

## CULTURES IN DIALOGUE

Series Editors: Teresa Heffernan and Reina Lewis

### SERIES ONE

#### ORIENTALISM, OCCIDENTALISM, AND WOMEN'S WRITING

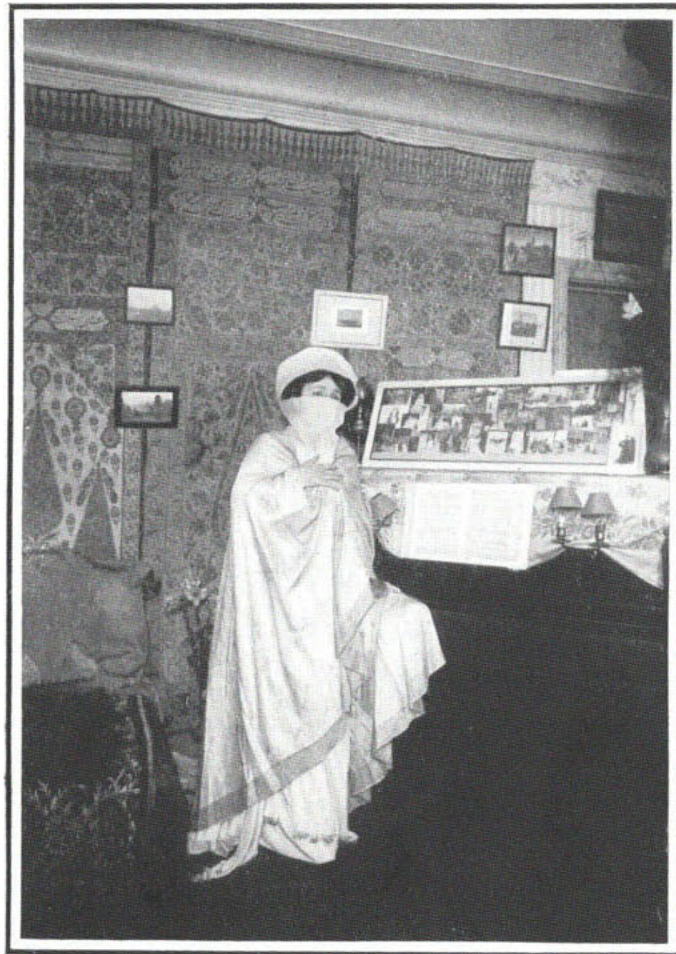
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**CULTURES IN DIALOGUE**  
**SERIES ONE**

Volume Three



## **A Turkish Woman's European Impressions**



ZEYNEB IN HER PARIS DRAWING-ROOM  
She is wearing the Yashmak and Feradjé, or cloak.

# A TURKISH WOMAN'S EUROPEAN IMPRESSIONS

BY

ZEYNEB HANOUM

(HEROINE OF PIERRE LOTI'S NOVEL  
"LES DÉSECHANTÉES")

EDITED & WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

GRACE ELLISON

WITH 23 ILLUSTRATIONS

FROM PHOTOGRAPHS & A DRAWING BY

AUGUSTE RODIN



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# CULTURES IN DIALOGUE

Series Editors: Teresa Heffernan and Reina Lewis

*Cultures in Dialogue* returns to active circulation out of print sources by women writers from the East and the West. Tracing cross-cultural and intra-cultural exchanges over three centuries, this project brings to light women's engagement with discourses of gender emancipation, imperialism, nationalism, Islam, and modernity. While the figure of Woman—Orientalized and Occidentalized—has been a central and fought over symbol in the construction of an East/West divide, women's own texts have been marginalized. Focusing on dialogue instead of divide, *Cultures in Dialogue* uses women's varied and contestatory contributions to reconsider the historical tensions between Eastern and Western cultures, offering a nuanced understanding of their current manifestations.

## SERIES ONE:

### ORIENTALISM, OCCIDENTALISM, AND WOMEN'S WRITING

Series One of *Cultures in Dialogue*, consisting of a mix of memoir, travelogue, ethnography, and political commentary, considers the exchanges between and amongst Ottoman and British and American women from the 1880s up to the 1940s. The seismic shift in the understanding of identity as the Ottoman Empire was rapidly being displaced at the end of the nineteenth-century opened up a space for discussions about female liberty and its relationship to Islamic, Turkish, and Western nationalism, about the gendering of private and public spheres, about rural/urban tensions and questions of class mobility, about the status of the harem, and about colonial and imperial interests. In the nineteenth-century the

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cosmopolitan Islamic Ottoman Empire began to shift from a concept of citizenship based on belief to one based on place of birth, culminating in an independent Turkey and radically altering the relationship of women to the nation. In this complicated exchange, some elite Ottoman women, who refused Orientalist portrayals of themselves as enslaved, asserted an agency and nostalgically invested in this disappearing culture whilst others rejected the old ways in favor of modernizing the nation. So too, some Western women, enjoying the status and luxuries Ottoman culture afforded, replicated even as they challenged Orientalist tropes. Further there were Western women promoting the force of empire, in the name of civilization. Where some bound feminism to imperialism and modernity, other Eastern and Western women interrupted this collusion, opening up other avenues and other models of feminism.

The twelve volumes in Series One trace the range of opinion found among Western and Ottoman women in this period, offering a chance to see how their dialogue influenced and defined each others' views. They also illustrate the challenges of writing about Ottoman female life when the harem featured both as a desirable cultural commodity in Western harem literature and as the socializing spatial relations that both facilitated discussions of female emancipation and were the subject of debate in the Islamic and Western world.

For some women, the release from veiling and seclusion promised personal and political liberty, crucial to the reform of the imperial sultanic regime. Other women viewed the shift to the modern nation with more ambivalence, understanding it as a surrendering of a long-standing agency available to elite Ottoman women. The British author Grace Ellison, for instance, was a reluctant suffragist whose repeated visits to Turkey convinced her that the luxury and protection enjoyed by elite Ottoman women should not be too quickly abandoned for Western models of female independence. Zeyneb Hanoum, on the other hand, was a Muslim Ottoman who initially longed to escape from the restrictions of the harem, dreaming of Western freedom and actively resisting the racialized portrayals of Ottoman women as passive odalisques. However she was sorely disappointed when, during her travels in Europe, she came to understand Western women as differently but as equally confined. Both writers



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explored the double-edged sword of modernity as they nostalgically invested in an already vanishing model of Ottoman femininity. Veiling, following the tradition of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the eighteenth century, was sometimes read by Western writers subversively as permitting sexual agency and also, as was the case with Ellison, as offering the possibility of passing as “other.” So too, for Eastern women veiling and seclusion were not necessarily about lack of power; rather, for elite women, such as Melek Hanoum, within the different Ottoman conceptualization of the public, the segregated household guaranteed their access to power.

