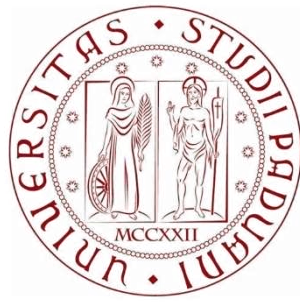




UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Geografiche e dell'Antichità

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Scienze Storiche

An Analysis of Orientalist Representations in European
Travel Writing: *Turkish Embassy Letters* by Lady Mary
Wortley Montagu and *Haremlik* by Demetra Vaka Brown

Relatore:

Prof.ssa Lorenza Perini

Laureanda:

Seray Sevinç

Matricola: 2141680

Anno Accademico 2025/26

To Filippo

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
SUMMARY.....	iv
CHAPTERS	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. TRAVEL WRITING	17
2.1. Travel Writing	17
2.2. Travel Writing and Gender	22
2.3. Historical Context of Travel to the Ottoman Empire	27
2.4. Edward Said's Theory of Orientalism	34
2.5. Harem	41
3. <i>TURKISH EMBASSY LETTERS</i> (1763) BY LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU.....	46
4. <i>HAREMLIK: SOME PAGES FROM THE LIFE OF TURKISH WOMEN</i> (1909) BY DEMETRA VAKA BROWN	70
5. CONCLUSION	92
TABLES OF FIGURES	95
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	96

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore the representation of Ottoman women in two travel narratives, *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763) by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and *Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Oriental Women* (1909) by Demetra Vaka Brown, in the light of Edward Said's Orientalism. Focusing on two travel writers from different historical periods, this thesis seeks to explore the ways through which both travel writers simultaneously resist and reproduce Orientalist discourse. It is argued that although both Montagu and Vaka Brown state their intentions to provide a more authentic and sympathetic account of Ottoman society and shatter prevailing stereotypical representations of women, their narratives nevertheless remain informed by Orientalist discourse they attempt to transcend. In this respect, this thesis contends that both travel writers rely on established Orientalist modes of representation, constructing the East as an extraordinary, fascinating, and culturally distinct space while reproducing the romanticised and exotic image of Ottoman women that had long shaped European perceptions of the Orient. Therefore, by comparing these two texts, separated by almost two centuries, this thesis argues that Montagu and Vaka Brown were unable to fully escape Orientalist discourse.

Keywords: Orientalism, Gender, Harem, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, *Haremlik*

Un'analisi di rappresentazioni orientaliste nella letteratura di viaggio europea: *Turkish Embassy Letters* di Lady Mary Wortley Montagu e *Haremlik* di Demetra Vaka Brown

Questa tesi esplora la rappresentazione delle donne ottomane nella letteratura di viaggio europea, con particolare attenzione a *Turkish Embassy Letters* di Lady Mary Wortley Montagu e a *Haremlik* di Demetra Vaka Brown, alla luce della critica saidiana dell'orientalismo. Si sostiene che entrambe le opere restino profondamente radicate nel discorso orientalista, nonostante le autrici dichiarino di voler mettere in discussione gli stereotipi allora diffusi sulle donne ottomane. Analizzando i due testi attraverso il quadro teorico di Edward Said, lo studio evidenzia come entrambe le autrici si presentino come voci correttive, sostenendo di offrire una descrizione più autentica della società ottomana rispetto a quella tramandata dai viaggiatori europei precedenti. Le loro narrazioni riproducono tuttavia molti dei presupposti, delle dicotomie e dei moduli rappresentativi propri del discorso orientalista. Anziché smantellare del tutto i luoghi comuni occidentali, entrambe concorrono a costruire un'immagine della donna orientale conforme agli schemi occidentali di fascinazione e oggettivazione. Le loro opere hanno così alimentato la circolazione e la legittimazione di una serie di idee sulle donne ottomane, molte delle quali hanno continuato a rafforzare la contrapposizione tra un Occidente progressista e razionale e un Oriente esotico e culturalmente altro. La tesi richiama inoltre l'attenzione sul ruolo che la letteratura di viaggio, in quanto genere, ha avuto nella percezione europea dell'Impero ottomano. I resoconti odeporici non sono soltanto testimonianze personali del viaggiatore, ma incidono in misura significativa sull'immagine che il pubblico europeo si forma dell'Oriente e dei suoi abitanti. Benché Montagu e Vaka Brown tentino di correggere le distorsioni precedenti, le loro narrazioni restano condizionate proprio da quella tradizione che aveva a lungo modellato lo sguardo europeo sull'Impero ottomano. Colpisce infine che l'opera di Vaka Brown, scritta quasi due secoli dopo il resoconto di Montagu e dopo le profonde trasformazioni intervenute nel frattempo all'interno dell'Impero ottomano, continui a operare entro la medesima cornice orientalista, accostandosi alle donne ottomane attraverso modelli rappresentativi ormai consolidati. Sotto questo profilo, il discorso orientalista della letteratura di viaggio si rivela straordinariamente resistente, riproducendo gli stessi presupposti attraverso generazioni di autori.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), commonly known as Lady Mary Montagu, was an English aristocrat, intellectual, a writer and poet. Being considered one of the most influential figures of the eighteenth-century England, she was a prolific writer and renowned for her extensive travels across Europe, and particularly for her travel to the Ottoman Empire. Montagu pursued a classical education through her own determination, thereby challenging the social restrictions placed on women of her time. At the age of twenty-three, she was expected to marry Sir Clotworthy Skeffington, an Irish nobleman chosen by her father. Rejecting the arranged marriage, Montagu eloped shortly before the wedding so as to marry Edward Wortley Montagu, who was the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III (r. 1703–1730). In this respect, it can be posited that her husband's occupation enabled her to travel extensively in the Ottoman Empire, and her gender provided her access to enter the private spheres within the empire including harems and Turkish baths, which remained inaccessible to the male travellers of her time. Montagu travelled to the Ottoman Empire between the years 1716 and 1718 so as to accompany her husband after his appointment as the British ambassador. Her travel to the Ottoman Empire paved the way for the emergence of *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763) which includes fifty-eight letters addressed to Montagu's family, friends, and acquaintances. The letters were written between the years 1716-1718, yet they were published following Montagu's death in 1763. The collection of letters was initially published as *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M—y W—y M—e: Written During Her Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, to Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters, &c., in Different Parts of Europe* (1763). Montagu claimed that the letters derived from "Sources that Have Been Inaccessible to Other Travellers," thereby inviting attention to the authority of women's perspectives in travel writing. However, the work is commonly recognized as *Turkish Embassy Letters*, which is a modern editorial title, due to the fact that it was produced during and after Montagu's travel to the Ottoman Empire in the company of her husband. In these letters, Montagu presents her experiences and observations about the Ottoman society, thereby touching upon a number of subjects including politics, religion, the role of women in the society. *Turkish Embassy Letters* is known to have inspired subsequent generations of European women

travellers and writers, and today it remains an influential and a significant work in contemporary scholarship.

Demetra Vaka Brown (1877-1946) was born as Greek-Ottoman in the island of Büyükada, Sea of Marmara in the Ottoman Empire. She later moved to the United States where she became a journalist and an author. Therefore, she is frequently discussed either as Greek-Ottoman or Greek-American author. She spent her childhood in the island of Büyükada (Prinkipo) in the sea of Marmara near to Istanbul; therefore, she maintained close interactions with Turkish people. Vaka Brown belonged to the Greek Orthodox *millet*, a minority community within the Ottoman Empire where her father worked as a bureaucrat of the Sublime Porte. Having moved to the US so as to avoid an arranged marriage, Vaka Brown is usually considered one of the first Greek immigrant women who participated in American mainstream culture and society. In the US, Vaka Brown worked for the American Press and the Greek Newspaper Atlantis in New York City. Also, she worked as a foreign correspondent in the US, the Balkans, and the Ottoman Empire. When she gave up journalism, she worked as a teacher for some period. Vaka Brown revisited the Ottoman Empire in 1921, after many years she had spent in the US. She had interactions with her childhood friends and acquaintances, who included a number of Turkish Muslim women. Having spent time with them, Vaka Brown observes the society, and particularly the life of the women. The time in which she had her visit was significant for the empire as it took place during the years when the foundations of the new Turkish Republic were being laid. Therefore, it can be posited that Vaka Brown encountered a dramatically transformed reality upon her return. The empire was undergoing a period of intense conflict occupied by the Allied forces and the rising nationalistic movements. Having visited the empire during the period marked by political and cultural instability, Vaka Brown documented her experiences so as to present this major transformation in her work *Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Oriental Women* published in 1909. As it was the case with Montagu, Vaka Brown's gender provided her chance to enter the private spheres including harems and baths. Yet, as opposed to Montagu, Vaka Brown had Ottoman origins, which provided her an insider perspective, as well. Vaka Brown also underlined this point in her work, claiming that she offers a different portrayal from her contemporaries, which is disputable. Tracing the emergence of a modern sensibility in the society, Vaka Brown constructs a narrative identity which offers perspectives from the East and West and modernity and tradition. In addition to *Haremlik*, she has several books on the Ottoman Empire that focus on Greek nationalism, politics of the Balkans, and the late Ottoman Empire during the period of political

and social turmoil. Her works are significant in that sense that they reveal a rare perspective on Ottoman society from the point of a Greek-Ottoman woman.

