

The East in the Eyes of Western Women travellers of the 18th and 19th centuries: solidarity and understanding the East

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"It also may be said that in our travels we saw only the bright side of Islam. Well! That is just what we desired to see; ... The fact of it is, we had heard quite enough of the dark side of Islam, so we determined to pursue our studies on the side looking to the sun ... Is it right, fair, or just, to visit other people in their homes, or in their countries, wherever they dwell, and come away to decry them? No! It is not right!" argues Emilie Hayacinthe Loyson, after her travels in Oriental lands in the years 1894-1896.

Abstract

Women travellers from Great Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria and America explored, visited, worked and resided in regions of the East that were considered "proper and safe for dynamic men only" (Smith, 1887). The mammoth body of writings by women travellers of the 18th and 19th centuries, that claim to be eyewitness descriptions of the female microcosmos, provide a rich and detailed interpretation of the Orient, including a *feminine* version, a *female gaze*. European and American women identified with the so-called *Other*, expressed their solidarity and participated in Muslim women's daily domestic life, customs, female social gatherings, religious celebrations and feasts. As a result, they accused male travellers- who had written about domestic manners in the East and the position of women in Islam of misinforming or misleading their readers, stressing that their accounts were based on second or third-hand information, their unrestrained imagination and exotic fantasies.

1. Introduction –Methodology

A cross-examination of the travel accounts of over 240 women of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries in Asia Minor, Cyprus, Egypt, Africa, Greece and other occupied Ottoman territories shows that an extraordinary number of European and American women, over six thousand¹ travelled, experienced the Orient and witnessed historical events. Women from Great Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria

¹The majority in the 19th century: these numbers, including many of their names and titles are recorded or mentioned in the writings of the 240 women travellers and harem women, such as Melek Hanum (formerly Marie Dejean Millingen). More analytically see: Kamberidou 2002.

and America visited, explored, trekked, hiked, worked or lived as permanent residents in regions of the Orient or the Ottoman Empire revealing their reasons for travel, their goals, their dreams as well as their reasons for publishing their experiences. (Kamberidou 2002, 2006b, 2012)

As early as the 17th century, women have been going from one corner of the world to the other, recording their impressions and relating their experiences. In 1659 two English missionaries, Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, set out for Alexandria to preach the Gospel but were detained in Malta for four years. They were imprisoned and tortured by the Inquisition for their religious beliefs. (Evans & Cheevers 1719) Women travelled in the 17th century, not only for religious purposes but for pleasure and knowledge, witnessing historic events, such as the Swedish travellers Miss Anna Akerhjelm (Anna Mansdotter Agriconia) and her friend Miss Catharina Charlotta de la Gardie who later married the Swedish Field Marshal Count Otto Guillaume Koenigsmark and continued her travels as the Countess Koenigsmark. Miss Akerhejelm, who accompanied the Countess in her travels with Count Koenigsmark from 1685-1688, provides remarkable information on historic events such as the Siege of Athens in 1687, the destruction and looting of the Parthenon by the Venetians; a detailed account of Francisco Morosini's campaign in the Morea in 1685, the only Venetian-Ottoman conflict from which Venice emerged victorious, as well as an extensive account on the Siege of Negreponte (Chalkis) in 1688. (Kamberidou 2012)

The 18th and 19th century accounts, observations and impressions are the primary sources used in this paper to provide an overview of the vast, diverse and multi-faceted female writings and subject matter, including a brief outline of gendered travel: the three categories of women travellers. The accounts are approached from a sociological perspective—which includes a gender perspective, the *female gaze* along with the *colonial or Western gaze*—and not examined for their historical content or literary value, indeed also significantly noteworthy and constituting other areas of concentration for research. The descriptive and exploratory research approach aims at achieving new insights that could contribute to an understanding and *celebration* of the "Otherness of the Other." (Patsantaras 2013) Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to pursue "the side looking to the sun" (Loyson 1905: 6) by focusing on the eyewitness accounts, information and descriptions of social phenomena that contribute to creating *bridges to understanding*, gaining new perspectives in understanding the so-called *Other* and as a result bridging cultural gaps. (Kamberidou 2007) One need point out here that the female travel literature was written primarily by white/Caucasian aristocrats and middle-class women—explorers, *humanitarians*, pilgrims, volunteers, sensation seekers, adventuresses, settlers, missionaries, professionals, artists, governesses, housewives, superficial sightseers, tourists etc—who ignored all the inconveniences, discomforts and even dangers of travel (malaria, cholera, pirates, corsairs, robbers, quarantines, dangerous storms) to experience the Orient. (Craven 1878, Ferté-Meun 1822, Demont 1821a,b, Grosvenor 1842, Celine 1848, Londonderry 1842, Egerton 1841, Merton 1846, Beaufort 1861, Pfeiffer 1852 a,b)

This paper focuses mainly on the accounts of 19th century women travellers who claim to be participant observers or eyewitnesses of the female microcosmos in the East, including Osmanli (Ottoman) society:

"Every rule and custom of harem life that I describe in my book will be found exemplified in the varied scenes that 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," claims the English artist Mary Adelaide Walker (1886 A' xii-xiii)

The accounts reveal that Eastern women open their homes and provide warm hospitality to their western guests and friends. Eastern women are also eager to learn about the [western] *Other*, namely western customs and manners, and not only. Eastern women also visit the homes of western women in the East and some pay visits to lady travellers on their yachts, such as Princess Nazli—grand-daughter of Mehemet Ali and wife of Hali Pascha—who visited Lady Brassey (1880) on her yacht in Constantinople in 1878. In their private and intimate conversations with Eastern women, despite *difference* or cultural barriers, western women express their emotions, repeatedly using terms such as *I feel*, *I felt* and *feelings* and convey their solidarity and identification with the women of the East. (Kamberidou 2002, 2012) Indeed a great number of Western and Eastern women *share* their concerns, dreams, emotions and desires. They discuss marriage, childbirth, divorce, religion and adultery. They discuss human rights, women's social privileges and legal rights, and both Eastern and Western women express their feelings and aspirations for liberty and freedom. A significant number—beginning with Lady Montague (1718) and ending with Lucy Garnett (1895)—seem to envy the legal position of Muslim women, observing that they enjoyed greater legal rights and social freedoms than their European sisters.

European and American women are welcomed into all the women's meeting places or gender spheres of Ottoman society, observing, visiting or interacting with the different peoples: Turks, Yuruk, Kurds, Jews, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks, Gypsies, Georgians, Circassians, etc. They focus in particular on *the women behind the veil*. They describe their social and political power and influence, the imperial harem's pyramidal hierarchy, the powerful women of Ottoman society, the valide sultans (mothers of the sultans of slave descent) and their rise to power, the Ottoman women's networks, their role in the appointment, dismissal and execution of state officials and rivals, the political power of the Grand Vezir's wife and her "political office" (Blunt 1878: A' 108) in her harem, the *voluntary slaves* or the phenomenon of voluntary slavery, the women *entrepreneurs*, namely harem women who bought and trained young female slaves in order to re-sell them later for a profit or to offer them as gifts to the sultan and other powerful officials so as to empower their female network or consolidate their authority and positions. (d'Istria 1859, Vivanti 1865, Lott 1866, Melek Hanum 1872, 1873, Walker 1886, Blunt 1878 A', Garnett 1891, 1895)

"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 [Prime Minister], 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." argues Lucy

Garnett (1891: 461), confirming the accounts on the authority of the Grand Vezir's wife and the powerful women in Ottoman society of her predecessors Fanny Janet Blunt (1878) and Melek Hanum (1872, 1873).

