

## DEPICTION OF TURKISH WOMEN AND THE HAREM LIFE IN THE MEMOIRS OF SOME WOMEN WRITERS IN THE EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY\*

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### Abstract

This article proposes an analysis of the ways in which Turkish women are depicted in the memoirs of some women writers in the early 20th century. This period in history, which corresponds to one of the most important eras of the Turkish woman, was one of self-consciousness and cultural search. The analysis of the depiction of Turkish women by Turkish and foreigner women writers in that era is of utmost importance since the discourses on women in Turkey were shaped in that way.

This article analyses the portrayal of Turkish women in general and the social role of women in particular by taking the below-given memoirs and some others into account. Demetra Vaka Brown's *Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women* (1909), Hester Donaldson Jenkins' *Behind Turkish Lattices: The Story of a Turkish Woman's Life* (1911), Zeyneb Hanoum's *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions* (1913), Grace Ellison's *An English Woman in a Turkish Harem* (1915), Selma Ekrem's *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl* (1930).

**Keywords:** Turkish Women, Harem, Veil, Memoir, Ottoman State

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### Özet

Bu çalışma, 20. yüzyılın başlarında bazı kadın yazarların anılarında Türk kadınlarının nasıl yansıtıldığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. 20. yüzyılın başı, tarihte, Türk kadını için en önemli zamanlardan birine denk gelmektedir ve bir bireysel farkındalık ve kültürel arayış dönemidir. Bu dönemde Türk kadınlarının ve diğer yabancı kadın yazarların Türk kadını tasvirlerinin analizi, Türkiye'deki kadınlar üzerine olan söylemi şekillendirdiği için, çok önemlidir.

Bu makale genelde Türk kadınının betimlemesini, özelde ise Türk kadınının toplumsal rolünü analiz etmek amacıyla aşağıda sözü geçen kadın yazarların anılarına ve diğer bazı eserlere değinmektedir: Demetra Vaka Brown'un *Haremlik: Türk Kadınının Hayatından bazı Sayfalar* (1909), Hester Donaldson Jenkins'in *Kafesin Ardındaki Türk Kadını: Türk Kadınının Hayat Hikâyesi* (1910), Zeynep Hanım'ın *Bir Türk Kadınının Avrupa İzlenimleri* (1913), GraceEllison'un *İstanbul'da Bir Konak ve Yeni Kadınlar* (1915), Halide Edip'in *Halide Edip'in Anıları* (1926) ve Selma Ekrem'in *Peçeye İsyân* (1930) adlı eseri.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Türk Kadını, Harem, Peçe, Anı, Osmanlı Devleti*

### Introduction

This study, based on comparative reading, aims to illustrate how Turkish women were depicted in the memoirs of women writers, who wrote in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Early 20th century is a transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic and coincides with "the key moments of the transformation of discourses on women in Turkey." <sup>1</sup> It consists of two parts: The first part, which is the general portrayal of Turkish women, gives details about Turkish women's positive and negative depictions and includes topics such as amusements, duties, physical appearances of Turkish women. The second part concentrates on veiling and charshaf. In this study, to be more objective women writers from different countries such as United States, England, and Ottoman Empire—a Greek-Ottoman writer and two Turkish-Ottoman writers, are selected.

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<sup>1</sup> Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 35.

### **General Portrayal of Turkish Women**

Halide Edib Adıvar (1882-1964), a famous Turkish novelist and feminist, thinks that women of all nations are the same and they understand each other. According to her, it is not important whether she is from Turkey or India or another part of the world. However, she does not support the same idea for men. She explains that a man from Turkey may not be able to understand another man from another country. Therefore, she thinks men belong to different groups such as races and nations, but "[w]omen are all one nation."<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that every woman belongs to a single nation, it might be interesting to elucidate the differences between Turkish women and the women of other races regarding personal characteristics. Demetra Vaka Brown (1877-1946), one of the most significant Greek-American writers at the turn of the last century, illustrates these differences as such:

