



ΧΑΡΟΚΟΠΕΙΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ
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**REVEALING EXPERIENCES HIDDEN FROM HISTORY: THROUGH THE EYES OF
WOMEN TRAVELERS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEA
REGIONS IN THE 17TH TO EARLY 20TH CENTURIES**

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Abstract

The firsthand accounts of 252 European and American women travelers of the 17th to early 20th centuries in Asia Minor, Cyprus, Syria, Egypt, Greece and other Ottoman occupied territories confirm that thousands of women travelled and witnessed historic events. Women from Great Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria and America explored, visited, resided as permanent residents, worked or served as volunteers, missionaries, educators, nurses, artists, governesses, ladies in waiting and servants of the western or eastern elite in different regions of the Ottoman Empire. This paper begins with a brief discussion on women travelers, subsequently focusing on 19th Century accounts regarding women's contributions in times of conflict, exclusively from archival sources: the narratives of women volunteers, nurses, care givers and morale builders during the Crimean War (1853-1856), when the colonial experience encouraged female engagement. The accounts of English, French and German women who cared for the soldiers in the military hospitals of Constantinople and its environs reveal that women played key roles in social care, public health and hospital management, showing initiative and innovation in crisis management. The female accounts describe the British military and naval hospitals; the nurses duties and hardships (1,500 patients per 3 women: two lady volunteers and one nurse); the hundreds of women who followed their husbands to war; the demoralizing barrack system; the degrading social status and abuse of the English soldier's wife and babies; the elevated status and protection enjoyed by the French soldier's wife; the French military system. The female narratives argue that the French soldiers, as opposed to the English, are educated, industrious, productive and creative, adding to the general good. They spotlight the superiority of the French soldiers as regards their manners, morals, courtesy, organizational skills, patriotism and especially their respect and treatment of women.



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Introduction and background: women's travel writing

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"To have been a soldier, or a soldier's wife, is tacitly to introduce the idea, that an individual has contracted such a mass of disreputable habits, that to place him or her in positions where sobriety, honesty, or respectability is concerned, is quite out of the question" (Marianne Young 1855: 152).

A plethora of scholarly works have been published on male Western travelers in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, however the accounts of female travel writers drawing attention to experiences hidden from history could also be a welcome addition or an alternative discourse with a gender perspective. Motivated by a cross-examination of the original accounts of 240 Western women travelers¹ in Ottoman territories in the 17th to 19th centuries, showing that over 6000 women travelled and experienced the *Orient* (Kamberidou 2017, 2016, 2015a), this paper continues the research, examining women's contributions in times of conflict.

As early as the 17th century, women have been going from one corner of the world to the other witnessing historic events, war and conflict, religious persecutions, pillaging and the *removal* or destruction of antiquities, and writing about it. In 1659, for example, two English missionaries (Quakers), Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers—set out on their journey to preach the Gospel—stopped in Malta for quarantine and were imprisoned by the Spanish Inquisition for their religious beliefs. Four years later they regained their freedom, thanks to "the kindness of the Lord D'Abaney", and returned to England. Their book—published much later—includes a critical account of the Catholic Church and a detailed description of their "cruel sufferings" and "torture" at the hands of the Inquisition: continuous "cruelty" and threats by the monks and friars of "impending Death", "whippings", being quartered and burnt, unless they converted (Evans & Cheevers 1719: 120, 148, 196)

Also traveling in the 17th century and witnessing historic events were two Swedish women, Anna Akerhjelm and Catharina Charlotta de la Gardie (Countess Koenigsmark), the wife of Swedish Field Marshal Count Otto Guillaume Koenigsmark. Anna Akerhejelm, who accompanied the Countess in her travels with Count Koenigsmark from 1685-1688, provides extensive accounts on: Francisco Morosini's campaign in the Morea in 1685, the only Venetian-

¹ Originally undertaken for a PhD completed in 2002 with 110 women travelers and updated for a book published in 2014 with 240 (Καμπερίδου 2002, 2014). Analytically, see dissertation: **Kamberidou, Irene** (2002). *Women Travellers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and the Multiethnic Ottoman Harem Slavery Institution (vol. 1): the Social and Legal position of women in Islam (vol.2)*. Athens: Doctoral Dissertation [in Greek]. Panteios University of Political and Social Sciences.



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Ottoman conflict from which Venice emerged victorious; the Siege of Athens and the destruction and looting of the Parthenon in 1687; the Siege of Negreponte (Chalkis) in 1688. For example, in one of the letters to her brother Samuel Manson Agriconus Akeirhjelm, she describes the battle of Negreponte, informing him that the attack succeeded and the Turks began to flee; over 1.000 Turks were killed and many threw themselves into the sea; 300 Christians succumbed; Count Walkeck, many brave officers and a colonel were killed; many illnesses among their people, more died from diseases than from the blows of the enemy (Καμπερίδου 2014, Kamberidou 2016, 2017).