Western women focus on the harem's elite slavery system, stressing that the enslaved black women from Africa and Arabia were never included in the Ottoman harem's elite slavery system, whereas the black eunuchs represented a status symbol. They describe harem music and dancing: the acrobats, the pantomimes, the musicians and the singers. They discuss their relationships with the eunuchs. They meet with the educated and *emancipated* women of Ottoman *high* society, who in the privacy of their homes had done away with the division of the haremlik and selamlık, educated their daughters in their private schoolrooms with English or French governesses and allowed them to take part in equestrian sports, in the privacy of their estates. They take part in the general amusements of the Osmanli women, "paying calls, attending *dughuns*, or wedding festivals, promenading, driving, shopping, and going to the bath" (Garnett, 1891: 463), an occasion of great festivity and ceremony for Eastern women. They are invited to participate in their picnics or excursions at the Sweet Waters of Europe, the Sweet Waters of Asia, the Sultans Valley and the Vale of Lindens (Fliamour). They participate in nearly all Eastern women's social gatherings, family pastimes, celebrations, feasts, ceremonies and rituals: the birth of a child, circumcision, wedding feasts, taking the bride to the hamam (bath) and so forth.

Certainly, many were fascinated by the Arab world and Arab hospitality in particular, such as Emilie H. Loyson, Lady Hester Stanhope, Princess Caroline (the Princess of Wales), Louise Demont and Celine (the Countess Stephano), to name but a few. For instance, while in Tunis in 1816, Caroline, the Princess of Wales and future Queen of England, enjoyed the magnificent hospitality of three harems where she was treated with honour and great respect. When she reached Tunis on April 3, 1816, Princess Caroline and her suite were all magnificently and warmly received at the palace of the Bey of Tunis. Three days later, on the 6th of April, 1816, they enjoyed a magnificent reception at the Bey's country palace, three miles from the town. While in Tunis they also paid a five hour visit to the seraglio of the Bey's eldest son, Prince Moustafa, who personally took her Royal Highness by the hand, and conducted her into his harem. (Demont 1821 a,b, Celine 1848)

With regard to their stay in the Bey's harem in Tunis on April 3, 1816, the Swiss travel writer Louise Demont (1821b), a member of her majesty's suite, informs us that the Bey took the Princess by the hand, and conducted her into this seraglio and they all followed, "however the gentlemen remained in the hall, it being forbidden for any man to enter the seraglio, under pain of death. We were introduced into a magnificent room: the women were dressed with incredible splendour, being loaded with gold, diamonds, and precious stones; their legs were uncovered, and their ankles encircled with diamond chains their fingers covered with rich rings, and the tips of them painted black. The Princess seated herself with the Bey and his first wife, upon rich cushions; [...] there were full two hundred different dishes, all served upon gold. After the repast, the slaves brought their finest perfumes, and sprinkled us with them from head to foot." (Demont 1821b: 16) In her memoirs later, Celine (1849), Princess Caroline's adopted daughter who accompanied her royal mother to Tunis, confirms

many of Demont's observations, adding her own, such as her intended long journey to the East.

Emilie Hayacinthe Loyson, an American by birth and French by marriage, also enjoyed Arab hospitality during her travels in Oriental lands in the years 1894-1896. In a letter to Rev. Dr. Edward Everett, dated December 1895, we learn that in Tunis she was frequently the guest of the Sheik-ul-Islam, Ahmed-Bel-Khodja, who she describes as a man who had a cultivated mind, consideration for the opinions of others, without prejudice or fanaticism, and was respected by Christians and Muslims: "His authority on religious questions is great throughout Islam, even with the Kalif-Sultan himself. He possesses a remarkably cultivated mind, open to science and reform, having charity for all men; And, though he is a most devout Mussulman, or, I should say because of it,--he has consideration for the opinions of others, without prejudice or fanaticism. He is respected by all Christians who know him, and venerated by all Mussulmans. We have been invited to a reception and banquet upon the marriage of one of his sons; And we were expected early in the afternoon [...] We had two hours of interesting and remarkably frank conversation, which was a combined course of Moslem and Christian theology, with something of human philosophy. [...] The Moslem bears the most incisive criticism with perfect good grace, as we have seldom found Christians able to do. (Loyson 1905: 107-109)

2. Theoretical discussion: the "barbarous East" and "civilized Europe" (Pardoe 1837 A'11)

Did western women really experience the Orient? Certainly, one could question the reliability of the female accounts, or how Western women really experienced the Orient due to their different socio-cultural perspectives, representations, prejudices or interpretations. Indeed, both women and men, due to a long literary tradition, had already experienced the Orient, before visiting the geographic region. (Melman 1995) Namely, they carried with them, to that region, the western or colonial gaze, i.e. their western European values, commonly shared images, notions, sensibilities, social stereotypes and views (Pratt, 1992; Mills 1993), such as the Victorian notions of propriety and the construction of womanhood, those relating to sexualism, morals and manners (Russett 1989), and undoubtedly Oriental fantasizing about polygamy, the exotic Orient and the harem institution.

Orientalism or what Edward Said (1986) describes as the distinction between *Western superiority* and *Oriental inferiority*, expanded and proliferated in the years of Western expansion. For example, Julia Pardoe (1837 A') examines and condemns western prejudices pertaining to "barbarous East" and "civilized Europe". On the other hand, Sarah Emily York (1853) and Harriet Martineau (1848) display religious and racial prejudices and myopic ethnocentricity. Lady Elizabeth Craven (1786), the French traveller, Mme de la Ferté-Meun (1822) and the English governess in Egypt, Emmeline Lott (1866) condemned certain domestic manners and customs such as regular home bathing, going to the public hamams or baths, Oriental dances and music. (Kamberidou 2003, 2006a), as opposed to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu who enjoyed the hamam, the harem performances held in her honour, as well as the dances of the subjects of the Port, e.g. the Greek dances in which she personally participated.

(Kamberidou 2006a) However, most western women did not seem to appreciate Oriental dance and music. Louise Demont (1821a,b), Mme de la Princesse de Belgiojoso (1855), Emmeline Lott (1866) and the Dowager Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava (1916) describe the harem dances and music as strange, curious, ugly, inconceivable, disgraceful, provocative, inappropriate, immoral, extraordinary, etc. They describe harem music as Arabian, Turkish, Persian, Egyptian, Eastern and Oriental, claiming it is the same for all the peoples of the East. (Kamberidou 2003, 2006a)

"There is only one dance in the Ottoman Empire, and it is the same for the Turks, the Arabs and all the Muslim nations spread out in this territory; It is the same for the Greeks and the Armenian subjects of the Sublime Port, and this universal dance does not deserve to be called a dance (or merit the name of dance) [...] I ignore what they find gracious in this dance." observes Mme de la Princesse de Belgiojoso (1855: 97), who was a guest in many harems during her travels in the depths of Asia Minor in 1852.

Euro-imperialism is also reflected in the female literature, i.e. the western or colonial gaze, views and positions pertaining to European economic and political expansion. (Pratt, 1992; Mills 1993) English women travellers such as Lady (Annie) Brassey (1880) and Mrs. Scott-Stevenson (1881) repeatedly express and defend their country's colonial experiences and goals with regard to Cyprus, Asia Minor, and so forth. For example, Lady Brassey (1880), a strong supporter of Britain's occupation of Cyprus, admits she was relieved that it would belong to England in perpetuity. In a letter dated Dec. 11, 1878 she asserts among other things, that "it had just been decided that the British Government were to retain Cyprus in perpetuity, and that they would probably also occupy some spot on the mainland, Alexandretta, in the Gulf of Scanderoon, being the most likely place." (Brassey 1878: 372) About two weeks prior to this, in a letter from Cyprus dated Wednesday, Nov. 27 1878, Lady Brassey expresses her concern about losing Cyprus to the Greek element, which she describes as *a perpetual thorn* in England's side, and is happy to hear of plans to populate Cyprus with poor Turkish refugees, stressing that: "the introduction of a large Mussulman population into the island would be a great thing, especially if it ever became a really permanent possession of England. If the Greek element should once prevail, it would be a perpetual thorn in our side, and the end would probably be that we should be requested to move out when we had done everything possible in the way of administrative reforms [...] The Turks on the other hand would suit the climate as well as the natives, and would be always contented with our rule. (Brassey 1880: 325-326)

The English traveller Gertrude Bell (1868–1926) who explored the Arab world (extensive travels in Asia Minor, Arabia, Greater Syria and Mesopotamia), is said to have been a spy who surveyed the regions as an archaeologist and mapped them to serve British policy. She contributed in founding modern Iraq and influencing British decision concerning the creation of nations in the Middle East. (Meyer & Shareen 2008) Although it is not the scope of this paper to examine the female accounts pertaining to the "removal" or destruction of antiquities by western travellers and *archaeologists* one need point out here that the renowned in her time *Queen of the Desert*, Lady Hester Stanhope (Merton 1846) discovered a medieval Italian

manuscript in Syria, according to which millions of gold coins were buried under the ruins of a mosque in Ashkelon. So she set out in 1815 to find the coins and persuaded the Ottoman authorities there to allow her to excavate, resulting in the first archaeological excavation in Palestine. She did not find the gold coins, but she discovered a marble statue which she ordered to be smashed into pieces and thrown into the sea!