Unlike Ellison, however, there were Western women who traveled to the Orient with a less complicated and more typically Orientalist and colonialist mission of “liberating” Turkish women from their slavery. Lady Annie Brassey, for example, was opposed to women getting the vote in England, which renders suspect her desire to “free” the veiled woman and exposes her imperialist interests. Privileged Ottoman women, nevertheless, as suggested in the accounts of women such as Musbah Haidar, enjoyed as much freedom to travel and were as educated as Western women like Brassey, further challenging Western stereotypes. Yet there were also Ottoman women, such as Halide Adivar Edib, who rejected the nostalgic investment in Ottoman identity in favor of a Turkish nationalist discourse of progress and modernization. This shift toward nationalism, however, threatened the cosmopolitan nature of Ottoman society. The new model provoked writers like Demetra Vaka Brown, a Greek Christian who was able to claim allegiance to an Ottoman Empire but who was necessarily excluded from a Turkish nation, to protest the imposition of national boundaries even as writers like Lucy Garnett promoted, in her obsessive attempt to categorize the women of Turkey, a racialized understanding of nationalism. But not all Western writers were as oblivious to the impact of the increasingly segregated Empire. Anna Bowman Dodd protested the presence of American missionaries who actively fermented dissent amongst Armenian Christians by teaching them they were “better” than Muslims. Selma Ekrem, from a renowned and progressive Muslim family, also discussed the negative impact of the model of racialized nationalism on what had been an inclusive and multi-ethnic empire.

If understandings of the nation, of private and public spaces, and of liberty differed across the East/West divide, so too did the

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understanding of class. The Ottoman system was not based primarily on lineage and blood and allowed for considerable social mobility, as was the case with Melek Hanoum, who married into the Muslim bureaucratic elite from relatively humble Greek/Armenian Christian origins. Given that literacy and foreign languages were for most of this period the preserve of the educated elite, it is no surprise that all the Eastern writers in this series came from this predominantly urban sector, many of them hailing from prominent families. Despite the social positions of the authors, still, traces of non-elite women's lives feature as integral to the social relations witnessed in Ottoman women's accounts. The investigations of Western writers, such as Hester Donaldson Jenkins, also touch specifically on the lives of subaltern women. Although these authors focus on cosmopolitan centers, such as Istanbul, provincial and rural life is also covered, particularly in the work of the American author Ruth Frances Woodsmall, who like many traveled widely in the region.

## ICONIC DISENCHANTMENT: EVALUATING FEMININITY IN THE EAST AND THE WEST

By Reina Lewis

The title page of Zeyneb Hanoum's book *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions* immediately alerts us to the web of connections out of which it was born. We learn that the author was the "heroine of Pierre Loti's novel *Les Désenchantées*" and that the volume we are about to read was edited and introduced by Grace Ellison. The presence of photographs is heralded along with the announcement that the illustrations include a drawing by Auguste Rodin. We also see that the book was published in Britain and America. When this book was printed in 1913, the idea that a Turkish woman—a woman that the Western reader would presume had been raised in a harem—could express herself at all would have been quite remarkable. That she could offer opinions on Europe would have made it even more intriguing. And that she was apparently connected to famous artistic and literary figures of the day would have lent some cultural capital to the unknown Turkish writer.

In the well-established field of harem literature, most accounts had been produced by Western women—who with their gender privilege could see the sites forbidden to Western men (see Melman). Beyond the generic interest attached to the rare writings of any harem inmate, Zeyneb Hanoum was in addition already a celebrity as the personage behind Loti's 1906 *roman à clef*.

Her account thus comes to us wrapped in allusions and associations, presented as letters, framed by someone else's introduction and footnotes, illustrated by other hands and often regarded as part of an ongoing literary exposé. This coupled with her own sometimes fanciful style of writing makes piecing together the "truth" of Zeyneb Hanoum's life something of a challenge.

**WHO WAS ZEYNEB HANOUM?**

Zeyneb Hanoum was the pen name of an elite Muslim woman raised in Constantinople/Istanbul in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Her given name was Hadidjé Zennour and she and her sister Nouryé-el-Nissa were given a Western style education by their progressive father Noury Bey. They adopted the names Zeyneb and Melek as pseudonyms after they had become famous as the characters in Loti's novel *Les Désenchantées*. The Ottomans did not use family names: *hanoum*, or *hanım* as it is transliterated now, is the honorific for lady and would have been used as a sign of respect for women of a certain rank or age. Similarly, the book refers to Zeyneb Hanoum as "Turkish," an imprecise term often used at the time to refer to Muslim Ottomans that blurred the distinctions between Zeyneb Hanoum's status as a member of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire and her religious and ethnic heritage. The term "Turk" was in flux during these last decades of the Ottoman Empire, coming to greater prominence as a rallying point for Muslim subjects as other regional nationalisms developed in the late nineteenth century. In this book "Turk" mainly refers to Muslim Ottomans but also at times to subjects of the Ottoman state as a whole.

The two sisters were the granddaughters of the Marquis de Blosset de Chateauneuf, a Frenchman who had entered the Ottoman Empire as a military officer. Whilst in the service of the sultan (Abdülaziz), he converted to Islam and married a Circassian woman. Making his home in Istanbul, he took the name Reschid Bey. His eldest son, Noury Bey, achieved success as an upper level bureaucrat, rising to be Minister of Foreign Affairs for Sultan Abdülhamit II, and was well known for his liberal and cultivated outlook. He raised his daughters to be educated and independent, but, like many women of their generation, they were still expected to make conventional marriages and live the life of a grand, secluded *hanım*, or lady. It was this that provoked Zeyneb Hanoum and Melek Hanoum to take drastic action.

