the harem was also a big influence over the changing traditions in the empire.

Leyla Saz, who was born in 1850 and brought to the Imperial harem as a result of her father's duty as a surgeon, wrote memoirs about life in the harem.

She was a very prominent composer of Ottoman classical music. She wrote in her memoirs that there were young Circassian girls taken as slaves, but they were brought up and educated with the greatest care (Woodard 2). Leyla Saz learned to speak French, Persian, Arabic and Greek; she also had music lessons in Western and Ottoman styles. Fatima, the Palace friend of LM in Adrianople, for instance had great beauty, which took LM several pages to depict in her letters; yet she was still interested in other cultures and people as her curiosity after the manners of other countries was from her breeding. Her beautiful complexion did not prevent her from educating herself in terms of religion and social manners; she was however, more prone to discover other sites of knowledge as a woman.

The condition of women in a country was the measure of civilization at those times as it is today. Education, especially, is not only what we call sciences but it is inclusive of all the civility and modesty a woman nurtures. One's civility is how she represents herself in the public and what sort of manners she exhibits. LM, in one of her letters from 1717, gave an account of her famous visit to a Turkish public bath, where she was astonished to see Turkish women with undeniable beauty. Having read of travellers' accounts of confined women in harems and veils, she was impatient to see the faces and personalities behind those veils or the private quarters where Turkish women isolated themselves. As she wrote, she was in her riding dress to which none of the ladies showed any surprise. She thought that these were the manners which she could not ever find in the West. The "disdainful," "wanton" smiles or "immodest gestures" would immediately accompany those English women in their assemblies if anyone got dressed out of the day's fashion (LM 313).

LM covered different issues in her letters to her friends and sister. This leads readers to question LM on her worldview about the position of women in the society and their learning place. LM divided her subjects as "Ottoman policy," "Islam," and "women" according to the needs or demands of her

addressees. In her letters to Alexander Pope and Abbé Conti, for instance, she dealt with more serious issues, while in her letters to Lady Mar, her sister, she addressed mostly the position of women and her visits to baths and the harem. Being a strong woman, having the courage of visiting the unknown places in Istanbul and conversing with Muslims as if they were friends for ages did not mean that LM was a feminist in all senses that she was called so. She had some priorities in life, like freedom of speech and a free space for women; however, she never held women higher than men in any case. She already knew men's needs and women's sensual nature. Her letters, therefore, addressed different issues to the recipients, as she customized her letters according to their tastes.

2.5 Orientalism and its Continuation by Western Women Writers

Not LM but many of her predecessors and antecedents approached the Eastern lands as an "imperfect extension" of metropolitan modernism (Connell 109). In "Sociology has a World History" section of her *Confronting Equality*, Raewyn Connell claims that the metropolitan theory was mainly developed through the sequence of experiences in the metropole without any reference to the historical progress of the colonized (109). That is why, she says, the periphery is readily accepted to be an extension to the metropolitan truths. Sara Mills also argues in her *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel* that Western women could not recognise the fact that their movements supported the imperialist discourse instead of undermining the existing ideology (44). Feminist Orientalism served to the transformation of Western society instead of establishing an understanding of harem culture.

Lisa Lowe put it in *Critical Terrains, French and British Orientalisms*, that "Orientalism is not a single developmental tradition but is profoundly heterogenous" (ix). The knowledge about the Orient has never appeared in history as monolithic. Its construction always depended on the race, gender, class and ethnicity of the observer. The Orient viewed by a British citizen, for instance, differed greatly from the French who based their assumptions or

experiences on various other grounds. An upper class British citizen also had different views about Muslim lands and its people while a young Circassian girl, sold to the imperial harem in Istanbul by Ottoman soldiers, felt abnormally blessed about her abduction. In *Harem: A Journey of Love*, Aslı Sancar creates a story which takes us to a completely different world in the harem, constructed differently from previous harem narratives. Each and every person takes his or her previous experiences or assumptions to these foreign lands they travel. Considering these subjective presumptions residing firmly in one's personality, it would be better to analyze travel accounts according to individual experiences.

The liberty of Turkish women was expressed in their dress as LM observed and wrote about somewhat ironically. The very dress, composed of 2 muslins, concealed the woman's whole body except for her eyes. According to LM, it was very light and comfortable, and its cloth adaptable to seasons. The point that LM stressed was the disguise this dress provided the Muslim with. She said there was no way that a husband would realize his wife under this cloth as it was even impossible to distinguish a slave from a great lady (LM 328). According to LM, this masquerade was a perfect tool for the women who were meant to meet their secret lovers. In such a case, she talked about the scarcity in the number of faithful wives who remained loyal to their husbands. Based on her assumptions about the use or abuse of disguise by the Muslim women, we automatically contemplate the multitude of secret relationships among the Turkish citizens. When she talked about women, she used the phrase, "the only free people" in the empire (329). She aimed at truly depicting the English who claimed to have liberty and the Turks who were notorious for being confined in their private quarters. However, Weitzman asserts that this is a consciously developed aesthetic strategy to subvert the mental attitudes and reveals more the differences between the two nations instead of equating them (355).

After mentioning the dress code, she switched the subject to the financial rights given to Muslim women in case their secrets were revealed and divorce

occurred. LM viewed two situations positively, the comfort and disguise for the dress, and the easiness provided for women on legal issues. She was happy to see the freedom that Turkish women enjoyed. As readers, however, we must be careful in considering some accounts or assumptions as true. We need to be truly informed about the extent to which those women used disguise to their benefit, namely for their personal intrigues. As being supportive to female liberty, there was also another custom apart from dress that Lady Craven remarked in Turkey. A Turkish husband could not enter his harem upon seeing a pair of slippers at the door since it would be an intrusion for those women inside. While Lady Craven took this liberty as to one's advantage in order to secretly keep her lover inside, Pardoe considered it a freedom of choice for harem women to even refuse her husband to enter into her surroundings (Yeazell 89).

CHAPTER III

LIFE IN THE HAREM

3.1 The Presentation of the Veil by Westerners and the Native Élites

The veiled woman was at the center of the East/West divide in the eighteenth century. Heffernan stated that the religious tension between East and West always undergoes a shift, yet remains loyal to its origins. “In this East/West divide, depending on which side articulates the dispute, the West’s moral decay is pitted against the East’s spirituality or, alternately, Western freedom and reason are pitted against Eastern fundamentalism” (Heffernan 204).

The initial aim of female travels to the East, be it a fight for freedom or to prove the West’s superiority over the Orient, turned out to result in deciphering or unveiling their own bounds and showing it to the whole world. There has always been a transformation in the representation of Muslim women that took place in relation to other changes in the imperial land. During the nineteenth century, for instance, “femininity” and “Victorian morality” were the adopted ideologies developing in Britain. Despite the fact that the same applied to their own society, Western writers incessantly described the oppression of Turkish women in their secluded quarters. Both Oriental and Occidental women were supposed to be under male protection and intellectually and physically destined for the domestic space. Furthermore, they were equally expected to obey their husbands.

The British LM Wortley Montagu, who travelled to Turkey in 1717-1718, opposed the Western construction of veiled women as oppressed. By the eighteenth century, the veil was already considered to be an oppressive custom among Muslim women. Having tried out the veil herself, LM distinguished herself from the European women who were oblivious of real freedom. Freedom was walking through the streets unrecognized, so that no one could approach with evil intentions. LM noticed in her disguise that it was not a punishment for

women to walk under the veil in the streets for women; contrary to the common belief, it was a “confirmation of esteem” (Kandiyoti 34). Women were not often in the streets, yet when they were, they secluded themselves from the male gaze. However, LM emphasized that this seclusion did not cover their femininity but rather highlighted it. If a woman wanted to be a respectable member of society, she had to carry the Islamic virtues attributed to her. These devoted women were called *muhaddere* in the kanunname (the book of law) and were accompanied by their attendants in public (Peirce 105).