The Ottoman Empire was a crucial destination for travellers for centuries. Its strategic position bridging Asia and Europe, in addition to the diverse landscapes and rich cultural heritage that developed across its territories, led it to be an attractive destination for travellers. The travels to the region were motivated by a number of purposes including exploration, trade, and diplomatic relations. The Ottoman world can be claimed to have been fascinating yet a fundamentally distinct realm; a Turk, in the first place, was the “non-Christian other.”¹ The Islamic identity of the Ottoman State, in this respect, can be considered to have contributed significantly to the ways in which the empire was perceived by European observers. The segregation of women, the notion of harem, presence of polygamy appear to be the most narrated aspects related to the Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire. The narration of these points in travel writings, which were unfamiliar to the Western reader, presented the empire as a distinctly different land and inevitably, evoked curiosity. Additionally, cultural practices, including cuisine, clothing, social manners, all of which reinforced that sense of difference between the European and Ottoman world. Furthermore, travellers who were in Ottoman lands for diplomatic purposes also produced a number of works. The narration of political and administrative structures, such as the sultan’s absolute authority and complex court rituals, empowered the sense of unfamiliarity and otherness. In this context, the region attracted numerous European travellers whose accounts often point to this ambivalent perception: the Ottoman lands were viewed as geographically close to Europe, yet culturally and religiously distinct from it.

As travellers ventured across the Ottoman territories over the centuries, they began producing written accounts of their experiences. In addition to the works by Montagu and Vaka Brown, many other European travellers produced accounts of their travel to the Ottoman Empire; *A Relation of a Journey Begun Anno Domini 1610* (1615) by George Sandys, *The Travels of Pietro della Valle* (1650–1663) by Pietro della Valle, *Travels in Asia Minor* (1775) by Richard Chandler, *Eothen; or, Traces of Travel Brought Home from the East* (1844) by Alexander Kinglake, *The City of the Sultan and Domestic Manners of the Turks* (1836) and *The Beauties of the Bosphorus* (1838) by Julia Pardoe, *La vie intime et la vie nomade en Orient* (1855) and *Scènes de la vie turque* (1858) by Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, and *On*

¹ Gönül Bakay, "The Turk in English Renaissance Literature," *openDemocracy*, February 14, 2003.

Horseback Through Asia Minor (1877) by Frederick Gustavus Burnaby, *Constantinople* (1877) by Edmondo de Amicis, and Grace Ellison's *An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem* (1915) are among these accounts. These authors portray their own experiences in their accounts as they travelled to the Ottoman lands from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century. Notwithstanding these works are different in terms of purpose and personal backgrounds of the authors they commonly represent Ottoman cities, society, and some of them involve with politics and gender. For instance, some of the abovementioned male travellers frequently underline political observations and bring exoticism to the fore, on the other hand, female authors tend to focus on women experiences as they had access to gendered spaces like harem and baths. These narratives had a role in the formation of European perceptions of the Ottoman world by frequently bringing the aspects and issues in relation to the notions of admiration, criticism, wonder to the fore.

Travel writing is a multi-disciplinary form which is frequently examined across a range of academic disciplines including history, literature, geography, anthropology, and sociology. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (2013), Youngs notes that travel writing “records our temporal and spatial progress” and “throws light on how we define ourselves and on how we identify others. Its construction of our sense of ‘me’ and ‘you,’ ‘us’ and ‘them,’ operates on individual and national levels and in the realms of psychology, society and economics.”² In this respect, travel writing has a role in self-definition and construction of otherness, with implications across a number of contexts. Youngs notes that “the publication in 1978 of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*” gave rise to “a wave of studies that looked at the ways in which travel writing, particularly of the nineteenth century, represented other cultures.” “Whereas Said’s focus was on the Middle East, his identification of the connections between travel, representation and empire continue to influence countless works on travel to other areas of the world.”³ Youngs invites attention to the significance of Said’s *Orientalism* in travel studies by noting that his work pointed out the fact that “travel writing does not consist simply of individual or disinterested factual accounts. Rather, travellers have already been influenced, before they travel, by previous cultural representations that they have encountered.”⁴ Therefore, “they never look on places anew or completely independently but perceive them instead through an accretion of others’ accounts.”⁵ In this respect, it can be posited that travel narratives appear

² Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

³ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 9.

⁴ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 9.

⁵ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 9.

to be “vehicles whose main purpose is to introduce us to the other, and that typically they dramatiz[e] an engagement between self and world.”⁶

Said underlines the fact that “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’”⁷ For this reason, “a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction” that exists “between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social, descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on.”⁸ In this respect, this thesis seeks to explore the Western representations of the Orient by taking into consideration Said’s argument that such representations were not merely neutral observations but part of a broader discursive practice that produced a binarical relationship between the East and West. This thesis claims that travel writings played a significant role in reproducing Orientalist discourses about the Ottoman Empire, informing how the European reader understood and imagined the region. In this respect, *Turkish Embassy Letters* and *Haremlik* emerge to be critical sources for examining historical Western representations of Turkish women through the eyes of female Westerners. Through their portrayals of Turkish women and the Ottoman Empire, both narratives produce a binary framework that positions the traveller-narrator and their culture as the normative “us,” while representing that of the Ottoman Empire as the contrasting “other.” This dynamic makes travel writing a particularly crucial source for examining how cultural difference and identity are discursively constructed. Both Montagu and Vaka Brown, who were travellers producing a literary work about a land other than their own, brought with them their own cultural backgrounds, experiences, and worldviews informed by their respective societies. These perspectives inevitably had an impact not only on how they perceived the places they visited but also on how they represented those places within their narratives, which is one of the points that this thesis seeks to explore.

A substantial body of scholarship has focused on European travel narratives on the Ottoman Empire. The themes including Orientalism, gender related points, cultural representations, and the relationship between travel writing and Orientalism are frequently touches upon. Aravamudan’s article “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the Hammam:

⁶Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 9.

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2.

⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 2-3.

Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization” (1995)⁹ is worth mentioning. He deals with one of the most discussed scenes of Montagu’s narrative, the bath scene. Focusing on the details in the narration of the scene such as the corset Montagu wears, Aravamudan provides an analysis concentrating on the notions of gender and identity. With a focus on “masquerade,” Aravamudan points to the performativity of Montagu’s gender. Aravamudan’s introduction of the concept of “levantinization” takes attention, which he uses to invite attention to how Montagu partially identifies with Ottoman culture without fully abandoning her English identity, positioning her between East and West. In this respect, Aravamudan reveals how the process of writing can be linked with the fluidness of identity. Barnes’ article “The Public Life of a Woman of Wit and Quality: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Vogue for Smallpox Inoculation” (2012)¹⁰ appears to be another study that is worth touching upon. This article points to a significant event that takes place in the narrative, which is Montagu’s getting informed about the practice of smallpox inoculation during her travel to the Ottoman Empire. Having encountered that practice, Montagu made her children inoculated and led to the people in England being aware of this practice. The article highlights the fact that Montagu was an aristocratic lady, which enabled her to have an influence on the society of her time. In this respect, the article represents Montagu in a positive way as a woman who showed her wit and vision in a society in which doctors, the public, and religious figures had controversy regarding the application of this practice. So, it can be claimed that Montagu had a role in this cultural and medical debate.

Barzilai-Lumbroso’s article “Turkish Men and the History of Ottoman Women: Studying the History of the Ottoman Dynasty's Private Sphere through Women's Writings” (2009)¹¹ is an important work. The article focuses on examinations of Ottoman dynastic history through women’s writings, which include foreign women travellers’ accounts, published in popular historical magazines in Turkey during the 1950s and 1960s, and a number of personal letters, harem memoirs, and recollections. The article is significant in the sense that it aims to lay bare how women writings can shed light into intimate aspects of the Ottoman elite’s relationships in general and of Ottoman women in particular. “Depiction of Turkish Women and

⁹ Srinivas Aravamudan, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the Hammam: Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization," *ELH* 62, no. 1 (1995): 69–104.

¹⁰ Diana Barnes, "The Public Life of a Woman of Wit and Quality: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Vogue for Smallpox Inoculation," *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 2 (2012): 330–362.

¹¹ Ruth Barzilai-Lumbroso, "Turkish Men and the History of Ottoman Women: Studying the History of the Ottoman Dynasty's Private Sphere Through Women's Writings," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 53–82.

The Harem Life in the Memoirs of Some Women Writers in the Early 20th Century” (2016)¹² by Döşkaya and Kaçmaz focuses on representation of Turkish women in the early 20th century. The following works written by Turkish and foreign writers are examined: Demetra Vaka Brown's *Haremlık: Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women* (1909), Hester Donaldson Jenkins' *Behind Turkish Lattices: The Story of a Turkish Woman's Life* (1911), Zeyneb Hanoum's *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions* (1913), Grace Ellison's *An English Woman in a Turkish Harem* (1915), Selma Ekrem's *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl* (1930). The article discusses that these writers' works can be discussed within an Orientalist frame as it claims that these works are produced so as to please the Western reader. The article provides information regarding *Haremlık* by Vaka Brown with a comparison of other works, which is significant in terms of observing the differences and similarities.

Foster's article “Colonialism and Gender in the East: Representations of the Harem in the Writings of Women Travellers” (2004)¹³ examines the depictions of harem in the narratives of female travellers by inviting attention to the fact that their portrayals are informed by gendered perspectives and colonial understanding. She mentions the bath scene and Oriental dance in Montagu's account by stating that the portrayals of these events were frequently influenced by Western assumptions and imperial discourse, often empowering ideas of Eastern difference and exoticism even while challenging some stereotypes. In this respect, these travel writings are complex to interpret; gender provides partial access to private spheres and alternative viewpoints, yet these descriptions cannot manage to fully escape the framework of colonial power and representation. Halsband's article, “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as Letter-Writer,” (1965)¹⁴ examines Montagu as an epistolary writer by focusing on her skill and distinctive style. It pays considerable attention to the historical context of her narratives were written and provides significant information about Montagu herself as a writer, an aristocratic woman, and a social person in connection with her society. The article provides information surrounding the process of *Turkish Embassy Letters* were produced.