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In the 18th century Maria Guthrie, the directress of the imperial convent for the education of the female nobility of Russia, provides a detailed description of her tour in the years 1795-1796 in "the Taurida, or Crimea, the antient kingdom of Bosphoros [...] and all the other countries on the north shore of the Euxine" (Guthrie 1802). Maria Guthrie sailed along the coast of the Black Sea, describing her experience in a series of letters to her husband the editor, Matthew Guthrie. The publication is illustrated by a map of the tour along the Euxine coast, from the Dniester to the Cuban, with engravings of ancient coins, medals, monuments and inscriptions, including maps and coins of Sinope and Trapezus: "I intend to put a great deal of method into my Tour, just to punish you men for your sneer at the charming disorder that must reign in the narrative of a female traveler", Guthrie (1802:15) observes in letter IV. In letter LXVII she describes the different nations in the Taurida, pointing out that she does not include "under this heading the Armenians, Greeks or Jews, although naturalized in this peninsula for ages; as they still preserve their national religion, customs, &c. &c. and do not seem to have mixed their blood in any considerable degree with the Tartras" (Guthrie 1802: 214). In letter LXXI she claims that punishments for the Armenians, Greeks and Jews were more severe, pointing out that they were usually nailed by the ear: "A shopkeeper caught in the act of cheating with false or short weights was nailed by the ear to his own shop-door [...] a punishment with set Jews, Armenians, and Greeks, the ordinary offenders in this country" (Guthrie 1802:223). Letter XCII includes her observations on Kerasund, Sinope and Trapezus. The ancient name Trapezus, founded by the Greeks, she notes, is a colony that will yield to none and known to the Turks by its middle-age name of Trebisonde, adding: "the modern names of places, merely corruptions of the antient in the mouth of the barbarians who cannot pronounce them better, this is strictly the case on the coast of Asia Minor in particular, where the Turks seem to have been contented with the possession of the antient Greek and Roman cities, without naming them anew in their own jargon" (Guthrie 1802: 305).

Women travelers of the 19th century witness and discuss religious-racial intolerance and violence, using terms and phrases like: rape, slavery, enslavement, terror, *terrorisme* (fr.), mass massacres, and the reign of terror in Turkey. They distinguish the "multiethnic Ottoman harem slavery institution" (Kamberidou 2016, 2015b, 2002) and examine the treatment of slaves, confirming that an Ottoman harem/household was made up of women and children from



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different nations: Islamized slaves, liberated slaves and descendants of slaves, the prototype being the imperial harem (Καμπερίδου 2002, 2014). They examine the position of the subjugated races (e.g. Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Gypsies) and the persecution of Christian subjects throughout Asia Minor: e.g. the three-day massacre of the Armenians in Constantinople and Candillee in 1896; color segregation—imposed by law or custom—on the Greeks, Armenians and Jews with regard to the colors of their clothing, footwear/shoes and houses/buildings. The early 20th Century female narratives spotlight the *Young Turk* nationalist movement (1908); the persecution of "all elements not pure Moslem"; "the Kerasund horror", the Armenian Genocide (1915-1917); the Hellenic Genocide, including the Pontic Genocide (1914-1923) and the ordeals of the refugees (Vaka 1914, Mills 1920, Norton 1922, Brown 1922, Neave 1933).

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It is important to point out here that the number of British women travelers is much greater than that of other nationalities, a fact related to Britain's intervention in the East, namely economic and political expansion. What made travel more affordable by the mid-19th Century, increasing women's mobility, was the development of the steam engine. In other words, the female travel literature was written primarily by socially privileged upper-class women—white aristocrats and middle-class women—that I have categorized into three groups: *The titled* (queens, princesses, members of the aristocracy and their suite); *the middle class* (professional women, authors, artists, governesses, explorers, journalists); *Women with a cause*, those that declare a social or religious purpose for their journey (war volunteers, nurses, missionaries, teachers-educators, philanthropists and nuns like the Sisters of Charity). This article focuses on the third group, following research on the social services provided by English, French and German nurses and philanthropist who cared for the soldiers in the hospitals of Constantinople and its environs during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Accordingly, it spotlights three exemplary representations of the period, specifically the firsthand accounts of three English women, who claim to be participant observers: Fanny M. Taylor (1856), a *lady* volunteer who published her two volume narrative upon her return to England immediately after the war, providing names and references to over 100 other *lady* volunteers and nurses; Lady Alicia Blackwood (1857, 1881), a volunteer who initially published 24 sketches of the hospitals and barracks of Scutari, the Bosphorus and the Crimea, and recorded her experiences and observations in her journal, published much later, in 1881; and Marianne Young (1855), an English officer's wife who visited and lived in many English and French military camps in Constantinople and its environs during the war. They reflect, represent or are typical examples of women's colonial experience, engagement and volunteerism during the war.

Through the *voices* of these three British women—exclusively from archival sources—this study contributes additional evidence, providing a bigger picture by unveiling experiences hidden from history, such as their firsthand accounts on the thousands of women near or in the warzones, and especially the hundreds of wives of the English soldiers, who were allowed to follow their husbands to war. The female narratives repeatedly condemn the abuse and



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humiliating position of the British soldier's wife as opposed to the socially elevated and respectable one of the French soldier's wife, concluding with recommendations and solutions for future changes. In comparing the English military system with that of the French, the female accounts argue that the French military system was superior morally, ethically, organizationally and administratively, especially with regard to its treatment and protection of women: employees, nurses, military wives, Sisters of Charity.

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Additionally, they reveal the horrors confronted by the English soldiers in the military hospitals (8.000-9.000 soldiers), more dying from the abuse of the uneducated male orderlies, starvation, infections, cholera and disease than in the combat zones: e.g. 6.000 British soldiers in the mass grave in Constantinople in 1856. They also bring to light and discuss the following: nurses overload (1,500 soldiers per 3 women: 2 volunteers and one nurse); the duties and services provided by the volunteers, paid nurses and sisters (Sisters of Charity and Sisters of Mercy); the destitute wives and babies of the English soldiers dying from neglect, starvation, frost-bite, alcoholism, cholera, malaria; a woman's initiative in establishing a *Women's Hospital* for the wives and widows of the soldiers, as well as a school for the refugee children of the German Kerch Jews. When describing the British military hospitals Young (1855), Taylor (1856) and Blackwood (1881) repeatedly complain about the shortage of doctors, nurses, volunteers, medicines, food supplies; the lack of clean water; the rats under the soldiers beds and their clothes swarming with lice.