The desire to know about other cultures and their clothing surrounded Ottoman ladies as much as it did the ambassadors’ wives. The wife of Sir Peter Wych, the English ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, was also observed with curiosity by the Sultanesse who desired her to attend her Highness. The Sultanesse asked Lady Wych about her spacious hips, if all English women were made so. John Bulwer, who recorded this event in 1653, stated that Lady Wych answered that they were the same as other women showing withal “the fallacy of her apparell in the device of the Verdingall” (MacLean 225). Till she showed it, the Sultanesse verily believed it had been her real size. Whatever the social status of these women required, the observer and gazer in this scene was certainly the Sultanesse. As the dress code in Islamic culture might look strange to Lady Wych, so were her farthingale or striking hips unusual to the Sultanesse. According to Bulwer’s narration, the answer by Lady Wych did not contain any offense; instead she made her demonstration of the false apparell in order not to leave a wrong impression of her womanhood. As a representative of her nation’s women, she was doubly responsible for the impression she made on the Ottoman women.

The focus on the status of Eastern women and their veil was one important aspect for the nineteenth century colonialists to justify their invasion. The cultural and religious degradation of Eastern women, such as Algerians, Moroccans or Egyptians, had to end up with the intervention of Europeans, be

they colonialists, travellers, missionaries, artists, or feminists. Here, the very motive for invasion arouses the question that if the purpose is to invade, why was there then a number of travels to Istanbul at the time? The desire for invasion is thence preceded by the desire for knowledge about the "other." Travels to the Levant had to be justified for everyone, particularly for women during the reign of the empires. As Thomas Palmer, in his travel accounts in 1606, notes, "not only travel writing but also travel itself needed defending" (MacLean 55).

It was not only for the Western male or female view that the veil was a symbol of backwardness, which was certainly the apparent motive to manifest the "hidden truth" behind the veil, but the native élites also adopted the damaging and suppressive nature of the veil. Unveiling, therefore, became the urgent need for the nationalist women to catch up with the West and its more modern tradition.

In *Dreams of Trespass*, Fatima Mernissi, a feminist sociologist born to a Muslim family, gave a detailed account of what a woman's life was like in the harem in 1940s Morocco. Hudud was one thing that everybody in the Mernissi family, as in all harems at that time, had to respect and avoid trespassing. Liberation, on the other side, which French women enjoyed in the French Zone in Morocco, was quite depressing for the harem women, apart from the elder women who were insistent upon keeping their traditions. The independence that the girls and women in the Mernissi family longed for was the free choice of clothes, of scientific education, of travel. Even one step beyond the hudud would bring happiness to women. Thus the Orientalist view of the West should not be confused with the nationalist view of Eastern women. What these women attacked was the manipulation of religion by men to create a male-oriented culture that was imposed on women. To end this, women like Mernissi, Halide Edip and many others of Iranian, and Syrian origins fought for liberation and women rights.

Mernissi's mother once told her unfulfilled desire to her daughter: "I want you to become independent, independent and happy" (Mernissi 81). These two adjectives "independent" and "happy" do not meet her mother's expectations and, independence and happiness, if not dissimilar in large, are not synonyms or twins after all. Fatima Hanım and Zeynep hanım whose short experience abroad taught them to stick to modesty and never leave their habits at home, recognized not long after that European women's freedom meant chatting for no purpose, or the European style did not exactly ease their mind. In a broader sense, no two poles brought total happiness to women. Comfort is always where you have people whom you are familiar with. In almost all cases of these travellers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the return to homeland was quite exhilarating.

The veil is a "gaze inhibitor" and incurs the desire for the unknown by the Western subject (Bullock 5). The mystery of the veiled women who lived in segregation was to be deciphered if only the Western men could make beneath the veil visible. The gaze has a point to see and view; the veiled woman, however, did prevent the gaze by avoiding exhibiting herself. Women in Islamic societies were supposed to hold their virtue and piety in private as well as in public. The exaggerations from many Western or Eastern writers about women's constraints were therefore ungrounded and out of place. The veil was one of the practices that women exercised to remain "ritually 'inside' while physically 'outside'" (Schick 72).The unseen is unknown, thus is unlikely to be controlled. The reversal of the relationship between the gazer and the object caused a shift of power. The Western subject, having constructed his image as superior and civilized, was already subject to loss of power.

Irigaray's work *Speculum* best examplifies the focus on sight as controlling the presence or absence of the speaking subject. The woman is conceived as simply a visual icon. The speculum as Irigaray uses it as a metaphor for visual paradigms conforms to the shape of the object it reflects. By

means of the speculum, woman is able to engage in specularization that is the reflection of the female subject on its own being rather than her masculine other. Thus the representation of women is subverted and the idea that women have "nothing to see" and "the logic of the same" is also deconstructed (Herman 274). If there was enough research on the structure of the buildings in the Ottoman quarters, travel writers would for long know about the "manipulation of gaze" by Ottoman women (Thys – Senocak 9). The veil was one way of hiding women from men's gaze, but buildings were also effective in this. Hunkar kasri, for instance, is a very good example of female patronage and the manipulation of gaze. This structure made things outside visible to whoever was inside while making it impossible to see or access things inside to outside viewers. *Valides* supported the construction of these structures because even outside of the palace, women "continued to be 'ritually inside'"; they also wanted similar constructions to that of the men (Emeritz 7). With this being in the records, a reconsideration of gender roles in Istanbul under Ottoman rule is required. In terms of creating a feminine culture, the seclusion of women was something unique indeed. Gender inequalities obviously existed in the empire, as in all ruling empires; however, the fact that Muslim women could obtain power and wealth cannot be denied.

The veil can be associated with the domestic space in terms of the "control exercised by women." Just as women could hide their identities under the veil and gain their freedom via this concealment, they could also create a free space for themselves in the harem. As a Western woman writing from within the Oriental quarters, LM showed "how surveillance also provides possibilities for resistance" (Boer 45). Boer believes that women in the harem acted as a group and had their own communication system. They did not simply spend time in their harems or baths and do nothing. They converged in conversations, be it simple or political, which gave them a collective power. From LM's letters, we

can imagine the scene where all the ladies in the bath braided each others' hair. It was also a way of communication where they reset their class differences.

Thus, despotism remains as "the only means left to men to escape from the control of women" as Bourdieu argues in his *De l'esprit des lois* (Boer 44). Meaning master over slaves in a domestic space, *despotes* in Greek is associated with the domestic. Despotism happened in two ways: one within the borders of the harem, second under Western discourse. According to the eighteenth century records, the seraglio was portrayed as somewhere where the despot used his power over his subjects, namely women. The suppression of women came with force. This was a mere fascination for the Western male audience because this domination over women was out of their reach or share. At least, it was described so. It was a fantasy that their male counterparts in the East enjoyed to the fullest, but they only heard about it. To be able to enjoy the other sex and its multiplicity was one thing they could not do, that is why they regarded the East as a feminine character and tried to master it via narrative. The Western women, on the other hand, had a slightly different mission to the East, which was a muted desire to displace their fears, anxieties, suppression onto Eastern women. These women were seen as a target through whose agency Western women would feel relieved and free of the limits imposed on them.

Western feminists encouraged the male ideology of colonial domination by using Eastern women as an example of enslavement. To discuss their own lack of freedom, they chose the East as irrational and oppressive – thus, Eastern women as enslaved and oppressed. Joyce Zonana argues that the understanding of masculine tyranny as foreign and Eastern only serves Western superiority:

> If the lives of women in England or France or the United States can be compared to the lives of women in 'Arabia,' then the Western feminist's desire to change the status quo can be

> represented not as a radical attempt to restructure the West but as a conservative effort to make the West more like itself. (Zonana 594)

Western women who attempted to essentialize and isolate Eastern women from men's quarters were not as free as they thought or claimed. As wives and sisters of consuls, Isabel Burton, Elizabeth Finn, and Eliza Rogers had to legitimize their journey to the exotic East by making it an expression of their devotion to their family and empire. They had to get permission from their men since parental approval to an adventure was essential for a woman to maintain her respectability. Englishwomen did not step back from giving advice, either, based on their travelling experience. They developed an imperial sense of authority so that their contested gender identity could be of value. Rather than warning other women not to approach those dangerous sites that men could only handle with their physical strength, these women tried to give practical information as to routes and other details which would be beneficial for those female travellers to see "with what ease and security ladies may travel, even alone in those countries which have been frequently supposed to be open only to strong and energetic men" (Beaufort vii, viii). Especially the prefaces to women's travel narratives often included advice for other female travellers, which indicated that British women had already assumed a limited measure of independence and could encourage other women to assume the same character in order to create a growing community of female travellers.

