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Interacting, sharing and bonding: ‘notes of personal experience’ by nineteenth-century women travellers

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As early as the seventeenth century, women have been going from one corner of the world to the other recording their experiences and reasons for publishing. Exploring, working and residing in regions of the East considered ‘safe for dynamic men only’ (Smith 1887, *Through Cyprus, Author of ‘Glimpses of Greek life and Scenery, etc’*. London: Hurst and Blacket), western women interacted with the peoples of Ottoman society, enjoying their warm and generous hospitality. Their gender allowed them to study, learn and become experts in areas where men had no access: the Ottoman harems, women’s daily life, social gatherings and celebrations. Western and eastern women discuss harem slavery, marriage, adultery, childbirth, abortion, divorce, religion and women’s rights. In reconsulting primary sources and focusing on the writings of nineteenth-century British women in Asia Minor (Turkey), this article contributes additional evidence on women’s alternative representations or less degrading gaze, while revealing a patriarchal system’s domestic-social reality that was founded on the institution of slavery. In other words, it differs from other studies in spotlighting the accounts that are illustrative of the polyethnic synthesis of the Ottoman households, i.e. the discourse on the multiethnic harem slavery institution, which distinguished Ottoman society, so as to provide a bigger picture and inspire new discussions.

Keywords: gender; Osmanli society; Ottoman Empire; multiethnic harem slavery; women

Introduction

Motivated by a cross-examination of the original accounts of 240 women travellers of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – undertaken for a PhD completed in 2002 and updated for a book published in 2014 – showing that over 6000 western women travelled and witnessed historical events (Kamberidou 2002, 2014a), this article explores alternative approaches in examining the *Oriental gaze*, using a gender perspective. In reconsulting original materials and primary sources, it contributes additional evidence on women’s alternative discourse, confirming that the female accounts were less judgemental or critical as compared to the male accounts. It differs, however, from other studies in spotlighting the discourse that illustrates the multiethnic harem slavery institution. This study focuses on the writings of British women in Asia Minor (Turkey) regarding ‘scenes that would have been quite inaccessible to the tourist’ (Walker 1886, vol. 1, xii), such as the female microcosmos of Ottoman society. In other words, this article deviates from other studies in examining the polyethnic synthesis of Ottoman society so as to provide a bigger picture and inspire new questions and discussions.

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Western women who visited, resided or worked in the Ottoman harems repeatedly observed their multiethnic synthesis (Kamberidou 2002). In interacting, *sharing* and *bonding* with the harem inmates, many western women seem to identify with them or express a type of understanding and solidarity. How do they do this? They buy female slaves at the slave markets and help them return to their native lands to save them from harem slavery (Demont 1821a; Celine 1849, vol. 1). In their writings they use phrases and terms like ‘the female mind immured’ (Lott 1866, vol. 2, 289), harem slavery, woman-kind, liberty, freedom, emancipation and womanhood (Montagu 1718; Craven 1789; Lott 1866). They invent words or concepts such as ‘Wo-manity’ (Harvey 1871, 71), ‘Slavedom’ (Beaufort 1861, 399) and ‘privileged rape’ (Guthrie 1802, 252). They take part in all the general amusements of the Osmanli/Ottoman women, ‘paying calls, attending *dughuns* or wedding festivals, promenading, driving, shopping, and going to the bath’ (Garnett 1891, 463). They even ‘masquerade’ as Muslim women in order to visit the mosques, wearing what they call a *Turkish woman’s dress* or the *yasmak* and *feredje* (veil and coat), associated here to spatial relations as it enabled them to integrate into Ottoman society, increasing their mobility in public and social spaces beyond the home or the harem, i.e. sacred space. For example, English author and artist Julia Pardoe (1837), disguised as a Turkish woman, visited two mosques in Constantinople late in the evening during the Ramadan, despite the warnings of her Turkish host that if she were discovered ‘she would be dismembered’ (377). Blunt (1878, vol. 1), daughter of the English Ambassador in Constantinople and wife of the English Ambassador in Thessaloniki, frequently dressed as a Turkish woman during her 20-year residency in Ottoman territories in order to visit the mosques, avoid harassment and circulate freely, as did Lady Craven (1789) and Lady Montagu (1718) before her.

In fact, a great number of women from Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria and America explored, trekked, worked and settled in different regions of the Ottoman Empire¹ considered ‘safe for dynamic men only’ (Smith 1887). Who were these women? They were missionaries, settlers, professional nurses, artists, governesses, housewives, superficial sightseers, tourists, explorers, humanitarians, romantics, pilgrims, volunteers and sensation seekers who ignored the inconveniences and dangers of travel – quarantines, malaria, cholera, pirates, corsairs, robbers and dangerous storms – to experience life and see the world. Such examples are Lady Craven (1789), Guthrie (1802), Demont (1821a, 1821b), the Countess Stephano, Celine (1849), Belgiojoso (1855) and Dora d’Istria (1859). Why did they travel? According to their accounts, they travelled to break out of their gilded cages, explore and discover the world, expand their horizons, acquire knowledge, experience life, seek pleasure and help others. French author Mme de la Ferté-Meun, who travelled from 1816–1819, argues:

Men generally condemn us to stay by the fireplace [...] they decorate our cage and go as far as to embellish it. I however have greater ambitions and aspire for a place in the sun, and for a very long time I had been secretly dreaming of the Orient. (1822, 3–4)

Why did they publish? Women published for many reasons: to get heard, to protest, to profit or to promote a cause. They say they needed to share their experiences and show their readers how easy it was for women to explore lands considered dangerous for their gender. English author Emily Beaufort (1861, vol. 1), who travelled to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Western Turkey, claims she needed to *share* her experiences with the public and show them with what ease and security ladies may travel alone in these countries. English volunteer Fanny Taylor (1856) needed to inform the public on the contributions and difficulties confronted by the professional nurses and lady volunteers in the hospitals of Constantinople during the Crimean War (1853–1856).