*Turkish women in some ways are very different from the women of other races. They may be more educated than our college girls, they may speak four or five languages, and read the masterpieces of each of these languages, but they remain children of nature, as we do not. If you spend a day with them and they love you, you will know their hearts and minds as they truly are. There is no false shame or prudery about them. They speak as they think and feel.*<sup>3</sup>

Another comparison between Turkish women and the women of other nations is made by Grace Ellison (d. 1935), a journalist, who encouraged dialogues between Turkish and British women at the beginning of the twentieth century. She thinks; Turkish women “are more pure-minded... than the women of any other nation.”<sup>4</sup> Being pure-minded was not the only quality Ellison wanted to emphasize, and there were other things that Turkish women produced and took active roles for modernizing the whole society. To achieve these purposes, Turkish women had organizations, edited papers, had programs to teach about national health, and trained the uneducated. Therefore, according to Ellison, Turkish women were not the women as portrayed by foreigners, mainly Europeans.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Edib Adıvar, 1935, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup> Vaka Brown, 1909, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Ellison, p.108.

<sup>5</sup> Ellison, p. 16.

Zeyneb Hanoum (1883-1923), a Turkish writer and one of the heroines of the famous work *Les Désenchantées* by Pierre Loti, was born into Muslim elite and traveled in disguise to Europe with her sister, hoping to find freedom in the West. She supports Ellison's ideas and argues that "Turkish women have managed to keep their minds free from prejudice."<sup>6</sup> For her, although Turkish women have no bad thoughts in their minds, they are "capricious," and "changeable," and they are more "conservative."<sup>7</sup>

While Ellison always had interests in enlightening and modernizing Turkish women and considered herself an anti-orientalist and a supportive of both national and female emancipation, she, like other writers of the time, indulged in orientalist views, even as she worked to correct misunderstandings. Therefore, the harem life has not been described as it is thought to be in her work and the work of other Orientalist writers. Because of these writers, people living outside of Turkey, believed in the stories of harem told by them. Selma Ekrem's *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl* is an attempt to do the opposite. In that book, she, who sees the young American girls for the first time, uses a highly ironical tone to eliminate the imaginary picture of the harem, not just from the minds of these girls, but from all the foreigners.

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

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

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

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

*"Yes, I come from Turkey," I added firmly, "but I did not live in a marble palace,*

*I did not have slaves. I did not lie on silken cushions. This [harem] you speak about exists only in your imagination."*<sup>8</sup>

When she was in the United States, Selma Ekrem carried such ironical tone, but when she came back to Turkey, this tone left itself to surprise. In her

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<sup>6</sup> Hanoum, p. 216.

<sup>7</sup> Hanoum, p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> Ekrem, pp. 311-312.

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autobiography, she wrote about how she felt when she saw the new situation of the woman in Turkey. Ekrem was shocked with the changes in the country. When she left Turkey, her primary objective was to find more freedom. When she turned back some years later, she thought she brought this freedom with her. For example, before her voyage to America, it was hard to see women in theaters, restaurants, and cinemas. The lattices were gone. The new republic was not powerful and combined, But still, it was a country where she found more freedom.<sup>9</sup>

We again learn from the works of women writers that Turkish women have no biases and that “[m]ost Turkish women are natural comedians.”<sup>10</sup> They like making people laugh. No matter how natural comedians they are, according to Hester Donaldson Jenkins (1869-1941), an American professor at the American College for Girls in Istanbul from 1900 to 1909, a Turkish lady does not have anything to perform but two duties such as being attractive to her husband and bearing him children.<sup>11</sup>

Hester Donaldson Jenkins' ideas about the duties of Turkish ladies coincide with Demetra Vaka Brown, who points out that "one of [the duties] is to love men and the other is to bear them children."<sup>12</sup> Either because of the duties mentioned above or because of their innate nature, Jenkins also argues that Turkish women are not involved in any activities, and they just sit.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ekrem, pp. 275-276.

<sup>10</sup> Vaka Brown, 1909, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Jenkins, p. 123.

<sup>12</sup> Vaka Brown, 1923, p. 185.