Heffernan's “Feminism against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’”¹⁵ is a notable work. In her work, Heffernan touches upon the previous scholarship on

¹² Füsun Çoban Döşkaya and Ercan Kaçmaz, “Depiction of Turkish Women and the Harem Life in the Memoirs of Some Women Writers in the Early 20th Century,” *Journal of History School* 9 (2016): 311–326.

¹³ Shirley Foster, “Colonialism and Gender in the East: Representations of the Harem in the Writings of Women Travellers,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 34 (2004): 6–17.

¹⁴ Robert Halsband, “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as Letter-Writer,” *PMLA* 80, no. 3 (1965): 155–163.

¹⁵ Teresa Heffernan, “Feminism Against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's Turkish Embassy Letters,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33 (2000): 201–215.

Montagu by referring to works of Meyenoğlu, Lowe, and Aravamudan, to exemplify. In doing so, she underlines the difficulty to point out Montagu's work as an Orientalist work or not. She provides subtitles in her work: "Feminism and Orientalism," "The Emergence of the (Un)veiled Woman as Placeholder in the East/West Divide," "(Un)building the Divide," "Reading and Writing Against the Divide." Through these divisions, she brings about a number of arguments including the bath scene, the practice of using veil, and she analyses these points from several perspectives without coming up with a clear answer. Her work is significant in the sense that she provides a clear outline of earlier studies, which helps the reader to have knowledge before delving into the issues in the article. Additionally, the fact that she discusses the points which are controversial is significant as it introduces a new understanding to the reader and give the reader to evaluate the issue from different perspectives. Kietzman's "Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters and Cultural Dislocation" (1998)¹⁶ argues that Montagu's work as in-between since it complicates the boundaries between the East and West: "Resisting the eighteenth-century tendency to Other women of empire in order to consolidate English women in a domestic sphere, Montagu's letters may be read as an ethnography of Turkish women's culture that does not represent culture as an order, an Other, or a fixed world of any sort but, instead, conveys the fluidity of a culture whose women seem remarkably able to accommodate a multiplicity of alterities into their social fabric."¹⁷ In this respect, she focuses on the bath scene and Montagu's connection of the notion of freedom and Turkish women throughout the narrative.

The chapter "Travel Narratives and Orientalism: Montagu and Montesquieu" in *Critical Terrains* by Lowe¹⁸ provides a comparative reading of the accounts of Montagu and Montesquieu. Lowe focuses on the employment of the Orient in both writers' works. Lowe contends that Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* represents the East as a fictional device so as to provide a critique of European society. On the other hand, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, although not fully escaping orientalism, offers some sympathetic depictions, particularly of private spheres like harem. Overall, *Turkish Embassy Letters* appears to be more experiential and gendered whereas Montesquieu's work emerges to be philosophical and symbolic. Meriwether's "Transculturation and Politics in the Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu"

¹⁶ Mary Jo Kietzman, "Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters and Cultural Dislocation," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 38, no. 3 (1998): 537–551.

¹⁷ Kietzman, "Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters," 537.

¹⁸ Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

(2013)¹⁹ is significant to mention. In this article, Meriwether examines *Turkish Embassy Letters* and Lady Mary Montagu's political writing in the newspaper "The Nonsense of Common-Sense" together. She departs from Mary Louise Pratt's argument in *Imperial Eyes* (1992) that travel and contact with new cultures stimulates change in people's writing; namely "how the shifts that took place in travel writing intersected with other forms of knowledge and expression."²⁰ The article invites attention to the process of transculturation which stands for a mutual cultural exchange in which Ottoman and European practices interact and inform Montagu's perspective. The article touches upon a number of points about Montagu and her narrative; gender roles, medicine, and social customs are some of these. In this respect, Montagu's work emerges to be a complex one which complicates the notions of cultures, identity, politics.

Secor's 1999 article "Orientalism, gender and class in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's "Turkish Embassy Letters:"to persons of distinction, men of letters & c"²¹ contends that "Montagu's letters reproduce dominant discourses which naturalize class inequality, even and especially in moments when they subvert Orientalist or gendered expectations."²² In this respect, Secor claims although the work appears to undermine Orientalist discourse at several points, it ends up reinforcing it. Secor notes: "One of the most influential representations of her times was *Les Mille et une nuits*, or as it came to be known in English, *The Arabian Nights*, a copy of which her biographer Robert Halsband located in her library" and "The Arabic manuscripts, themselves a latter-day transcription of the oral lore, had been loosely translated into French by Antoine Galland in 1704."²³ In this respect, she analyses Montagu's intertextual reference to the *Arabian Nights*. In this respect, her work is a close reading of several points that is in relation to her main argument. Sherman's "Instructing the "Empire of Beauty": Lady Mary Worthy Montagu and the Politics of Female Rationality" (1995)²⁴ discusses that "Montagu's apparent anti-feminism does not reflect bouts of gender disaffection. Rather it is a gambit, instrumental to a unisex view of politics that requires each sex to act responsibly and men to nurture that potential both in the public sphere and in conjugal relations."²⁵ In this

¹⁹ Rae Ann Meriwether, "Transculturation and Politics in the Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 53, no. 3 (2013): 623–641.

²⁰ Meriwether, "Transculturation and Politics," 623.

²¹ Anna Secor, "Orientalism, Gender and Class in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*: To Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters &c," *Ecumene* 6, no. 4 (1999): 375–398.

²² Secor, "Orientalism, Gender and Class," 376.

²³ Secor, "Orientalism, Gender and Class," 385.

²⁴ Sandra Sherman, "Instructing the 'Empire of Beauty': Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Politics of Female Rationality," *South Atlantic Review* 60, no. 4 (1995): 1–26.

²⁵ Sherman, "Instructing the 'Empire of Beauty,'" 1.

respect, she analyses the periodical “The Nonsense of Common-Sense.” Patrona’s “The Forgotten Female Voices of the Greek Diaspora in the United States” (2015)²⁶ concentrates on the female writers of Greek origin that lived in the US. Along with Eufrosine-Korinna Kanoutas, Theano Papazoglou-Margaris, Maria Vardoulakis, and Maria Sarantopoulou Economidou. She mentions that Vaka Brown was the most renowned among them. Bringing the voice of women writers from Greece, Patrona invites attention to the departure of these writers from conventions.

Stanski’s work “Dangers, Delights, Development: Female Travel in The Mysteries of Udolpho and The Turkish Embassy Letters” (2022)²⁷ is an interesting article in the sense that it makes a comparison of Montagu’s travel with a work of gothic fiction. Stanski makes an analysis of their journey comparably. Juxtaposing Montagu’s work with a gothic novel is interesting in the sense that the attention is invited to the elements of gothic fiction such as mystery, curiosity, and danger. This can subtly underline an orientalist framework that considers the East as a sphere of mystery and wonder. In this way, Stanski touches upon the mental, emotional, and psychological aspects of these travels that the writers deal within their works. Some of the dangers that Montagu faces with in her journey, for instance, are “becoming so immersed in other cultures that she loses the ability to function in her own culture as an Englishwoman”²⁸ and being unable to have the same comfort she had in the Ottoman Empire in England as well. Yet, Montagu still has a positive view on her journey and encourages women like her to take that road Stanski claims.

Goffman’s article “Authenticity, Orientalism, And the Female Traveler: Writings from Inside the Harem” (2005)²⁹ focuses on a number of works by female authors which deal with representations of women in Ottoman harem. The article touches upon both Vaka Brown and Montagu. It states: “Vaka Brown's Oriental identity, however, was clouded by her Christianity, by her immigration to the U.S., and, perhaps most of all, by the changes in national identity brought about by the end of the Ottoman Empire.”³⁰ Bringing three works of Vaka Brown to the fore, *Haremlik* (1909), *A Child of the Orient* (1914), and *The Unveiled Ladies of Stamboul*

²⁶ Theodora D. Patrona, “The Forgotten Female Voices of the Greek Diaspora in the United States,” *The Journal of Modern Hellenism* 31 (2015): 87–100.

²⁷ Julia Stanski, “Dangers, Delights, Development: Female Travel in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Turkish Embassy Letters*,” *Spectrum*, no. 8 (2022).

²⁸ Stanski, “Dangers, Delights, Development,” 2.

²⁹ Carolyn Goffman, “Authenticity, Orientalism, and the Female Traveler: Writings from Inside the Harem,” *The Turkish Studies Association Journal* 29, no. 1/2 (2005): 91–104.

³⁰ Goffman, “Authenticity, Orientalism, and the Female Traveler,” 99.

(1923), the article claims that she has several identities: “her “Oriental” femininity; the inherited characteristics, as she imagines them, of a Byzantine Greek; and her status as a modern Western woman.”³¹ And through these identities, she achieves different things: “As she consciously repositions herself between the Ottoman period and the Turkish Republic, she depicts the late Ottoman experience from the standpoint of one of the ‘subject races’ who lived a life distinctly different from that of Zeyneb Hanım and Melek Hanım.” Additionally, “through her Byzantine Greek heritage, she claims an ancient legacy deeper than the Ottoman. At the same time, she asserts her ‘Turkish point of view,’ and she populates her books with her childhood Muslim friends and their feminine households.”³² As for Montagu, the article mentions her impact on the following works on the private sphere of harem: “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, in her *Embassy Letters* (published in 1763), set the tone for later women writers by ‘writing against the already prevalent codification of the polygamous harem as a space of sexual depravity and random cruelty.’”³³ She had a huge impact: “Later women writers, such as the subjects of Lewis’s study, also sought to dispel the eroticism of male Orientalist representations of Eastern women and to portray instead a life that comprised more than mere sexual fantasy and that even offered women a certain empowerment.”³⁴ In this respect, the article by focusing on these three important works of orientalism and female traveller-writers offers a notable analysis that can shed light into understanding these works.