It is important to point out here that nursing was in the process of gaining recognition as a profession during this period. Formal training began thanks to volunteers like Taylor (1856), Blackwood (1881), Sister Bernadine, formerly a German aristocrat, and Florence Nightingale, the latter extensively studied since the early 20th Century. Researchers have repeatedly examined Nightingale's contributions, pointing out that she was the founder of professional nursing, and had an impact on diverse areas of public health: hospital policy, management and design, patient care, making rounds, infection control, sterilization, hospital epidemiology, hospice care, keeping medical statistics, etc. (Cook 1913, Kopf 1978, Gill & Gill 2005). So, without intending to down play Nightingale's extensively studied and disputed contributions, this paper focuses on the *invisible* heroines or low profile women of the 19th Century, like Young (1855), Taylor (1856) and Blackwood (1857,1881), as Nightingale was not alone, but a symbol of her time, promoted extensively in the British press as a role model. A great number of women volunteers, nurses and *lady* travelers refer to Nightingale's contributions. In contrast, Marianne Young's (1855) publication highlights the *invisible* heroines and the *invisible* heroes—volunteers, nurses, sisters as well as the soldiers, more dying in the military hospitals than in the battlefield—and the demoralizing consequences of war beyond the warzones.

Despite the shortage of nurses, and although hundreds of English women were volunteering, the female accounts argue they were rejected by the War Office. Additionally, the hundreds of wives of the English soldiers who accompanied their husbands to war were not allowed to fill the



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gaps or contribute in any way in the military hospitals. Why were they not given the opportunity to be useful, e.g. clean, wash, cook, sew or assist the trained nurses and lady volunteers? The answer, "deep-rooted prejudices" (Blackwood 1881:82), the inflexibility of the British military system of male orderlies, rigidity in changing rules and regulations or interfering with the system. Even Nightingale, who was a trained nurse— responsible for training other nurses and in charge of the Barrack hospital in Scutari—was not allowed to care for the higher ranks. The officers had male orderlies for nurses: "It must be remembered" argues Lady Blackwood, "that she [Nightingale] was about to introduce a system hitherto unknown at the War Office. She had to face and, as best she could, to overcome deep-rooted prejudices against, and opposition to, any interference with the ordinary rules and routines of our military hospitals. Her staff of trained nurses were to take the place of the orderlies [who were men], who too often were ignorant and incapable of performing the commonest requirements for a poor invalid" (Blackwood 1881: 82).

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Historical background to the Crimean War and women's involvement

The purpose of this article is not to deal with the historical or political background of the Crimean War (1853-1856), which has been extensively studied by historians, sociologists and political scientists² (Σαρχής χ.χ.έ/Sarris n.d.). However, to explain the presence of thousands of women, mainly British, near or in the warzones, I need briefly refer to the battles and the escalating power struggles over control of Ottoman territories. In the 1850s Russia and France were competing over the Ottoman occupied territory of the Holy Land. The threat of Russian interference in the Ottoman Empire increasing, Britain, Austria and Prussia became involved as well. Peaceful negotiations having failed, the British and French sided with the Turkish Ottomans (Sarris n.d.). This is the reason for the presence, in the warzone areas, of British, French and German women volunteers, nurses, missionaries, sisters, travelers, and war *tourists* (Kamberidou 2017), in addition to the hundreds of wives of the British soldiers, and the wives of the German and Polish legions (Blackwood 1881, Taylor 1856, Young 1855).

Thousands of troops, from all the countries involved in the Crimean War, intended to limit Russian expansion into Europe, were sent to the area.³ Almost immediately upon arrival hundreds of British soldiers, and the women that followed them, began to perish, mostly from

² The Crimean War occurred on the Crimean Peninsula, which lies on the southern tip of the Ukraine, and projects into the Black Sea. The Crimea was an important military position for the Russians at the time since their naval fleet could access the Mediterranean Sea from the region (Sarris n.d., Osmanli Reality, 2 vols. Athens: Arsenidis).

³The war between the Russian Empire and an alliance of the United Kingdom, France, the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Sardinia. It was mainly fought between the Russians and the British, French, and Ottoman Turks, and as of Jan. 1855 with the support of the army of Sardinia-Piedmont, predecessor state of today's Italy (Sarris n.d).



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cholera. The soldiers that reached the overcrowded, poorly staffed and unsanitary hospitals were no better off. They were lying on filthy floors infested with vermin from open sewers and dying from starvation, lack of medical supplies, typhus, typhoid, cholera or dysentery. The 19th century female accounts corroborate current studies concerning the horrific mortality rates in the armies that participated in the war: 1 in 5 men sent to the Crimea died (Gill & Gill 2005). A volunteer at the "Great Barrack hospital" in Scutari, Lady Blackwood claims six thousand brave British soldiers were buried there, in a mass grave, after the war (1881: 49). According to Taylor (1856), on one side of the General Hospital in Constantinople was the British Burying Ground where 50 to 70 soldiers were buried daily, "wrapped up and carried away to the dead house. Death indeed became familiar to us as the ordinary events of life. Among one thousand five hundred sick committed to the care of three women, it was impossible to attend to the greater number" (Taylor 1856 v.1: 87-88).