A marriage was arranged for Zeyneb Hanoum to her father's secretary and protégé—a liberal man of good prospects (who was eventually to succeed him as Minister of Foreign Affairs)—but she would not tolerate it. That this was a sticking point for her is indicative of one of the contradictions common to women's emancipation at this time. Many fathers of the forward thinking

Muslim elite wanted their daughters to have an enlightened education. Foreign governesses were increasingly to be found in affluent households, but the aim of this education was often to produce better wives and mothers rather than women who were independent in their own right. This frustrating situation was also faced by many affluent women in the West. For Ottoman women the tension was not just personal: the debate about female emancipation was hotly pursued by all sides of the political spectrum in the Ottoman Empire. The figure of woman, as guardian of tradition or emblem of modernity, took on a central role within debates about modernization and Westernization as the Empire struggled to hold its own against internal revolt and external hostility. Pressured on both sides, individual women fought to have their voices heard.

### PIERRE LOTI AND LES DESENCHANTEES

Zeyneb Hanoum thought that one of the ways she could make a difference was by attracting Western sympathy for the problems of the educated Ottoman woman. Fluent in five European languages and familiar with French, English and German literature, it was not surprising that she put great faith in the power of writing. Her chosen conduit for her story was the famous French author Pierre Loti (the pseudonym of Louis Marie Julien Vaucluse, 1850-1923), who was already held in great esteem as a friend of the Turks. Like many Ottomans, Zeyneb Hanoum was a fan of his *Azizade* (1879) and had already written to him in 1902 to express her appreciation. When she heard that (the now aging) Loti was to visit Istanbul again in 1904, she and Melek Hanoum decided that he was the person best placed to bring again to the world's attention the restrictions faced by Turkish women like themselves.

They determined to meet with the author and to inspire him to write another book, this time about the contemporary situation of Muslim Ottoman women. Knowing that his works were embroidered accounts of his own experiences, and understanding fully the Western appetite for images of the exotic harem woman, they quite self-consciously commodified their story and their self-presentation in a way that would meet the expectations of the Orientalist writer. In her interaction with Loti and in this account, Zeyneb Hanoum simultaneously stages herself as the oppressed harem inhabitant as expected by the West and challenges those

stereotypes with evidence of her education, her ability for self-determination, and her political acumen.

Zeyneb Hanoum and her sister wrote to Loti, subsequently arranging a series of meetings—and this is where the story gets murky and where the trail of false and pseudonymous identities becomes more complicated. The sisters did not work alone: they were assisted by the French journalist and author Marie Lera, who published under the pseudonym Marc Hély. For the sisters, a false name was a wise precaution—the repressive regime of Abdülhamit forbade Ottomans from unsupervised contact with foreigners and, as daughters of a palace official, Zeyneb Hanoum and Melek Hanoum would have been particularly subject to surveillance. Writing to Loti under the false names of Zeyneb, Neyr and Leyla (this last being Hély's alter ego), they and Loti understood the risks, and he specifically stated when he published *Les Désenchantées* that “the heroines never really existed,” altering their assumed names once more so that the three characters were known as Zeyneb, Melek and Djénane.

In *Les Désenchantées*, Andre Lhery, the amorous protagonist, is contacted by the sisters Zeyneb, Melek and their friend Djénane who are desperate for him to bring the plight of cultured Muslim women to the attention of the West. Through a series of secret and exciting meetings their tale is told and, as could be expected in a novel by Loti, one of them falls in love with the older French author. Typical of the tragic fate attributed to women in harem narratives, all three women are doomed by the end of the book. Djénane dies for love of Lhery, committing suicide rather than returning to her estranged husband; Melek dies from a brain fever, prompted it is implied by dread of her forthcoming nuptials; and Zeyneb ends the novel fading away from a chest infection she refuses to treat in protest against an unwanted marriage.

The novel was published to great acclaim in 1906 and was read avidly in Europe, America and in the Muslim world. But before it came out, its heroines had left Istanbul, fleeing the harem for a new life.

## THE FLIGHT TO EUROPE

The sisters knew that Loti's precaution of giving them false names would not be sufficient protection against imperial reprisals and decided they must flee. *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions*

starts with their arrival in France. In her first letter to Grace Ellison from Fontainebleau in 1906, Zeyneb Hanoum writes of the response to their disappearance in Istanbul, but explains that she cannot bear to recount again the “nightmare” of their escape when, “every detail of that horrible journey will remain clearly fixed in my mind until death” (28). Although Zeyneb Hanoum could not face writing about it, we do know how they eluded the sultan’s guards, since the story of their dramatic escape was later recounted by Melek Hanoum in an article in the British *Strand Magazine*. Knowing that Ottoman subjects were unable to travel without the sultan’s permission, and sure that permission would not be granted, the sisters bribed their Polish music mistress to let them have her passport and that of one of her daughters. Pretending to be visiting cousins in the country, they left home dressed as usual in contemporary Western fashion, shrouded in the veiling outerwear typical of Muslim Ottoman women. Discarding their *çarşafs* at the Pole’s house, they made their way to the railway station and boarded the Orient Express for France. The fallacy of their supposed sojourn in the country was discovered and, when the train stopped at Belgrade, they were nearly arrested on the sultan’s orders (on the grounds that Melek Hanoum was still a minor), but they managed to escape with the assistance of some Serbian friends.

Arriving in France the sisters found it impossible to book into a hotel as Zeyneb Hanoum was gravely ill with the consumption that was later to claim her life. Eventually they were assisted to a sanatorium, from where they made their first sanctioned excursions without the restrictions of a veil. Their arrival in Europe was a cause célèbre and wherever they went they were greeted by interest from society and the press. This was especially the case in France, where their connection to Loti ensured tremendous public curiosity—sometimes in surprising ways. Zeyneb Hanoum notes in this volume with some asperity that kindly strangers sent them gifts of hats, as if the sisters “were too shy to order hats for ourselves, and are still wandering about Switzerland in our *tcharchafs*” (66). In fact, and as was integral to their successful escape, the sisters like most elite Ottoman women were quite accustomed to purchasing French fashion (if not hats) at home in Istanbul. As well as hats, the sisters received invitations from society ladies anxious to meet the real *désenchantées*. This fascination with their fictional alter egos

was to continue as the image of the cultured but doomed *désenchantée* began to coalesce into an icon of oppressed, but elegant, Ottoman femininity.