The degradation of Muslim people, especially of Muslim women, remained harsh by those guardians of Western civilization who advocated "the natural superiority of the male" over the female (Ahmed 524). Leila Ahmed finds it then interesting why these so-called civilized men were shocked by the oppression of Muslim women by Muslim men. They must already have been familiar with it.

To restore their power, Western men attacked the veil in different ways. One was, as French painters did, to expose women in paintings, photographs, etc, to portray them naked. Thus the period of unveiling already started. Ingres, a French painter, claimed that he could travel to the ancient world through a vision of the Orient though both scenes were filtered through books. LM's letter to an unknown woman dated 1 April 1717 made Ingres speculate further on the bath scenes and paint them accordingly. In *Bain Turc*, in order to maintain the intimacy as in the fantasized relations of the harem, he placed the musician and the woman to her right, compressed any distance between the women in the picture, keeping the viewer's look so low that the ceiling cannot be seen. While LM spoke of 200 women, Ingres placed twenty-five women in his work who were far from having any distance from one another. Ingres consciously produced an impression of intimacy so that the *Bain Turc* could create an atmosphere in which its inhabitants touch and intertwine carelessly and hold their distance to the kind public space (Yeazell 41). It also evokes sexual frustration that West desired for so long.

There were two myths about the harem: one that displayed the opulent spaces of the palace where female concubines and slaves waited the return of their master-husbands; the other, a prison in a Muslim household where women were under their husband's absolute control. European Orientalists painted the harem as a place where debauchery was carried out in order to evoke Islam as a false religion, as the anti-religion of Christianity. The voyeuristic gaze in Orientalist painting manifested the "masculine" European desire to enter into the secret parts of the harem and surrender the women from all sides. In the works of Orientalist painters such as Gérôme and Delacroix, it is obvious that they displayed the mystery and the picturesque of the Orient while at the same time presenting those images as the accurate displays of the Near East. Nochlin claims that the viewer (Europe) is separated from the subject (Orient) intentionally in many of Gérôme's paintings. In *The Snake Charmer*, the viewer

watches the entertainer from behind; thus he can observe not only the charmer, but also a group of people watching the charmer since they are as much a part of the painting as the charmer himself. Gérôme awaits for the same amazed facial expression from his audience as the one on the faces of the spectators. Everything in the painting, such as people, architecture, carpets and events, establish it as exotic. There is a lack of Westerners in the painting – none are depicted there; yet the ever present gaze of the Western viewer eliminates this absence.

Simultaneous, with any attempt to liberate Eastern women from their husbands' despotism, Europeans tried to justify their domination over the Orient. The efforts to replace Western democracy with Eastern tyranny were evidence of their self-identification through Oriental paintings rather than of the realities of the East. Georges Rochegrosse's *The Slave and the Lion* is among those paintings that best exemplify Western notions of the East's oppression of women. The painting features a pale bare-breasted female who is leaning against a sofa where her brown-skinned master is resting and watching her at the same time. Ultimately, trespassing into the harem and visualizing the women meant a fair European conquest. The variety and proliferation of those images over time stood for victory, for the "unknown" was already dominated from various angles. These notions of a masculine colonizer and a feminine subject to "legitimize colonial rule as a reflection of male superiority which was seen as 'natural' in society" also enclose what is known as the "colonial gaze" (Hunt 1).

It was not only the veil that Western men attacked but also the very spirit of women that changed from North to South. Montesquieu was one among those who based his argument about women's sense of "superiority" or "boldness" versus their "weakness" and "effeminacy" on his theory of climate. According to him, people from the North have courage and security with more frankness and less suspicion and cunning. People from the South, however, are naturally less confident and have more desire for revenge (Boer 48).

Nevertheless, he missed a vital point that no culture or religion can claim to be superior to another as each is subject to change and control by those who are prone to fallacy.

The year 1718 during the Tulip Period (1718-1730), was a significant point in Ottoman history in terms of the empire's first Westernization reforms. In this period and in the following years, there were several writers who travelled to the Orient by ethnomasquerading to see how it felt to be an Easterner. "Ethnomasquerade" is defined by Konuk as "the performance of an ethnic identity through the mimicking of clothes, gestures, appearance, language, cultural codes, or other components of identity formation" (393). There are many ethno-masquerading travellers, both male and female, who cross-dressed with different purposes. Among these writers were Mary Wortley Montagu, Julia Sophia Pardoe, Sir Richard Burton, Grace Ellison, and Isabel Eberhart, the last having cross-gender dressed as an Arab boy in North Africa. Richard Burton disguised himself in 1853 as a pilgrim to enter the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, forbidden to infidels. The female travellers, especially Ellison, wanted to experience the heroic acts of Burton by cross-dressing themselves, yet their transgression was temporarily invisible and gendered, thus limited. They could only taste the alternative femininities by visiting the already private quarters only accessible to Muslim women. On the other hand, these female cross-dressers, including LM, desired to challenge Orientalist misrepresentations, yet took pleasure in racialized power contrasts that were initial aim. Their feminine pleasure in those rich stuffs gave them gendered authority over their accounts of the harem.

Kader Konuk suggests some reasons for LM's dressing in Ottoman attire: "to satisfy her curiosity, to claim authenticity through close experience, to travel incognito by passing as an Ottoman woman, and to serve as a corrective to men's travel writing on the Orient" (Konuk 304). Konuk's argument is that LM's

was a strategy to identify herself with the Ottoman women of the upper class and to assert her own aristocratic roots.

The Westernization movement in the Ottoman Empire was not appreciated by all Westerners; instead, there were some like Julia Pardoe and Demetra Vaka, who saw the changing trend as fake and meaningless. Dress is above all an indication of the change, progress, or failure in travel literature. Therefore, the Ottoman clothing reforms were in the agenda of the European travellers. Julia Pardoe was a travel writer of the Romantic Period who went to Istanbul in 1835. At the time, the clothing reform in the Ottoman Empire was already past and the turban was replaced with the fez, robes with trousers and Western-style coats. St. John Bayle, the writer of The *Turks in Europe: Sketches of Manners and Politics in the Ottoman Empire* (1853), commented on the inappropriate European dressing of the Ottomans. They might have adopted the European clothing, but this dress revealed more of their barbaric character so far hidden by the turban (Konuk 410). Pardoe, also, was not pleased with what she saw in her travel to Istanbul. She called the fez “hideous and unmeaning,” “a mere caricature of the worst of all originals – the stiff, starch, angular European dress” (Pardoe 6-7). The shift in the Ottoman men and women’s clothing to the European style took the Other’s chance to observe these people in their original form. In the end, this caused the risk of credibility and lack of interest for the Western travel writers who wanted to display unusual scenes to their readers.

3.2 Perceptions of the Harem by Outsiders

Nineteenth-century European travellers often commented on the physical separation of women in Ottoman Turkish houses and thus their inaccessibility for the male travellers. The physical separation also led to the social separation. This led to the “orientalist” fantasy about what “haremlik,” women’s spaces, looked like and what happened there. What pulled secular travellers to the Orient was especially the eroticized view of the harem, where beautiful women

were imprisoned, waiting for their man all day to pay attention to them. Based on the writings of others rather than being actual observations, these accounts ignored historical certainty and undermined the difference between fact and fiction. They simply essentialized the “Oriental” woman through Western lenses.

As is widely known, French literature of the eighteenth century largely used the harem to further notify Western readers that Eastern women were subordinate subjects in the empire. The harem theme was adopted especially after Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*. Dr. Galina I. Yermolenko notes that Jean François Marmontel’s 1761 popular Moral Tale, “Soliman II,” features the conquest of a sultan by Roxalana, a pretty European slave. Roxalana succeeds in converting Soliman with “ideas of personal liberty” and her objections against the restraints in the seraglio (40). In English literature as well, the harem was meant for the oppression of women. Defoe’s feminist heroine in *The Fortunate Mistress* calls herself “Roxanna” (Trumpener 187-88). The use of the harem theme and the name Roxana was a metaphor for “liberty and female rights” generated after Montesquieu’s rebellious harem sultan.