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The female narratives refer to the significant battles in the Crimea, such as the *Battle of the Alma* (Sept. 20, 1854), the first battle in which the Russians were defeated in the clash with the British and French forces. Wounded British soldiers, fighting on the Crimean Peninsula, were shipped across the Black Sea to the poorly staffed military hospitals, as well as the camps, huts, stables and ships that were converted into temporary hospitals. Another was the *Siege of Sevastopol* (Sept. 25, 1854 to Sept. 8, 1855), a city in the south of the Crimea which was the home of a major fleet of Russian ships. British, French, and Turkish troops besieged Sevastopol for one year, capturing it on September 9, 1855. Though so much nearer the seat of war, Lady Blackwood (1881) claims they seldom received reliable information of actual events. Rumors reached them of French successes at Sevastopol and accounts of British losses in some extempore attack on the Redan, but "the real facts were learned by the poor wounded men being brought down in quick succession to our shores" (Blackwood 1881:150).

After the *Battle of the Alma* and the *Siege of Sevastopol*, according to Taylor (1856 v.1), the British *Times* reported the frightful state of affairs in the military hospitals, inspiring volunteers and philanthropists to go out or send money and supplies. The first group of volunteers arrived in Constantinople with Florence Nightingale and Mr. and Mrs. Bracenbridge on November 4, 1854. Queen Victoria had sponsored a relief fund to aid the sick and wounded, and a smaller relief fund had been provided by the British *Times*. Nightingale—under the authorization of Sidney Herbert, the Secretary of War—selected a team of 38 volunteer nurses to care for the British soldiers. She recruited nuns and women from "the lower classes" who she considered would be more manageable. Nightingale and her nurses arrived at the military hospital in Scutari in 1854 and found soldiers wounded and dying amid horrifying sanitary conditions.

At the *Battle of Balaclava* (Oct. 25, 1854) the British cavalry charged to their doom due to incompetent command, and ten days later, the Russians suffered heavy losses at the *Battle of Inkerman* (Nov. 5, 1854) which involved British, French, Turkish, and Russian armies. According to Lady Blackwood's narrative, when news reached England of the *Battle of*



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Inkerman—between the allied armies of Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire against the Imperial Russian Army— along with many calls for help for the sick and wounded, many women volunteers left England for the noble profession of nursing (Blackwood 1881). In line with Taylor's account, the *Battles of Inkerman and Balaclava* sent down hundreds of sufferers, and the number of nurses that had gone there were "only a drop of water in the ocean amidst the thousands now in the Eastern hospitals" (Taylor 1856 v.1: 10). As a volunteer at the General Hospital in Constantinople, in the winter of 1854, she notes, "the sick came in almost daily, it was so sad to see them die one after the other [...] not in the glory of the battlefield, but in these dreary corridors" (Taylor 1856 v.1: 96-98). The Russians were also warded off at the *Battle of Eupatoria* (Feb. 17, 1855), a town in the Crimea occupied by the Turks. A few months later, from the Sea of Azov, during a six month period (May 25–Nov. 22, 1855), British and French war ships attacked Russian ports, bombarded the towns but were unable to land and overthrow the port towns due to strong resistance. As Lady Blackwood observes, many years after the Crimean War—which ended in February 1856, the Ottoman and Russian Empires agreeing to terminate military activities in the Black Sea and all nations to respect the autonomy of the Ottoman Empire— "Germany, France, Austria, the East, South Africa, and almost every portion of the globe had finally recognized the blessing of the nursing sisters, especially near the battlefield" (1881: 83).

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Undeniably, the female narratives provide firsthand information for future researchers concerning the consequences of war beyond the battlefield, and in particular the conditions in all British military hospitals which had received at least 8.000 sick and wounded soldiers. Regarding the estimated number of patients, in context with Lady Blackwood's narrative: the Great Barrack Hospital had 4,000 sick and wounded soldiers; the General Hospital 1,000; no numbers provided for the temporary hospitals in the stables and in the two large hulks/ships on the Bosphorus; 800 patients at Kulalee hospital and preparations were being made to receive another 1,500 soldiers; no numbers given for the Haida Pasha Palace which was converted into a hospital exclusively for British officers; no numbers given for the Naval Hospital in Therapia, which was under the supervision of Mrs. Mackenzie. An estimate of some 8.000 -9.000 soldiers could be considered a safe approximation. These numbers do not include female patients or casualties: women volunteers, nurses, the wives and babies of the English soldiers, the Sisters of Charity, etc.

The Sisters of Charity, 11.000 women of different nations

"Whenever French armies for the last 200 years have gone out to battle, they also take a gentle holy band of Soeurs de la Charite" (Taylor 1856 v.1: 317).

Fanny M. Taylor (1856), in a two volume narrative of her twelve month experience as a volunteer in the hospitals of Koulali and Scutari, announces that she published her experiences



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because she wanted to inform the public of the contributions and difficulties confronted by the nurses and lady volunteers, like herself, during the Crimean War, including the gradual improvements made in the hospitals at Constantinople by these women, such as the establishment of *Women's Wards* in the military hospitals and a *Women's Hospital* for the wives of the soldiers. In her preface, she also points out that she wanted "to rectify the absence or lack of information concerning the heroism displayed by the soldiers who suffered and died in the obscurity of the Hospital Wards, in comparison to the innumerable details in the English press of the valour of the soldiers on the field in all that relates to the Crimean campaign" (Taylor 1856 v.1). She also highlights that many lady volunteers and nurses died from diseases and many soldiers from the abuse of the "untaught regimental orderlies" (Taylor 1856 v.1: 218).