<sup>13</sup> Atatürk, in his 21.03.1923 dated speech in Konya describes the activities of Turkish women and their involvement in social life as such:

*Our women have always lived with our men side by side. Not today, since old days, since a long time ago, our women have marched together with men not by half a step backward in the conflicts of life, in agricultural activities, in earning life. Nobody can deny that, in this war, and in the previous wars it is always women who have held the ability of life of a nation. It is always the honourable, the devoted and the divine Anatolian women who plough, cultivate the land, bring timber and wood from the forest, take the yield to the market and change it with money, continue the family life, moreover, carry the ammunition on their backs, with their ox-carts and their babies in their laps, ignoring the rain, the winter days and the hot weather.*

*But the honourable ladies and honourable gentlemen, as you all well know, despite the fact that our women have sacrificed a lot, serviced a great deal, have such capabilities which are as significant as men's capabilities in any field, our enemies and the superficial consideration of the spirit of the Turkish woman have presented Turkish women in anomalies. There are people who say our women live a secluded life, have nothing considering knowledge and wisdom, have no private and social life, are deprived of everything, and are kept away from life, the world, humanity, work and profit by Turkish men. But is this the real truth? Without a doubt,*

Lucy M. J. Garnett (1849–1934), a folklorist and traveler known for her works on Turkey argues the opposite of Jenkins by saying the following: “Paying calls, attending dughuns [weddings], promenading, driving, shopping, and going to the bath, are the chief amusements of the general run of Osmanli women.”<sup>14</sup> As it is clear in Zeyneb Hanoum’s work, it was not possible during the last years of Sultan Abdülhamid II to visit “traveling theaters and Karagöz.” She says: “Tennis,” “croquet,” and “other games” were impossible even “traveling circuses” and “rowing” were not allowed.<sup>15</sup>

The above-given examples prove that there is some lack of unity and coherence in the works written by women in the early twentieth century narrating the Turkish women. For instance, some of these women writers, like Hester Donaldson Jenkins, only wrote about the woman living in the city and focused more on the Harem life, instead of the village life. They wrote about Turkish women but mainly the examples were taken from elite minority groups. While some women writers were interested in the liberation, education, and freedom, others were involved in private lives of elite women, like Sultans. Therefore, there are problems in the depiction of Turkish women and objectivity is the main one. For example, according to a study by Emine Onaran İncirlioğlu, the image of Turkish village woman is not totally clear in the minds of the readers. In some works she is portrayed as "strong, wise, powerful, and confident," however, in some other works she is portrayed as "overworked, undervalued, ignorant, submissive and downtrodden."<sup>16</sup>

The upper-class women (or the elite women in large cities), however, are sometimes depicted as "inactive," "unaware," and “secluded.” However, there were sophisticated women in big cities, who took active roles in the modernizing organizations. Turkish women in the countryside were relatively active in social life, whereas the women in cities were not seen as active participants.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, “[c]ountry women in all parts of the empire were in the position of producers.”<sup>18</sup>

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*considering Turkish women under these circumstances means not considering them at all. See*

Atatürk, p. 151.

<sup>14</sup> Garnett, 1911, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> Hanoum, p. 175.

<sup>16</sup> İncirlioğlu, p. 200.

<sup>17</sup> Kurnaz, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Afet İnan, p. 34.

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Whatever the case, there seems to be a gap between the narratives of Turkish women in urban areas and rural areas. It is clear that there was a huge gap between the educated and the uneducated women. Maybe as Jenkins states, it is ten years,<sup>19</sup> but being educated or and being illiterate cannot be easily explained by years. Also, although Turkish women were illiterate in the rural areas, we should never forget that they had the rich cultural background.

The Turkish women in villages were depicted as ignorant but more productive. The women in cities were depicted as secluded, but more aware of the problems of women in general. Therefore, the image of both country and urban women that have been portrayed either in the memoirs or other works by national or international writers, who focused on women's emancipation, does not solely reflect the Turkish women objectively.