While the European male painters represented Eastern female bodies with a voyeuristic and pornographic view, feminist writers put sexuality in the harem in their own terms in their writing. Prostitution and keeping mistresses were then considered as Eastern ways that ruined the ideal romantic, monogamous Western relationship. Elizabeth Gaskell, in her 1853 novel *Ruth*, invoked a feminist Orientalist image with her character Jemima Bradshaw when Jemima was thinking of her marriage: “She felt as if she would rather be bought openly, like an Oriental daughter” (240). Gaskell and her likes found natural this practice when performed by the Turkish; it was then less degrading. It was simply against Western ideals.

Western men’s representation of the seraglio resembles a Foucaldian panopticon. The controlling eye was the despot’s and the surveillance never ended. He had the power of communication and agency. Just as he was not the

sole controller of the harem, he also did not have a direct communication with his subjects. He performed it through his eunuchs. In Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, for example, Usbek, the noble Persian man, left for Paris and his long absence created chaos in the seraglio. His eunuchs whom he left behind to keep command over the harem women tried to maintain the despot's power in his absence. In his narrative, Montesquieu displayed a harem where women felt imprisoned and the despot was described as one who centered every issue on sexual pleasure. Roxane, Usbek's beloved wife, wrote him a farewell and admitted that she cheated on him. She says, I "learned how to make your frightful seraglio into a place of delight and pleasure" (Letter CXXI). Men like Montesquieu and Grosrichard saw the harem without the slightest clue of what was happening inside this closed space. They opened this space in their imagination and create writing through fantasy and phantasm.

Western women, like their men, had their own imaginations about the seraglio. Wollstonecraft called Eastern women "mere animals" who were "only fit for a seraglio" (83). N.M. Penzer, a British scholar who specialized in Oriental studies, found out that "the modern *seraglio* is directly derived from the Italian *serraglio*, 'a cage for wild animals,'" while its original in Persian, *sara* and *sarai*, meant "building" or "palace" (16). During the late seventeenth century, *seraglio* was used to refer to a "place where wild beasts are kept" (*OED*). Women like LM, however, wrote from within the harem whose accounts therefore seem more realistic and objective.

As one can see an explicit Oriental institution of seraglio in Montesquieu, Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the founding text of Western liberal feminism, also inaugurates a fully clear feminist Orientalist discourse. She associated the East with tyranny. Any abuse of power, especially the gendered despotism, was also linked with the Eastern way of life. Detesting Eastern ways, she labelled anything corrupted in the West as Eastern. Thus, she found Western women's education as one "worse than Egyptian bondage"

(221) and their masters “worse than Egyptian task-masters” (319). She also criticized upper-class women as those “dissolved in luxury,” therefore weak “like the Sybarites” (130). She was obviously against “Mahometanism,” the belief that women have no souls. Wollstonecraft used Mahometanism for her argument on women’s rights in the West, yet Ahmed points out something about this readily accepted fact about Islam concerning the whole orientalist literature, indeed. She believes that these stereotypes or pre-conceived images about Islamic culture are all created and re-created by the same Western men who have admitted the “inferiority of Western women” (523).

Florence Nightingale was also one of the women travellers who condemned the confinement of women in the harem. She did not detest the male domination or the slavery of women in these private quarters, yet she found it disgusting for women to stay in and produce nothing on their own. “If heaven and hell exist on this earth, it is in the two worlds I saw that morning – the Dispensary and the Hareem,” she wrote in her 1849 tour of Egypt (208). Considering her own customs at home and her upbringing, Nightingale might have found Hareem life disgusting. Yet she went far beyond essentializing the Eastern way of life, she directly equated it with hell. In Blount’s terms, she was one of “those who catechize the world by their owne home” (Blount 4).

Against Nightingale’s and Wollstonecraft’s assertions about Muslim women confined in the harem, some special health treatments and educational initiatives were undertaken by these women. LM, for example, launched huge debates about inoculation against smallpox, which she learned during her stay in Istanbul from Turkish women. It was a dreadful disease for most of the Europeans, who suffered and mostly died in the end. The treatment of smallpox by Turks was seen as an experiment practiced by a few ignorant women, who were among the illiterate and unthinking people of the East. The physician William Wagstaffe especially called LM “some sanguine Traveller from Turkey” (Grundy 17). Despite the debates and the attacks against inoculation, it spread

throughout England and the rest of Europe when LM successfully inoculated her own children.

The financial situation of women in the Western world during the eighteenth century was not so pleasant, which LM and many other women travellers resented especially after they faced the quality of life for women in the East. While their Western counterparts had neither the right to custody of their children nor were supported after a divorce, Muslim women enjoyed a multitude of rights in case of separation from the husband: “[...] the discourse about the place of Eastern women in their own world often implied an inchoate critique of Western patriarchy and contributed to the articulation of a discourse on the inequality of Western women in their own sphere” (Çevik 469). LM especially indicated the privileges given to women, be she mischievous or disobedient, in the empire. She admiringly said, “Neither have they much to apprehend from the resentment of their Husbands, those Ladys that are rich having all their money in their own hands, which they take with ’em upon a divorce with an addition which he is oblig’d to give ’em” (LM 329).

3.3 The Harem: A Free Space for Communication

Patronage in Islamic societies simply meant status and influence. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a huge influence of valide sultans in the architectural designs in the empire. The two specific mosques, Atik Valide and Yeni Valide, were commissioned by Nurbanu Sultan and Hatice Sultan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries successively. As Phillip Emeritz points out, “The harem was not a prison for women; it was merely another stage for political power” (2). Their contribution to these structures also reveals their roles as Muslim woman and mothers to the Islamic rulers (Emeritz 7). Women in these centuries were regarded as invisible by Western male writers. The information that is accessible to historians now was not so in the past, which is why it was much easier to create erotic or phallocentric stories about the harem. For Western ideology, the veil for example was a sign of subjugation, while in

fact it was a practice that upper class women desired to carry out. It was a respectful act and esteem for Muslim women rather than a punishment. Contrary to the Western imagination, women established their own community in the harem, where princesses and concubines were trained like young men and eunuchs in their private quarters. Women in these confines managed to exert influence over the male quarters, and that was truly a skill to be esteemed. One way to achieve this was through reproduction. Women gained authority under male constraints through childbearing. It was indeed not a simple task to manage inside the harem. Women were the supreme authority there, while men were assigned their duties in the public sphere.

For LM, space was very significant for the communication of women, through which they gained their independence. The image of the Oriental woman in others' minds was one who was locked up in the harem, serving their sons or the husbands. Jean Dumont comments in his *A New Voyage to the Levant* (1696) on the Sultan's wives, who were guarded by white and black eunuchs "who never permit 'em to enjoy the least Shadow of liberty" (167). Like male writers, some female writers as well judged women in the seraglio as not having any desire to have a say in the family. Wollstonecraft, for instance, criticizes women who could accept such a life in seraglio:

> In a seraglio, I grant, that all these arts are necessary; [...] but have women so little ambition to be satisfied with such a condition? [...] Surely she has not a soul immortal who can loiter life away merely employed to adorn her person, that she may amuse the languid hours, and soften the cares of a fellow-creature. (112-13)

Women staying in the seraglio and being under the control or surveillance of their husbands were weak and depraved according to Wollstonecraft. Education, intellectual development, and communication were so important for women to be able to stand alone. Women in the West rid themselves of Oriental ways and became more rational and reasonable.

While men's and some feminist women's perception was based mainly on female sexuality in a narrow sense, some women writers were already aware of the fact that harem was not merely a place for female fantasy. As Lisa Lowe puts it, "The harem is not merely an orientalist voyeur's fantasy of imagined female sexuality; it is also a possibility of an erotic universe in which there are no men, a site of social and sexual practices that are not organized around the phallus or a central male authority" (48). Lowe here refers to the very special communication or bonding between females whose understanding of sexuality is completely different from what was claimed or imagined by those male writers.