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According to her account, the English press was flooded with articles stressing that nurses were needed, and especially articles on Nightingale. There was intense excitement in England when the newspapers of October 1st 1854 announced the battle of Alma. The army had left England in March 1854 and the news of victory rang through the land. But, then followed the lists of the soldiers killed and wounded, bringing the realities of war to every English home. The lists were accompanied by the harrowing details of the battlefield, the embarkation of the wounded and their arrival at the imperfectly prepared hospital at Scutari. The newspapers were filled with complaints. The first cry for help was that the wounded had arrived at Scutari and there was no lint or linen to dress their wounds with So Taylor goes on to ask "why were the English soldiers deprived of the comforts enjoyed by the French?" (Taylor 1856 v.1: 3-4).

On the first appearance of sickness at Varna, she argues, the French had sent for the Sisters of Charity. "Why, it was said, are there no such nurses in England?" (Taylor 1856 v.1:4) She repeatedly focuses on the shortage of nurses and volunteers, arguing that many English women wished to volunteer and many were rejected as they were not considered adequately trained or appropriately prepared. Initially, Nightingale appointed two ladies to assist her in the selection process, and although around 70 nurses applied only eleven were considered qualified. By October 21st 1854, the first band was completed with only 38 women chosen. All applicants went through training at some of the London Hospitals and it was clearly defined that proselytizing was strictly forbidden and religious subject never to be introduced or discussed, unless a patient was a member of their own faith (Taylor, 1856 v.1: 4-9), as confirmed in Lady Blackwood's accounts as well (1881:160).

On the other hand, the French and Sardinian services had hundreds of trained *Soeurs de la Charite* (Sisters of Charity) nursing the soldiers and the poor, argues Taylor (1856 v.1), adding that this order from France its birthplace, spread into all lands and numbered 11.000 women of different nations. These women, no longer exclusively from the ranks of the poor, were ladies of high rank, even princesses, who laid down their wealth to enter the order. In Constantinople, during the Crimean War, the Sisters of Charity served six or more military hospitals; were



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trained to prepare medicines; had pharmacies and ambulances. They were the only doctors for a large number of poor in Turkey. Additionally, according to Taylor's account, the mission of *les Soeurs de la Charite* in Constantinople was founded fifteen years ago, in 1839, by an educated German Lady of high rank [Sister Bernadine], who had gone to Paris to enter the order. Sister Bernadine, who lived many years in the East and spoke Turkish, escorted Taylor and the other volunteers and nurses in the streets of Galata and Pera to assist them in their purchases, getting needed supplies, as "she knew the right price given for everything" (Taylor 1856 v.1: 315). They also visited their schools "which contain many hundreds of children, of as many countries as are gathered together at Constantinople", as well as their dispensary, their boarding school for girls and their "Orphan's Dormitory". The orphans, according to her observations "do a great deal of needlework towards their own support; they also dress dolls in the different costumes of the country for sale" (Taylor 1856 v.1: 319-322).

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In 1855, Sister Bernadine asked Lady Alicia Blackwood to start a school for the refugee children of the Kertch families, as the sisters had little time since their hospitals were filling rapidly with the wounded soldiers from the Crimea, and Lady Blackwood agreed at once. According to her account, while she was in the Crimea with other volunteers and nurses, they learnt of the fall of Kertch and the destitute women and children who, after the surrender of the town, ran to the beach in front of the English ships imploring help and refuge. Whole families, the most part German Jews, faced extreme destitution: "An application had been made to the Turkish Government on their behalf and a few piastres a day had been granted, which barely provided necessary food for them—food being scarce. After a while several German Jewish families moved into Pera" (Blackwood 1881:156). Meanwhile, a number of women, the wives of the soldiers, had arrived chiefly from the Crimea, several of whom were very ill, fever again prevalent and the newly established—by Lady Blackwood—*Women's Hospital* was nearly full, so by the time she visited the German Kertch families she found their condition improved. According to her narrative, Sister Bernadine and the sisters helped the Kertch people: nursed their sick, made their clothes, washed their children, and taught them to cook their food to more profit. Lady Blackwood wished their missionaries stationed in Constantinople could help as well, and was astonished that a Catholic, Sister Bernadine, asked her, a Protestant, to start a school for the children of the Kertch families. In a short time they gathered 30 children amongst the Kertch families, whose parents seemed pleased at their being taught to read and write, and Sister Bernadine fulfilled her own promise on her part, which was to teach Jewish children. In time the school increased to 56 children and the parents applied to become Turkish subjects, renouncing Russia (Blackwood 1881).



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Soldier's wife, "a word of fear"

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"I cannot help thinking that the English soldier's wife is one of those miserable mistakes in our social system, by which we are apt to make people bad, and then severely punish them for being so, by measures only calculated to make them worse" (Young 1855: 126).