Once Zeyneb Hanoum had recovered sufficiently to travel, they began a peripatetic existence that took them through France, Switzerland, Italy, Britain, Spain and Belgium. The support they had hoped for from their grandfather's French relatives was not forthcoming: the family had disowned him on his conversion and were never more than "frigidly polite to us poor Moslem fugitives" (*Escaped* 135). The sisters traveled throughout Europe, visiting cultural sites and assessing the conditions of women, though the freedoms they had expected to find turned out to be far more restricted than they had imagined when they dreamed of Europe from within their harem.

Back home, news of their escape was initially suppressed by Abdülhamit and their father was obliged to publicly disown them. Though he continued secretly to pay them an allowance, their absence was a cause of grief in the family and would have put him in a very delicate situation politically. As foreign newspapers carrying the story of their departure were blocked on imperial orders, society in Istanbul struggled for reports of them. When word got out, as Zeyneb Hanoum explains, even those women who supported them were unable to do so publicly for fear of reprisal. Their mother died soon after they left (of shame, Melek Hanoum claimed) and their father passed away in 1908, leaving them financially insecure. Melek Hanoum had that year married a Polish aristocrat (and converted to Roman Catholicism). But that source of income dried up when he lost his estates in Russia during the revolution in 1917. Needing to support her family, since her husband, a skilled amateur musician, could only obtain poorly paid work as conductor of a cinema orchestra, Melek Hanoum became a dressmaker in shops, eventually opening her own business. She bore this reversal of fortune well, taking it as badge of honor that she could now support her family, having learned the unsuitable, for her status, trade of dressmaking in secret when she was a girl in Istanbul.

Zeyneb Hanoum did not fare so well. She was disillusioned with the life available to women in the West and found the rigors of trying to survive in a market economy insufficient compensation for the increased but still restricted freedoms of non-segregated



society. She returned to Turkey just before the First World War, now doubly disenchanted, at home in neither East nor West. She ends her book on the boat that is taking her back to Turkey, not specifying the cause of her departure, though Melek Hanoum later records that her sister was deported as an enemy alien when hostilities started as Turkey supported Germany (see also Tamar).

Zeyneb Hanoum was away from Turkey for the tumultuous events of the Young Turk revolution in 1908 and though she returned during the Young Turk years, known as the second constitutional period, she took no active part in politics as far as we can tell. There is little information on her life after she wrote this book. The only news we have comes from Ellison who visited her friend in Turkey in 1913/14, commenting that their first meeting since Zeyneb Hanoum had “so resolutely and for ever closed the book of her European experiences” was “just a little painful” (*Englishwoman* 187). Whilst Ellison attends political meetings, Zeyneb Hanoum—“who ate *décolletée* in the presence of men”—stays quietly in the harem, her behavior policed by older female relatives (*Englishwoman* 189). When Ellison returned to report on the new Turkish Republic in 1923, she records that Zeyneb Hanoum has passed away: “[t]oo unhappy to live, she willed herself to die before she was thirty” (*Turkey Today* 120).

#### HOW THIS BOOK CAME TO BE MADE

It seems that it was while they were in France that the sisters met Ellison and began the correspondence running from 1906-1912 that was to form this book. However, Ellison later claimed that she had met them at their father’s house on a previous visit to Istanbul in 1905 (*Turkey Today*). Whenever they actually met, the sisters found in Ellison a sympathetic and informed respondent. It was to be a profoundly productive relationship, leading to the publication of a book by each sister. It is their dialogue with her that structures the volume reprinted here and that gives it its unique flavor.

Grace Ellison (d.1935) was not a typical English woman: working as a professional journalist, she was a committed supporter of the Ottomans and a feminist. Having visited Istanbul once already as a “schoolgirl tourist” (*Turkey Today* 108), her connection with the Ottoman sisters gave her a chance to find out more about the city that she loved. Her second trip came during the course of their correspondence in 1908 when she went to

Istanbul to report on the opening of the new Young Turk government, returning for a prolonged stay in the autumn and winter of 1913-1914. On this trip Ellison wrote the columns for the British newspaper the *Daily Telegraph* that were to form the basis of her evocatively titled book *An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem*, published in 1915 (and also reprinted in this series). Whilst she was in Istanbul researching her own book, Ellison was still in correspondence with Zeyneb Hanoum and appears to have been completing her work on the manuscript of Melek Hanoum's book, *A Tragedy in the Imperial Harem*. Ellison contributed an introduction to both sisters' books, vouching for their authenticity and providing some scene setting for the English-language readership.

The fact that Zeyneb Hanoum's book appears in the form of letters emphasizes the existence and importance of a dialogue between the Ottoman and Turkish women that was, as the *Cultures in Dialogue* series demonstrates, far more widespread than is generally held to have been the case. Having prevailed upon Loti to offer one rendition of their story, it might be thought that in her own book Zeyneb Hanoum would tell the unexpurgated truth of her experience. But we cannot read this book as a straightforwardly unmediated account of an Ottoman woman's experience. There are many clues in the book itself that reveal the extent to which she, and Ellison, framed her story in particular ways and for particular purposes. Zeyneb Hanoum was aware that, in writing for an English readership, she would come up against Orientalist stereotypes and assumptions. Like most Ottomans, she knew that the West was fascinated by the idea of the segregated harem and she knew that this determined how she and her compatriots were viewed. But she also wanted to sell her story and sell her book. So whilst on one hand she proclaims "How I wish that nine out of every ten of the books written on Turkey could be burned!... Every book I have read has been in some way unfair to the Turkish woman" (178), on the other hand, she herself produced another book about the harem. If her book is to be the "truth" of the harem experience it must also be a viable commodity in the book market, so the first edition appeared in red binding with an image of a woman in a *yaşamak* embossed on the front cover. Like other writers from the region, Zeyneb Hanoum faced the challenge of exploiting her unique selling point—that she was a voice from

“behind the veil”—whilst simultaneously trying to subvert the stereotypes which it invoked.