LM, differing from male writers, looked into the matter with a slightly different view. She saw the baths as a women's coffee house, where women could exchange the latest news. According to her, the free space that Muslim women enjoyed in baths provided them with an easiness that allowed them to wear light cloths or no cloths among their own sex. This was a facility offered to Turkish women in all ranks. Just as Western men called it pressure over Muslim women to wear muslins or ferigée, the Muslim Turkish women could not grasp the logic behind Western riding dress or court dress with their corsets and petticoats. LM put it in a rather insightful tone, saying, "I saw they believ'd I was so lock'd up in that Machine that it was not in my power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband" (LM 314). We can understand here that LM interpreted for the Muslim women how to see and judge their sex from another culture. Perhaps they did not scrutinize the matter in the way that LM perceived it. Displacement of unpleasant experiences onto the other led LM to cover the issue this way. The distorted accounts of the abusive treatment of veiled women were common in the seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century travel narratives. These voyeuristic fantasies in fact distracted attention from inequities at home, presented the Orient in need of civilization, and displayed Europe as free and civilized. These narratives paved the way for the male reader to feel himself in the role of a savior, like a colonial hero, "white men

saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 242). LM pointed out that even slaves in the Muslim world were treated more kindly and fairly compared to her own people. She also referred to the undeclared enslavement of women around the world and men who were enslaved in the feudal system of serfdom. She also asserted that those Eastern women called slaves would get the same treatment in the West without taking the label "slave."

One reason for the narratives on the harem was that "the harem sold books" (Lewis 12). Reina Lewis, a Professor of Cultural Studies, titles her first chapter "Selling the Harem," associating the selling and the popularity of the books published from the eighteenth century on about the harem. Especially after the publication of Montagu, Grace Ellison, Halide Edib, and Demetra Vaka, harem literature became a popular literary activity for women writers. LM's accounts, and the false accounts of the previous male authors, revealed the unreliability of the male-authored sources; thus the publications by women erupted in the 1850s.

According to LM, communication between women was important and the details that ensured it were of significant as well. Since she had access to all those places forbidden to men, "she learned that the harem rested less on sexual than family politics; that women (veiled, of course) moved freely about the streets; and that the segregation of the sexes created a female space with its own culture and its own hierarchy" (Grundy 148). There were only a small number of coffeehouses in England in the seventeenth century, and LM satirized English society for prohibiting its women to enter these houses and take part in the social gatherings. On the other hand, LM was successful in catching small elements in Turkish women's daily lives that contributed a different perspective to the position of women in the empire. The Turkish baths and coffeehouses were places where women were able to express their worries or share their privacy with other women. Turkish society was able to eliminate many social problems through these baths and to establish a close bond between its women.

The braiding of hair, for instance, was repeated several times in LM's letters and symbolized the very harem itself (Boer 60). She defined it as "Beautifull Hair [...] braided either with pearl or riband, perfectly representing the figures of the Graces" (314). The process and the result both represent how braiding was a means of successful and productive communication between women. Braiding hair was a silent communication. Though it tells a lot, Western men had already constructed their own fantasies about female sexuality in the harem. These prejudices or misconceptions led them into writing preposterous fictions or drawing pictures having no correspondence with reality. As LM wrote whenever she found it appropriate to criticize previous travel accounts, readers by far were "entertaind with by the common Voyage-writers [...] very fond of speaking of what they don't know" (343).

As Blount pointed out, "Putting off the old man" and releasing "former habit of opinion" is of significant value to objectively evaluate the other culture and appreciate its distinct features (MacLean 130). Hair did not have a particular importance for LM, but instead its function in the communication of women was what mattered to her. Just like weaving connects women and gathers them at times when they most need to share something, braiding hair also brought women to a degree that they could produce something and share it in their own circle. The women in the baths decided the patterns and the jewellery to be attached on the hair; lastly it was their work to be appreciated as something of feminine character. LM was very careful in observing women's headdresses as well.

Lady Mary felt that Turkish women rightly understood the constraints on English women. The second point is when we regard her assumption or insight as true. Turkish women in the bath might attribute her tight clothes to her husband's decision, indeed. This shows how appearance may deceive and misguide the truth. It also shows the power of men in the Eastern world in decision making. Because decisions were made by men in the Muslim world,

Muslim women thought the same was the case for the Western world. Perhaps the Muslim women might have been unappreciative of the leadership of men in almost all matters.

3.4 Alternative Perspectives in Harem Literature

There are several travel narratives through which we can find out the other's perception of the Western world as represented via its representatives. Intersubjectivity, as we call it, is thus "not only constructing the 'I' as subject but acknowledging the presence of other subjects and the possibility of imagining the self as an-other to an-other subject" (Adak 4). In LM's accounts, for instance, we see both the apprehension and uneasiness of her being invited to go naked in front of other ladies in the bath in Adrianople and the content at the same time over being welcomed with the greatest civility. By the looks centered on her, she embraced the possibility of being gazed at. Adak specifies this exchange between two different poles as "the razing of the hierarchy between Self/Other, West/East, in order to enable the *fluidity* and *reciprocity* of exchange between the poles of these dichotomies" (5). It is not a static exchange as seen from the one-sided Western travel accounts. In the accounts recorded by various female authors like LM, Pardoe, Vaka, and Ellison, the Eastern women wrote back or subverted the monologic discourse, indeed. They either spoke through their veils or chose the way they represented their culture to the foreigners. Mikhail Bakhtin defines this monologic discourse as the subordination of "the social diversity of speech types" to a single authoritative voice. This exchange between East and West requires the deconstruction of this monologic discourse in favor of dialogism, that is "[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin 263). After all, journey to a foreign land, if aimed for purposes and ends other than religion and trade, requires a process of unlearning.

LM's presence in the bath as an English lady and her description of the scene in the very private female quarters put her in a position such that she looked like "mimicking the voyeuristic male gaze of an Orientalist painter" (Konuk 395). Hers was not a reaction but a mere depiction of the scene that she eye-witnessed:

> To tell you the truth, I had wickedness enough to wish secretly that Mr Gervase (an Irish portrait painter) could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very much improved his art to see so many fine women naked, in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions while their slaves (generally pretty girls of seventeen or eighteen) were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty manners. (LM 314)

Claiming herself to be the first Western female entering the hamam, LM needed to portray the scene either to prove her presence there or to arouse the same curiosity for the others. The several stereotypes that already fossilized in people's minds were once more revived through LM's depiction of the hamam scene. It even became a source of inspiration for the famous Orientalist painter, Auguste-Dominique Ingres's painting *The Turkish Bath*. Srinivas Aravamudan, despite LM's harmless sexual content in her description of the Bath, also claims that the descriptions are "suggestive of lesbian possibilities" (85). The homoerotic content, as she called it, is full of implications that were hidden behind LM's sympathetic attitudes. However, Kader Konuk asserts that LM put on the male gaze to "establish her narrative authority" (395). It neither has the risk of being seen as a lesbian act nor indicates a hegemonic discourse over Muslim women. LM prevented this happening by raising her credibility. As she confirmed it, there was no "wanton smile" or "immodest gesture" among the Turkish women or slaves while she was in her riding dress (313). She was also

not fully naked in the end so as to avoid possible rumours or misunderstandings.

The passage reveals LM's opposition to the previous male travel writers who represented women either as lascivious or unattractive in the female bath. What Weitzman finds interesting in this section is yet "the voyeuristic male artist that LM uses as a measure of the women" in the bath (351). The female flesh being aestheticized was likened to the naked women in the paintings of the Italian school of female beauty. LM also sympathized with Turkish ladies drinking coffee in the bath, the scene being similar to one in coffee houses in London. LM established a common link and friendship between Turkey and Europe, thus avoiding any implication that these women lived in an exotic world alien to Europe (Weitzman 351).