Lewis’ *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (2004)³⁵ is a comprehensive work on female travellers and the Ottoman Harem. Lewis’ work is divided into six chapters as follows: “Harem Travellers,” “Empire, Nation and Culture,” “Harem: The Limits of Emancipation,” “Eroticised Bodies: Representing Other Women,” “Contested Behaviours, Gendered Spaces,” “Dress Acts: The Shifting Significance of Clothes.” In his work, he deals with “a series of little-known or ignored English-language publications about segregated life by Ottoman women from the beginning of the twentieth century.”³⁶ The writers examined constitute travellers that took journeys between the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey, Britain, the United States of America, and the rest of Europe. Lewis touches upon a wide range of writers including Ottoman writers like Halide Edib, Demetra Vaka Brown and

³¹ Goffman, “Authenticity, Orientalism, and the Female Traveler,” 99.

³² Goffman, “Authenticity, Orientalism, and the Female Traveler,” 99.

³³ Goffman, “Authenticity, Orientalism, and the Female Traveler,” 96.

³⁴ Goffman, “Authenticity, Orientalism, and the Female Traveler,” 96.

³⁵ Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

³⁶ Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, 1.

the sisters Zeyneb Hanım and Melek Hanım, and British writers such as Grace Ellison. Lewis states that these writers are connected to each other either through personal acquaintances or the way Lewis connects them through arguing similarities in their ideologies. In Chapter One, Lewis invites attention to the harem writings, which together constitute harem literature. He examines the works produced within this literature and outlines the traditions of the genre. The role Anglo-American publishing industry took in the production and circulation of these works is discussed. Moreover, the engagement between the writers of these works is touched upon. Chapter Two provides information regarding the life stories of the traveller-writers and their connections with the Ottoman Empire. It also seeks to provide answers to the question “who was the Oriental woman?”.³⁷ Chapter Three deals with one of the tropes of the Oriental literature, which is the portrayal of harem and polygamy. Lewis aims to discuss how each writer employed these notions in their works and argues that in some of the accounts such as, that of Vaka Brown’s, there appears to be “relucta[ncy] to relinquish their connections to treasured habits of old-fashioned harem living.” Chapter Four focuses on the descriptions of the concept of beauty particularly on Vaka Brown’s account. Chapter Five focuses on the harem, “conceptualising it in terms of spatiality.” Examining “how its segregating spatial relations exerted a socialising force on subjects within and beyond the Islamic community,” Lewis dwells on “the stereotypically deadened space of the harem” and analyse it “as a social text whose interpretation was differently available to variously racialised subjects.”³⁸ Furthermore, the chapter makes a comparison between “Ellison’s thrilling escapades in a veil” and “the complicated participation of Ottoman women in non-segregated spaces at the turn of the century, culminating in an analysis of women’s nationalist assertion of gendered spatial rights during the Allied occupation after the First World War.” The last chapter points to the cross-cultural dressing and gender performativity through photographs that are included in some of these works. Employing “an understanding of the ethnic and racial nature of gender identities into theories of gender performativity,” Lewis aims to shatter the binaries that are frequently included so as to “inhere in cross-cultural dressing in light of the varieties of Ottoman responses to European dress.”³⁹ Lewis underlines these photographs serve as a means of reality that confirms the authenticity of these journeys. Also, the tense relationship between Ottoman and Western women and ethnographic authority is aimed to be analysed alongside the cultural turn in ethnography so as to explore the varied meanings and possibilities of clothing and visual

³⁷ Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, 9.

³⁸ Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, 9.

³⁹ Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, 9.

representation for people moving between the West and East. It is significant to underline that these chapters are linked firmly although they seem divided. Therefore, Lewis' study is an important source for this study since it both deals with a wide range of works and frequently refers to the framework of Orientalism along with providing information about the historical context.

Arapoglou's "Vaka Brown: The Historicized Geography/ Geographic History of an Immigrant" (2004)⁴⁰ is another work on Vaka Brown. In this work, the writer compares Vaka Brown with other writers who are celebrated by American reading public, Anzia Yezerska and Mary Antin. The article underlines a significant point, which is Vaka Brown's writing under the name of "Mrs. Kenneth Brown," which, the article claims, hid her ethnic background, and made her be considered an American writer rather than an ethnic or immigrant one. Yet, as her writing combined Greek, Ottoman, European, and American elements, Vaka Brown created a space "in between" cultures. So, she has a mixed identity which goes beyond boundaries. Arapoglou's another work is her PhD thesis "Mapping Literary Identities: Space Trans-actions and Inter-actions in the Works of Mark Twain, Henry James, and Demetra Vaka Brown" (2005).⁴¹ In the thesis, she explores these writers' spatial poetics and identity politics. The travel writings of these authors are explored as historically contingent, and also socially, spatially significant. Another important article is Ahdifard's "Each race in its proper sphere": understanding Ottoman nation, race, and class in the travel narratives of Demetra Vaka Brown (1877–1946) and Leila Ahmed (1940)" (2021).⁴² It focuses on travel writings of Vaka Brown and Ahmed. *The Unveiled Ladies of Stamboul* (1923) by Vaka Brown and *A Border Passage* (1999) by Ahmed are mainly discussed. The writer explores the writings of two writers of Ottoman heritage with a focus on gender in relation to religion and nationalism. Micallef's "Identities in Motion: Reading Two Ottoman Travel Narratives as Life Writing" (2013)⁴³ examines *Haremlik* by Vaka Brown and *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions* (1913) by Zeyneb Hanoum so as to investigate their works as narratives of harem literature. Focusing on the three themes shared by both works,

⁴⁰ Eleftheria Arapoglou, "Vaka Brown: The Historicized Geography/Geographic History of an Immigrant," *Journal of Modern Hellenism*, no. 21/22 (2004): 83.

⁴¹ Eleftheria Arapoglou, *Mapping Literary Identities: Space Trans-actions and Inter-actions in the Works of Mark Twain, Henry James, and Demetra Vaka Brown* (PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2004).

⁴² Unita Ahdifard, "'Each Race in Its Proper Sphere': Understanding Ottoman Nation, Race, and Class in the Travel Narratives of Demetra Vaka Brown (1877–1946) and Leila Ahmed (1940–)," *Studies in Travel Writing* 25, no. 1 (2021): 50–64.

⁴³ Roberta Micallef, "Identities in Motion: Reading Two Ottoman Travel Narratives as Life Writing," *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 2 (2013): 85–110.

which are education, harem, and political participation, the writer aims to produce how their autobiographical personas evolve throughout their narratives.

Lewis' article "Harems and hotels: segregated city spaces and narratives of identity in the work of oriental women writers" (2000)⁴⁴ investigates works of Vaka Brown, Halide Edib Adivar, and Zeyneb Hanum. Lewis seeks to explore harem and how these writers challenge Western stereotypes regarding harem. *Childhood in the Late Ottoman Empire and After* (2016) edited by Fortna⁴⁵ is a significant work that brings a number of articles focusing on autobiographies of writers and focusing on the representation of Ottoman child in fiction including novels. Köksal's article "Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Demetra Vaka's and Selma Ekrem's Childhood Memories" (2016)⁴⁶ in the work takes attention in the sense that it provides significant information regarding the childhood of Vaka Brown. Vaka Brown's childhood is particularly significant for an analysis in the sense that she spent her childhood in the Ottoman Empire, which was a period that shaped her writing dramatically. Her memories there and her understanding of the Orient have significant reflections on her works. In this respect, Köksal's article is a significant source to have an insight into Vaka Brown's perception of the Ottoman Empire.

The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing (2013) by Youngs is a pivotal work to mention. Youngs' work provides extensive research on travel, travel writing, and history and development of travel writing starting from the medieval period to the twenty-first century. The Introduction of the book takes attention as it offers some alternative definitions of the genre, and the kinds of works can be counted as a work of travel writing according to various scholars' points of views. To exemplify, Youngs invites attention to Peter Hulme's criteria to define a narrative as a work of travel writing: "For texts to count as travel writing, Hulme believes, their authors must have travelled to the places they describe."⁴⁷ Additionally, Youngs underlines the distinction between fictional and factual accounts of travel and brings some arguments regarding the difficulty of making such distinct categories to the fore.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the

⁴⁴ Reina Lewis, "Harems and Hotels: Segregated City Spaces and Narratives of Identity in the Work of Oriental Women Writers," *Journal of Gender Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 165–177.

⁴⁵ Benjamin C. Fortna, ed., *Childhood in the Late Ottoman Empire and After* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

⁴⁶ Duygu Köksal, "Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Demetra Vaka's and Selma Ekrem's Childhood Memories," in *Childhood in the Late Ottoman Empire and After*, ed. Benjamin C. Fortna (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 250–273.

⁴⁷ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 4.

⁴⁸ Youngs refers to Korte: "'As far as the text and its narrative techniques are concerned, there appears to be no essential distinction between the travel account proper and purely citational forms of travel literature.'" He adds: "Defining travel writing by its authenticity, by the criterion that the journey that is narrated did actually take place, depends, Korte remarks, on an assumption that can only be tested beyond the text itself. Some theorists will agree

Introduction frequently refers to Said and the significance of his *Orientalism* in travel writing. In the same vein, Youngs touches upon postcolonial theory and the connections between empire, race, the act of travel, and capitalism. Youngs' work is divided into three parts. In the first part, he provides the historical development of the genre and provides his ideas on the connection between text and society. In the second part of the book, he focuses on a number of themes in relation to the act of travel including quest, gender and sexuality, race, and inner journey. In this part of the book, while dealing with gender and sexuality, he touches upon the significance of Lady Mary Montagu as a female traveler. Part Three focuses on writing and reading of accounts of travel writing and presents some predictions regarding the future of the genre. Youngs' work appears to be a foundational text in the study of travel writing.