A plethora of western European women experienced the *Orient*, and wrote about it. Imperialism or European colonialism—directly related to exploration and travel—had made many parts of the world secure for women travellers, especially in the mid to late 19th century and early 20th century. The number of English women travellers or travel writers is much greater than those of other nationalities (eg. French, Austrian, Swiss, German), a fact related to Britain's intervention in the Middle East (Orient), which contributed to the development of Mediterranean travel.

Travel for pleasure was an upper class European activity in the 18th and beginning of 19th century, but by the mid 19th century more women began travelling. Industrialization (the invention of the steam engine, steam train, steamers) had made travel more affordable and increased women's mobility: women from middle class, missionaries, professionalism, governesses, nurses, teachers, etc. However western women required a culturally legitimate excuse for their journey to the Orient. Travel, an interest in the foreign or the exotic was condemned in females but tolerated in the context of the pilgrimage and the vocational duty, which provided women with an escape from family constraints and social barriers, as well as an alternative to domesticity, especially for single [unmarried] women. Nevertheless, regardless of the social constraints, the overwhelming majority of lady travellers openly reveal their true intentions and passion for travel. (Kamberidou 2012)

3. Respecting the *Otherness* of the *Other*

Many women travel writers exhibited extraordinary, for their time, open-mindedness, respect, understanding and solidarity for the "*otherness* of the *Other*" (Patsantaras 2013), such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1718), Mary Adelaide Walker (1886), Fanny Janet Blunt (1878) and Lucy Garnett (1895) who seem to view Eastern manners and domestic life, e.i. gender relations and the harem institution, from a sociological or a historic angle rather than a moral or judgemental one. (Kamberidou 2012) Although most 19th century travellers were not necessarily opposed to imperialism or colonization, many were critical of the abuses it produced, such as the English traveller Mary Henrietta Kingsley, who explored West Africa in 1893 and 1895 and the American traveller Emilie Hayacinthe Loyson who travelled in Oriental lands in the years 1894-1896. The first, Mary Kingsley attacks the social prejudices of British politicians with regard to the peoples of Africa, and the second, Emilie Loyson proposes bridging the gulf between Christianity and Islam, good-fellowship and reconciliation through cultural exchange.

Mary Henrietta Kingsley attacks the social prejudices of British politicians: "stay at home statesmen, who think the Africans are awful savages or silly children- people who can only be dealt with on a reformatory penitentiary line." Her lobbying and lectures in England along with her two handbooks, *Travels in West Africa* (1897), and

West African Studies (1899) contributed to promoting tolerance or a new understanding of African tribes. (Blunt 1994) Her views on West African culture were controversial for her time, especially those on polygamy. She was criticized by the Church of England because she expressed her disapproval of missionaries converting African people and corrupting their religion, especially with regard to polygamy which she argued was practiced out of necessity, stressing that when converted African men were forced to choose one wife and abandon their other wives and children, this resulted in the impoverishment and destitution of their abandoned families, creating enormous societal changes and economic problems.

The English traveller and author Lucy M. J. Garnett (1891) also seems to approach 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, who she claims surpassed the number of four wives allowed a Muslim. Garnett argues that a Yuruk man needed at least seven wives as polygamy was necessary for survival, a means of acquiring the necessary labour for agricultural work, which enabled the men to work as shepherds or in camel breeding, as their social customs did not allow them to hire help, so they had to marry it. The demand for labour was so great that men had to buy their wives from their fathers and in urgent circumstances did not hesitate to steal women that belonged to other tribes:

"Unlike the Kurds the Yuruks are polygamous, the number of their wives often exceeding the limit of the four fixed by Mohammed. A man of average wealth marries at least seven helpmates, and he must be a poor man indeed who does not possess three. For, though a plurality of wives is to the Osmanli [Ottoman] an expensive luxury, it is to the Yuruk a necessity of existence. He requires a certain number of 'farm-hands' to enable him to pursue his calling of flock-master, camel-breeder, &c., and a social usage does not allow of his hiring such 'hands', he secures their services by marrying them. 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. Though the Yuruks are, as far as possible, endogamous, they do not scruple, when short of wives, to steal them from other tribes; And, the services of the women being in such request, the husband has to purchase them from the father with a sum of money." (Garnett 1891: 210-212)

3.1 Promoting "permanent peace between the millions of Christians and Mussulmans": "bridging the gulf between Christianity and Islam" (Emily Loyson 1905)

"Our author [Emilie H. Loyson] discovers that the Arab, though despoiled by our conquest, has preserved riches of which we cannot deprive him ... The vanquished finds therein a source of joy of which none can deprive him: for he has laid up his treasure in his heart." (Prince de Polignac, Colonel of the French Army in Algiers, Paris, July 4, 1897)

Exceptionally noteworthy, as they are unconventional and unique for the period, are Emilie Hayacinthe Loyson's observations, parts of which are presented below, including her recommendations for *permanent peace, bridging the gulf between Christianity and Islam* and cultivating understanding and reconciliation through *cultural exchange*, since diplomacy is unable to bridge the chasm. She argues adamantly that Christianity has great achievements to offer Islam and Islam has precious treasures to give in exchange:

"This moral atmosphere which encircles our globe to-day is like an overcharged electric belt that requires but a scintillation of diplomatic friction to spread rapine and carnage throughout the world. The lust of gold and the ambition of empire are the main driving forces in this menacing cataclysm [...] Leaving the lesser divisions, we here place ourselves before two most powerful standing armies on the earth; and they are the most powerful because they are the two greatest religious bodies existent. We do not count in numbers, but in moral forces; And their greatness lies neither in the wealth nor empires they represent, but in their common indestructible faith in their Common Creator, Universal Ruler, and Divine Father. On one side of these two formidable armies, is divided Christendom, armed *cap-a-pie* with all the refinements of science and modern invention for human slaughter; On the other *undivided* Islam, for the most part miserably accoutred with our worn-out matchlocks and broken swords. Christendom includes about four hundred million souls; Islam numbers nearly three hundred millions. Between these far-stretching battalions which stand, or rather bivouac, over against each other, there lies a neutral zone, which fallow green fields; And there sleeps Israel—alas among the tombs of the Prophets [...] Diplomacy can do but little to bridge the chasm which divides these millions of believers, and war can only widen it and envenom the horrible wound in the great heart of humanity. While arms are at rest for a time, or an armistice is declared, then is the opportunity to prepare for permanent peace. Let not her sentinels sleep on the watch towers!" (Loyson 1905: 2-3)

So what does she recommend? Arguing that Christianity has great achievements to offer Islam and Islam has precious treasures to give in exchange, Loyson proposes bridging the gap between Christianity and Islam, good-fellowship, friendly intercourse, reconciliation and understanding through cultural exchanges:

"When engineers would bridge over an abyss which yawns between two unequal shores, there must be a levelling process of cutting down one and building up the other. A similar operation is necessary if we would bridge the gulf between Christianity and Islam. And all the debris and scoria should be cast into the depths of the abyss to help build up over oblivion the grand highway of human happiness. When this is accomplished and we are able to pass over freely and in good fellowship, we shall discover that if **Christianity has great achievements to offer to Islam, Islam has treasures of priceless worth to give in exchange** [...] One of the best means of hastening this reconciliation between seemingly opposing principles, and between different races and opposing peoples, is friendly intercourse, good fellowship, and union between persons of different creeds or religious beliefs, as well as between different seekers after scientific truths. (Loyson 1905: 3-5)

Loyson also claims that, "as a Humanitarian believer I take a paramount interest in the religion of Islam which counts nearly three hundred millions of the firmest monotheists on the globe! – and that France has thirty million Moslem subjects in Africa alone, independent of her large possessions in the extreme Orient; And that there is united with my profound religious interest a bounden, patriotic duty, which must not be ignored [...] By my impression of these travels in Oriental lands I may be suspected of unusual sympathy for Mussulmans [...] I will say that I am certainly very sympathetic for the grand indomitable Arab race, and for the sublime, unswerving faith of Islam. Was not Abraham the father of Ismael, as well as Jacob? [...] I will state that I am also very sympathetic for the believers in the farther East: the Hindus, who, though they have not a positive conception of the Living God, are less than all others given to persecution because of religious dissimilarities, and make for peace on earth more than do those of other great religions. Moreover, I love the Jews—and with peculiar affection; For they are of the Ancient Race of Believers, chosen of God [...] In short, I am an orthodox Christian; And because I am a Christian, I am bound by my faith to seek and help, persuade, and love those who are sick, ignorant, unhappy [...] Yet, my sympathy for Islam does not prevent me from deploring their polygamy, their lack of energy, and the unwarranted seclusion of their women. Nor does my consideration for the Hindus prevent my disgust for their filthy fakirs and their obscene symbolism. Nor does my affection for the Jews assuage my ever-increasing sorrow for their unrighteous refusal of rehabilitation to the Great Jew—Jesus—that which the Christian world most justly claims to-day for a lesser Jew—Dreyfus." (Loyson 1905: 8-10) Concluding Loyson stresses that although she is a Christian she is not "blind or indifferent to the sins and vices to which Christians are given so often, in flagrant negation of their faith." (1905: 10)

In a letter addressed to Rev. Dr. Edward Everett Hale, of Boston, Massachusetts, dated from Tunis, December 1895, Loyson advocates the reconciliation of various religious beliefs, "**permanent peace between the millions of Christians and Mussulmans—many of whose provinces touch each other, and who are necessarily coming more and more into contact** [...] Unification is neither possible nor desirable. Reconciliation of various religious beliefs in the Brotherhood of Man is the only remedy for all this world's ills" (1905: 107)

4. Why they travelled, need one ask?

"In exactly the same manner as the artist feels an invincible desire to paint, and the poet to give free course to his thoughts, so was I hurried away with an unconquerable wish to see the world. In my youth I dreamed of travelling—in my old age I find amusement in reflecting on what I have beheld." (Ida Pfeiffer, March 16, 1850)

The overwhelming majority of lady travellers, as previously stated, openly reveal their true intentions and passion for travel. Even those who in the beginning of their books, letters, travelogues, etc., claim to be on a religious pilgrimage, at the same time, on the exact same page, in the same text, or else throughout their book, they repeatedly express their desire to explore, see and discover the world, expand their horizons, learn and study the peoples of the globe, acquire knowledge, discover

themselves and who they are, seek pleasure, break out of their gilded cages, escape gender oppression in Europe, etc.

Although the right to travel, single status and living alone, was not tolerated in western societies, a significant number of women travellers were not married, and among those that were many travelled alone. For example, Mme de la Ferté-Meun (1822: 183), travelling alone in the Orient from 1816-1819, without her husband, stresses that the purpose of her journey was the desire to learn all: "le desir de tout connaitre." She also argues that "men generally condemn us to stay by the fireplace [...] they decorate our cage and go as far as to embellish/adorn it. However, I have more ambition than that, I aspire for a place in the sun and for a very long time I have been secretly dreaming of the Orient." (Meun 1822: 3-4)

Princess Celine (Countess Stephano), the adopted daughter of Queen Caroline, from the island of Chios, a female Ulysses who travelled all her life, stresses that she has a great passion for travel, adding: "Nothing appears to me so unnatural as a stationary state of existence. It is intended for man to move from place to place, to visit his fellow creatures in distant lands, and to render homage to the Creator, by admiring the wonders of his works. (Celine 1849 A' 224) Frances Maclellan (1835) openly declares in the preface of her book that she travelled for pleasure. Even the missionary Sarah Emily York, admits that she wanted to study the peoples of the world, acquire opportunities for observation and "come to learn to know myself." (York 1853: 274)

The Austrian explorer Ida Laura Pfeiffer (1852) who travelled around the world alone all her life, experiencing tent-life and horse-back travel while visiting the Holy Land, Egypt, Hindostan, Persia and Asia Minor, to name a few, observes: "I have been called, in many of the public journals, a *professed tourist*; but I am sorry to say that I have no title to the appellation in its usual sense. [...] Nothing but a natural wish for travel, a boundless desire of acquiring knowledge, could ever enable a person to overcome the hardships, privations, and dangers to which I have been exposed." (Ida Laura Pfeiffer 1852: 333)

Three single women, the author Agnes Smith (1870), her sister Violet Smith and their friend Edith astounded their social environment when they announced they were going on a one year journey to the East:

"The Holy Land seems to be considered quite the tour for a gentleman. [...] So when two friends and myself resolved, in the summer of 1886, to absent ourselves for a year from home, for the purpose of visiting scenes endeared to us by so many hallowed associations, great was the consternation expressed by our friends at the idea of three ladies venturing on so lengthened a pilgrimage alone. 'Do you think they will ever come back? They are going amongst Mohamedans and barbarians,' said some, who knew of our intention. [...] And if our education does not enable us to protect ourselves from the influence of such dangerous opinions as, it is said, we shall hear in a varied society with which it may be our lot to mingle, what is that education worth?" (Smith, 1870: 1-2)

Many western women, risking their lives in order to learn, to see and explore, transgressed gender boundaries. They masqueraded as men or as Muslim women in order to enter the mosques, as did Lady Hester Stanhope in the beginning of the 19th century—who disguised as a Mameluk—visited the mosques of Damascus. In 1836,

the English author and artist Miss Julia Pardoe, disguised as a Turkish woman (not as a man), visited two mosques late in the evening during the Ramazan, that of Saint Sophia and the mosque of Sultan Ahmet, despite the warning of her Turkish host that if she is discovered she would lose her life (Pardoe 1837: 375-377).

Marie Dejean and her friend Nazib Hanum, the adopted daughter of the Princess Essemah Soultan—a sister of Sultan Mahmud, historically acknowledged as the exterminator of the Janissaries—were guests at the harem of Haider-Effendi in Constantinople, in 1836. That evening both women left the harem disguised as men and visited the mosque of Saint Sophia. (Melek Hanum 1872: 25) Fanny Janet Blunt (1878: B') frequently dressed as a Turkish women in order to circulate freely and visit the mosques during her twenty year residency in the East, as did Lady Elizabeth Craven (1789) and Lady Montagu (1718) before her.

Lady Stratford, the wife of Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, also transgressed gender boundaries, but not disguised as a man. She is reported to have visited and stayed on the Holy Mountain, namely at Mount Athos, not disguised as a man but as herself. Lady Stratford de Redcliff visited the monasteries of Mount Athos during the Crimean War (1853-1856), a place absolutely forbidden to women, even today! Up to today, we have no reports of a woman visiting Mount Athos.