Similarly, Henry Blount, who voyaged to the Ottoman Empire from 1634 to 1636, was presented by his contemporaries to be willing to counter English customs conflicting with his worldview and to encourage English subjects to use it in their imperialist and Orientalist efforts. After his voyage, he stopped drinking English spirits; instead, he became a drinker of water and coffee. In contrast to Dallam and Biddulph, Blount's travel accounts together with his views influenced English society at all levels, from royal households to common readers. Blount gathered knowledge about the Ottoman Empire to oppose all the anti-Islamic views. Thus he caused an "imperial envy" for the English who wanted to become rivals with the Ottomans on a global scale (MacLean 126). As Bernadette Andrea put it in her review, "the absence of Orientalism in Blount's narrative actually rendered it more usable for subsequent English imperialist efforts" (9).

The relationship between travel and gender is often reduced to Trollopian stereotypes. It is often assumed that women's experience of the Orient was greatly dependent on their husbands or brothers and their role was simply "supportive" (Melman 26). Indeed travels are always seen as strings firmly attached to the literary field instead of social and cultural phenomena. However,

it was a cultural thing that inspired and influenced others' experiences. Lord Byron, for instance, was inspired to travel to the East as a young boy, being influenced by LM's Turkish letters that he read "'before [he] was *10 years* old'" (Winch 2). Like their male contemporaries, women writers also were the actors of their own experiences.

Some students of women's autobiographical writing have found that both men and women tended to relate their experiences or narratives to that of others. "Their sense of the past is collective rather than individual" (Melman 27), as seen in their travel accounts. French novelist Gérard de Nerval, for instance, had already constructed an image of an erotic harem in his mind before he arrived in the East since Europe imposed the illusion so successfully on its subjects. Upon searching about the sleeping arrangements in the viceregal harem, his discovery of the sexes sleeping apart and religious law forbidding them to see each other naked below the neck shed light on his previous knowledge. He was even shocked upon hearing from the sheik that the legitimate wife had the right to demand a divorce if she had to "divide with another the honor of sleeping next to her husband" (Yeazell 207). After all, he said to the consul, "what an illusion still persists in Europe regarding the customs of these people. The life of the Turks is for us the ideal of power and pleasure, and I see that they are not even masters in their own houses" (207).

In the countries where colonization was not an issue, such as Turkey, the biggest impact was the cultural domination. Though the beginning of the twentieth century saw a fast growing interest of the Turkish population for the Western way of life, in furniture, clothing, or mentality, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed this interest only partially, which did not reach the extremes to abandon their cultural and religious roots. LM's compliments and admiration for the Turkish women in Constantinople do justice to Turkish women in the sense that they were not yet overwhelmed by Western habits at

the time. Individual alienation was absent from Ottoman ladies, as their sole purpose was to perform and spread Turkish values in the women's quarters.

Travelling to foreign lands and making statements on social and cultural structure is quite easy. The difficult thing is to follow the same path with so much curiosity in questioning one's own origins also. The Mediterranean societies before the Arab conquest of the Middle East, the Greeks, and the Hebrews all claimed to have performed polygamy and various forms of segregation (Melman 60). Even the usage of eunuchs dates back to the Byzantines. Just as seclusion by Christians was widely researched by art-historian Barnette Miller, the harem and its Christian past was profoundly observed by Grace Ellison. Ellen Chennels, and Catherine Elwood, who were among the later writers on the harem, also emphasized the secure nature of harem life. Elwood saw the husband's protective self as "the natural wish of the husband to guard his beloved from even the knowledge of the ills and woes that mortal men betides ..." (153-54) She regarded women's private quarters as a "retreat" which is sacred, respected, and guarded. Ellen Chennels was another figure who four decades earlier cited that Mohammad did not bring a religion of polygamy. Instead, he did his best to prevent people from committing license. His rules brought restrictions to the universal license that long prevailed (Melman 72).

The Victorian and Edwardian middle class women's perception of the world, particularly harem life, was constructed through the lens of their own values. Middle-class travellers projected their own values onto Middle Eastern families (Melman 140). The dichotomy between the sexes and their spheres was coded and respected as a value by middle-class British women. Domestic woman was safe from the sins and temptations of the outside world. Thus, she remains virtuous and refrains from sinning. The man's world is the complete opposite of the woman's: It is the public sphere, where protection is hard to achieve. Therefore, the private sphere, that is the domestic sphere, is where women were expected to inhabit. It is sacred and "safe from all intrusion"

(Melman 441). The women's quarters in the Ottoman Empire were as separate yet sacred as it was in the West. The masculine representation of women lining to reach the master and of the deep hatred they nurtured for each other with the desire for the master was simply a way to divide those women. It was also to display a deceptive image of a sex whose sole desire was to engage with men at the cost of harming her same sex. There were, however, alternative voices that stood up against these stereotypes. Their rewriting of Western harem literature, as Zeynep Çelik argues, dissolves the "frozen" parts of Orientalism, subverting all the assumptions of "both the colonizer's unilateral power and the disquieting powerlessness of the colonized" (Çelik 204). It is clear that LM also perceived women's quarters in the empire as "safe" spaces that belonged to women only (Boer 59). They were safe both in terms of their distance to the men's controlling and sharing information and staying up-to-date about the latest issues.

Instead of allying with their Protestant background, these women writers left the providential scheme of things and headed toward first-hand knowledge. As MacLean put it, "Knowledge is acquired in proportion to cultural difference, and cultural difference can best be experienced free from religious similarity" (135).

It was not only LM who shed light on the issue of monogamous marriages in Istanbul. Anna Bowman Dodd was aware of the misperceptions and misconceptions in the West about Eastern marriages. Polygamous marriages were few and made by the élite who emulated the imperial model (Dodd 435). Unlike this wealthy minority, most of the population in Turkey had only one wife. Harem for Turkish society simply meant a home for the family. It might be composed of other family members than wife and children; yet not necessarily a second wife. It was claimed and written by many Western travellers that Osmanli women were deprived of basic human rights while their men had the privilege of being free. Bowman Dodd, however, challenged these views and stated that "it

is the European rather than the Osmanli women who seem to be still in bondage" (Dodd 434). The Victorians and Edwardians readily accepted the harem as a feminine quarter free from the male libido. They perceived it as autonomous and self-ruling as the valide sultan, the mother of the Sultan, ranked the highest among all the women. Moreover, the role of the women in decision-making or in other political issues was not trivial. The mother-in-law had supreme power.

The "passive compliance," as MacLean called it, is applicable to both slaves and women under Ottoman rule only if the observer is negligent enough not to consider the cultural and religious difference between Christian and Islamic communities (97). The slaves were as highly valued and considered a part of the house or imperial harem as other Ottoman subjects; as for women, they were the "namus" or symbol of honor and decency for all the household, and therefore any intentional harm would bring destruction to the very core of the family.

Concubinage is one of the most debated issues in terms of its link to slavery. Women in eighteenth-century Britain were strong supporters of the anti-slavery movement. The association between slaves and women in terms of their place in public was open to discussion for these women. Concubinage in the Middle East was therefore an important issue to be touched upon. It was crystal clear that hierarchical Middle Eastern society was more mobile and flexible than Victorian class society. Harriet Martineau, Mary Louisa Whately, and even the evangelical missionaries agreed that slavery in the Middle East was quite different from the Afro-American experience of slavery (Melman 146). Slavery in the Middle East although it was also bondage for the slaves, was not permanent or changeless unlike African-American slavery. Rather, it provided an upward mobility for the female circles. Concubinage meant emancipation for those from Georgian and Circassian regions who wanted to flee from the poor conditions of their lives. Even the families preferred their daughters to be accepted into the

imperial harem as a concubine as these girls were kindly treated and well-educated in the harem. They were even married to Viziers or Pashas by the Sultan when they were of age. According to Adolphus Slade," the harem was to Oriental women what India had been to English men: a social ladder" (Sancar 89).