Accidental Orientalists: Modern Italian Travelers in Ottoman Lands (2017) by Barbara Spackman⁴⁹ is another work that is worth mentioning. Her work explores the representations of the Ottoman Empire by Italian travellers from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. A number of figures including travelers, geographers, authors such as Edmondo de Amicis, Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, Antonio Baldacci, Corrado Alvaro, and Guido Piovene, Amalia Nizzoli, Giovanni Belzoni are touched upon. Through the analysis of travel narratives, Spackman examines themes such as identity, nationalism, modernity, gender, and sexuality along with the relationship between Italy and the Ottoman world. Spackman also makes a differentiation between British and French, and Italian travellers in the Ottoman Empire:

Italy comes late both to unification as a nation state and to the colonial enterprise; Italians who traveled to the Middle East in the nineteenth century thus did so without the backing of state power with imperial ambitions, or of cultural and scientific institutions of the sort that supported British and French travelers and those associated with them.⁵⁰

In this respect, she contends that notwithstanding the fact that Italy did not have the same colonial power as France or Britain, Italian travel writers frequently portrayed their Orientalist ideas; however, their accounts also appear to include more complex and sometimes contradictory perspectives informed by Italy's distinctive political and cultural role in the Mediterranean.

with Korte and regard appeals to biography an irrelevant distraction. Others will consider the requirement that travel writing record actual journeys a reasonable test," 5.

⁴⁹ Barbara Spackman, *Accidental Orientalists: Modern Italian Travelers in Ottoman Lands* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

⁵⁰ Spackman, *Accidental Orientalists*, 2.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The following chapter, first, introduces the travel writing genre and focuses on the connection between travel narratives and gender. The historical context of travel to the Ottoman Empire is provided. Then, Said's Orientalism, which is the framework of the analysis of the travel narratives, is explored. Additionally, harem is discussed as a notion recurrently touched upon in the thesis. Chapter Three focuses on Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* and explores it in the light of Said's Orientalism by focusing on Montagu's portrayal of Turkish women. Chapter Four discusses Demetra Vaka Brown's *Haremlik* within the framework of Said's Orientalism. Chapter Five concludes the study and elaborates on further studies that can be carried out.

CHAPTER 2

TRAVEL WRITING

2.1. Travel Writing

Travel has had a principal place in human history. As travellers began to convey their journeys by recording their experiences, travel writing gradually appeared as a literary genre. Travel writing has been regarded as an interdisciplinary field of study which is in connection with various disciplines including history, literature, geography, anthropology, and several others. Konte's utterances appear to be significant to touch upon at this point as she underlines the necessity to follow an interdisciplinary approach in travel studies: "the history of travel writing is naturally bound up with the history of travel itself -its various forms, circumstances and cultural contexts, so that any study of travel writing necessitates an interdisciplinary approach."⁵¹ Through their accounts, travellers documented their observations and encounters that took place in travelled lands. Travel narratives can be produced in a range of forms including journals, letters, diaries, and memoirs. Travel narratives represent more than a documentation of the traveller's experience. They aptly convey representations of individuals, societies, culture in the travelled territory. Travel narratives narrate a journey which is frequently assumed to have occurred and narrated from the author-narrator's perspective who is the traveller at the same time. Travel narratives can connect the traveller and the reader in the sense that the reader is drawn into the traveller's world in which individual experiences, and ideas and assumptions in relation to these are portrayed.

It is significant to touch upon the historical development of travel and some important travel writings in Europe. Herodotus is often considered one of the earliest travel writers. He drew on the disciplines of history and geography in his writings which were his firsthand experiences.⁵² It can be posited that his work set a standard for early model travel writings.⁵³ Several centuries later, Marco Polo emerged as a significant figure. His *The Travels* (c. 1299) is considered one of the most significant travel narratives in European history. His work,

⁵¹ Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing: From Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, trans. Catherine Matthias (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 3.

⁵² Orkun Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures: Accounts of Izmir as the Oriental Other in British Travel Writing Tradition* (PhD diss., Ege University, 2011), 21.

⁵³ Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 21.

conveying his experiences in Asia, contributed to the development of the genre. Additionally, it is important to note that his representation of the East emerges to be exotic and unfamiliar according to some scholars, therefore, some scholars hold the belief that his work laid the foundations for “the other,” which is a concept that is based on a binarical relationship between the East and West.⁵⁴ Polo’s othering appears to be linked with the presence of Islam in the travelled lands as it created a contrast compared to Christianity. Furthermore, as pilgrimage was one of the earliest forms of travel, its contribution to the genre is worth mentioning. Medieval pilgrim narratives frequently drew on religious accounts while narrating the journey. In these accounts, subjectivity appears to be limited since they were informed by religious motivations.⁵⁵ Yet, pilgrim narratives also had a role in presenting the East as “the other” by rousing the sentiments of curiosity and wonder.⁵⁶ *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (1357) can set an example to the works which includes detailed descriptions of foreign cultures, points in relation to pilgrimage, and geography. Notwithstanding the accuracy and authorship of the account have raised doubts among scholars, the work remains significant in the sense that it informed European representations of distant lands and people. It can be claimed that the abovementioned accounts prepared the basis for the differentiation between the East and West.

There exist several events and conditions that had contributed to the growth of travel narratives. Starting from the medieval and early modern periods, The Crusades and the expansion of the Mongol Empire can be considered to have led to an increased mobility since it gave rise to the discovery of new trade routes along with promoting religious missions and commercial exchange.⁵⁷ By the thirteenth century, merchants and missionaries obtained geographical knowledge beyond the Holy Land to the Far East. Travellers like Marco Polo produced significant narratives that informed Western perceptions of distant regions.⁵⁸ In the fifteenth century, the motivations for travel started to be diverse including trade, diplomacy, scientific inquiry, and exploration. Starting from the seventeenth century, Britain contributed significantly to the development of travel writing genre. As this thesis focuses on Montagu’s narrative and Britain is considered to have dominated the travel writing genre, it is significant to touch upon the historical development of the genre in relation to Britain. Through colonialism, travel writing became firmly linked with imperialism. Narratives emerged to be a

⁵⁴ Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 23.

⁵⁵ Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 24.

⁵⁶ Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 24.

⁵⁷ Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 18.

⁵⁸ Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 18.

means to produce knowledge about foreign lands and peoples.⁵⁹ The time between 1867 and 1909 is characterized by “the expansion of the British Empire” “at its peak with India, Africa, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Bermuda, and South New Guinea as its 20 colonies.”⁶⁰ For “The British Imperial eye/I,” the Mediterranean and the Middle East emerged to be significant.⁶¹ In addition, the developments in the areas of transportation, communication, and scientific knowledge promoted the act of travel at that time. Several institutions including the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Asiatic Society were among the ones that supported travels to the previously unexplored regions. In this respect, it can be claimed that travel writing developed significantly during the British imperial expansion. Starting from the nineteenth century, the participation of women to the genre also started to be notable.

It is significant to accentuate that “[t]ravel writers bring their own subjectivity into their accounts, ‘allowing us insights not only into the places they visited but also into their personal responses to events and to people.’”⁶² In the same vein, in his own travelogue, *Journey to Kars*, regarding two Victorian travelling companions Glazebrook contends: “a single event, thus shaped by two men, may be made to serve two different purposes, and so emerge in a different form in each of their accounts; yet neither lies.”⁶³ Thus, it can be suggested that travel writing does not merely describe places, people, and cultures. It also inevitably constructs and produces meanings about these. In the introduction of his work, Youngs invites attention to the relationship between travel, power, and the production of knowledge by referring to the statement of Frow: “‘genres actively generate and shape knowledge of the world;’ they ‘create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history or of philosophy or of science, or in painting, or in everyday talk.’”⁶⁴ In this respect, it can be suggested travel narratives actively participate in creating and shaping knowledge instead of solely representing the documented travel. Travel writings tend to produce a certain way of understanding a place, culture, and people, which can be carried out with the authority of the narrator and several textual strategies. Notwithstanding the traveller may appear to convey “the truth” about the travel, his or her account is subjected to be informed by historical contexts, cultural assumptions, and ideological perspectives. In that sense, travel

⁵⁹ Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 19.

⁶⁰ Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 19.

⁶¹ Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 19.

⁶² Susan Bassnett, “Introduction,” in *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jennifer Speake, 3 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2003), xi–xv, xiv.

⁶³ Glazebrook, quoted in Orkun Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 6.

⁶⁴ Frow, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 2.

writings can be considered constructed by the author-narrator who is inevitably under the influence of several factors.

In relation to the constructedness travel writing, it is significant to elaborate on the scholarly discussions regarding the authenticity of travel narratives. Youngs invites attention to Hulme's criteria for a narrative to be counted as a work of travel writing. Hulme argues that "[f]or texts to count as travel writing," "their authors must have travelled to the places they describe."⁶⁵ "There is" "an ethical dimension to their claims to have made the journeys they recount. If the claim is later found to be false, the author's work 'is discredited' and the text moves out of the category of travel writing into another such as the imaginary voyage."⁶⁶ On the other hand, this clear distinction between factual and fictional accounts of travel seems to be problematic according to some scholars as "[e]ach borrows from the other, employing similar narrative structures and literary techniques."⁶⁷ Youngs points to Kowaleski's argument: "travel accounts have historically formed one of the main sources for the novel and travel writers continue to utilize fictional devices such as an episodic structure, picaresque motifs, and (most significantly) the foregrounding of a narrator."⁶⁸ In this respect, travel writing both has had an impact on the development of fiction and has drawn on fiction by making use of its literary techniques. Therefore, it can be claimed that travel writing did not develop in a vacuum, rather, it has had an interaction with other genres. Episodic structures, plots dealing with adventure, and the employment of a first-person narrator are some of the prominent features of travel writings that are also shared by fictional works. The employment of first-person narration frequently brings the issue of unreliability to the fore, as well, since the first-person point of view tends to be highly informed by prejudices, emotions, limited knowledge, cultural assumptions, or personal interests. Thus, travel writing can be claimed to occupy a space between factual documentation and literary construction by drawing on elements of history and fiction. In the same vein, Korte underlines that:

[A]ccounts of travel depict a journey in its course of events and thus constitute narrative texts (usually composed in prose). They claim – and their readers believe – that the journey recorded actually took place, and that it is presented by the traveller him or herself. Within this basic frame

⁶⁵ Hulme, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 4.