Ellison knew from her experience that Ottoman women and men were fed up with dealing with the inane, ignorant and offensive comments they faced from curious Westerners. She was also aware that in offering to discuss her private life Zeyneb Hanoum was contravening the Islamic codes of privacy in which, in an extension of architectural and sartorial methods of seclusion, it was not done to discuss private business outside the family. Mindful in the early days of their correspondence that she “wanted to ask indiscreet questions” (xix), Ellison in an aside to the reader confesses that she understood that an expression of sympathy to Zeyneb Hanoum “would have offended her” (49). Inferring, but still never saying, that she had deduced that “the” reason behind Zeyneb Hanoum’s flight was the unwelcome marriage, Ellison is resigned to the knowledge that “in due time probably she would tell me all, but if she did not, nothing I could do or say would make her, for ‘Turkish women will not be cross-examined’” (49). In contrast to the intrusive and unfeeling interrogations of the European journalists who hounded the sisters for interviews, Ellison’s reticence displays a familiarity with Ottoman cultural codes that was an important factor in the sisters’ willingness to confide in her: “Do you see now, dear Englishwoman, why we appreciated your discreet interest in us, and how we looked forward to a friendship with you” (53).

*A Turkish Woman’s European Impressions* is a composite book, made up an exchange of letters, Ellison’s interjections and footnotes, and with an agenda that was shaped by the interaction between Zeyneb Hanoum, Ellison and also Melek Hanoum, who contributes two letters. The book is structured by an account of the relationship between Ellison and the sisters, framing a broadly chronological narrative of the Ottomans’ time in Europe. The different locations of their letters sketch in the route of their travels, whilst their reflections on life in Turkey flit backwards and forwards in time from childhood reminiscences to contemporary events prior to and after their departure for Europe. The volume is held together by the dialogue between the three women, though their commentary on the writing process also interrupts the narrative. The mix of these authorial voices and the various registers of discourse within the book (from chatty and personal to

official information giving) not only hints at the power relations between the women themselves but also indicates the ways in which international and imperial power relations differently structured their freedom of movement and experiences of travel.

### **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

Zeyneb Hanoum makes clear from the start that her book is written in response to the enduring Western interest in both her particular story and to the interest in the harem in general. Citing her familiarity with and approval of the eighteenth-century Lady Mary Montagu's letters, Zeyneb Hanoum immediately lays claim to a Western tradition of harem literature, establishing herself as a truly authentic voice and setting herself up as a corrective to the misinformation of other sources. A writer like Zeyneb Hanoum faced several challenges in trying to tell her story to the West: keen to demonstrate that Ottoman society was on the cusp of social change, she did not want to pander to Western misapprehensions, yet her own experience revealed the frustrations still faced by Ottoman women.

Throughout the book, Zeyneb Hanoum sets up a contrast between Ottoman women's hopes and the disappointing results of Western feminism. She subjects Western female "liberation" to a critical and at times caustic assessment, putting local developments in an international context. Her commentary veers between generalizations about "Oriental" female nature and the specificities of Hamidian repression—"is not this resignation to the yoke of the tyrannical Sultan proof of [Turkish] fatalism?" (120). Her hopes for a revolution that will bring about "the Liberty of the Individual, and the uplifting of the race" (120) are grounded in an explanation of the social and political factors that both determine women's sense of themselves and inhibit or control their social roles and codes of respectability. Making the point that "I am not really pitying women more than men under the Hamidian regime" (42), Zeyneb Hanoum locates her assessment of women's lives as a social rather than only a gender issue, mounting a relativist and politicized analysis of the apparent fripperies of elite female society in West and East.

Central to this is her evaluation of what she sees as the emptiness of Western bourgeois society and the dangers of social snobbery. Presenting Ottoman society as intrinsically democratic,

and describing, as do other commentators, a world in which rich and poor alike are welcomed into everyone's homes and where social standing is not a matter of envy, she comments that "I never made the acquaintance of the disease 'snobbery' in my own land" (118). Writing in response to Ellison's enquiry about whether Caux "had smart enough visitors to justify" a "special correspondent" (107), Zeyneb Hanoum marvels that English readers can be so interested in society gossip. She contrasts European women's vacuous desire to be counted as "smart" enough to be written about in the papers with the totally unwelcome surveillance suffered by Ottoman subjects. The strange Western appetite for international gossip and celebrity journalism is recast in an all too familiar and unwelcome guise—"Here, too, there are detectives of a kind!" (109).

Zeyneb Hanoum is perpetually shocked at how Western women and men waste their opportunities for free association and free speech. The Paris Season is found to be a mindless social whirl characterized by the impossibility of authentic and sustained social interaction: conversation, when there is any, is limited to gossip or superficial chat about cultural events. The intellectuals whom they had hoped to meet are "lost between the lace and the teacups" (156) and, with everyone seeming only to aspire to be charming, important subjects are "carefully avoided as tiresome" (158). This is hard for Zeyneb Hanoum to comprehend, especially given that in Istanbul she had illegally started women's soirees that were organized and attended at great risk, so motivated were she and her friends for an intellectual and political outlet.

### FEMINISM AND CLASS

The Young Turk government of 1908 brought to Turkey some of the personal freedoms Zeyneb Hanoum had craved and Ellison starts chapter seventeen with a footnote telling us that she had received this letter from Zeyneb Hanoum (dated November/December 1908) whilst covering events in Istanbul. Meanwhile, in foggy London, Zeyneb Hanoum is cheered by Ellison's Turkish postmark, finding a link to home as she commences a long chapter provocatively entitled "Is This Really Freedom?". Reporting on a range of spaces and encounters in London, she views them all through a reversal of the Orientalist gaze that re-assesses the gendered relations of the apparently

unsegregated West. The street, the ladies club, the houses of parliament, are revealed to be either versions of the harem—"But my dear, why have you never told me that the Ladies Gallery is a harem?" (194)—or public zones in which women's presence was heavily policed. In finding the harem in Europe, Zeyneb Hanoum returns to their Western point of origin the Orientalist stereotypes that she knows color attitudes to her life in Istanbul. What the West projects onto the East, she volleys back, finding the ladies club to be "not a big enough reward for having broken away from an Eastern harem" (185). Her only partial admiration for Western feminism was shared by Ellison and other women of this period, many of whom argued that Eastern women should pursue their own, regional, path to an appropriate form of emancipation. This is not simply a relativist argument, it was also a recognition that Western liberation was harsh and incomplete.