When she arrived in Scutari in 1854, Lady Blackwood asked Florence Nightingale at the Barrack Hospital to assign her where she could be most useful and Nightingale asked her to take charge of some 260 women and babies of the soldiers, who were living in dark rooms underground in the Barrack, and suffering from hunger, frost bite, malaria, etc. Lady Blackwood, uses the following terms and phrases, to describe the women and their dreadful circumstances: cursing, swearing, pandemonium, drunkenness, intoxication, sinning, demoralization, abject misery, frightful to behold, and covered with vermin. She argues it was impossible to get medical help for the women and their babies as the men came first. This led her to take the initiative to establish a *Women's Hospital*, which she succeeded in doing in the second year of the war, as well as a hospital shop for the women to protect them from the exploitation of the black market and encourage their "industrious and conscientious habits" (Blackwood 1881: 55), namely combat their alcoholism. To survive the cold, and their dreadful conditions, intoxication was common, the women learning to use any money they acquired for alcohol. Thus Lady Blackwood decided to establish the shop in the hospital, where women would register their needs and receive, at reasonable prices, the necessary supplies like soap, flannel and tea.

More analytically, in 1854 Nightingale asked Lady Blackwood to take charge of the destitute women and relieve her of the burden, adding, "my work is with the soldiers, not with their wives. Now, will you undertake to look after these poor women and relieve me from their importunity? [...] If you will take the women as your charge, I will send an orderly who will show you their haunts" (Blackwood 1881: 49-50). Lady Blackwood assented at once and accompanied the orderly to what she describes in her journal as the dark rooms underground, cellars and dens in the Barrack, without light or air, the abode of about 260 women and infants: "If I entered into any description of these dens, it would be to say, they must have been fitly likened to a Pandemonium full of cursing and swearing and drunkenness. The arrangements of a barrack room for married soldiers in those days were such, that other than this result could hardly be expected. They were certainly as much sinned against as sinning! [...] it is difficult or impossible for an English imagination to realize the terrible demoralization produced and increased by the



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fact that there was no actual division between the portions of the floor appropriated by the married couples" (Blackwood 1881: 50-52).

The prevalence of sickness amongst the women made her fully comprehend the deficiency of the medical department. When she pleaded with a medical authority that someone should come and see a woman who was suffering, the answer was—"the men must be attended to before the women" (Blackwood 1881: 53). Several of the surgeons were very ill themselves, mainly due to exposure to malaria, and the great need of space to accommodate the increasing number of soldiers who were continually arriving, made her work even more difficult. The room appointed for her on one day as a kind of hospital ward to care for the women, was needed the next for the new arrivals. This made her realize that she had to procure a separate house, apart from the Barrack, to care for the wives and offspring of the soldiers. She demanded the Turkish Government provide for such quarters and she sought supporters, eventually applying to Commandant Lord William Paulet to procure a house suitable for a women's hospital. Finally, a large house was acquired and she hired several women, employing them both as nurses and as washerwomen for the hospital, the chaplains, and the officers. Mrs. Keatley, the wife of Lieutenant Keatley was appointed superintendent of the hospital. She also hired two Swedish women, married to soldiers of the Polish legion, "in work and washing", and provided accommodation to a third Swedish woman who was most thankful, as Lady Blackwood (1881) points out, to be an inmate of the women's hospital, no longer having to live in tents pitched in mud. Still she was extremely disturbed by the fact that she was not able to help more women, and specifically those who were not soldiers' wives.

With regard to military wives of other nations, exact numbers are not provided in the female narratives, although they do refer to their presence, e.g. on an excursion to the Black Sea with Lady Stratford de Redcliff, Lady Blackwood (1881) met the women of the recently formed, at the time, Polish legion—eight wives and four children. Three of the wives were Swedes, married to Poles, who were at Bomarsund and taken prisoners with their husbands. She employed the two and provided accommodations for the third, as previously cited. Later on, according to her account, when improvements had been made, she established "a little school" for the children, along with a "Sunday School". Night schools were also set up for the soldiers to keep them busy, out of trouble, and away from pubs, as previously cited. What made her take all those initiatives? To explain, I must here revert to the destitute condition of the women and Lady Blackwood's narrative. The soldiers' wives—the majority from Varna, where they had encountered all kinds of hardships—told Lady Blackwood they had not seen soap for months, their clothing had never been renewed and many had died of cholera. Any little money they may have received from their husbands appeared to have been spent for the most part in drink as comfort from the severe weather. Having been exposed to great cold, they were driven to intoxication: "Their habits of intemperance had become such, that almost anything they could get



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they would sell in order to purchase that dreadful poison, arrack, which was sold in abundance by the Greeks," argues Lady Blackwood (1881: 56).

Marianne Young (1855) also discusses the hardships of the wives and widows of the English soldiers, arguing these poor women were driven half-frenzied to intoxication for relief. She too attacks the barrack system and claims to have witnessed vice going hand-in-hand with misery in Turkey, while confessing she had done nothing to help them: "I take immense blame to myself [...] but was apt to avoid the evil, rather than try to remedy it" (Young 1855: 220).

She attacks the "demoralizing Barrack system" (1855: 61), using the following phrases to describe the harrowing conditions and hardships confronted by the wives of the English soldiers: poor creatures, shame and horror, terror-stricken, helpless, starving women, a burden and a disgrace to the army. "The barrack-system *must* either wholly demoralize the purest-minded woman or crush her beneath a fearful sense of its shame and horror", argues Young (1855: 62). She condemns the British military system which allows hundreds of women to accompany their husbands to war, without making provisions for their shelter, protection or usefulness. She claims to have seen their tears and despair, adding "I was associated with many of the poor creatures who, unhappily, as the most respectable and unburdened, were allowed to accompany the army to Turkey; and they were suffering, uncared for, and in some cases dissolute. Self-respect was lost; and the women were a burden, a disgrace to the army, instead of being as they should have been, useful items in their camp machinery" (Young 1855: 60).