According to Fanny Janet Sandison Blunt, daughter of the English Ambassador in Constantinople and later the wife of English Ambassador in Thessaloniki:

“Women and animals of the feminine gender are not allowed to enter the precincts of the Holy Mountain. This prohibition seems to be in some way connected with the curiosity of Lot’s wife, whose punishment is expected to befall the adventurous daughter of eve who should thus transgress. This superstition has, however, lost much of its force since Lady Stratford’s visit to the monasteries during the Crimean war, when some of the monks tremblingly watched for the transformation, till they had the satisfaction of seeing her Ladyship quit the dangerous precincts in the full possession of the graces that characterised her.” (Blunt 1878 B' 313)

4.1 Why they publish: "needed to share"

Western women surpassed the socio-cultural barriers of their societies during periods in history when not only travel outside of Europe, but publishing was also viewed as an exclusively male experience. Even those who published anonymously or with a male pseudonym, reveal their gender and their identity throughout their books. Emily A. Beaufort (1861 A'), who travelled to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Western Turkey, in her preface asserts— as did many lady travellers before and after her—that she “needed to *share* her experiences with the public. To show them with what ease and security ladies may travel alone in these countries, frequently supposed to be open only to strong and energetic men.” Mrs. R. L. Bensley (1896), after her journey to Sinai, upon her return home lost her vision, but needed to *share* her experiences so she wrote them down in Braille and her book was later published with the photos she had taken during her travels.

Fanny M. Taylor (1856), in her preface presents her reasons for writing, according to which she wanted to inform the public on the contributions and difficulties confronted by the professional nurses and other lady volunteers in the hospitals of

Constantinople during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Lady Harriet Catharine Egerton (1841), who visited the Holy Land, announces in her preface that she published her impression in order to contribute the profits of her book to the women of Ireland, specifically to the Committee of the Ladies' Hibernian Female School Society which had 232 schools and 13,696 scholars, "the only Society labouring in Ireland for the exclusive benefit of the female children of that country."

Many European women visited the Holy Land and wrote about it, such as Mme de la Ferté -Meun (1822) and E.A. Finn (1866). Harriet Martineau (1848) describes her Arabian journey and especially her five week experience in the desert in Egypt. Lady Ann Blunt (1881) embarked on a pilgrimage to Nejd and visited the court of an Arab Emir and the Bedouin tribes of the Euphrates, and wrote about it. Amelia B. Edwards (1888) wrote about her "Thousand miles journey up the Nile". One need reiterate here that the female travel literature was primarily written by white aristocrats and middle-class women that we can categorize into three groups, which I will briefly refer to. Each group could be extensively examined separately and comprise another study or area of concentration:

The first group or category is that of the *titled*, i.e. royalty or royal women such as queens, princesses, members of the aristocracy and their suite or entourage. Such an example is Caroline, the Princess of Wales, later Queen of Great Britain, who after separating with her husband was politically persecuted, deprived of seeing her daughter Princess Charlotte (1822), thus she exiled herself and travelled from 1814-1820 accompanied by the ladies and gentlemen of her suite, which included Louise Demont (1821a,b), Lady Charlotte Lindsay, Lady Forbes, Maids of Honour and her adopted daughter from Chios, Celine (1849) who later became a promulgator of the Greek cause, publishing her travel accounts and impressions and, as previously cited, continuing her travels to the East, after the Queen's death. Another example included in this category is the self-exiled princess Christine Trivulce de Belgiojoso or Mme de la Princesse de Belgiojoso known in her lifetime as "La princesse, journaliste renommée" (1855, 1858). She lived with her daughter in the depths of Asia Minor, in the valley of Eia-Maq-Oglou, a valley that she bought for 5,000 francs. From her home in this valley, which was near Angora and Verandechir, she began an eleven month journey in January of 1852 to explore the region, walking in the freezing desert and living in a tent. She did not consider the journey that difficult as she claims to have become accustomed to the dangers and discomforts entailed in a voyage in the Orient. (Belgiojoso 1855)

The second group is made up of the *middle class*, professional women, authors, artists, governesses, feminists, explorers and romantics who confess they want to experience life and see the world. This category focuses on domestic manners, harem life, the daily life of women in the East. It includes educated women, like Fanny Janet Blunt (1878) and Mary Adelaide Walker (1886) who both had over 40 years of residency and travel in different regions of the Orient and Ottoman society; women who travelled alone (without a male escort or husband), like Mme de la Ferté-Meun (1821), the English governess in Egypt Emmeline Lott (1866) and the English author Agnes Smith (1870); travelling couples, the women who travelled with their husbands as well as those who travelled with their fathers like Julia Pardoe (1837) and Mary Frances Felicia Skene (1847).

The third group is made up of the *women with a cause*, those that declare a social purpose for their journey or claim they have a calling: volunteers, missionaries, teachers-educators, nurses. This category includes the mass movement of women volunteers during the Crimean War and the wives of the English and French soldiers who followed their husbands to war, in the battlefield. Unlike the wives of the French soldiers, who were treated with respect and honour, those of the English soldiers were socially stigmatized, considered women of questionable moral values by their compatriots. (Kamberidou 2002)

5. Wo-manity: solidarity and understanding

Western women seem to identify with the women of the East. In expressing their solidarity, sympathy and understanding they invent terms such “Wo-manity” and “Slavedom”. (Harvey 1871: 71, Beaufort 1861: 399) In their writings they repeatedly use terms such as “woman-kind”, “liberty”, “freedom” “emancipation” and “womanhood” (Montagu 1718, Craven 1789, Guthrie, 1802 Lott, 1866, Melek Hanum 1872, 1873, Adalet 1890, 1892)

In their identification and solidarity with their gender Western women buy female slaves and liberate them, as did the Princess of Wales, Caroline during her travels in 1814-1820. At the slave market in Tunis, in 1816, Princess Caroline, the future Queen of Great Britain, bought and liberated 100 slaves and provided them with the necessary funds to return to their homes. In Cairo she bought six female slaves, provided them with dowries (financial support) and liberated them and in the Ottoman slave market in Athens she bought three female slaves, provided them with money and liberated them. (Demont 1821a, Celine 1848 A')

Celine, the adopted daughter of Princess Caroline, stresses that her royal mother discovered a slave market in Tunis for the sale of slaves of all nations and “purchased one hundred of these unfortunate beings, and restored them to liberty. Among them was the daughter of the Balearic Islands, and another was a beautiful Genoese female of good family. These liberated captives were provided with money to assist them in returning to their native countries. I shall never in my life forget the happy faces of the slaves restored to freedom by the Princess” (Celine 1848 A' 91-92)

One need reiterate here that Western women not only visit the slave markets, but they are warmly received—as official guests, as intimate and close friends or as employees—in harems (households) that corresponded to all the socioeconomic Ottoman classes. As a result they attack European prejudices and accuse male travellers of misleading and misinforming their readers, stressing that their accounts on Eastern women were based on their unrestrained imaginations, including second-hand and third-hand information, especially those with regard to domestic manners, the impropriety or immodesty of Eastern women. The first to do so, to attack European prejudices and accuse male travellers of “stupidity” is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1718) who is cited by many 19th century male and female travellers. In a letter to her sister the Countess of Mar dated April 1, O.S. 1717, from Adrianople Lady Montagu attributes western misconceptions on Turkish women’s *inappropriate* behaviour to “the stupidity of all the [western] writers that gave given accounts of them” (Montagu 1718, Montagu 1840: 122)

Miss Julia Pardoe, around 1837, also attacks European prejudices regarding the impropriety of Eastern women: “It is an amusing fact, that an idea of impropriety is

attached by Europeans who have never visited the East, to the very name of a harem; while it is not less laughable, that they can never give a reason for the prejudice! How little foundation exists for so unaccountable a fancy must be evident at once, when it is stated that the harem, or women's apartments, are held so sacred by the Turks themselves, that they remain inviolate even in cases of popular disturbance, or individual delinquency; the mob never suffering their violence to betray them into an intrusion on the wives of their victims; and the search after a fugitive ceasing the moment that the door of the harem separates him from his pursuers." (Pardoe, n.d.: 126)