It is important to point out here that the number of English women travellers is much greater than that of other nationalities, a fact related to Britain's intervention in the East, which contributed to the development of Mediterranean travel. In addition, what made travel more affordable, increasing women's mobility by the mid-nineteenth century, was the development of the steam engine: steam locomotive and steamship. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, travel was prohibitively expensive and essentially an upper-class activity. Accordingly, the female travel literature was written by white aristocrat and middle-class women that we can categorize into three groups (Kamberidou 2002, 2014a): the *titled*, i.e. queens, princesses, members of the aristocracy and their suite; the *middle class*, which included professional women, authors, artists, governesses and explorers; *women with a cause*, those that declare a social purpose for their journey or claim to have a calling, i.e. missionaries, volunteers, nurses and teachers-educators. One need mention here that the first and second group focus on the Ottoman harems, observing their multiethnic synthesis.

Methodology and theoretical discussion: 'scenes inaccessible to the tourist'

Drawing on long-neglected travel writings by British women and using alternative articulations that challenge traditional interpretations of Orientalism, this contribution follows Melman's (1995) approach to both gender and class. Melman's methodology establishes alternative views on the Orient that are less monolithic and more complex and heterogeneous than those of Said (1986). Placing gender at the forefront during the colonial era, Melman (1995) describes the many ways in which English women looked at Oriental people and places, how they developed an alternative discourse which presented a challenge to the hegemonic notions of the exotic and the different. In other words, she examines the reconstruction of gender and class through contact with other cultures as opposed to 'the gender-blindness in Edward Said's epochal *Orientalism* from which women are absent' (Melman 1995, xxii). She shows that women travellers did not perceive Oriental women as 'absolutely alien' or as 'the ultimate *Other*'. To a certain extent, 'oriental women became the feminine West's recognizable image in the mirror' (Melman 1995, 316). Accordingly, this article uses an exploratory and descriptive research approach (Melman 1995), entailing a qualitative and comparative cross-examination of the female accounts in order to gain alternative representations or new perspectives. Such an analytical methodology considers the *topos* – the geographical – along with the social which includes power structures and representations framed by political forces (Sarris, n.d.).

This study endeavours to rethink the relationship between western women travellers and their *Oriental* subjects, providing additional evidence on women's alternative perspectives, confirming that the female discourse was less judgemental or critical as compared to that of the male traveller (Sarris, n.d.), while drawing attention to the multiethnic harem slavery institution. To accomplish this, I spotlight harem visits and female accounts that show western and eastern women *sharing* their concerns, emotions and desires, i.e. surpassing cultural barriers or the significance of place (*topos*) as cultural elements that shaped their social experiences and daily lives. In other words, European women appear to understand, defend or express their solidarity with the harem inmates, despite their western values and prejudices.

In examining the female discourse on Ottoman society, primarily in Asia Minor (Turkey), particular attention is given to the accounts of British women who seem to view eastern manners and customs with a *less derogatory gaze* than their male counterparts.

Specifically, British women writers and artists (Montagu 1718; Pardoe 1837; Hornby 1863; Lott 1866; Blunt 1878; Walker 1886; Garnett 1891, 1895) articulate alternative representations of racial-gender difference using a less degrading or discriminatory lens. For instance, they do not eroticize or *exoticize* their subjects in the same manner or level as their male counterparts (Sarris, n.d.). They also appear to understand or identify with the female population of the Ottoman harems. Many even justify certain forms of behaviour such as adultery, violence, infanticide and the art of manipulation, arguing that they were the results of harem slavery, polygamy and confinement (Hornby 1863; Lott 1866; Blunt 1878; Walker 1886; Garnett 1891, 1895).

My focus is on the accounts of British women who claim to be participant observers of the female microcosmos (private and public space) of Ottoman society. To be exact, British women who lived a long time in Ottoman territories and spoke the Turkish language, enabling better communication with the harem inmates, such as Blunt (1878), Walker (1886) and Garnett (1891, 1895). For example, Blunt (1878) published her two-volume study on 'The Peoples of Turkey' after a 20-year residency in Ottoman territories. Walker (1886) claims that every rule and custom of harem life that she describes in her book have been:

drawn from notes of *personal experience* during a residence of nearly *thirty years* in the East. I have selected those more particularly connected with my work as an artist, which brought me amongst scenes that would have been quite *inaccessible to the tourist or the visitor*. (Vol. 1, xii–xiii)

Garnett (1891, 1895), who had also been living in Ottoman territories a number of years (not specified) and spoke the Turkish and Greek languages, repeatedly quotes or confirms Blunt's (1878) observations. These women, having visited or lived in the harems of different *social classes*, mostly in Turkey, reveal that eastern women not only opened their homes to their western guests and friends, but they also opened their *hearts*.

On the other hand, a number of studies show that western women travelling to the Orient also carried with them a *colonial gaze*, i.e. their European values, commonly shared images, social prejudices and misconceptions (Pratt 1992; Mills 1993; Burton 1994; Melman 1995; Lewis 1996; Ghose 1998). Orientalism or what Said (1986) describes as the distinction between *Western superiority* and *Oriental inferiority* expanded and proliferated in the years of western expansion. English women like Mrs Scott-Stevenson (1881) and Lady Brassey (1880) repeatedly defend their country's colonial goals with regard to Asia Minor and the occupation of Cyprus. They also condemn certain eastern customs like regular bathing. Lady Craven (1789) and Lott (1866) argue that regular bathing is unhealthy and causes premature aging. Demont (1821a, 1821b) and Belgiojoso (1855) describe eastern dances and music as strange, ugly, disgraceful, provocative and immoral.