For one who had grown up on "fairy tales" of the West, the disappointments of Occidental female life may be hard to bear, but this does not mean that she uncritically supports the methods and aims of Western feminism. The Ottoman "*revoltée*" may have wanted to change her world, but she has very clear ideas of how this should or should not be done.

Her account of the London suffrage street meeting is revealing: she is appalled that the women campaigners were prepared to risk abuse from "ruffians" that, most horrifically, for Zeyneb Hanoum impugns their status as ladies. She was not alone in finding the idea of street politics off-putting—British feminists themselves took great care in their public interventions to counteract the potentially de-gentrifying and de-sexing implications of their subordination of gendered spatial rules (see Tickner). But for Zeyneb Hanoum, conscious that her elite Ottoman social status was not acknowledged in the West, her conclusion to Ellison could only be, "[i]f this is what the women of your country have to bear in their fight for freedom, all honour to them, but I would rather groan in bondage" (191). She was not imagining the ways that feminist activity potentially undermined social status: on her visit to the Houses of Parliament, the policeman's reassuring answer to a curious MP's question was that Zeyneb Hanoum and the other women waiting in the lobby were not "suffragettes" but "ladies." With gentility and feminism presented in some quarters as mutually exclusive, it is not surprising that for the émigré Ottoman the risk

of losing the markers of rank—“[n]o physical pain could be more awful to me than not to be taken for a lady” (190)—did not outweigh the meager benefits that might be achieved by public demonstrations.

Zeyneb Hanoum’s concern with respectable behavior extends to the more innocuous activities of European women. She is shocked and disapproving about the apparently pointless Alpine sports and other tiring exercises favored by European women, seeing them as indelicate and unfeminine. Typically, she contrasts the decorous and artistic nature of Turkish dancing with the Western craze for waltzing. These comments attempt to validate an alternative definition of female respectability on the part of a woman whose background in the East and in a harem could put her almost automatically outside European codes of taste and propriety. Her references to the presence of slaves in her Istanbul household serve a similar function. For “civilized” Westerners, who had largely abolished slavery (with varying degrees of reluctance) by the mid-nineteenth century, the continuation of the Ottoman slave trade was evidence of a now abhorrent and barbarous practice. Many commentators, including Ellison, felt compelled to explain how the Ottoman Islamic slave system gave slaves in principal better rights than was the case in, for example, the more familiar American plantation system. But the prurient fascination, especially with enslaved women, continued. Zeyneb Hanoum does not mount a prolonged discussion of the relative merits of Ottoman domestic slavery (for details see Toledano). Instead, in chapter seventeen, she uses a joking reference to cannibalism among African slaves as a way of illustrating the cultural relativity of definitions of happiness. As I have discussed elsewhere, this story serves to align the Ottomans with the West, as both are equally likely to fill the African’s imaginary cooking pot; Zeyneb Hanoum also stresses her elite social status, highlighting the vast social gap between herself and the young slave girl (*Rethinking* 126-7). Though the Anglo-Ottoman convention of 1880 had officially suppressed the African slave trade, the practice of sourcing (African and white Central Asian) slaves for elite harems continued into the turn of the century. By 1908 when the Young Turks revived the clause from the 1876 constitution outlawing slavery, many of the slaves in elite harems were already officially free but often remained in the household where, as many

Westerners commented, their treatment was far preferable to that of domestic servants in the West. Zeyneb Hanoum's comments about the innate democracy of Ottoman society become an endorsement not of class equality, but of a world in which social stratification is mollified by conventions of charity and domestic inclusiveness not possible in the market economy of the West.

## RELIGION

Religion is another component of the book's comparative commentary and one that prompts the most interruptions from Ellison. Although she starts out by saying that Zeyneb Hanoum, like many Muslims, displays a "knowledge" and "understanding" of the bible that "would put to shame many professing Christians in our Western Churches" (36), she feels compelled to distance herself from any of Zeyneb Hanoum's unflattering statements about Christianity. She interrupts Zeyneb Hanoum's comments about the "terror of Extreme Unction" with the no-nonsense disclaimer that "[t]he editor is not responsible for the ideas expressed in the book, which are not necessarily her own" (160). In response to Zeyneb Hanoum's criticism of the ignorant Nonconformist Christian who presumed to teach her about "Christ," Ellison is again moved to distance herself, though this time more moderately: "It may be reasonably urged I reply that Zeyneb Hanoum's criticism of our Christianity is far from adequate. But I have preferred to present the impressions of a 'Turkish woman'" (207). Given that other of Zeyneb Hanoum's misapprehensions about Western life are left intact, the points where Ellison cannot avoid intervening indicate the fault lines of this cross-cultural project. Her admiration for the Turks and her determination to counter Western prejudice are why she supports the publication of Zeyneb Hanoum's book, but she is aware of the limitations of Western tolerance and does not want herself, or the book, to be damned for crossing the line too often. It is not surprising that her editorial voice appears in connection to subjects that were the most likely to alienate the book's readers. She may want to promote and protect Zeyneb Hanoum, but she also has to maintain her own authorial integrity: her activities as a (not uncritical) feminist (see *Disadvantages of Being a Woman*), and as a professional woman mean that she must ensure that she is not tainted by association with any too unpalatable observations by the



Ottoman. So, though she leaves intact many outright criticism of Western values (such as Zeyneb Hanoum's horror at the Liberal British government's imprisonment of suffragists) and does not correct errors that she deems unimportant, when it comes to religion she stands her ground for the benefit of her readers. Just as Zeyneb Hanoum must present herself as a reliably authentic "Turkish woman," so too must Ellison present herself as a reliable editor, with sufficient integrity to manage the interface between English-language readers and the alien source of the material they are reading.

### EDITORIAL FACTORS

But, if Ellison uses editorial statements to ensure her own authority, she also leaves uncontested many exchanges that do little to puff up her consequence. Zeyneb Hanoum, who sees all Western affectations through the relativizing lens of Hamidian oppression, chides Ellison in no uncertain terms for complaining that she was not "free" to choose her own mealtimes in her pension. Contrasting the risks she took in Turkey to receive correspondence from the outside world, Zeyneb Hanoum treats the Englishwoman's complaint as mere petulance from one who has no idea of what really constitutes a lack of personal freedom. Ellison silently includes this letter and also makes no move to interrupt when Zeyneb Hanoum refers to Ellison's Orientalist desire to "make the acquaintance of a harem, where there is more than one wife" (39), despite the implication that she should have known that polygyny was now very rare.