Hester Donaldson Jenkins in her book argues that the upper-class women do not know Hegel and play Bach let alone the lower class women. Contrary to what Jenkins thinks, Mehrdad Kia proves just the opposite. According to her “[w]omen educated at the palace [know] how to read and write Ottoman Turkish. They also [study] the fundamental tenets of Islam, including the essential elements of Islamic law, as well as the arts of sewing, embroidering, singing, and playing various musical instruments.”<sup>20</sup> Besides Mrs. Max Müller, (Georgina Adelaide Müller), a women traveler, while visiting the house of a Minister, notices that the Valide in the house is a musician and her sister-in-law is good at drawing and painting.<sup>21</sup> And if Turkish women dance, it is a great advantage for them. They can even “become a favorite, a Sultana, a Sultan's mother, the queen of the Imperial Harem.” Not just music, dance, and drawing, Turkish women are also interested in literature especially foreign literature.<sup>22 23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jenkins, p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Kia, p. 155.

<sup>21</sup> Müller, p. 177.

<sup>22</sup> Hanoum, pp. 71-72, 38.

<sup>23</sup> Vahan Cardashian, the male Armenian writer of *Actual Life in the Turkish Harem* (1914), supports Max Muller and Zeyneb Hanoum. He says: “[Turkish Woman] is familiar with Voltaire, Hugo, Chateaubriand, Dumas, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron; she renders most skillfully Wagner, Grieg, Chaminade, which demonstrates her native ability and equality with the cultured European and American woman.” See Cardashian, p. 70.

*Even though Turkish women read foreign literature, they do not like foreigners, and they do not open their doors to them.*<sup>24</sup>

*It is not because they have hostile feelings towards them, but because Turkish women have lost confidence in them; because they have been ridiculed; because they have been pitied.*<sup>25</sup>

*Since a Turkish woman does not like to be pitied and does not like to be questioned, she does not tell her complaints or even moans to other people, primarily foreigners.*<sup>26</sup>

*Because Turkish women are “proud” and they would rather be respected for their pride.*<sup>27</sup>

Apart from being proud and pure-minded but not being active, according to Jenkins, Turkish women read a great deal. They even read the Bible, and they try to interpret it. They read it to understand the holy book—the Qur’an. Zeyneb Hanoum, for example, is much better at evaluating the Scriptures than the Christians in Western Churches. She can discuss Christianity with anyone who is a professional.<sup>28</sup>

As it is apparent from the above discussion, on the one hand, Turkish women have been portrayed as illiterate, and on the other hand, they have been depicted as well-educated. Thus, we, as readers are confused about which one is telling the truth.

This situation was the same when marriages were concerned. While some women writers supported polygamy, others stood against it and considered monogamy as the only way to a healthy relationship. This has been a debatable topic for centuries. For instance, as it writes in the Qur’an the number of wives is not just four as Jenkins stated in her work.<sup>29</sup>

Grace Ellison states that polygamy rarely exists in Turkey. She tells an interesting story about a man who married two women. In the story, the man

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<sup>24</sup> *But when Turkish women open the door of their house, they also open their “big” and “generous” hearts.* Ellison, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Ellison, p. 21-22.

<sup>26</sup> Ellison, p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> Ellison, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> Hanoum, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> *If ye fear that ye shall be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.* Qur’an: Nisa, 3 and 129. Kuranikerim, <http://www.kuranikerim.com/english/4.html> (10.06.2016).



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was rather religious and prayed five times during the day. Although one could pray at home, this man always went to the mosque nearby. Seeing him always early in the mosque, a friend of him one day asked; "How is it you are so early?" "However early I come, you are always here." The man answered "I have two wives,"; "I get away as soon as I possibly can."<sup>30</sup>

As a person who had experienced the problem of a second wife, Halide Edib thinks having another woman as the wife may result in sorrow.<sup>31</sup> She had to leave Salih Zeki Bey, her husband, just because he had a close relation with a teacher.<sup>32</sup>

Islam permits a man to marry up to four wives. But the actual event was not seen among Turks of the lower class, only wealthy people married twice or more<sup>33</sup> since the second wife meant an extra apartment, an extra slave, and an extra payment.<sup>34</sup>