One need point out here that the discourse on Orientalism – the socially constructed Orient – is tied to notions of power and superiority established to assist the mission of western colonization.² It refers to a construction of identities based on views and representations of the biologically inferior and 'culturally backward Other' (Isin 2005), the 'subordinate cultural Other' (Burton 1994), the weak, defenceless and ignorant Oriental awaiting the dominance of the West, or the exotic and threatening 'Other' (Mohammad 1999; Isin 2005; Gökarıksel 2012). As Isin (2005) appropriately argues, Orientalism is less about the Orient and more about provoking various assemblages of meaning that make possible various actions upon the Orient. Such allegations are brought together to illustrate the inferiority of the Oriental ways of being and the superiority of the West.

In effect, Anglo-Saxon racial superiority was reinforced and solidified in the second half of the nineteenth century, a period of unprecedented colonial expansion, mainly

English and French. The imperial project – a pervasive economic, political and cultural formation – involved direct domination and conquest of other countries and increasingly imperialistic foreign policy. As a result, a set of imperial feminist ideologies were also created. A number of studies have extensively explored western women's experience of imperialism, the *western gaze* or the *Orientalist gaze* (Pratt 1992). A significant contribution is Burton's (1994) research on British middle-class feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Burton (1994) helps coin the idea of *imperial feminism* in a study which reveals an array of feminisms based on notions of racial moral superiority. In exploring the historical dimension of the relationship between feminism and imperialism, she shows how British women apply imperialistic ideology and rhetoric to justify their own right to equality. Burton (1994) argues that Victorian and Edwardian feminists, such as Josephine Butler and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, believed that the native women of colonial India constituted a *special white woman's burden* in need of liberation at the hands of their emancipated British sister. British women activists, she argues, preached sisterhood but treated Indian women as a subordinate cultural *Other*.

In the same spirit, Ramusack (1992) uses the term *maternal imperialists* to describe British women's treatment of Indian women. Ramusack (1992) shows how the categories of race and gender influence efforts to promote social reforms within an imperial relationship. She examines the careers of five British women who went to India to preach the gospel, but functioned as cultural missionaries preaching a gospel based on models adapted from their colonial experience. At least three of these women, she argues, became *maternal imperialists* who treated Indian women, not as equals, but as daughters being prepared for adult responsibilities.

Ghose (1998), following in the steps of her predecessors (Ramusack 1992; Burton 1994), describes the power relations inscribed into the traveller's gaze. She examines the writings of British women in India that point to an ambivalent relation of power between the traveller and the *native*. In examining the reason women's writings were different from men's, she argues that it was not due to an instinctive empathy with the *other*, but the result of a gender ideology that was influenced by a specific racial ideology in the frame of the colonial context.

Davin (1992) also focuses on British women, specifically Protestant missionaries in China, who outnumbered men by the end of the nineteenth century. She examines their life in China, concluding that both the teaching and the example offered by these women were limited by the religious and feminine conditioning they had received growing up in Victorian society (Davin 1992, 267). Davin (1992) claims their contribution to the emancipation of Chinese women was limited since they struggled to understand, being hampered by the barriers of culture and race.

Then again, Lewis (1996) argues that women, as cultural producers, contributed to and drew on the imperial project to create alternative representations of race or racial difference, through a different and less degrading gaze. Looking at both visual and literary culture on the Orient, Lewis (1996) observes that women did not have direct access to the male position of western superiority and she challenges 'masculinist' assumptions relating to the stability and homogeneity of the *Orientalist gaze*. In examining the Orientalist depiction of Jews as the Orientalized *Other* in George Elliot's novel *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and the Orientalist paintings of the French artist Sophie de Bouteiller, known by the pseudonym Henrietta Brown (active 1855–1878), she shows how their gendered agency and less degrading gaze contributed to creating alternative representations of racial difference.

Undeniably, while most nineteenth-century women travellers were not necessarily opposed to imperialism or colonization, many were very critical of the abuses it produced. As a result, they provide alternative representations through a less critical and discriminatory lens, or as Lewis (1996) argued, a less degrading gaze. For example, English author Mary Henrietta Kingsley, who explored West Africa in 1893 and 1895, attacks the social prejudices of British politicians who think the Africans are awful savages or silly children who can only be dealt with on a reformatory penitentiary line (Kamberidou 2014b). English author Lucy Garnett (1891) approaches the practice of polygamy as a survival strategy, ‘a necessity of existence’ (Garnett 1891, 210) when she refers to the Yuruks, a nomad tribe of Asia Minor that surpassed the number of four wives allowed a Muslim. Garnett argues that a Yuruk man needed at least seven wives to survive:

Each wife has her separate tent and her special occupation. The care of the flock will be divided between two or three, each tending a certain number of goats or broad-tailed Qaramanian sheep; The fourth looks after the camels; The fifth collects fuel and draws water; The sixth makes the butter and cheese; And the seventh weaves, on the loom before-mentioned, the brightly coloured and substantial rugs and carpets which find their way to this country under the names of ‘Kelim’, Qaramanian, &c. (Garnett 1891, 211–212)

In fact, many British women exhibit respect, understanding and solidarity for the harem inmates (free and slave) of Ottoman society, producing a *gaze* on the Orientalized *Other* that registered in different way, as opposed to Ramusack’s (1992) *maternal imperialists*, Burton’s (1994) *special white woman’s burden* or Davin’s (1992) observations, according to which western female missionaries struggled to understand the natives since they were hampered by cultural and racial barriers. This researcher argues that a great number of British women surpassed these cultural barriers. Such examples are Montagu (1718), Pardoe (1837), Walker (1886), Blunt (1878) and Garnett (1895) who seem to view the Ottoman harem institution from a sociological, ethnographic or historical perspective, rather than a moral or judgemental one.