LM compared free Turkish women with confined European Christian women with an intention to eliminate all blind prejudices back then. She did not deny the existence of slavery in Turkish households, yet brought a new understanding to the concept of slavery in Islam by relating it to Christian households. In her letter to Lady Bristol she confesses,

> I know you'll expect I should say something particular of that of the slaves, and you will imagine me half a Turk when I don't speak of it with the same horror other Christians have done before me, but I cannot forbear applauding the humanity of the Turks to those creatures. They are never ill used, and their slavery is in my opinion no worse than servitude all over the world. 'Tis true they have no wages, but they give them yearly clothes to a higher value than our salaries to an ordinary servant. But you'll object men buy women with an eye to evil. In my opinion they are bought and sold as publically and more infamously in all our Christian great cities. (LM 402)

The representations of Eastern women in their domestic sphere were not as innocent and defensive as LM's though. Inspired by accounts of male travellers, painters had artistic representations of Eastern women gently lying on divans. The relaxed bodies and the loose clothes wrapping them were all the assumptions of the Western males about harem women. The oriental women were depicted as seductive and lazy as they were allowed to be. These paintings unfortunately caused people to establish a close association between the idea of bodily comfort and the East. Muslim women, loyal both to religion

and tradition, wore flowing clothes but it was modest, not seductive. In the paintings by Western males, these women's robes revealed the female body beneath and constructed them as sexual objects. Also a relationship was set up between the freely lying body and the relaxation of sexual taboos.

Still following the "rhetoric of likeness" in the context of slavery, LM closely examined how slavery was performed by Turks. Reading about various sorts of slavery around the world, she praised the way Turks treated their slaves. They were not offended by their masters and were highly valued. The women's situation in Ottoman lands was also justified by providing similar exercises performed by Christians. According to Weitzman, LM held concubinage equal to European prostitution. He evaluated LM's opinion about slavery of women and said the concubinage in Muslim lands or prostitution in Christian quarters were "each civilization's addiction to essentially the same vice" (353).

Melman strongly believes that the Western women did not represent the women's situation in the Middle East, they rather depicted or projected what they had seen or experienced there. And she puts it in a very clever way, "seeing is a pre-programmed activity" (Melman 308). The women travellers from England were perceived from their middle-class gender ideology, which based female solidarity on particular virtues. There were also some women writers from the Middle East who completely disagreed with the logic behind the harem. Huda Sha'rawi (1879-1947), Nabawiya Musa (1890-1951) and Zaynab Fawaz (1860-1919) were only some of these women who drew a dreadful picture of harem life. For these women, harem meant exploitation, oppression, isolation, and mostly hatred and violence among women.

Tolerance toward the "difference" was outstanding as a permanent characteristic of the Augustans. LM was one of those Augustans who sympathized ways in which others sustained their lives. It was especially toward the sexual other that the Augustans were attracted in terms of the distinct ways

of living cultures. LM, for instance, was so much affected by the verses that Ibrahim Bassa wrote for his contracted wife that she thought of him as a “Man of Wit” and his verses “a Sample of the finest poetry” (334). She even wrote down some verses in her letters addressed to the Sultana, Eldest daughter of Sultan Achmet III, “The Nightingale now wanders in the Vines / Her Passion is to seek Roses” (334). There, she emphasized once more that, “The vulgar Turk is very different from what is spoke at Court or amongst the people of figure” (333). She called the language they used as Scripture Language when they were addressing a great lady or a man. She also praised the sublime style Turkish people had both in their manners and in their poetry.

The Victorians, on the other hand, tried to find out the similarities between Western and other cultural, familial structures. Western women in the nineteenth century especially believed the uniformity of all women regardless of their ethnicity, class, or culture. They shared many things in common, such as maternal instincts, domesticity, naivety, and the desire to serve others. In contrast to the majority of observations by travellers about the laziness and uselessness of Oriental women, Emily Beaufort, the Victorian author of travel books on the Near East, gave an instance from the Lebanese civil war of 1863. Though the Muslim population was still reduced racially to the lowest degree of humanity, Beaufort was able to respect the contributions made by women in that war (Finn vi). Her portrayal of those women was dominated by activity. The Druze and Christian women both had nationalist pride and raised war-cries, mourned the fallen, and stayed beside their men.

The citationary nature of Orientalist writing, particularly travel writing, was existent in the sixteenth century as well. The report of Istanbul in Biddulph’s *The Travels* was almost identical to Thomas Washington’s 1585 translation of Nicolas de Nicolay’s *Navigations* (MacLean 73). Though Biddulph criticized the travellers who believed straight away what they were told, he personally accepted anything in print as true. When he wrote about the deflowering of

Byzantium emperors' wives and the cutting them in pieces by Mehmed II in 1453, he simply repeated Nicolay's sentences (MacLean 76). Such vigorous narration, as if he had witnessed the events, reminds us not to confirm every written record without further investigation.

The motive and motivation in travel determines the travellers' perception of foreign lands and cultures. In Biddulph's case, we see the condemnation of Muslims for simply being racially different. Because Islam was not much to his taste, he did not even bother to draw historical and racial lines between Arabs, Saracens, and Turks; all were tyrannical and devilish in the end. Just his opposite, LM sympathized with Islam as a religion and its rules brought by the Prophet Mohammed. She wrote in her embassy letters that his religion bestowed more rights upon women than any others. The seclusion or restrictions to sexual license protected women from claims made by males to her individual rights.

These were various reasons for travellers to set off for the Levant. Meeting other Christian communities was the reason in the case of Biddulph. Yet he made the most of every opportunity to instruct lessons to the women in his community. For this, he explained the duties of Muslim women to their husbands, the severe punishment for whoredom, and the in-house activities of women. Comparing his community to the pastoral Muslim nomads' – whom he calls "Turcomanni" – Biddulph found lessons for his people in England:

> the women keepe their tents, and spend their time in spinning, or carding, or knitting, or some household huswifery, not spending their time in gossiping and gadding abroade from place to place, and from house to house, from ale-house to wine-taverne, as many idle huswives in *England* doe. (MacLean 81)

Biddulph addressed women in Muslim quarters and in Christians, which was quite offensive, for he praised the first group for their womanly duties but the second group were condemned for taking male liberties. The Christian

supernaturalism dominating his views on travel hindered him from seeing the relative nature of cultures.

LM' sense of Justice most resembled Henry Blount's, a travel writer from the seventeenth century. In his *Voyage to the Levant* (1636), he wrote he was not that sort of traveller who would "sit down with a booke knowledge thereof," but instead witnessed everything through personal encounter, be it hazardous or challenging (MacLean 127). LM took the same view so that whatever she saw or heard in Constantinople, she applied it to her own use and made her own discourse of it. Once she had a conversation with a lady in Constantinople with whom she kept a friendship afterwards. The lady asked LM how Christian men could allow their wives to offer themselves to public men as freely as they wished. It was totally contrary to the Muslim belief that a woman be permitted to receive visits from as many men as she thought proper and to drink an unlimited amount of wine. When LM assured her about this wrong impression that the lady had somehow acquired, the Turkish lady asked then about the necks, eyes, hands, conversations that were all presented in public. After this sincere conversation between these two women, LM found the woman reasonable enough to choose the "Mahometan manners" and she was persuaded that "a woman who is determined to place her happiness in her husband's affections, should abandon the extravagant desire of engaging publick adoration" (260).

Unlike Biddulph, whose decisions or statements were based on tradition and Christian belief, Henry Blount, a man of observation and precocious wit, adopted the relativity of cultures. Because civilizations and cultures are "to be valued on their own terms and not those of an opposing perspective," Blount preferred keeping his personal taste or interests to himself; instead he related the geographical and cultural characteristics of the Ottomans to their success throughout the world.

Experience may go hand in hand with pre-acquired knowledge, but the first comes closer to understanding human institutions. Blount not only disproved

the preconceived certainties about the East, but at the same time used travel for his own self-reconstruction. He believed that before any judgment of the East and any advantage could be obtained, Eastern culture must be observed in its place. Women had a disadvantage of being excluded from communities who studied “things Oriental” until the 1900s. Female explorers like Lady Anne Noel Blunt and Gertrude Bell were not allowed to present their experiences to the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), the promoter of Victorian and Edwardian exploration and geographical societies until much later.