It has to be underlined that every society has its traditions such as the division between the sexes, clothing, and isolation of women from the outside world. Other cultures, mainly Western, may not familiarize with the traditions in Turkey. As an outsider, it is easy for the writer of the West to criticize and come up with new ideas, but it is hard to make even small changes. To give a good example of the cultural shock that social change created in the heads of these writers, we can quote what Ellison noted in her book, *An English Woman in a Turkish Harem*:

*In 1908 more than two men sitting at a cafe together were "suspect" and reported at headquarters; in 1913 Turkish women meet in a restaurant*

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<sup>30</sup> Ellison, pp. 57-58.

<sup>31</sup> She tells this event from her life which led to divorce as such;

*Salih Zeki Bey's relation with and attachment to a teacher looked severe enough to make it seem conceivable that he contemplated marriage. A believer in monogamy, in the inviolability of name and home, I felt it be my duty to retire from what I had believed would be my home to the end of my life. But knowing Salih Zeki Bey's passing caprices of heart and temperament I wanted to be sure, before breaking up my home, of the stability of his latest attachment. I, therefore, took the little boys with me and went to Yanina near my father with the intention of waiting there for a few months. At my return, Salih Zeki Bey told me that he had married the lady, but to my great surprise, he added that polygamy was necessary in some cases, and he asked me to continue as his first wife. There was a long and painful struggle between us, but at last, he consented to a divorce, and I left what for nine years had been my home. See, Edib Adıvar, 1926, p. 307-308.*

<sup>32</sup> Edib Adıvar, 1935, p. 208.

<sup>33</sup> "[having] more than one wife is not a Turkish, but a Muslim custom. Among the races of the Islamic faith the Turks indulge in polygamy least." See Halid, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> Garnett, 1911, p. 206.

*and discuss political subjects—certainly this is not the Turkey I expected to see.*<sup>35</sup>

When it comes to physical appearances of Turkish women, some foreign observers think that Turks are dark, but Hester Donaldson Jenkins proves that they are not, by referring to the inter-marriages with Circassians. For her;

*Turkish women do not have dark skin, and when it comes to their hands, they have more beautiful white hands than people anywhere else in the world.*<sup>36</sup>

*The Turks have brown hair and brown eyes and a pale white skin. Their hair is abundant and delicately curly. Their eyes are usually large and well-set. Turks do not like pure black eyes, but brown and hazel. Blue is considered the most beautiful of all.*<sup>37</sup>

*Turkish women usually have clear-cut, delicate features, and their lips are full. If one has moles on the face, she is considered beautiful. If there are no moles, the Turkish lady is not regarded as utterly beautiful. The hanums (ladies) are fat since they do not exercise. The standard for feminine beauty is a fat, white, and fair-haired woman. As European fashions enter Istanbul, however, many ladies prefer a slim figure and become very stylish.*<sup>38</sup>

For Lucy M. J. Garnett the complexion and appearance of Ottoman women were as such:

*An Osmanli woman is usually about, or perhaps slightly above, the middle height, with softly rounded contours, small hands and feet, and a waist innocent of stays. Her abundant hair is soft and silky, and ranges in color from light brown to glossy black; her eyes, now languid in their expression, now sprightly, may be brown, black, blue, or grey, and are shaded with long sweeping lashes, and surmounted by finely marked eyebrows, "curved like a Frankish bow; "her nose is either straight or slightly aquiline, and delicately shaped, and between her rosebud lips gleam the pearliest of teeth. But not satisfied with what Nature has done for her, the Osmanli belle, to enhance her charms, calls art largely into requisition.*<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ellison, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Jenkins, p. 208.

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, pp. 206-207.

<sup>38</sup> Jenkins, pp. 207-208.

<sup>39</sup> Garnett, 1891, pp. 426-427.

### **Veiling and Charshaf**

There is almost not a single memoir that did not include the veil or charshaf when Turkish women are considered. Especially if the memoir is about Turkish or Ottoman women, there is always a chapter concerning the veil. Veiling, which is still a matter of concern, has been evaluated by different groups and different people for private purposes. In these works, some support veiling while others reject putting the veil on. Some say women cannot wear veils outside the house, while others are more open and say that they have the right to go out as they please.