Spaces for interacting and bonding: the harems

Western women provide a vast, diverse and multifaceted discourse on female social space in Osmanli society. They are warmly received as official guests, intimate friends or employees in harems that correspond to all the Ottoman social classes. They use terms such as the harems of ‘the middle class’ (Walker 1886, vol. 1, 205), ‘the bourgeois’ (Belgiojoso 1855, 1039–1040), ‘the wealthy classes’, ‘the labouring classes’ and ‘the Turkish peasant’ (Garnett 1895, 62). They also describe ‘the harems of the poor man’, ‘the poor villagers’ (Blunt 1878, vol. 1, 91) and the ‘poor Mussulman’ (Melek Hanum 1872, 279). The majority, however, concentrate on the harems of the Ottoman elite, or as Melek Hanum (1872) describes them, the harems of ‘the well-to-do middle-class man’ (1872, 279), ‘the rich Pasha with three tails’, ‘the minister with a portfolio’ (1872, 280) and ‘the Turkish grandees’ (1872, 296).

‘Family life is, in reality, unknown amongst the Turks and the degree of separation which exists in Turkish households between the men and women can be measured by the greater or less amount of affluence in which the family lives’, argues the wife of the Grand Vezier of Turkey (Melek Hanum 1872, 279), formerly Marie Dejean, whose first husband was Sultan Mahmud’s physician Julius Milligen, a friend of Lord Byron. According to her account, in contrast to the harem of the poor Mussulman the well-to-do middle-class man establishes his household (selemlik³ and harem) by drawing ‘a more palpable line of demarcation between himself and his harem’ (Melek Hanum 1872, 279).

Many British women visit the harems of the Ottoman elite, especially the Imperial Serai (the sultan's harem in Constantinople) which was a separate building, specifically another palace near the sultan's palace. They provide detailed descriptions of the imperial harem's polyethnic synthesis, its pyramidal hierarchy (power structure) and its elite slavery system, in which the black women from Africa and Arabia were hardly ever included, as opposed to the black Islamized eunuchs (men and boys) who were considered a status symbol. They meet the valide sultans – mothers of the sultans of slave descent – and describe their rise to power. They also describe the women's networks and their role in the appointment, dismissal and execution of state officials and rivals (Lott 1866; Blunt 1878; Brassey 1880; Walker 1886; Garnett 1891). English governess Emmeline Lott (1866) – employed by the Viceroy of Egypt, Ismael Pacha, for his son and heir to the throne Ibrahim Pacha – having experienced harem life in Egypt and Constantinople observes:

Brilliant as are the pen-and-ink sketches that our poets have painted of harem life. I have visited and resided in three of them, which ought to have been, and most undoubtedly are, the most magnificent of all those gilded cages, and I have no desire to visit or live in a fourth. (Vol. 2, 289)

British women also visit or reside in the *harem-palaces* of the married princesses (daughters and sisters of sultans) where one woman reigned supreme, and not her husband since all princesses were considered superior to their husbands. They also visit the wives of the Grand Veziers (prime ministers) of Turkey and those of other state officials. For example, Blunt (1878), being a consul's wife and daughter, frequently visited the Grand Vezier's first wife, providing a detailed description of her 'political office in the harem' (vol. 1, 108), including her influence beyond the harem walls: acts of political favouritism and interventions. Garnett's (1891) observations regarding the Grand Vezier's wife are also revealing:

We have become very emancipated in the West, no doubt, but we are yet far from having attained such an equality of the sexes as would allow a Cabinet Minister to divide with his wife the responsibility of choosing his colleagues and subordinates in office. Such is however the influence possessed by the clever and intriguing wife of a Grand Vizier, not only directly over her lord, but indirectly through her friends in the Imperial Serai, that the dismissal of old, and appointment of new functionaries of the Porte often rests to a great extent virtually with her. (461)

British women enter the harems of women *entrepreneurs*, free Muslim women who bought and trained female slaves, including slave children and infants of both genders, in order to resell them later for a profit or offer them as gifts to the sultan and other powerful state officials. In the harems they also meet the *voluntary slaves*, Circassian and Georgian women and children, who to escape poverty chose to be taken to the slave markets (Montagu 1718; Lott 1866; Blunt 1878; Brassey 1880; Walker 1886; Garnett 1891).

During their visits they discuss slavery, marriage, adultery, divorce, property rights and childcare. Lady Hornby, in a letter from Constantinople dated 26 June 1856, observes that 'eastern women are less prejudiced and more intelligent than the men because they listen and are eager to learn and adopt better ways' (1863, 395). With regard to childcare, Blunt (1878) and Lott (1866) advise their hostesses to stop giving opium to their children for toothaches and minor ailments and politely mention that the polluted with tobacco and narcotics harem atmosphere is detrimental to their health. According to Lott (1866, vol. 2, 300), 'the population of Turkey diminishes every year, as is always the case in all ill-governed countries; and here it is positively alarming, partly from polygamy, and partly from infanticide'.