Like Lady Blackwood, she too argues that "respectable" women were much needed as nurses and volunteers, as well as servants to officer's wives, but no one would hire the wives of the English soldiers. Why? According to her narrative, when an honest farmer's daughter or a well principled servant girl marries a soldier, she falls on the social scale, and is considered immoral. So even in England, no one would hire "a soldier's wife as an assistant in any domestic duties. Who does not dread her habits? To whom is not her very name a word of fear?" (Young 1855: 60).

In France, however, a soldier's wife is respected and socially elevated, and like her husband, enjoys a reputation which secures employment. I need point out here that although Young (1855), throughout her book, describes herself as a soldier's wife, her social status is quite higher. As an English officer's wife—the wife of Captain Thomas Postans of the Bombay Army— she received privileged treatment during her travels. She never lived in the same barracks, tents, mud-huts, ditches and Turkish hills with the wives of the English soldiers.

In French society the profession of soldier inspired great esteem, and as a result a French soldier's wife enjoyed a high social status, as opposed to the social stigma attached to the soldier's profession in English society. What made the French soldier superior to the English? Education and the self-respect cultivated by their military system's character of discipline. The female accounts confirm that English society looked down on soldiers, who were usually recruited from the lower social classes, and their service and training resulted in the



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accumulation of vices and bad habits, making it impossible for them to find employment when discharged. Inevitably, English society looked down on women who married soldiers. Becoming a soldier's wife meant losing social status, morality and self-respect, and never being able to find employment. In England, as previously cited, a soldier's wife is degraded in the social scale and never hired as a domestic servant or an assistant in any domestic duties (Young 1855, Blackwood 1881).

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After having met and observed the wives of the English soldiers in their camps at Scutari, Gallipoli, and Varna, Young (1855) and Blackwood (1881) condemn the demoralizing barrack system which forces women to live in destitution together with the men. At the English camp of Scutari, Young (1855) is shocked by the state of these "terror-stricken and helpless women" who "fevered under a burning sun at Constantinople" and were left at Gallipoli under promise of a speedy return to their native land, but remained for months in Turkish houses, swarming with rats and vermin, or in the barracks with the men (Young 1855: 61). Both Young (1855) and Blackwood (1881) argue that the barrack system forces women to adopt corrupt behaviours, such as intoxication, drunkenness and other vices to survive the degradation, the freezing weather and the hunger. The only solution, Young (1855) argues, is raising the moral character of the army through the protection of women's modesty, religious education and counselling, ultimately rendering the soldier's wife a respectable and useful member of society, as is the French soldier's wife.

The French, infinitely our superiors: the French "Administration"

"The French were infinitely our superiors", argues Young (1855: 108). Between the tents of the English brigade and the town of Boulehar was "a world of French camps" that she frequently visited, and was amazed to see the French had engineers, ambulances, canteens and *cantinières*, the latter women-canteen keepers attached to military regiments. The French *cantinières* were professional women who provided the soldiers with wine, food, or other goods and services. They had their own private tent and horse, and were treated with equal courtesy by the French officers and soldiers. When needed, they also worked as nurses to the sick and assistants to the surgeons. Women of the regiment had specific duties and were never a handicap or burden to the army. According to her account, the French military system was more considerate to the needs of the soldier. It produced self-respect, great nationality, patriotism, and especially unity and sympathy among soldiers and officers. The French soldiers, she argues, are not treated as mere machines by their superiors, as is the case with the English: their health and comfort, even their daily needs and recreations are subjects of interest to their officers. As opposed to the English, they are industrious, productive, educated and creative, "adding to the general good" (Young 1855: 95).



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She was also impressed to see French soldiers spending their free time reading, writing, singing or engaging in athletic games. All the soldiers were employed in some handicraft, such as table making and chair repairing. They were often seen seated in circles listening to one of their party singing national, military, or patriotic songs. Even the French facilities and tents-barracks were superior to the English, with insulations for the cold and the heat. All their trenches had been commenced by French engineers and no sooner had they pitched their camps, they immediately built convenient roads to them, dug wells, and set up sign-posts. They even established a free post-office for their soldiers and a coffee mill, for fresh coffee for all the French camps (Young 1855).

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Young (1855) felt great shame when the French asked her about the treatment and employment of English military wives. On her way to Varna, for example, during a formal dinner on board the *Thabor*, which was crowded with French troops, the subject came up. The *Georgiana* transport had passed them, overloaded with horses and women, the wives of English soldiers and as a result they asked her "a hundred questions at dinner about the matter", as she informs her readers, adding: "The fact was, that I had seldom felt more ashamed of any chance association [...] when, as an English soldier's wife, I became identified with this subject, and was expected to explain, to French officers, our military system of protection and employment to the wives of our soldiers. Of course they could not understand me. 'Were they going out to the seat of war, instead of Sisters of Charity, to minister to the comfort of the sick and wounded?' 'Oh no!' 'As cooks?' 'Certainly not.' 'Where were they to live? What carriage had we for them? Who was responsible for their conduct? What pay had they for their duties?' What could I say? Could I lower the opinion held by the French of our army, our discipline, our religious estimate of ourselves as a moral and benevolent people, by telling the Colonel of the Fifth, and my friend the Staff officer of the Prince Napoleon, that our women were perfectly untrained in all habits of usefulness; that they were allowed to crowd out, to live like sheep upon the Turkish hills; [...] or to lie in ditches outside our camps?" (Young 1855: 158-159)