Why do women have to cover their hair and put on the veil? Grace Ellison explains it as following; “[Muhammed] regarded a woman's hair as her “crowning glory,” and it was for this reason he considered it wiser for married women's hair to be veiled.”<sup>40</sup> <sup>41</sup> Therefore, asking “a Turkish woman to go out without her veil is almost like asking an Englishwoman to go out without a blouse.”<sup>42</sup> To be more precise and certain we should always refer to the Holy book<sup>43</sup> on such important issues.

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<sup>40</sup> Ellison, p. 86.

<sup>41</sup> However, Walter A. Hawley, in *Asia Minor* (1918), puts forward that in Istanbul, some higher class women walk the streets unveiled. This modernism is accepted by many of the men, for when a woman is veiled she can meet a lover in the street or at a bazaar and remain unknown to all others, even her husband. Turkish men do not like this, and they support their wives if they want to unveil. See Hawley, p. 255.

This is just what Montague expressed almost two centuries ago. She said: "The most usual method of intrigue is to send an appointment to the lover to meet the lady at a Jew's shop, which is as notoriously convenient as our Indian houses.." See Montagu, p. 71.

Moreover, Jenkins thinks veiling helped women to be successful "[seeing as] the Young Turk party was well organized, women served to carry their dangerous messages and papers from one harem to another, for a Muslim woman is never searched." See Jenkins, p. 125.

Cardashian, who is against veiling, finds that the life of Turkish women “is a life of bondage.” He sees it as “an insult to the intelligence and reliability of the Turkish women.” He says: “Veil and shawl must go.” See Cardashian, p. 103.

<sup>42</sup> Ellison, p. 76.

<sup>43</sup> *And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male attendants free of sexual desires, or small children who have no carnal of women; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! Turn ye all together towards Allah in repentance that ye may be successful.* Kuranikerim, DOI= <http://www.kuranikerim.com/english/24.html> (10.06.2016).

Garnett notes that: "[t]he Turkish veil and cloak are worn out of doors by Muslim townswomen, as also by the Christian women domiciled in their neighborhood. But the countrywomen both of mountain and plain, and whether Christian or Muslim, go about their daily avocations unveiled." <sup>44</sup> Especially women in rural areas do not "hide their faces behind veils or yashmaks." <sup>45</sup>

Halide Edib had a contradiction about veiling. She argued that if one puts on the veil and covers her face, this creates a barrier. <sup>46</sup> She also said that a reasonable Turkish woman would never ask to unveil. <sup>47</sup>

If one studies Turkish women who lived in the early days of the twentieth century s/he may easily read that Turkish women were not free, and that they were all latticed behind big walls. <sup>48</sup> Zeyneb Hanoum's words in her work support this idea. When she escapes from harem and reaches France, she stands in front of a window without lattices and iron bars and says the following:

*You ask me to give you my first impression of France (wrote Zeyneb), but it is not so much an impression of France, as the impression of being free, that I am going to write. What I should like to describe to you is the sensation of intense joy I felt as I stood for the first time before a window wide open that had neither lattice-work nor iron bars.* <sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, Clara Erksine Clement (1834 -1916), an American author and traveler wrote that;

*Turkish ladies go about with a freedom that ought to be sufficient for those of any nation. They shop in Pera and the Mussulman quarters. They row about in caiques and visit their friends. On Tuesdays, they assemble in the cemetery of Scutari. On other days they go to Therapia, the Islands, or to the*

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<sup>44</sup> Garnett, 1911, p. 218

<sup>45</sup> Afet İnan, p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> Ellison, p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> Jenkins, p. 103.