Eastern women not only open their homes (harems) to their western guests and friends, but they open their *hearts* (inner space-beyond space), expressing their longings for freedom and liberty, questioning their religion and polygamy, something we do not find in the male accounts (Kamberidou 2002). In Constantinople, a woman of the Ottoman elite, who spoke English, in her conversation with Lady Brassey (1880, 99) said: ‘How odd it must be to you Europeans to hear us talk about our brothers and sisters and their mothers, for there are just as many of one as of the other’. Lady Brassey (1880) claims that her hostess, whose name she does not reveal, ‘expressed the opinion of many of her sex in Turkey’ and questioning the Koran said:

I have read the Koran straight through thirty times in the original Arabic, and many expositions. The priests try and teach us to believe that there is one God, neither man nor woman, but a spirit, and that Mahomet is His prophet. But how are we to believe that, when everything is for man, and nothing for women? A good God could not be so unjust. He must be all man, and a bad Turk too. We are told that we must kneel to our husbands and kiss their hands. If they kiss ours, as mine always does, he having lived in western Europe, their lips will be burnt, and our hands also, with the most horrible torture. We are to walk, even when weak and suffering, while they ride; and we must carry their parcels too. It can’t be right. As I don’t believe that, how am I to believe anything? (99–100)

On the other hand, although the harem inmates – specifically those of the so-called middle-class and the Ottoman elite – do not seem satisfied with their condition, western women appear to envy the legal position of the Muslim wife and daughter. British women argue that the legal rights and social freedoms of free Muslim women (as opposed to Islamized slaves) were far superior to those of the Christian women of Europe, especially the laws concerning inheritance, property rights, marriage and divorce. British women repeatedly observe that if we exclude the law of Mohamed, that allows a man to marry four wives and to be the owner of an unlimited number of slaves, Muslim women enjoyed greater legal rights than their European sisters (Montagu 1718; Craven 1789; Pardoe 1837; Harvey 1871; Blunt 1878; Walker 1886; Garnett 1895).

It is important to point out here that this was true in theory, as far as the written law was concerned. Melek Hanum (1872), the first wife of the Grand Vezier, argues that violations of the legal rights of Muslim women in Turkey were daily phenomena.

In Turkey, as in every other country where the arbitrator takes the place of the law, society is at the mercy of the powerful and of the greedy. In such countries everything is permitted to those who have power. [...] Eminent economists, like Stuard Mill, have brought forward a theory, according to which it appears that women’s rights are better established under the Mussulman than under the European law [...] But if from the written law we turn to the living one, from theory to practice, it is there one sees of what little use for the woman are her pretended rights. (352)

Nevertheless, the accounts reveal an obsession with the legal rights of Muslim women in Ottoman society since in European societies women were economically vulnerable and unprotected from divorce, even those of the aristocracy. For instance, Harvey (1871), Blunt (1878, vol. 1), Walker (1886) and Garnett (1895) applaud the custom of the *nekyah*, as did Montagu (1718) and Craven (1789) before them. The *nekyah* was a marriage contract, agreed upon during the betrothal ceremony, where they appointed a sum of money to be paid to the wife in case of divorce. This contract protected a woman by maintaining her in the position of legal wife, for if her husband decided to divorce her, he would be obliged to pay her the *nekyah* settlement as well as the *nafakah* (three-month alimony payments determined according to her social rank). Moreover, the husband had no rights to her private fortune or her trousseau. In addition, a Muslim wife had to be provided for with a separate residence, apartment or palace, according to her social status,

including servants, slaves, coaches and money. If her husband was unable to maintain her according to her social rank, or in the lifestyle she had been accustomed to before the marriage, she could divorce him. Garnett (1895) in examining the legal position of a free Muslim woman (as opposed to an Islamized slave) argues:

As a daughter, she was entitled, on the decease of her father, to inherit his property in common with her brothers [...] As a wife, she had the uncontrolled possession and disposal both of the wealth, which was hers before marriage [...] She could inherit property without the intervention of trustees, and dispose of it, as she pleased [...] A husband is legally bound to support his wife, and her slaves or servants, according to her rank and his means, and to furnish her with a suitable residence. (60–62)

So, to avoid all of the above, Turkish men usually married slave concubines and not free Muslim women of their own social class (Montagu 1718; Harvey 1871; Melek Hanum 1872; Blunt 1878, vol. 1; Walker 1886; Adalet 1892; Garnett 1895). When a man married a free Muslim woman, as previously mentioned, he not only had to maintain her in the lifestyle she had been accustomed to before the marriage, but he had no idea what he was getting into. He could not see her face or converse with her until after the marriage. As observed, he preferred to liberate and marry his own slave concubine, having already *sampled the merchandise*, or buy a slave that belonged to a free Muslim woman who bought and trained children to sell them later. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries accounts reveal that the Ottoman Turks preferred to marry Islamized slaves for the following reasons: slaves had no families or relatives to protect their legal rights and social privileges or interfere in family matters; slaves had no relatives to intervene in matters of the state when politically powerful families or dynasties were involved; slaves had no demands or ambitions since they were trained in the harems to be obedient, submissive, patient and servile; marriages with slaves were much less expensive, as was divorce. It was much easier and less costly to divorce a wife who use to be a slave and did not have a family to protect her interests or legal rights.

The multiethnic harem slavery institution

The multiethnic harem slavery institution was the collective segregation, confinement or enslavement of the female gender in *one specific space* (the harem), as *one collective identity* since all the women – slave and free – shared or legally belonged to *one man or master*: sultan, grand vizier, pacha, bey, etc. (Kamberidou 2002). The female accounts repeatedly confirm that an Ottoman harem was made up of women from different nations: Islamized slaves, liberated slaves and descendants of slaves, the prototype being the imperial harem. The female population of the sultan's harem in Constantinople was made up of thousands of women and children from Circassia, Georgia, Greece, Africa, Arabia and Europe. All these women and children belonged to one man or master, the sultan. This was the basic model for the harems of all the so-called Ottoman social classes (Demont 1821a; Pardoe 1837; Celine 1849; Harvey 1871; Melek Hanum 1872; Blunt 1878; Walker 1886; Adalet 1890; Garnett 1895).