After a thirty year residency in various regions of the East, the English artist-travel writer Mary Adelaide Walker (1886) argues that the male accounts were inaccurate, untrustworthy and "doubtless, superficial, for to gain any accurate knowledge of the home life of a people you must live amongst them and with them; and, more, you must meet them half way on the road of human sympathy and kindly feeling [...] No husband or master of a family would, under any circumstances, receive a friend within the limits of the harem, and the information on domestic matters can very rarely be gained but at second-hand, most often from sources inaccurate and untrustworthy. This rule of rigid exclusion has been relaxed, only within the last few years, in the case of medical men in the exercise of their profession." (Walker 1886 B' 38)

6. The real position of women in the religious system of Islam

"I think I never saw a country where women may enjoy so much liberty, and free from all reproach as in Turkey". (Lady Elizabeth Craven, Constantinople 1786: 205)

"It is easy to see that they have more Liberty than we have." (Lady Montagu, 1718)

Western and Eastern women discuss "the real position of women in the religious system of Islam" (Garnett 1895: 61) and discover that the legal position, rights and freedoms of Muslim women was far superior to that of the Christian women of Europe, especially with regard to the laws concerning inheritance, marriage, divorce and property rights. European women, beginning with Lady Montagu (1718) and ending with Lucy Garnett (1891, 1895), seemed to envy the legal position of the Muslim wife who enjoyed greater legal rights and social privileges of than her European counterpart.

One need point out here that in western societies, it was not until the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century that social movements emerged demanding legal rights for women, like the right to divorce, own property, receive alimony and vote. Whereas in the Islamic world, a woman had the right to own and control property, to inherit it, to dispose of it as she wished, to divorce her husband and maintain her property, to receive compensation, to plead her case in court, etc. For centuries it was customary for wealthy Muslim women to make donations, endow buildings, mosques, mausoleum, public baths, etc. They had religious rights and obligations as well, the right to the honourable title of *Hafiz* which was conferred not only to men, but to the women who had committed the whole of the Koran to memory, the right to participate in the pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and so forth. (Ferté-Meun 1822, Blunt 1878, Garnett 1895)

"The legal position of free Muslim women was the same as it had been for the last thirteen hundred years!" argues Lucy Garnett (1895), in her article entitled *Women under Islam: their social status and legal rights*. "As a daughter, she was entitled, on the decease of her father, to inherit his property in common with her brothers, in a proportion determined by law according to the number of his children. As a wife, she had the uncontrolled possession and disposal both of the wealth, which was hers before marriage, and of that, which may have subsequently been accrued to her. She could inherit property without the intervention of trustees, and dispose of it, as she pleased during her lifetime or at her death. No doctrine of coverture existed for her; she could sue or be sued independently of her husband, and also sue or be sued by him. In the event of her suffering wrong, or being accused of wronging others, she was at liberty to plead her own cause before the public tribunals, and often does so most ably and eloquently. 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. To quote from the Hedaya (or Guide, a commentary on Muslim law): 'It is incumbent on the husband to provide a separate apartment for his wife's habitation, to be solely and exclusively appropriated by her, because this is essentially necessary to her, and is therefore her due, the same as her maintenance,' &c [...] The law of Islam allows a man to marry four wives, and to be the owner of an unlimited number of slaves. A second wife means an extra suite of apartments, an extra slave or train of slaves, according to her rank; for each hanum must have her own special attendants and an extra allowance of pin-money." (Garnett 1895: 60-62)

The female accounts 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, as far as the written law was concerned, enjoyed greater legal rights than their European counterparts. (Montagu 1718, Pardoe 1837, Celine 1848, Walker 1886, Blunt 1878, Adalet 1890, 1892, Garnett 1895)

"It is true their law permits them four wives; but there is no instance of a man of quality that makes use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer it.", argues Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1718), the wife of the English Ambassador in Constantinople, adding "When a husband happens to be inconstant (as those things will happen), he keeps his mistress in a house apart, and visits her as privately as he can, just as it is with you."

In a letter to her sister the Countess of Mar dated April 1, O.S. 1717, Lady Montagu, writes: "Upon all I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire: the very divan pays respect to them; and the Grand-Signior himself, when a pasha is executed, never violates the privileges of the harem (or women's apartment), which remains untouched and entire to the widow. They are queens of their slaves, whom the husband has no permission so much as to look upon." (Montagu 1718).

The accounts reveal an obsession with the freedoms and rights of Ottoman women, since in European societies women were economically vulnerable, even those of the aristocracy, like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1718) and Lady Elizabeth Craven (1789). Lady Montagu and her husband separated a few years after their departure from Constantinople and she was left with nothing and completely reliant on his good will for her maintenance. It was even worse for Lady Elizabeth Craven (1786), who began her travels in 1786, after her divorce from William Craven, who not only left

her with no financial support but he deprived her of her seven children! No wonder the introduction of her travelogue is an attack on abusive and tyrannical husbands.

Lady Craven claims that the behaviour of the Turks towards women is an example for all nations! She argues that the legal position of Muslim wives is much superior to that of their western sisters, especially with regard to divorce and financial compensation. Lady Craven (1789) observes that the Turkish lady has so much Liberty that she is the happiest creature on earth, and that no woman enjoys so much "Liberty" and security as does a Turkish wife, stressing that when a Turk is beheaded and his property confiscated, they never touch his wife's wealth, since the harem is considered a sacred place:

"The Turks in their conduct towards our sex are an example to all other nations—A Turk has his head cut off—his papers are examined—every thing in his house seized—but the wife is provided for; her jewels are left her. The Harem is sacred even to that rapacious power which has seized the master's life, only because he was rich—It may be said, that in Turkey likewise, women are perfectly safe from an idle, curious, impertinent public and what is called the world, can never disturb the ease and quiet of a Turkish wife—Her talents, her beauty, her happiness, or misery, are equally concealed from malicious observers. Of misery, unless a Turkish woman is beyond conception unreasonable, I cannot imagine that her portion can be great; for the wife whose wretched husband earns subsistence by carrying water, or burdens, sits at home bedecked with jewels, or goes out as her fancy directs, and the fruits of his labour are appropriated to her use [...] and I repeat it, Sir, I think no women have so much liberty, safe from apprehension, as the Turkish—and I think them, in their manner of living, capable of being the happiest creatures breathing" (Craven 1789: 234-235)

Miss Julia Pardoe observes: "All this may, and indeed must appear startling, to persons who have accustomed themselves to believe that Turkish wives were morally manacled slaves. There are, probably, no women so little trammelled in the world; so free to come and to go unquestioned, provided that they are suitably attended; while it is equally certain that they enjoy this privilege like innocent and happy children, making their pleasures of the flowers and the sunshine; and revelling like the birds and bees amid the summer brightness, profiting by the enjoyment of the passing hour, and reckless or thoughtless of the future," stressing that Muslim women "are not like birds in a cage, or captives in a cell;-far from it; there is not a public festival, be it Turk, Frank, Armenian, or Greek, where they are not to be seen in numbers, sitting upon their carpets, or in their carriages, surrounded by slaves and attendants, eager and delighted spectators of the revel. Then they have their gilded and glittering caiques on the Bosphorus, where, protected by their veils, their ample mantles, and their negro guard, they spend long hours in passing from house to house, visiting their acquaintance, and gathering a dispensing the gossip of the city." (Pardoe, n.d.: 127)

Annie Jane Harvey (1871), Fanny Janet Blunt (1878) and Mary Adelaide Walker (1886 B') confirm that a Muslim wife had to be provided for according to her socioeconomic status—with separate dwellings or apartments, servants, slaves, coaches, money, and not only! She had the legal right to ask for a divorce if her husband was unable to maintain her according to her rank, or in the lifestyle she had

been accustomed to before the marriage. Additionally, in case of divorce her husband had no rights to her wealth or belongings.