The examples of direct dialogue between the two women, as well as the general epistolary form of the book, suggest a relationship that was candid and not uncritical. As well as their evident affection for each other, the relationship was valuable for all involved, providing routes into publishing for both sisters, and furnishing Ellison with powerful source material for what was to be a series of books about the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. Producing the book for publication once Zeyneb Hanoum had returned to Turkey, Ellison's concern, expressed from the beginning, that Zeyneb Hanoum might find Europe equally disenchanting has the benefit of hindsight, as well as a well-intentioned condescension typical of material from this period.

But we can detect from the book itself some clues about its status as a literary commodity. As well as the evocative title and plush front cover, the chapter headings indicate what publishers thought would attract the interest of the Western reader. Phrases like, “A Dash for Freedom,” “Bewildering Europe,” and “Dreams and Realities,” all evoke the contrast between Eastern enclosure and Western liberation typical of Western Orientalism. Chapters on “Taking the Veil” and “The Moon of Ramazan” promise the glimpses of sequestered life generic to harem literature, whilst “A Misfit Education” hints at the conflict faced by the cultured *hann*. But the book’s critical review of Europe is also signaled by sections on “The Alps and Artificiality,” whilst chapters demanding “Is this Really Freedom?” proclaim the book’s potential insurrection. As the table of contents suggests, there is a tension in the book between its desire to challenge Orientalist stereotypes at the same time as it relies on those stereotypes for its market. Similarly, it criticizes Europe at the same time as it must sell itself to the Western reader. One of the ways that this conflict can be seen is through the dissonant relationship between the book’s written and visual components.

The illustrations were regarded by the publisher as a major selling point; not just in the coup of having the author’s likeness done by Rodin, but also in being able to offer photographic evidence of harem life. Though professional photographers had been established in the Ottoman Empire from the second half of the nineteenth century, their images, many designed for export to the West, would have been made in the studio. Models were often from the minority populations, since Muslim women would rarely have permitted photographs of their unveiled faces to be reproduced for public circulation (see Graham-Brown). Muslim Ottomans were keen amateur photographers, but these images would have been restricted to a private family audience and not seen by the West (see Micklewright). The photographs in Zeyneb Hanoum’s book, of domestic interiors and Muslim Ottoman female life, would therefore have been considered something of a rarity. There is no information on the provenance of these photographs: some of them are snapshots (like the sea-side scene “Turkish Child with a Slave” 35); others are studio shots (like “Turkish Lady in Tcharchaff” 89 and “Yashmak and Mantle” 135, both of which, presumably of one or other of the sisters, were

taken in front of the same backdrop); whilst others (like “Turkish Ladies Paying a Visit” 173, of the two sisters and an un-named friend) look like they were posed for an amateur photographer in a domestic interior. That the photographer may have been male could explain the strangeness of the three women sitting indoors still in their outerwear *çarşafs*.

The range of visuals suggest that they may have been selected by publishers with a view to the market, since, in a book concerned with Zeyneb Hanoum’s time in Europe, all but three of the illustrations are from or about Turkey. The ethnographic informational captions may well have been composed by the publishers rather than Zeyneb Hanoum, again with an eye to supplying some of the Orientalist exotica that the written narrative often denies. The photographs hover between supporting the story and disrupting it. When Zeyneb Hanoum criticizes the immodesty of European waltzing, we see immediately two shots of a “Turkish Dancer” and “A Turkish Lady Dressed as a Greek Dancer” (70), accompanied by the information that “Turkish women spend much of their time dressing up.” Although the captions seem to have glossed over the fact that the dancer is wearing the same clothing for both Turkish and Greek “costume,” the photographs serve uncomplicatedly as a visual endorsement of the literary narrative, illustrating the subject under discussion and augmenting it with nuggets of ethnographic “manners and customs” local detail. But taken overall, the visual propensity to figure the sisters shrouded in *yâsmaks* and *çarşafs* is at odds with the written text that emphasizes their liberation from the veil in Europe and that celebrates their mobility and agency even whilst they were still wearing it in Turkey. In other words, the visuals allow for the reader a continuation of the well-established conventions of Western visual Orientalism where, in fine arts and popular representation, the veiled “Oriental” woman was a highly sexualized object of pity, titillation and curiosity—precisely the register of stereotype that Zeyneb Hanoum wants to challenge.

The difficulty that Zeyneb Hanoum might have faced in exerting control over the images in her book is suggested by the caption to “A Corner of a Turkish Harem of Today” (192) where Ellison makes clear that she herself had found it impossible to place for publication images that transgressed treasured clichés of harem life. This photograph is the only one whose point of

production is known and its caption reveals that Ellison had already faced unsympathetic editing when these were “returned” by a “London newspaper” with the comment that “[t]he British public would not accept this as a picture of a Turkish harem.” Proving her superior knowledge of contemporary Turkey, Ellison rejoins that “in the smartest Turkish houses European furniture is much in evidence,” hinting at the constraints faced by those who wanted to sell alternative accounts of the harem. We see in *A Turkish Woman’s European Impressions* an uneasy alliance between visual and literary narrative through which the visuals (arriving in the book through a slightly different route than the, albeit also edited, written material) provide some of the pleasures of the Orient that Zeyneb Hanoum’s acerbic commentary might otherwise disrupt.