An average harem in Ankara in 1892, according to the Turkish author Adalet (1892), was made up of approximately 100 women, of whom 97 were slaves and only 3 were born free Muslims. In Ottoman society, slave offspring were considered legitimate and held the legal status of a free Muslim (Blunt 1878; Adalet 1890; Garnett 1895), regardless of *social class*. To illustrate, Melek Hanum (1872) and Blunt (1878, vol. 1) repeatedly observe that the children of all the sultan's female slaves – from the scullery maid (the lowest ranks) to the fair and delicate beauty purchased to be trained as his concubine – were considered

legitimate. As a result, many valide sultans plotted to eliminate their rivals and their offspring, such as the mother of Sultan Abdul-Aziz (1861–1876), Perdevniyal Sultan. To reduce the number of future heirs to her son's throne and secure her powerful position as valide sultan, Perdevniyal brought forward an old palace regulation, according to which every seraglio woman found pregnant would be subjected to the operation of artificial abortion, with the exception of her son's first four slave concubines, which she had personally chosen and trained. In Ottoman society, political control involved sexuality and the control of sexuality.

Sexual slavery in Ottoman society was a central part of the slave system. A female slave was considered an *odaliques* (a concubine) and a male slave, respectively, an *oglanı*. In the Ottoman patriarchal and phalocratic society, male and female slaves were not considered communicative beings (*mal-I natik*), but sexual objects that represented a political meaning or political control, specifically that of sovereignty and subjugation (Sarris, n.d., 333–334). To paraphrase Peirce (1993, 17), more than any other Muslim dynasty, the Ottomans raised the practice of slave concubinage to a reproductive principle. The dynasty could control the reproductive activity of an individual (male or female) by limiting it, postponing it or preventing it. One need point out here that all the Ottoman Sultans and princes (sons of sultans) from the fourteenth to twentieth century were the sons of female slaves. Practically all the male and female offspring of the sultans – after the generations of Osman and Orhan – were born of slave concubine mothers (Peirce 1993; Sarris, n.d.), such as the French valide sultan Aimee Dubucq de Rivery, known as Naksh-i-Dil sultan (Ferté-Meun 1822, 314), the mother of Sultan Mahmud II. The primary purpose of the Imperial Harem was to secure the male line, the birth of male heirs for the throne. Furthermore, the majority of the Ottoman Empire's state officials, since the fourteenth century, were slaves or liberated slaves, who also owned slaves (Sarris, n.d.), such as the viziers (ministers), the grand viziers (prime ministers) and the janissaries (soldiers, elite infantry taken during childhood from Christian populations). Male slaves achieved high status in Ottoman society, especially after their training in palace schools like the Enderun, which prepared them for their future roles.

Slavery was vital for the Ottoman Empire's economy and social system and it certainly included the male population. Women travellers, beginning with Lady Montagu (1718) and ending with Garnett (1895), argue that Islamic Law recognized as legal property only the non-Muslims who fell into the hands of the True Faithful as spoils of war from conquered races or expansionist raids. The Ottomans also acquired slaves from the pirates and corsairs who attacked European ships, from abductions, slave-markets, private sales and as gifts exchanged between the wealthier classes. Slaves of both genders were easily integrated into Ottoman society, eventually becoming free Muslims: liberated through marriage, procreation-reproduction, adoption, military or public service. British women, such as Montagu (1718), Pardoe (1837) and Walker (1886), observe that slaves were treated with respect and kindness in Turkish homes, as opposed to the treatment of the African slaves in America and Europe, who could never aspire to be *elevated* to an official or public position. Moreover, how many western slave owners or European prime ministers liberated and married their slaves or recognized their slave offspring?

The practice of breeding among slaves, common in America, was never practised, so new slaves were always in demand with preference to children who were raised and trained in the harems and easily integrated into Ottoman society. The harem slavery institution was the Ottoman system's primary socialization agent, an indispensable part of its self-reproduction. Many women travellers are shocked by the socialization processes they witness in the harems. They observe slave girls and boys (the children of non-Muslim populations) together with the children of their owners (little pachas and hanums, princes

and princesses) being trained for their future roles, duties and services. Western women provide detailed descriptions of the training and education of boys and girls in what they call the *children's harem* (Pardoe 1837, vol. 1; Belgiojoso 1855; Lott 1866; Walker 1886, vol. 2). It is important to reiterate here that slavery was vital for the Ottoman Empire's social system to survive: 'The institution of slavery being indispensable to the social system of the Osmanlis, its total abolition would involve the abolition of the harem, a revolution for which they are as yet by no means prepared', argues Garnett (1891, 382). Consequently, the slave trade continued to flourish until the beginning of the twentieth century, despite the pressures exercised on Turkey by Europe.

English authors Mary Frances Felicia Skene (1847), Fanny Janet Blunt (1878) and Mary Walker (1886) repeatedly observe that the sultan's laws abolishing slavery were openly violated since the institution of slavery was necessary for the Ottoman social system to survive. As a result, the slave trade continued to flourish, despite Sultan Abdul Medjid's successive firmans (laws, sultanic decisions) abolishing the slave trade in 1846, those prohibiting the slave traffic of Georgian and Circassian slaves in 1854, and the firman of 1857 prohibiting the sale and exportation of 'negroes'. According to the Chesson report on Turkey, the Muslim elite's great demand for human merchandise has led to the desolation, devastation and destruction of Africa. The African slave trade continues exclusively in order to allow the wealthy classes of Muslims in Turkey, Persia and Egypt to have a surplus of slaves: women, children and eunuchs for their harems (Chesson 1877, 7–9).