Fanny Janet Blunt (1878), referring to women's property rights, observes, among other things: "The dowry is, of course, among Muslims is given by the bridegroom; the only dowry Turkish brides are bound to bring consists of a rich trousseau. Should the lady possess any property the husband cannot assume any right over it, nor over any of the rest of her belongings. The wisdom and generosity of this law cannot be too highly commended; it is an indispensable clause in the canons of polygamy. So easy is it for a Turk to divorce his wife that he has only to say to her in a moment of rage, 'Cover thy face, thy nekyah is in thy hands', and she ceases to be his wife and must at once leave his abode, carrying with her, luckily for her, 'bag and baggage'." Blunt 1878 A' 81)

Women who are divorced are not socially stigmatized, argues a Turkish woman from Ankara, Adalet (1892) in her article entitled *Turkish Marriages viewed from a Harem*, dated July 1892:

"In Turkey a divorce has not all the weight attached to it by Europeans. A woman divorced from her husband is not treated with contumely, even in the highest classes, and often marries again, this being caused by the facility with which a man may divorce his wife. There is no court to go to, and no trial to ensue. A man simply states to his wife that he has divorced her, on which she will go away, and the man having repeated the same to the *cadi* (judge) will have an act of divorce written, which he will send to her. If it is the first or second time that this occurs he may take her back again without any formality ensuing, and it will be only after the third that she will be lost to him forever. Seeing the ease with which this may be done, it is not surprising if men abuse it and divorce their wives for a fault which is hardly worthy of a harsh word. However, in the higher classes it is not so general as in the lower, where a man often divorces his wife for a badly cooked dinner or an unsewed button, knowing very well that if he repents of it he may have her back before evening. I know a lady who was divorced from five husbands, and is now living with her sixth, without having incurred any worse censure than that which an unaccommodating temper must bring to all who indulge in it." (Adalet 1892: 136-137)

6.1 Obstacles to divorce

The female accounts argue that the laws protected married women from men's abuse of the divorce laws. A serious obstacle to a man's facility to divorce, other than religious and social restrictions, including public opinion, which condemned frivolous divorces, was the institution and custom of the *nekyah* (marriage contract). The *nekyah* was contracted before the marriage, during the betrothal ceremony, where they appointed a sum of money to be paid to the wife in case of divorce. Without the payment of this money, a divorce could not be had legally. This marriage contract protected a married women by maintaining her in the position of legal wife, for if the husband decided to divorce her, he would be obliged by law to pay her the *nekyah*-money or settlement. (Harvey 1871, Melek Hanum 1873, Blunt 1878 A', Walker 1886 B', Garnett 1895)

According to the accounts, the nekyah was simultaneously a legal document, a civil contract, a marriage contract, a covenant, a marital agreement, as well as a type of financial dower, settlement or premarital financial arrangement, prepared during the betrothal, to be paid to the wife if her husband decided to divorce her. It was essentially her protection against divorce. Undeniably the nekyah contract, could be annulled by a husband for the simplest of reasons, but he was obligated to pay his wife this compensation (the nekyah money) as well as her nafakah (three-month alimony) and he had no rights to her trousseau and her private fortune. (Harvey 1871 et al) Obviously, many 19th century European women travellers envied this arrangement, including those of the 18th century like Lady Montague and Lady Craven, who, as previously cited, had been divorced by their husbands and were economically vulnerable.

More analytically, Lucy Garnett (1895), who repeatedly cites many of Fanny Janet Blunt's (1878) observations in her works, argues:

“Though great facilities appear, at first sight, to be given to a man in the matter of divorce women are, on the other hand, safeguarded from a too arbitrary exercise of this prerogative by certain wise regulations, which to a great extent modify such facilities in practice. ‘The curse of Allah,’ said the Prophet, ‘rests on him who capriciously repudiates his wife.’ And, in addition to religious and social restrictions, a serious obstacle to divorce is offered by the nekyah. This is the settlement upon the wife at the betrothal of a considerable sum of money, to be paid to her in the event of such dismissal from her husband’s roof, and without the payment of which no divorce could legally take place. So essential is such a dower considered that, even were mention of it omitted from the marriage contract, the law would presume it by virtue of the contract itself. A Muslim marriage being a purely civil contract, consisting of a proposal on one side and acceptance on the other, and rendered legal by the testimony of two witnesses, it can also be dissolved by the contacting parties according to one of three methods of procedure.” (Garnett 1895: 60-61)

With regard to these three methods of procedure, a marriage could be dissolved firstly, by mutual consent. If a couple were not on good terms with each other, and all attempts at reconciliation made by their friends and relatives were unavailing, *a divorce by mutual consent* was pronounced, and the woman returned to her father’s house, taking with her, besides the dower (nekyah), everything she brought into the marriage and all of which she had become to possess since her marriage. (Garnett 1895)

Secondly, if a man divorced his wife *without her consent*, she was legally entitled to her nekyah money and her nafaka, the three month alimony or compensation (Harvey 1871, Melek Hanum 1872, Blunt 1878 B’, Walker 1886 B’)

Thirdly, a wife could ask for divorce, claim her release and be entitled to receive payment of the nekyah for various reasons, among which were desertion, cruelty or neglect to maintain her in the degree of comfort to which she was entitled to which was determined by her social status. A wife could claim the right of divorce, but some reason had to be assigned for the demand, and amongst the reasons defined by law and regarded as sufficient to justify it, was the impossibility in which a husband may find himself of maintaining his wife in a style suitable to her social rank (Melek

Hanum 1872, Adalet 1892, Walker 1886 B'), a reason why most Muslim men preferred to marry islamized slaves rather than a free Muslim woman who had legal and social rights, including a family to defend and secure them. (Kamberidou 2012)

If however, the wife, without such adequate reason and *contrary to the desire of her husband*, requested a divorce, she obtained it only by foregoing her dower, (the nekyah-money or settlement), her three month alimony (the nafakah), her trousseau and her private fortune, unless there had been a special agreement contracted before the marriage. (Garnett 1895, Adalet 1892, Harvey 1871)

As for the much-discussed question of *the custody of children*, Adalet (1892) stresses that this was settled for Muslims at the outset by Mohammed, who decreed that a son must remain with his mother so long as he requires her care and a daughter until she is of a marriageable age. If a child was born to a couple after their separation, and the mother nursed it, the father was required to pay her for doing so; and, if wealthy, he was required to spend proportionately for the maintenance of the mother and nurse out of his plenty. If the mother died, the right of custody reverted to her female relatives, if any were living, the child's maternal grandmother having the first right, and, on her death, and failing a sister of suitable age, its maternal aunts. Should the mother have been without female kin, the father's mother and sisters brought up the children.

With regard to the widows of the deceased, they seem to be well taken care of as well. Adalet (1892: 140) informs us that, if childless, a widow inherited a quarter of her husband's fortune, as well as the sum first settled on her in the pre-marital contract (the nekyah/dower), but if she had a child she had the right to the eighth part of her husband's fortune, the rest being divided between the other relations. If a free Muslim woman who possessed a private fortune died, then the husband inherited one quarter, another went to the children and the rest to the parents of the deceased. If she was childless then the husband took the half.

"Barring the law on divorce," (Adalet 1892: 140) concludes that "the interest of women is well looked to and it seems to me that we cannot complain of our first lawgivers. That all marriages should be happy is impossible, but seeing the strange manner in which we become acquainted with our future husbands, and all the chances that exist against our happiness, we have comparatively few failures in that line, and can be well proud of our wedded life."

Naturally, there are accounts pertaining to violations of Eastern women's legal rights and social privileges. As an example, I will briefly refer to Melek Hanum, who was the one and only wife of Kibrizli Mehemet Pacha before he divorced her, married Ferideh Hanum (who became his one and only wife) and later became the Grand Vezir of Turkey. Melek Hanum in both her books reports violations of her legal rights as well as those of her divorced daughter, Aisheh Hanum, the Grand Vezir's daughter. Both women were deprived of their nekya money (settlement), their nafaka and their personal property even though their husbands divorced them with the first degree/formula of divorce:

"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. The divine law, public opinion, all are nil; the only recognized law is the caprice of those who govern [...] 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 [...] Now where are women's rights amongst this fight between the strong and the weak?", argues Melek Hanum (1872: 352), who escaped from Turkey in December 1865 with her daughter and reached Greece in 1866.