<sup>48</sup> To the question "Do the Muslim ladies get out of the harem?" K. H. Basmajian, in *Life in the Orient* (1910), replies that they have perfect liberty to leave their houses and go wherever they please. "You see in the streets more Muslim women than Christians. It is usual to see hundreds of Turkish women walking on the beach of the Bosphorus, chatting, laughing, and smoking. This liberty is not common among the Christian women. The *yashmak* is the woman's protection against the jealousy of her husband and the insult of others." See Basmajian, p. 169. Being free depends on "the liberality or illiberality" of Turkish woman's husband. See Jenkins, p.100.

<sup>49</sup> Hanoum, p.53.

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*Sweet Waters of Asia. They make their devotions in the mosques or at the tombs of the Sultans. They witness the exhibitions of the dervishes, and they do all these things with a will and an air of extreme enjoyment such as Christian women rarely show.*<sup>50</sup>

In that era, many changes concerning women were brought about with the Second Constitution. One of these changes concerned the position of women in the society. Before the Second Constitution, women were considered to be a lot lower than men in every field. They were supposed to stay at home, deprived of every advantage in life, while their fathers, brothers, and husbands enjoyed themselves in everyday life. Therefore some of these women worked very hard to bring about this beneficial change.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the freedom that existed in Turkey in 1908 aroused great desire in the hearts of Turkish women for a fuller intellectual life.<sup>52</sup> Many women's organizations were founded after 1908.

### **Conclusion**

This article attempted to demonstrate how the image of Turkish women was portrayed by themselves and by other women writers in their memoirs in an uneasy period, which involved Islamism, nationalism, and westernization. It is shown within the study that these issues were persistently reflected and highlighted in the depiction of Turkish women.

Some women writers were too critical, and had personal interests, while others were supportive and helped Turkish women gain equal rights and enter the workforce. The era in which these writers lived and had the chance to write was not a sustainable period, especially for Turkish women. There were significant events all over the world, and Turkey was just in the middle of these developments. This was a transition period both for the Turkish women and the government of the Ottoman Empire.

When the writers mentioned above are taken into account, we can say that they not only supported the emancipation of Turkish women, but also they were active supporters of education and liberation. Among these writers two of them were foreigners, Jenkins and Ellison. Whereas Jenkins was a representative of America and the American way of education, Ellison did not

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<sup>50</sup> Clement, pp. 249-250.

<sup>51</sup> Jenkins, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> Jenkins, p. 220.

support a particular way of education but was for Westernization of Turkish women in general. Vaka Brawn was a Greek-Ottoman, and the rest were Turkish, all of whom spent many years outside Turkey.

All of these women writers, therefore, tried to act like modern representatives of a modernized society. They used stories that would please their readers. They came from upper-class families, had a Western education and became activists in Ottoman Turkey. It was a way of earning money and status for Ottoman and Oriental writers to be able to find readers in the Western world, and therefore many of these women writers followed the same directions in orientalist discourse while writing for a Western audience.

Within this study, it is made clear one more time that generalizing is not a good way of depicting or explaining certain things since there are always others, who will say just the opposite. Instead of creating or highlighting the existing stereotypes, the reality should be depicted.

*The missionary discourse always linked the Oriental world and the Oriental woman to the veil. Education was always believed to unveil the women and arouse them from “darkness.” While strict believers in Islam considered unveiling a sin, missionary women, however, supposed unveiling as a spiritual liberation, and social progress. Consequently, from the missionary perspective, “modernizing, educating, and unveiling women were virtually the same, and, conversely, the veil was but a symbol of their ultimate subjection to a materialistic Oriental world.”*<sup>53</sup>

In all of the works studied in this study, we have observed that the writers have an agenda on their minds while talking or writing about the Turkish women. The missionary or Orientalist discourse is prevalent in each of them, even in Zeyneb Hanoum’s writings.<sup>54</sup> The emphasis on education and the veil is not just a coincidence.

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<sup>53</sup> Başcı, pp. 109-110.

<sup>54</sup> There are a great deal of academic studies which argue that Grace Ellison is the ghost writer of Zeyneb Hanoum’s *ATurkish Woman’s European Impressions* as the editor of the book.

20. Yüzyıl Başlarında Bazı Kadın Yazarların Anılarında Türk Kadınının ve Harem Yaşamının Tasviri

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