⁶⁶ Hulme, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 4.

⁶⁷ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 4.

⁶⁸ Kowaleski quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 4.

of definition, accounts of travel manifest themselves in a broad formal spectrum, giving expression to a great variety of travel experience.⁶⁹

In this respect, associating travel writing with the notion of authenticity, “by the criterion that the journey that is narrated did take place, depends” “on an assumption that ‘can only be tested beyond the text itself.’”⁷⁰

It is significant to bear in mind that notwithstanding travel narratives may pose certain challenges if they are evaluated as historically accurate accounts, their significance does not merely depend on their capacity to offer objective representations of past realities. Travel writing provides significant insights into the historical formation, repetition, and circulation of patterns and discourses of representation, which is an aspect significant for this thesis. An exploration of themes, descriptions, and narrative strategies can lead to comprehend how knowledge about places, cultures, and peoples was constructed within specific historical and cultural contexts. For this reason, works of travel writing should not be evaluated merely as factual records of the travel since they are also cultural texts through which meanings and perceptions of spaces and societies are produced and disseminated. Similarly, this thesis contends that travel writings participate in the construction and circulation of discourses which inform the ways in which foreign spaces and identities are perceived. The exploration of travel writings is significant to trace the processes through which knowledge is historically constructed and how representations are circulated. In this respect, travel narratives have the capacity to disclose the assumptions and power relations of their time. Youngs points to the publication of Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978 as a significant point in the academic interest in travel writing as his work invites attention to the representation and construction of the other cultures,⁷¹ namely that of the Middle East. Said’s examination of the connection between travel, imperial power, and representation contributed to the development of the genre in the sense that travel narratives began to be considered much more than mere descriptions of foreign places or people. Said accentuates that travelers are informed by pre-existing views, values, and understanding of earlier travelers and their accounts, which constituted a dominant discourse. In this respect, “[p]ostcolonial theory’s recognition of the connections between travel, empire, capitalism, and racial ideologies gave an important impetus to travel studies. It broke the illusion that travel texts are ideologically neutral and objective.”⁷² It can be posited that

⁶⁹ Korte, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 5.

⁷⁰ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 5.

⁷¹ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 9.

⁷² Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 9.

postcolonial theory highlights “[t]he biggest fiction ... is travel writing’s own claim to being an objective genre. What does anyone really know about a foreign place that isn’t partly his or her own creation? We’re always choosing what we see, what we don’t see, and whom we meet; we’re always inventing our destinations.”⁷³ Thus, “the experience of travel and the perception, representation and the reception of it”⁷⁴ remain as significant points to consider.

2.2. Travel Writing and Gender

Youngs invites attention to the fact that “[a] number of critics have pointed to a long-maintained cultural identification of travel with masculinity, and of stasis and domesticity with the feminine.”⁷⁵ In the same vein, Bassnett posits: “The essence of adventure lies in taking risks and exploring the unknown, so it is hardly surprising to find that early travel accounts tended for the most part to be written by men, who moved more freely in the public sphere.”⁷⁶ Bassnett underlines that early modern travel writing was dominated by the male if it is considered that travel, adventure, and exploration were notions that were historically associated with masculinity, and men had greater freedom to move within the public sphere. Bassnett contends that classic and early modern travel narratives conventionally portrayed men as heroic explorers, while women were passive figures or destinations in male authored narratives.⁷⁷ She sets *The Norse Sagas*, *The Arthurian Cycle*, *The Odyssey*, *The Lusiads* as examples to her argument. This gendered conception of travel was also notable during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in a period in which European exploration and expansion empowered the image of the male traveller as a courageous adventurer. In this respect, Bassnett contends that this link between travel, heroism, and masculinity informed early travel literature and the narratives of the following centuries.

Notwithstanding female traveller-authors have contributed to travel writing throughout history, many accounts by women were neglected or downplayed. This can be linked with the assumption that women who travelled beyond the domestic sphere would be considered to shatter traditional gender roles and expectations for centuries, thereby undermining social expectations. Marrone’s comment⁷⁸ is in line with this: “The fear that her ideas might incite

⁷³ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 10.

⁷⁴ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 10.

⁷⁵ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 135.

⁷⁶ Susan Bassnett, “Travel Writing and Gender,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 225.

⁷⁷ Bassnett, “Travel Writing and Gender,” 225.

⁷⁸ Claire Marrone, *Female Journeys: Autobiographical Expressions by French and Italian Women* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 14.

other women to step outside traditional family roles created quite a stir. Women who ventured outside the domestic circle constituted a threat to family life. By extension, the makeup of society and humanity at large was called into question.” Nittel states that “one of the earliest female accounts of a journey is the central piece of *Itinerarium Peregrinatio Egeriae*, rediscovered in 1884.”⁷⁹ Given the religious nature of the text, Nittel states that “the pilgrimage to a holy place as well as the intention to relive the suffering of Jesus Christ manifested the first kind of female travel.”⁸⁰

The notion of gender informed the ways in which travel narratives are read and interpreted. Youngs invites attention to the feminist publisher Virago, which was one of the publishers that has contributed to the scholarly interest in women’s writing that started to flourish towards the end of the twentieth century.⁸¹ The republication of significant works by women, such as the narrative by Mary Kingsley on her travels to West Africa and Congo, took the attention of both the public and scholars, thereby bringing the overlooked and downplayed role of women in travel writings to the fore. Bassnet points to the feminist movement of the 1970s in terms of the role it played in recuperating women’s travel writing by shattering the male-dominated literary canon and republishing the overlooked works of women travellers.⁸² In addition to Virago, she underlines the crucial contribution of scholars of Victorian literature as they brought the accounts of the neglected writers like Isabella Bird to the fore. In this respect, they sought to accentuate the fact that contributions to the travel genre by women authors had been largely overlooked. The growing scholarly interest in women’s travel narratives tended to focus on the differences between the narratives produced by men and women authors. Some scholars contended that women traveller-authors perceive aspects of the societies which frequently tend to be ignored by male traveller-authors. To exemplify, the author Colleen J. McElroy notes: “When I have joined women in such places as Japan, Greece, Vietnam and Jordan, I have understood the tone, the social ramifications, without having understood every word. And when I presented my poems, I felt part of a larger, universal group.”⁸³ The scholars who supported this argument also put forward that women are more likely to demonstrate empathy toward colonized or marginalized communities.⁸⁴ In this respect, it can be claimed that

⁷⁹ Jana Nittel, *Wondrous Magic: Images of the Orient in 18th and 19th Centuries’ British Women Travel Writing* (Berlin: Galda & Wilch, 2001), 18.

⁸⁰ Nittel, *Wondrous Magic*, 18.

⁸¹ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 131.

⁸² Bassnett, “Travel Writing and Gender,” 226.

⁸³ McElroy, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 132.

⁸⁴ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 132.

scholarly examination of women's travel narratives tends to be based on a binary in the sense that the focus is on the difference of their narratives from those of men. Notwithstanding, women authors were praised for offering perspectives that differed from those of their male counterparts, they nevertheless relied on a gender binary by defining women's writing primarily in opposition to that of men. This scholarly approach is also problematic in the sense that it assumes a single, universal experience of all women writers.

McEwan, for instance, undermines the assumption that women travellers formed a single, unified group by inviting attention to the variations in social class, age, religion, historical period, and geographical location. She argues:

Travel writings by white women were positioned geographically, metaphorically and metaphysically between the dominant culture and the 'wild zone'. While both men and women have occupied these margins in literary production, they have been positioned there in very different ways. In addition, there were differences between women in how they occupied these margins, which in turn produced significant variations in their texts.⁸⁵

In that sense, the works of women authors cannot be considered to form a single, universal category of the travel writing genre. It is also significant to underline that women authors challenged male-authored narratives in many ways. Lucie Duff Gordon's *Letters from Egypt* can be an example in which she portrays "the daily lives of Egyptian women in terms that contested the fantasising of her male contemporaries."⁸⁶ In that sense, some women authors shattered "the growing tendency towards eroticisation of the unfamiliar that characterises so many texts by male travellers."⁸⁷

"Not all women travellers were middle class, not all shared the same ideological standpoint, though clearly those women who travelled under the umbrella of the British Empire were, albeit unconsciously, colluding with the colonial enterprise."⁸⁸ In this respect, it is significant to acknowledge the differences between women themselves, which can include age, race, nationality, economic privilege. In this respect, for instance, regarding the scholarly argument about women's empathy towards colonized or marginalized, it is significant to bear in mind women's position may differ in a colonial setting. It is possible to come across narratives that can be claimed to reproduce imperial ideology rather than resisting it. Women

⁸⁵ McEwan, quoted in Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender," 228.

⁸⁶ Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender," 229.

⁸⁷ Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender," 229.