6.2 Protection against men who abuse divorce privilege

While Western women envied Eastern women's legal rights, they seem to be disturbed by the facility with which a Muslim husband could capriciously divorce his wife three consecutive times by simply just stating to her that he has divorced her, without the necessity of assigning any reason for the act. However what really seemed to shock them was the strategy husbands used to reclaim their wives after divorcing three times. What was this strategy? When I man had divorced his wife a third time, in order to get her back she had to marry another man and pass the night with him first. In reality, the "intermediary husband" (Blunt B' 1878) was actually a preventive measure for men who abused the divorce privilege.

To begin with, a husband could divorce his wife even in her absence, by simply announcing before a witness or in public that he divorces her. There was no social weight, scandal or stigma attached to divorce. There were no formalities or legal procedures, no court to go to or trial that ensued. (Adalet 1892) The accounts refer to three degrees or types of divorce. For example, according to Melek Hanum, who was divorced by her husband in her absence, divorce was "of three sorts; the first degree of divorce is the weakest, for the husband who wishes to do away with it has only to recite a formula, and pass his hand over his wife's head to render the marriage valid again [...] when the husband showers upon the wife a battery of three combined divorces which he rapidly discharges upon the woman's ear; then it becomes very difficult to renew the matrimonial bond. The divorce by which I had been separated from his Highness [the Grand Vezir of Turkey, Kibrizli-Mehemet-Pasha] was not of this dreadful description, stigmatized by the Koran under the name of *Telakisalisseh*; it was a simple divorce (of the first-degree), which a spark would have sufficed to re-ignite." (Melek Hanum 1872: 354-355)

However, what really seemed to shock Western women, as previously mentioned, was the strategy a husband used to reclaim his wife after he had divorced her for the third time, a strategy to which Muslim women, such as Adalet and Melek Hanum do not refer to in their writings. The first western account on this strategy is Lady Montagu's: "I could not believe it, yet it is certainly true that when a man has divorced his wife in the most solemn manner, he can take her again upon no other terms than permitting another man to pass a night with her; and there are some examples of those who have submitted to this law rather than not have back their beloved." (1840: 175-177)

Fanny Janet Sandison Blunt (1878 B' 82) observes that "a Turkish husband has the power of divorcing his wife and taking her back twice; but should he send her away for the third time, she must be married to another man before she can again return to

her first husband. This strange and disgusting law is meant as a check upon people disposed to abuse too often the privilege of divorce."

The person asked to fulfill this strange position of "intermediary husband", according to Blunt, was usually "advanced in years, generally belongs to the poorer class, and receives a sum of money for his services. The conditions are that he should enter the abode of the lady for one night only, with every right over her of a legal husband, and quit it the next morning, telling her, "Thy liberty is in thy hands, thou art no longer my wife." Cases have been known, when the old gentleman, finding his position pleasant, has refused to give the lady up, and if this should happen the first husband is wholly without remedy and must forego his desire of reunion with his former wife. An incident of this kind happened at Adrianople, affording much merriment to my Turkish friends. The couple concerned were very fond of each other, and lived happily together except at times, when the husband, under the influence of *raki*, would become quarrelsome. The wife, a fine spirited woman, would retort, and violent disputes followed, ending in alternate divorce and reconciliation. This happening once too often, the husband, unable to repossess himself of his spouse, had recourse to an old effendi who had seen better days, and promised 20 pounds for his services. The effendi, according to custom, went to the bath, dressed himself in a new suit of clothes, and being presented at the appointed time, the nekyah ceremony was gone through. The old gentleman walked into the harem, seated himself upon the lady's sofa, and began to enjoy through the fumes of his nargile, the sweet vision of his unlooked-for happiness; while the lady, whose dreams did not exactly harmonise with his, after offering the acquaintance-cup of coffee, generally shared by the wife on such an occasion, preferred standing at a respectful distance. [...] He decided upon remaining master of the situation, leaving the poor husband to lament the loss of his wife and his 20 pounds, and quite regardless of the useless burden he would become to the doubly-injured lady." (Blunt 1878 B' 82-83)

7. Concluding remarks: bridges to understanding

"To gain any accurate knowledge of the home life of a people you must live amongst them and with them; and, more, you must meet them half way on the road of human sympathy and kindly feeling." (Mary Walker 1886 B' 38)

Many studies have extensively examined travel writings that objectify the peoples of the Orient, accounts that exaggerate Oriental customs and present the superiority of the Europeans, e.g. the Victorian women and men that describe the Africans as savages that need to be tamed, those that focus on the immoral or inappropriate sexual behaviour of Eastern women, and so forth. So I acknowledge that in focusing on the accounts that embraced diversity and understanding of the peoples and manners of the East, I neglected those pertaining to violations of Eastern women's legal rights for the reason that we have already "heard quite enough of the dark side of Islam." (Loyson

1905:6) Whereas research is limited on travel writers who examine and condemn western prejudices pertaining to the "barbarous East" and "civilized Europe" (Pardoe 1837 A' 11), like Emily Loyson (1905) who proposes cultural exchanges between Christian and Muslim societies and promoting permanent peace by bridging the gulf between Christianity and Islam, among other things. So we should no longer examine and disseminate the accounts that focus on *differences* and *tolerance* for the *inferior Other*—as they have been extensively researched in the last two decades. We need to give attention to those that celebrate or embrace diversity, *respect for diversity*, in addition to the accounts that examine "commonalities" and "sameness" (Kimmel 2004), regardless of race, colour, religion, etc.

Essential to begin building *bridges to understanding* is focusing on and disseminating the vast, diverse and multi-faceted thematology (subject matter) in the female writings that touch many issues and questions, not necessarily related to gender but simultaneously viewed from a gender perspective. To facilitate and contribute to building *bridges to understanding*, we need to highlight or emphasize the information provided in the numerous female accounts that exhibit extraordinary, for their time, open-mindedness, respect, understanding and solidarity for the women (and men) of the East, such as that found in the writing of Mary Walker (1886), Fanny Janet Blunt (1878), Emily Loyson (1905) and Lucy Garnett (1891) who seem to view Eastern manners and domestic life, including gender relations and the harem institution, from a sociological, a historic or an ethnographic angle rather than a moral or judgemental one. This is not difficult to accomplish, as the information is available since thousands of women travelled and wrote about it, especially in the 19th century, the majority travelling to escape the gender oppression of their western societies.

Without a doubt, Western women had easier access to family life in Eastern societies and most of them seemed to enjoy the warm hospitality of the East. Their gender allowed them to research, study, learn and become *experts* in areas where men had no access! Eastern women not only opened their homes to their western guests and friends, but they opened their *hearts*. This type of communication, interaction or *sharing* contributes to creating *bridges to understanding*, namely bridging cultural gaps. In other words, Eastern women, in their intimate and confidential contacts with western women shared their feelings, concerns as well as their "commonalities." (Kimmel 2004) They were warmly received into the homes or dwellings (tents) of hundreds of Eastern women (and men): Turks, Kurds, Yuruks, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Circassians, Georgians, Arabs, etc. They were welcomed into the harems and the selemeleks (men's quarters) of Asia Minor, the zenanas of India, the huts of Africa etc. Certainly, many European women identified with the native people and related to them, without objectifying them, because they too, as women, were objectified in their western societies. To reiterate, the plethora of 19th century accounts, the rich thematology, and particularly that which focuses on understanding and respect for diversity need to be studied and disseminated.

"Is it right, fair, or just, to visit other people in their homes, or in their countries, wherever they dwell, and come away to decry them? No! It is not right! [...] We did not go to Africa and Asia on a hunting expedition in quest of big game not to be found

in Europe: lions, tigers elephants [...] We went seeking our fellow-men whom we knew not; New and unlike peoples, of gentle manners and simple faith; With all their varied environments." (Loyson 1905:6-7)

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