In the rare instances that a French wife accompanies her husband to war— such as the young *cantiniere* that was on board the *Thabor* with Young (1955), she is given the rank of corporal, and her husband becomes accountable for her conduct: "Her husband must be a man in the same company, in which she takes rank as a corporal, and he becomes responsible for the conduct of his wife. Should she commit acts worthy of Algiers, the husband suffers with her. The soldier must accompany his wife to the scene of her punishment, and be identified with her. So that, on one hand, the man has an object in maintain a sense of duty and propriety of his wife; and the wife, on the other hand, may be withheld from evil, by the knowledge that its punishment will involve her husband" (Young 1855: 155-156).

The French *cantiniere*s enjoyed the greatest possible respect and protection in the discharge of their duties: "They become the care of the whole regiment; exposure and fatigue are spared



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them in every possible way, and their health and privacy thoroughly regarded" (Young 1855: 157). This is the reason the French were so astonished whenever they saw "transports crowded with women; women and horses! for truly this was the arrangement", argues Young (1855: 157). The French were also astonished by the lack of gallantry of the English, "who bring women to the wars in a foreign land, suffer them to stand unsheltered [...] and oblige each woman to sleep with nine other persons of both sexes in a circular tent some twelve feet in diameter" (Young 1855: 92-93).

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Observing everything carefully on board the *Thabor*, Young was impressed by the French "Administration" which she describes as a valuable class, educated soldiers, carefully selected and regularly trained as the attendants on the sick, as opposed to the uneducated orderlies in all British hospitals. Moreover, their system called, *Administration* included other duties and professions such as tailors, carpenters, shoemakers, and artisans of all sorts: "All the soldiers composing the Administration, appeared full of intelligence; during the day, they employed themselves in reading, working, and writing [...] in the evening, they formed into little circles, and amused themselves by singing [...] there was no uproar, riot, or impropriety of any kind" (Young, 1855: 149-150), as was the case with the English soldiers. Following this experience she poses the following question: What was their great secret? What made the French soldiers superior to the English? The answer she argues is Education and "the much better *materiel* of which the army is composed, and the self-respect which is always supported by the character of discipline" (Young 1855: 151).

A French soldier, she argues, is usually an educated man, who was not recruited, but chose to enlist. When he retires or becomes a civilian, he enjoys the social acknowledgment of French society, the social prestige of having been a brave man who served his country. The English soldier, in contrast, is recruited from a less privileged social background, perceived as a machine or an animal, and unable to find employment when discharged: "The English soldier fights, while in the army, with all the bravery of the Briton, but it is as a machine. He is governed by force, and in habits and feelings is often little better than a mere animal" (Young 1855: 152).

Concluding remarks: Women's initiatives and proposals

The female accounts confirm that the British military system of engaging or employing the service of women in military hospitals was not based on "a permanent footing" as was the French, with the thousands of Sisters of Charity trained as surgical nurses, pharmacists, health care providers, "the doctors to the poor", and in hospital management as well. In contrast, British women volunteers and nurses "learnt their knowledge by experience" (Taylor 1856 v.2: 269). The British War Office did not allow, train or encourage women's participation since there were male orderlies in all military hospitals, in addition to "deep-rooted prejudices", argues



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Blackwood (1881:82) with regard to changing or interfering with the military system and the rules and routines of the military hospitals.

Young (1855) proposes the English follow the French system called *Administration* and assign specific duties to the wives and widows of their soldiers in or near the combat zones—such as nurses, cooks and needlewomen for all the soldiers, while providing them with proper protection "against the evils prominent in their position" (1855: 218-219). She argues that "if every regiment had taken this view, and judiciously acted on it, as soon as they left England, employing the women in hospitals, under the control of the medical officers, as in training-schools, till the Forces left Varna for the Crimea, and then storing them [the women], as it were, under proper superintendence, at Scutari, Gallipoli, Therapia, or the Dardanelles, until their services were again required, what immense good might have been done! What enormous sums saved! (Young 1855: 219)

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The three female accounts clearly show that women played key roles in social care, public health, hospital management and resolving problems. Other than nursing the soldiers, their wives, widows and infants, as well as civilian populations, they established shops in the military hospitals with the necessary supplies and cheaper prices, to avoid the black market; a "Free Gift shop in the hospital at Scutari, under the charge of the Superioress of the Sisters of Mercy" (Taylor 1856: 91); a *Women's Hospital* in Scutari; "Ladies Wards", "Diet Kitchens" and sterilization practices in the military hospitals; schools and Sunday schools for children; a library, reading rooms with newspapers, night schools and lecture series for the soldiers to keep them away from the pubs and out of trouble. When necessary they took initiatives, ignoring army regulations or disobeying military rules. For example, regarding sterilization practices, they set up ovens in the hospital wards and corridors to cook and boil water for the soldiers, clean water for their beef tea and drinking water. At one point, cooking in the wards was put to a stop by an order from the inspector-general, Dr. Cumming and thus their only means of assisting the soldiers ended. Taylor (1856), upset by this restriction, argues that "soldiers were abandoned to starve rather than breaking any military rules. Military discipline was never lost sight of and an infringement of one of its smallest observances was worse than letting twenty men die from neglect" (Taylor 1856 v.1: 83).

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