⁸⁸ Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender," 228.

travellers, especially in the nineteenth century, could simultaneously challenge certain forms of oppression while reproducing colonial attitudes. For instance, female travellers like May French-Sheldon posit criticism of colonial violence and defend the people they encountered, yet their writings still reflect assumptions of cultural superiority.⁸⁹ French-Sheldon in her account criticizes colonial violence and supports a humane treatment of the African. Nevertheless, her narrative portrays assumptions of Western superiority. Bassnet claims that her encounter with Sultan Mireali, whom she judged for adopting European clothing rather than traditional dress, reveals her belief in her own cultural authority. In this respect, her narrative points to the fact that women travellers were not necessarily free from imperial ideologies. Instead, they can simultaneously challenge colonial practices while reproducing colonial attitudes. Therefore, several women-authored travel narratives disclose contradictions between humanitarian concerns and participation in imperial discourses, thereby revealing that gender alone cannot determine a traveller's perspective. Other elements including race, class, nationality, and colonial context should be taken into consideration. So, the acknowledgement of the existence of the "plurality of [women's] gazes"⁹⁰ is crucial to analyze travel narratives. Holland and Hugan states:

Women's travel writing is not insulated from the criticisms levelled at its male counterpart: more specifically, it is not immune from imperialist and ethnocentric nostalgia. However, its interrogation of the identity of the traveling subject – a subject recognized as being constituted by the complex interactions of gender, race, and class – marks contemporary women's travel writing as a vehicle for the displacement of patriarchal and imperial identity norms.⁹¹

In this respect, travel narratives by women authors should be considered in dialogue with colonial discourse and other elements to examine the writings critically instead of evaluating any woman authored text as inherently feminist or anti-colonial. Contemporary feminist critics, scholars such as Ghose, Mills, Bohls, support this point of view by shattering essentialist claims that all women share a common way of experiencing the travel and representing it.

Another point that contemporary criticism on women travel narratives is about biographical accounts of women travellers. Youngs underlines the fact that biographical analyses tend to be carried out on women travellers instead of examining their works critically. Contemporary criticism highlights how women travellers were considered unconventional or

⁸⁹ Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender," 227.

⁹⁰ Ghose, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 133.

⁹¹ Holland and Hugan, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 134.

rebellious figures who managed to travel by challenging the expectations of the society. In this respect, biographical accounts of women that highlight women as heroic, adventurous figures appear to neglect distinctive characteristics of women's travel writings. As Ghose states:

While women travellers have become the focus of a tremendous upsurge in interest . . . work on [them] tends to wallow in the anecdotal and to concentrate on constructing a myth of the intrepid, autonomous heroine braving all odds in the wilds. . . . [I]n the case of female writers all critical faculties, so acutely deployed in the analysis of men's texts, are, it seems, suspended. . . . the historical context and the relations of power that the traveller is bound up in, are conveniently elided.⁹²

Nevertheless, later scholarship invited attention to the distinctive characteristics of women's travel writing. It underlines that women were less often commissioned or institutionally supported than men; therefore, their narratives frequently adopted a more personal, reflective, and observational style. Some critics also seek to undermine the treatment to the women travelers solely and autobiographical readings of them since they believe these readings neglect the historical and ideological contexts in which these women wrote.

Contemporary feminist critics argue that travel has historically been associated with masculinity whereas women have been linked to domesticity and immobility. For this reason, it can be claimed that women travel writers strived to protect their presence in a literary tradition shaped by masculine norms. Lisle posits that because of this: “the public persona of the travel writer is empowered by a masculine, rational and aggressive organising scheme that succeeds to the extent that it writes over feminine characteristics in the self and in others.”⁹³ Since women authors lacked an established literary tradition, they accentuated personal experience rather than the scientific and anthropological style which existed in male accounts. “It is rare to find the kind of serious, anthropological monograph with extended footnotes like those produced by many male writers, which may be due to the exclusion of women from scientific professions in the nineteenth century.”⁹⁴ In this respect, women used to write about their experiences with an absence of a literary tradition. Their narratives were in the form of letters, diaries and memoirs instead of formal monographs. This pointed to their marginalization in intellectual sphere. While a number of these writings were initially intended for private use, several of these were later published. Nevertheless, although women had long been deprived of

⁹² Ghose, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 133-134.

⁹³ Lisle, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 135.

⁹⁴ Bassnett, “Travel Writing and Gender,” 231.

mobility and literary tradition, late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided some opportunities. Additionally, Smith invites attention to the developments in these centuries including “democratization, literacy, education, increasing wealth, urbanization and industrialization” which can be considered to have had an impact on women’s chance to travel and write. In this respect, travel emerged as a source of power and women’s narratives provided alternative perspectives, as Smith underlines: ““women have always been and continue to be on the move.””⁹⁵

It is significant to invite attention to the fact that women travellers were not passive observers or authors. Their journeys and writings had significant effects regarding many aspects such as politics and social matters. To exemplify, Gertrude Bell had a significant role in British policymaking in the Middle East after the First World War, which reveals women travel writers used to participate in imperial projects and inform historical and geopolitical developments. She was ““a member of the Arab Intelligence Bureau in Cairo and played an influential part in the post-war carve-up of the Middle East by the British and the French authorities.””⁹⁶ As posited by Caulifield: “the rise of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, ‘along with many current Middle Eastern troubles, can be traced clearly to the post-war, artificial creation of states in which [Bell’s] writings and expertise were so important.””⁹⁷ Similarly, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu witnessed the Ottoman practice of variolation during her stay in the Ottoman Empire between 1716 and 1718. She witnessed the effectiveness of it in preventing smallpox; therefore, she had one of her children inoculated there in 1718. Upon returning to England in 1721, her other child also had it, and she encouraged the practice among the British elite. So, she contributed to popularization of variolation at a time when smallpox was widespread in Europe. In this respect, it can be claimed that Montagu played a significant role in introducing Ottoman medical knowledge to Britain and helping to the establishment of the early development of preventive medicine.

2.3. Historical Context of Travel to the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire represented one of the most significant destinations for diplomatic, commercial, religious, and cultural encounters between Europe and the East. Starting from the early modern period, Ottoman lands took the attention of European travellers who wrote their observations of the travelled lands through travel narratives. Travellers’ interest in the Ottoman

⁹⁵ Smith, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 136.

⁹⁶ Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 137.

⁹⁷ Caulifield, quoted in Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, 137.

Empire developed for centuries. Constantinople (Istanbul) was the capital of the empire and a meeting point between Europe and Asia. So, it was a significant destination for travellers seeking to understand Ottoman culture and everyday life. The narratives on the Ottoman Empire did not only provide descriptions; they also reflected the intellectual, political, and cultural perspectives of European observers. In this respect, it can be posited that narratives about the empire created a space in which knowledge about the Ottoman Empire and the East was constructed and informed by contemporary European perceptions.

Bassnett underlines that “the popularity of travel accounts is a British phenomenon.”⁹⁸ In this respect, it can be claimed that there is also a significant amount of works written by British travellers about the Ottoman Empire, one of which is *Turkish Embassy Letters* by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. British travels to the Ottoman Empire have a significant place in the history of British travel writing. In this respect, it is significant to trace the historical context of the development of the genre and the contact between Britain and the Ottoman Empire in the past. During the sixteenth century, as Britain gained significant power particularly on the sea, the voyages to other lands expanded, and first examples of non-fiction travel narratives started to appear at that time. Richard Hakluyt’s (1553-1616) *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation* is a significant work to touch upon. Hakluyt’s work was produced during 1589 to point out “Britain’s merits in voyaging and compete with other major powers of Europe in the field of travel writing.”⁹⁹ It gave rise to the emergence of many other travel narratives in Britain along with Sir Walter Raleigh’s (1552-1618) *The Discovery of Guiana* (1596). The foundation of the Royal Society in 1660, which was an institution that encouraged people to travel and explore the world so as to gain knowledge about the world, was significant. In this respect, travel writing was being promoted by the state itself. Additionally, the beginning of the Grand Tour of Britain was significant. The Grand Tour, which appeared in the mid-seventeenth century and reached its height during the eighteenth century, was a significant part of British education. It is acknowledged that “[f]rom the later sixteenth century onward, and more frequently in later times,” it was possible to “encounter people whose main motivation for travel was their desire to write about the places visited. Such books found a public among the English gentry or the French magistrates for whom, by the seventeenth or eighteenth century, the possession of a large library was a matter of social prestige.”¹⁰⁰ In this

⁹⁸ Susan Bassnett, “Travel Writing within British Studies,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 3, no. 1 (1999): 1–16.

⁹⁹ William H. Sherman, “Stirrings and Searchings (1500–1720),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 17–36, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Suraiya Faruqi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 122.

respect, many English upper-class young men, who were frequently accompanied by a tutor, used to travel “through the English Channel, then to Paris by a coach, and from Paris, to Basel, Geneva, Strasbourg, Frankfurt, Vienna, Florence, Venice, Rome, Naples, and across the Alps, back to England.”¹⁰¹ The lands travelled for the Grand Tour were not the only destinations for travel; several travels were also made to the lands out of the Grand Tour. Several factors including “scientific and technological developments” and “new philosophical perspectives”¹⁰² encouraged the travellers to discover the new lands and have knowledge about the world. In other words, travelling was a way to learn about “the other” or the “non-European.” With the Renaissance and Reform movements, people started to feel more liberated from religious dogmas, and the exploration of the world was also being encouraged by the state. As a result of these, young men used to travel to Europe, who were usually from upper class families. Some of these important works produced at the time are as follows: Thomas Coryat, *Coryat’s Crudities* (1611); Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1613); Sir Francis Drake, *The World Encompassed* (1628); Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1667); Daniel Defoe, *A Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724); Henry Fielding, *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (1755); Tobias Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy* (1766).