In contrast to European demands regarding the immediate abolition of slavery, Adalet (1892), a Turkish writer from Ankara, proposes the *gradual* abolition of slavery in Ottoman society, arguing that this would inevitably lead to the end of the multiethnic harem slavery system. In her article, Adalet (1892) recommends that the Turks no longer take Islamized slaves as their legal wives, but prefer to marry free Muslim women, who at least receive some education and are women they can respect, as opposed to the uneducated slaves they normally abuse. She also claims that Turkish women are ashamed of being the daughters and grand daughters of former slaves. Adalet (1892) argues that she is in favour of the abolition of slavery but feels the process must provide time for adaptation. She advises free Muslim men and women to stop buying new female and male slaves, stressing that they should, however, take care of the ones they already own and not throw them out into the street. She also insists on the immediate removal of all male children from the 'impure and degrading environment of the harems' while highlighting the necessity of promoting female education in order to save their race. The promotion of female education, she argues, would raise the level of the men in Ottoman society: 'there is no hope for the Turk if women remain what they are and the social system continues to destroy the moral force of women and as a result that of the men' (Adalet 1892, 130).

Although the Turkish government professed to share the anti-slavery views of England, the slave trade continued openly until the twentieth century. The harem slavery institution was abolished in 1922 with Kemal Ataturk and the abolition of the Sultanate. Polygamy, or rather polygyny, was abolished in Turkey in 1926, with the adoption of Swiss Law.

'The science of weaving nets' or the art of manipulation, a result of slavery and confinement

They keep their wives, daughters and concubines caged up in lattice-windowed houses; protect them by eunuchs, those atoms of mankind, whom they deprive of all social intercourse with the male sex and the outer world, and treat as abject slaves. (Lott 1866, vol. 1, 16)

Harem inmates like Adalet (1890, 1892) and Melek Hanum (1872) claim that there was no real social contact, communication or interaction between the two genders that belonged to the same family or household. The female accounts reveal that harem inmates – risking death – showed disrespect for religious laws by committing adultery, infanticide, artificial abortion and apostasy from Islam (Kamberidou 2002). They used the *veil* as a means of anonymous circulation to meet their lovers or to escape from the harems and from Turkey (Craven 1789; Pardoe 1837; Skene 1847; Melek Hanum 1872). Western women, in their writings, refer to many escape attempts, mysterious disappearances and premature deaths of women who could not adapt to ‘the yoke of the harem’ (Lott 1866, vol. 2). Melek Hanum (1872) condemns this female institution of slavery. After 30 years of harem life, Melek Hanum and her teenage daughter Aisheh Hanum escaped from Turkey in December 1865.

Many British women, instead of condemning certain forms of behaviour or conduct which they would have normally denounced in their western societies – such as adultery, violence, deception and the art of manipulation – seem to justify or describe them as unavoidable, a result of harem slavery, confinement, survival strategies, means of self-empowerment or opposition (Lott 1866, vol. 1; Harvey 1871; Blunt 1878, vol. 1; Walker 1886, vol. 2; Garnett 1895).

Lott (1866, vol. 2, 294), having experience harem life in Egypt and Constantinople, argues that ‘the very condition of slavery renders the practice of trickery, subtlety, and artifice, unavoidable, and makes easy the science of weaving nets’. Lott appears to justify their conduct, arguing that their life in the harem was ‘frightfully monotonous’, engendered ‘melancholy madness’ and ‘a lethargic stupor enshrouded the mind’ from the polluted with tobacco and powerful narcotics atmosphere, which had also affected her health, so she was forced to resign from her position as governess and return to England (1866, vol. 2, 289).

It is very easy to understand how Harems become the very hotbeds of every wicked quality, the seeds of which are already slumbering in the heart of woman. The inmates are surrounded by rivals, always watched, for the surveillance surpasses even that of the secret police in Russia [...] yes, Reader, they come *under the yoke of the Harem*, and they are by degrees habituated to its form; but against the essence their very instinct revolts. [...] how is it possible that there should not be violent outbreaks, shameless coarseness, great barbarity? (Lott 1866, vol. 2, 295–297)

With regard to adultery, western women imply it was a form of resistance, a protest or a survival strategy (Kamberidou 2014a). They defend the women who have been accused of adultery and are extremely outraged by the punishments imposed. One need point out here that when western women discuss adultery or the punishment of an *adulteress* they are referring not only to the legal wives (free Muslim women) but also to the Islamized slaves of all ranks that belonged to one man or master.

Dora d’ Istria (1859) argues that women were faithful and loyal to their husbands and masters, but only when they could not do otherwise. Melek Hanum (1872) claims that nearly all of Sultan Abdul Medjid’s women brought their lovers into the Imperial harem, and there was rarely one among them that did not have a lover. Belgiojoso (1855) observes that there was no woman, at least in Constantinople, that was faithful or devoted to her husband or master. How could they be faithful, she asks, since they had not chosen them and in fact hated them?

Belgiojoso (1855), having also lived in many harems in the depths of Asia Minor, argues that the women wore a mask and excelled in the art of manipulation, intrigue and conspiracy. She lived in the valley of Eia-Maq-Oglou near Angora and began an 11-month

journey in January 1852 to explore the region, walking in the freezing desert, living in a tent and enjoying the hospitality of various harems along the way. Belgiojoso observes that the harem inmates were intelligent, clever, dynamic and very eager to learn about western manners and customs. They asked her many questions, but when their husband or master entered the harem, they suddenly went silent, played shy, submissive and obedient, until he left the room and the merriment and discussions resumed.

The accounts reveal that an adulteress usually disappeared mysteriously and her body was disposed of or buried discretely. The assassin was never arrested and no investigation followed, as it would have been pointless. When a body was discovered no one could identify it. No man had ever seen the face of a Muslim woman that did not belong to him in the capacity of slave, wife, daughter or close relative. According to the accounts, an *adulteress* was either placed alive in a sack and thrown into the Bosphorus to drown, or she was killed and then the body was placed in a sack or a wicker basket and thrown into the Bosphorus which had been *converted into an immense city of the dead* (Montagu 1718; Demont 1821a; Lott 1866, vol. 2; Harvey 1871; Blunt 1878).