LM distinguished herself from those writers who had never been to Turkey but were ever easy to associate “Turk” with “Islam.” Used as a synonym for Islam, “Turk” was seen as an enemy to be discovered, challenged, and constructed in Western terms. Wollstonecraft, unlike LM, claimed the superiority of Western values and believed that “despotism that kills virtue and genius in the bud” does not “hover over Europe with that destructive blast which desolates Turkey” (131). She found the Eastern ways agreeable to the Muslim women, yet she could not comprehend the European ladies’ slavish attitude and servitude to their husbands. While it was natural to her Eastern counterparts, it went against her cultural background and values. Likewise, the English husband who applied Islamic culture to his women was even more shameful, according to Wollstonecraft, since the despotism of the harem was so foreign to European cultures.

CONCLUSION

Many writers have addressed the issue of women's conditions in the East as something equal to slavery throughout the centuries. The peak of these ungrounded prejudices and fantasies about Eastern women was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when there were attacks but at the same time counterattacks, against the claims about the position of these women. There were travellers with or without adequate experience, who wrote on the unequal and unfair relationship between Muslim men and their women. Their claim was simply the use of woman as objects for various reasons, such that they could even be sold as a slave to another man. There were many women writers, too, who continued this discourse constructed by male travellers, and who ignored the differences between cultures. These attitudes, however, were proven false by observant and broad-minded writers like LM, Demetra Vaka Brown, Grace Ellison, and their likes.

Montagu's remark about women slaves, for instance, shows how her judgment at this point was really crucial for deconstructing prevailing prejudices. She mentions that the Muslim owner of slaves "never sells them, except it is a punishment of some very great fault. If ever they grow weary of them, they either present them to a friend, or give them their freedom" (145). She further explained that the slaves were treated in a merciful manner unlike the contemporary Western practices. Muslim slavery was an upward mobility, a sort of privilege, as they sometimes enjoyed even more freedom than free people. Having researched a lot about Islam, she already knew that in Islam, one of the greatest virtues was setting a slave free by buying his or her freedom.

Trade routes affected relationships between East and West, and companies began to have offices in the East. As the Ottomans became weaker politically, the "Oriental discourse" changed and the Ottomans became a model for Europeans for what England should not be. The accounts by Western merchants were generally inaccurate, ignorant of facts, and prejudiced. And the

later written travelogues had a citationary nature which had almost no credibility. Montagu referred to those writers as the authors of “absurdities” (368). She thought writing and living in a country were completely different from simply visiting it for a short while and then describing it as if one had the utmost allowance to enter its private quarters.

During that time, there were few writers who mentioned Turks and Islam positively in their travelogues. LM is probably the best example of one who explored Islam, related it to Turks, and gave details and first-hand knowledge. LM Montagu travelled to the Ottoman Empire in 1717 with her husband Edward Wortley, who was Ambassador to the Sublime Part. During their stay in Constantinople, LM wrote various letters to her acquaintances in England, which made her the forerunner of feminist literature on the Orient.

Montagu used the “rhetoric of likeness” and thought that East had equal qualities with the West and that the West misrepresented the East and its people. She even brought back home useful Turkish practices such as inoculation against smallpox. She herself was plagued with the disease, and her son was healed after the inoculation. In order to understand the importance of Montagu and her observations, one has to examine the mainstream Western attitudes toward the East and Islam before the nineteenth century. After the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453, Islam was considered to be the biggest threat for Christians. Martin Luther (1483-1546), for instance, believed that the one “who fights against the Turks [...] should consider that he is fighting against an enemy of God and a blasphemer of Christ, indeed, the devil himself.” The term “Turk” had many negative connotations in Europe and the word was attributed to any Muslim as well. It meant “a cruel, tyrannical man, barbarian; one who treats his wife hardly” (Oxford). Similarly, the East, especially Turkey, was labelled as a despotic state that followed Islamic rules and its exotic teachings strictly and blindly. Thomas Carlyle, English philosopher, writer, and essayist during the Victorian era, praises LM to be “the first Englishwoman who

combined the knowledge of classical and modern literature with a penetrating judgment and correct taste" (Brewster 721).

On the other hand, there was increasing interest by Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to travel to the East and to depict its women as mere sexual objects. The enhancement of sexuality and its association with harems was yet another topos that male English writers and some French painters used in their works. It was safer and more interesting to paint the naked body of a stranger, especially one who wore a veil in public, than that of an English or French woman. Thus, Orientalism became the medium of artists who were dealing with nudes in their paintings. Muslim women who were exposed in these erotic dimensions by Western male Orientalist artists were mostly depicted in the bath or hammams. The obsession of Western painters and writers who studied Muslim women exclusively in their private quarters, was that they were unable to dissociate women from a secluded place. There are various examples of sexuality in bath paintings, such as Ingres's *Le Bain turc* (1862) or Jean-Léon Gérome's *Bain Turc ou Bain Maure* (1872), *Un Bain Maure* (1874), and *Femme Turque au Bain* (1877).

Harem and baths are the main signifiers for the European colonial concept of Islamic women and their position in the empire. In Ingres's *Le Bain turc* (1862), more than twenty women are packed in a room where they are depicted as sexually arousing and aroused at the same time. While presenting the harem as a place of confinement, the painting also tells a lot about the women's spaces where sexuality was freely practiced. The private and secluded areas are especially important for these painters as they were able to witness the scenes in inaccessible quarters of those women, and privacy was particularly an important part of sexual fantasies. Through Orientalism, these private spaces become home for Muslim women. Therefore, free sexuality was considered the norm for Oriental women as they were involved in these practices almost every day.

There were women, however, who deconstructed the stereotypes and the Oriental discourse through the projection of their own experiences into writing. Mernissi in her *Dreams of Trespass*, tells anecdotes to invalidate stories about harems constructed till then. Her mother's trying to spend time with her husband and children separately from other members of the family destroys the impression that the harem was so private and its laws so restrictive. Mernissi paints a picture of the "harem" that has several connotations. One is "hudud" or frontier - not between women and men in the house, but between women and the outside. The harem, depicted by Westerners as merely a spatial concept constructed within walls, was in reality inclusive of mostly the behavioral conventions between sexes. It conveyed the cultural codes within Muslim families and thus met the social and cultural needs of Islamic societies.

In terms of Muslim women's restrictions and thus their limited view of life and its conditions, they perceived Western man as cruel and unyielding. Montagu, however, elaborated the issue alleging that Muslim women were indeed less restricted than the European women. She put forward various reasons for her claim:

> [...] Turkish ladies, who are perhaps freer than any ladies in the universe, and are the only women in the world that lead a life of uninterrupted pleasure exempt from cares; their whole time being spent in visiting, bathing, or the agreeable amusement of spending money, and inventing new fashions. A husband would be thought mad that exacted any degree of economy from his wife, whose expenses are no way limited but by her own fancy. Tis his business to get money, and hers to spend it: and this noble prerogative extends itself to the very meanest of the sex. (406)

Montagu believed that all these rights are necessary for a woman's freedom. Thus, she respected Islam as the religion that allowed this privilege to its female followers. As for the intellectual qualifications of women, she mentioned Fatima

whose presence in Adrianople gave her utmost pleasure. Fatima was highly educated and sociable as well as attractive. As well as Leyla Saz, who was well-educated and tender in her attitudes, Fatima also stood as a witness against negative stereotypes of Muslim women.

The existence of such literature as Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721) or the *Arabian Nights* led people to criticize Montagu's *Letters* in terms of their descriptions of Eastern harems and baths. The romantic image of Muslim women in the East - the slaves, belly dancers, women braiding hair, beautiful eyes - is claimed to receive Western male admiration and a desire to possess concubines. Thus, the popularity of Montagu's *Letters* and thus its popularity are mostly attributable to the bath scenes and the depiction of Eastern harems. However, just as it is unfair to give her work full credibility in terms of authenticity, it is also wrong to interpret her work as merely a seductive or manipulative text,

Montagu is considered an influential figure of Western Oriental writings. She challenged her day's common travelogues, which attempted to give a picture of the East based on preconceived stereotypes. Regarding her social position and background, she can be partly blamed for her involvement only with the upper class. Yet as Arthur Weitzman points out, Montagu "pierced the myths of [the] orient by refusing to demonize the Turks" and when "she looked at the 'other' she saw herself (357).

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