Zeyneb Hanoum’s tone of dissatisfaction was noted by the reviewer in *Times Literary Supplement* who, citing her as one of Loti’s *désenchantées*, dismisses her book at the outset as unrepresentative of Turkish female opinion. “A negligible exception,” Zeyneb Hanoum’s attempt to speak for the generality of Ottoman womanhood is invalidated on the count of her European bloodlines, though she is still found to possess “to the full that characteristic of clear vision and independent thought” that is “first among the virtues of the harem.” Whilst it is “decidedly healthy for us to see the tables turned against our own self-complacency,” her “generalisations” are often found to be “trespassing too far upon our mental hospitality”:

Her impressions are amusing, if rather superficial: a nation is not so easily atomized by a foreigner. Our impression is that Zeyneb Hanoum, steeped in French decadent literature, would be interesting and unhappy in any society; but morbid people can often see others very clearly, and much of her criticism hits the mark.  
(March 13, 1913: 107)

The reviewer in the *Daily Telegraph* was not surprised that “disillusionment was still the fate of the disenchanted” (February 21, 1913), opining that “restlessness and uncertainty are still the prevailing qualities of the [female] sex.” Nonetheless, the book is hailed as “curiously self-revealing” and full of “human interest,” not just for debunking the typical idea of the harem as a “luxurious prison,” but also for revealing how women and men suffered under the “tyranny” of the Hamidian regime. Zeyneb Hanoum’s

comparisons between East and West are cited with interest, especially the Hamidian-style “red tape” surrounding their visit to the House of Commons. When Zeyneb Hanoum’s criticizes the British government for imprisoning and torturing suffragists, the reviewer, whilst noting that Zeyneb Hanoum “scarcely seems to grasp the full significance of the feminist movement,” finds no offence, responding rather that “it is a difficult problem, and one upon which Western civilization might perhaps learn something from the East.”

In this largely positive review, the book’s conditions of production play a major part in validating the authority of the ideas contained within. Ellison’s position as someone who has “actually stayed in a Turkish harem” substantiates her right to vouch for Zeyneb Hanoum, whose own status is, as was typical, augmented with reference to her “courage” as one of the *désenchantées* who “escape[d]” the harem. These extra-textual referent points produce a reality effect that corroborates the reliability of the individuals involved in the book’s production, endorsing the volume as having arisen out of “correspondence which has all the merits of frankness and sincerity.”

## CONCLUSION

The tendency in these reviews to evaluate Zeyneb Hanoum’s authenticity on grounds of either blood or culture (with “decadent French literature” serving as a font of all evil on both counts) is typical of responses to “Oriental” women writers. The *Times Literary Supplement* depicts her hybridity as the source of her discontent and a reason to mistrust her story, emphasizing that she “is no typical Turkish lady, but the grand-daughter of a Frenchman,” whilst later Marc Hély, in her bid to take the credit for the Loti correspondence, also disparages the sisters as “without a drop of Turkish blood” (Syliowicz 96). In fact, mixed ancestry was not untypical of elite Ottoman families, especially with the tradition of Circassian and Georgian concubinage, but in the story of the *désenchantées* it was often cited to depreciate their claims. Representing their mixed heritage as a reason for rather than an invalidation of their position, Melek Hanoum herself argues that it was their “European blood” that revolted against the “slavery” of their luxurious harem, making them “in consequence far more

unhappy than [they] ought to have been" (*Escaped* 130). In her eulogy for Zeyneb Hanoum, Ellison also reminds us that

[h]er whole appearance and manners were stamped with 'race.' Was it from her French Crusader ancestor, or from her Circassian family that she took her distinction? Who can tell? Anyhow she was an interesting and unhappy personality wherever she happened to be, as is so often the case with the super-sensitive offspring of these mixed unions. (*Turkey Today* 113-114)

Although *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions* was constructed and packaged to attract an Orientalist consumer, the discontents of Zeyneb Hanoum were always going to be a problem for its target market. On one hand, her complaints could be accommodated as proof of Oriental barbarity, but, on the other, her evidential account of a modern Ottoman life challenged the stasis characteristic of the exoticized harem of Orientalist fantasy. If speaking out against Hamidian abuses was welcome, her criticisms of Western society were read as an affront. Turning her back on Western life could be evidence of her irredeemable otherness or of the failings of Western modernity.

Whatever the criticisms of Zeyneb Hanoum's book, the image of the *désenchantées* which was already well established when they started writing to Ellison, went on to become a touchstone in debates about the changing nature of Ottoman and Turkish womanhood in both East and West. For commentators of different political persuasions the totemic figure of the *désenchantée* could signify either the tragedy of a wasted life or the feckless indolence of the spoilt elite. The book itself in the years after its publication was seen to be creating as much as reflecting discontent among Ottoman women, often linked to the already pernicious effects attributed to French fiction. Visiting in 1911, after the publication of *Les Désenchantées*, Hester Donaldson Jenkins linked the two, arguing that the "discontent of which Loti writes is common enough, for the influence of poorer French literature on its constant readers has been to give false ideas of life, to increase sentimentality, and to arouse discontent" (see this series; 20-21). The reliability of Zeyneb Hanoum and Melek Hanoum as representatives of Ottoman womanhood was contested even as the

motif of the *désenchantée* became a commonplace in the lexicon of Orientalised femininity.

Ottoman and Turkish reformers during and after Zeyneb Hanoum's lifetime were determined to rid themselves of the picture of the indolent *hanım* that plagued their relations with the West. What had once been an embarrassment to Ottomans abroad who were insulted by the presumption of domestic tyranny, became for the Young Turks and later the Turkish nationalists an irritating emblem of *ancien régime* decadence. With the advent of the Turkish republic in 1923, the preferred vision of womanhood was either the stalwart peasant woman or the educated daughter of the republic—active, unveiled, modern (see Durakbaşa). Frances Woodsmall writing in 1936 on the novelty of a Turkish beauty contest illustrates the iconic nature of the now redundant *désenchantée* model:

This emphasis on physical exercise for Eastern girls is naturally producing a new ideal of feminine beauty. The Turkish beauty contest would not award the prize to the languorous girl of the Ottoman Empire period, who was suited to sit on a soft Turkish divan in a palace on the Bosphorous with lustrous eyes shadowed by kohl, a decorative figure from Pierre Loti's *Désenchantées*. The new standard would make quite different requirements for beauty of figure and bearing characteristic of the modern athletic Turkish girl of the New Republic. (also this series; 81-2)

Zeyneb Hanoum knew that in telling her story she was intervening in Western Orientalist cultural codes. She also knew that her words would be judged by detractors and supporters at home. She realized that in telling her story she was speaking for more than her own individual experience, but she cannot have predicted quite how significant the image of her and her sister as *les désenchantées* would prove to be. The reprinting of her book brings back into circulation a text whose contentious afterlife deserves not to be curtailed.

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