The basket and the sack in Turkey contain the victims of jealousy, which the handiwork of the eunuchs has sent to their last account! For these specters of men are, like the thugs in India, adepts at strangulation. It is no uncommon thing in the Harems to hear them relate to each other, if not their own exploits, at least those of their predecessors in office, and I have often seen the elder ones give their fellow-phantoms illustrations of the manner in which those deeds have been accomplished. (Lott 1866, vol. 2, 208–209)

Concluding remarks

This article has argued that in interacting and *bonding* with the harem inmates of Ottoman society, mainly in Asia Minor and Constantinople in particular, British women expressed their understanding, acceptance and solidarity, despite their western values and social prejudices. In contributing additional evidence on women's alternative discourse, this article has strengthened the arguments of previous studies, while drawing attention to the multiethnic harem slavery institution, which reflected the multiethnic synthesis of Ottoman society. Women's access to spaces and situations that western men could not reach has demystified the exotic or the *Oriental*, revealing a patriarchal system's domestic-social reality that was founded on the institution of slavery.

Slavery was vital for the Ottoman Empire's economy and social system and it certainly included the male population. The accounts confirm that the Ottoman slavery institution resulted in the multiethnic composition of the Ottoman households: harems and *semliks*. The female accounts repeatedly corroborate that an Ottoman harem – especially that of the elite and the so-called middle class – was made up of women from different nations: Islamized slaves, liberated slaves and descendants of slaves, the prototype being the imperial harem. This multiethnic harem slavery institution was the collective segregation or enslavement of the female gender in *one specific space* (the harem), as *one collective identity* since all the women – slave and free – shared or legally belonged to *one man or master*: sultan, grand vizier, pacha, bey, effendi, etc. As a rule, the Ottoman Turks liberated and married Islamized slaves who were trained in the harems to be obedient and servile and had no relatives to protect their legal rights and social privileges.

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Notes

1. For six centuries the multiethnic and multilingual Ottoman Empire – with Constantinople as its capital since 1453 as the centre of interactions between the Western and Eastern worlds – controlled vast lands in the Mediterranean region. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it controlled much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, the Caucasus, the Horn of Africa, North Africa and so forth (Peirce 1993; Kamberidou 2002; Sarris, n.d.).
2. In European historiography, the meaning of 'the Orient', originally referring to Egypt and the Levant, has changed in scope several times the Orient included a vast region with a multitude of social structures, cultures and countries (Middle East, Asia, etc.), especially during the Ottoman Empire when it included the Mediterranean region as well (Sarris, n.d.).
3. Men's apartment or the portion of the house reserved for the men (Sarris, n.d.).

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

Interactuar, compartir y crear lazos: "notas de experiencia personal" por mujeres viajeras del siglo XIX

Ya en el siglo XVII, las mujeres han estado yendo de una esquina del mundo a otra registrando sus experiencias y razones para la publicación. Explorando, trabajando y residiendo en regiones del Este consideradas "seguras sólo para hombres dinámicos" (Smith 1887), mujeres occidentales interactuaron con los pueblos de la sociedad otomana y disfrutaron su cálida y generosa hospitalidad. Su género les permitió estudiar, aprender y volverse expertas en áreas donde los hombres no tenían acceso: los harenes otomanos, la vida cotidiana de las mujeres, las reuniones sociales y las celebraciones. Las mujeres occidentales y orientales discuten sobre la esclavitud del harén, el matrimonio, el adulterio, el dar a luz, el aborto, el divorcio, la religión y los derechos de las mujeres. Al reconsultar las fuentes primarias y centrándose en las escrituras de mujeres británicas del siglo XIX en Asia Menor (Turquía), este trabajo brinda evidencia adicional sobre las representaciones alternativas de las mujeres o una mirada menos degradante, a la vez revelando la realidad de un sistema patriarcal doméstico social que fue fundado sobre la institución de la esclavitud. En otras palabras, difiere de otros estudios en que centra su atención sobre los relatos que son ilustrativos de la síntesis poliétnica de los hogares otomanos, esto es, el discurso de la institución de la esclavitud multiétnica del harén, la cual distinguía a la sociedad otomana, de forma de proveer una visión más amplia e inspirar nuevas discusiones.

Palabras claves: género; sociedad otomana; Imperio Otomano; esclavitud multiétnica del harén; mujeres

互动、分享与亲密连结；十九世纪女性旅行者的“个人经验纪事”

早在十七世纪，女性便从世界的一隅移动到他方，纪录着她们的经验与目的以进行出版。西方女性探索、工作并居住于被认为“仅对强而有力的男性而言是安全”的东方（Smith 1887），与奥斯曼社会中的人们互动，并享受着当地人所提供的温暖与殷勤好客。她们的性别，使其得以学习、研究并成为男性无法取得管道之处的专家：奥斯曼的妻妾、女性的日常生活、社交集会与庆典。西方与东方女性一同讨论妻奴制度、婚姻、通姦、生产、堕胎、离婚、信仰与女性权益。本文重新查阅主要资料，并聚焦十九世纪身处小亚细亚（土耳其）的英国女性书写，对女性的另类再现或较不带有贬抑的凝视，提供额外的证据，并同时揭露立基于奴隶制度上的父权体制的家户—社会现实。换句话说，本研究与其他凸显奥斯曼家户作为多元族裔综合体——例如多元族裔妻奴制度——并以此识别奥斯曼社会的解释有所不同，藉此提供更广泛的图像，并刺激新的讨论。

关键词：性别；奥斯曼社会；奥斯曼帝国；多元族裔妻妾奴隶；女性