The British and The Turks are known to have first encountered during the Crusades.¹⁰³ Since the territories were geographically distance, their contact remained limited. In this respect, for centuries, the relationship between the two nations were based on economic interests rather than warfare. In the sixteenth century, Anglo-Ottoman relations had a partnership based on their shared political and commercial interests. England started to develop good relations with the Ottoman Empire as it sought for an ally against Spain. To strengthen this relationship, The Ottoman Empire, for instance, bestowed the 1580 capitulation to England, which provided privileges to the English in the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁴ The Levant Company was established, which solidified the trade between the English and Ottoman. Britain sent ambassadors to the Ottoman Empire, one of whom was Montagu’s husband, Edward Wortley Montagu, for instance. In the seventeenth century, Anglo-Ottoman relations expanded, trade

¹⁰¹ Virginia Kay Jones, “Travel in Great Britain and Beyond: Locations from British Travel Literature,” in *Houston Teachers Institute Curriculum Unit 04.02: Beyond Houston* (Houston: Houston Teachers Institute, 2004), 181–209, 185.

¹⁰² Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 12.

¹⁰³ İ. Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, “On Dokuzuncu Asır Başlarına Kadar Türk-İngiliz Münasebâtına Dair Vesikalar,” *Belleten* 13, no. 51 (1949): 573–648, 573.

¹⁰⁴ Despina Vlami, *Trading with the Ottomans: The Levant Company in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 13.

peaked between 1620 and 1683. The first Ottoman envoy arrived in England in 1607, which revealed that relations between the two powers were much more than being solely based on economic cooperation.¹⁰⁵ Britain expanded its imperial and commercial activities. Two powers started to have favourable relations, which was significant for Britain due to the strategic geographical position that the Ottoman Empire had. Following the Ottoman defeat at the Battle of Vienna in 1683 and the subsequent Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, which was the treaty widely regarded as the official beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. The British Empire put efforts to stabilise the relationships. In the rest of the seventeenth century, the relations between the British and the Ottomans remained relatively stable. During the eighteenth century, the relations between the two powers started to diverge from stability as the imperial activities of Britain resulted in its involvement in Ottoman politics. During this period, between the years 1716 and 1718, Montagu visited the Ottoman Empire with her husband Edward Wortley Montagu, who was the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Upon the Treaty of Karlowitz, the Ottoman Empire started to seek for closer relations with Europe, and it established embassies in Europe to follow the developments there. The first permanent embassy in Britain in 1794, which empowered diplomatic ties between them.

The nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was marked by profound political, military, and administrative transformation. The empire gradually lost its political and territorial dominance. Several nationalist movements emerged across the Balkans. The Egyptian crisis of 1831 emerged as a significant event in the sense that it revealed the empire's growing military weakness. Therefore, the empire sought help from Russia, which led to the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi (1833). This treatment was significant as it changed the balance of power in the region, which was preoccupying for the European states as the empire had close relationship with Russia. Sultan Mahmud II's a series of reforms in 1835 to strengthen and modernize the empire take attention. In this respect, several administrative and social changes took place such as adoption of European-style clothing for government officials. These changes took place as the empire adopted several modifications to reobtain the power that it was losing. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire continued to experience both political reform and internal instability. Consequently, the nineteenth century was marked by several efforts to modernize the Ottoman state. Also, the aim to confront issues including political crises and territory loses was notable.

¹⁰⁵ H. Mustafa Eravcı, *Avrupa'da Türk İmajı: XVI–XIX. Asır İngiltere Örneği* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2010), 68.

In the early twentieth century, the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 restored the constitution and parliament.¹⁰⁶ This marked the beginning of the Second Constitutional Era under the leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). The Young Turks sought to limit absolutist rule and promote political and administrative reforms throughout the empire. The political landscape continued to evolve in 1909 with the 31 March Incident. The 31 March Incident resulted in the deposition of Sultan Abdülhamid II and the accession of Mehmed V to the throne.¹⁰⁷ Despite these constitutional reforms, the Ottoman Empire continued to face internal instability, rising nationalist movements, and mounting international pressures. It was during this period of political transformation that Demetra Vaka Brown visited the Ottoman Empire in 1909 and produced her work *Haremlik*. This period was marked by political, social, and cultural transformation. The empire experienced the final decades of its existence. The tensions between traditional structures and emerging modern ideals, particularly regarding questions of governance, identity, and gender, were notable during the era. Vaka Brown's travel coincided with the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1909). His rule was characterized by centralized authority, political censorship, and efforts to preserve the empire in the face of increasing nationalist movements and European intervention. During this era, debates surrounding constitutionalism, modernization, and the status of women were visible in urban cities such as Istanbul. Vaka Brown arrived during the Young Turk Revolution which led to optimism among reformers who sought for equality, social progress, and political rights. Additionally, the debates in relation to women's education, public visibility, and legal rights were among the key issues on the agenda. In this respect, Vaka Brown visited an Ottoman society that was negotiating the relationship between its Islamic traditions, imperial heritage, and desires for modernity. Thus, it can be claimed that Vaka Brown's *Haremlik* points out the dynamic social transformations unfolding within the empire itself. Vaka Brown's position as a Greek-Ottoman origin author provided her opportunity to observe these developments from a perspective that was more multifaceted than that of many earlier European travellers.

Travel writing can be considered as “a process of ‘inscription and appropriation’” through which foreign lands and cultures are interpreted from the traveller's perspective, which empowers colonial systems of power. Porter's statement seems significant at this point:

From the beginning, writers of travel have more or less uncounsciously made it their purpose to take a fix on and thereby fix the world in which they found themselves; they are engaged in a

¹⁰⁶ A. L. Macfie, *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1923* (London: Routledge, 2013), 52.

¹⁰⁷ Macfie, *The End*, 101.

form of cultural cartography that is impelled by an anxiety to map the globe, center it on a certain point, produce explanatory narratives, and assign fixed identities to regions and the races that inhabit them. Such representations are always concerned with the question of place and of placing, of situating oneself once and for all vis-a-vis an Other or others. They are also an integral part of the ideological practice of every social formation that becomes aware of the existence of more or less remote lands and neighboring peoples.¹⁰⁸

In this respect, it can be posited that European travel narratives frequently empowered certain assumptions instead of encouraging cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, it can be suggested that travel accounts bring power relations to the fore. Many British travellers starting from the seventeenth century made their travels in the historical context. George Sandys' *A Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610* (1615) can be considered one of the earliest examples of the genre. Sandys was an English traveller and poet. He travelled between 1610 and 1612 to the Ottoman lands. Istanbul, Asia Minor, Egypt, Palestine, and the Levant were among the places he visited. He published his experiences in *A Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610* (1615) in which he touches upon several points including the religion of the empire and religious differences between England and the Ottoman empire, society, architecture, culture, and customs. Richard Chandler's *Travels in Asia Minor* (1775) is significant to touch upon. Chandler was a traveller, an antiquarian, archaeologist who had profound expertise in classical history and literature. Having been assigned by the Society of Dilettanti, which used to support the study of ancient Roman and Greek art, he made his visit to many ancient cities in such as Thrace, Tenedos, Troas, Scio, Smyrna, Antiochia, and Scala Nova. Then, he went to Greece to carry out some observations at historical sites in 1765. Chandler, upon returning home, published his account about these travels, called *Travels in Asia Minor* (1775), in which he presents the data collected surrounding the history of ancient civilizations and ruins in Asia Minor. Moreover, his narrative touches upon cultural patterns like the descriptions of clothes and food. Frederick Gustavus Burnaby's *On Horseback Through Asia Minor* was published in 1877. *On Horseback Through Asia Minor* focuses on Burnaby's observations particularly on the Armenian society, who were the Christians of Asia Minor. It is known that Burnaby's journey to Asia Minor stemmed from the purpose to examine if the Armenians were experienced suffering as claimed by the European press at that time, and to examine the military capabilities of the Ottoman troops. The book is highly political considering these points and its involvement in arguments regarding Russia and Britain. In this respect,

¹⁰⁸ Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 20-21.

from different centuries various travellers, with varying purposes, made their visits to the Ottoman lands and created their works.

Julia Pardoe *The City of the Sultan and Domestic Manners of the Turks* (1837) is another notable work. Pardoe's visit took place during a critical period for the Ottoman Empire in which there were frequently revolts against the empire and the new attempts towards modernisation were in progress. Pardoe was a novelist, poet, and traveller. She is known to have started to write at an early age, and she produced a number of works in both fiction and non-fiction. Therefore, she became a significant figure in the century she lived in. She is particularly known for her travel writings. While *The City of the Sultan and Domestic Manners of the Turks* (1837) is widely accepted as her the most well-known work, she also produced other travel narratives such as *The City of the Magyar, or Hungary and Her Institutions in 1839-40* (1840) in which she penned her travel experiences in Hungary. In *The City of the Sultan and Domestic Manners of the Turks*, Pardoe writes about her nine months in the empire where she was accompanied by his father in December 1835. It is known that due to her father's occupation, she possessed certain privileges that enhanced the scope and authority of her travel writing, even in distant regions such as the Ottoman Empire. These advantages included gaining access to restricted spaces, such as military sites and the residences of members of the ruling elite. As it was the case of in some other women travellers like Montagu, she had access to the harem due to the advantage that her gender provided her. The book turned out to be an enormous success, upon which she published a guidebook for Istanbul called *The Beauties of the Bosphorus* (1839).

Many other travel writers to the empire and their works are as follows: Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant* (1636); Sir Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1666); Richard Pococke, *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries* (1743–1745), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (*Turkish Embassy Letters*), John Covel, *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* (written 1670–1679, published later); Edward Daniel Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa* (1810–1823); Charles MacFarlane, *Constantinople in 1828* (1829); David Urquhart, *The Spirit of the East* (1838); Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen; or, Traces of Travel Brought Home from the East* (1844); William Makepeace Thackeray, *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (1846); and Edwin Pears, *Turkey and Its People* (1911), Grace Ellison, *An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem* (1915). These travellers visited the Ottoman lands for various motivations including diplomatic, commercial, or cultural relations. Their narratives reflect the experience of the author-narrator

and serve as a means through which British perceptions of the Ottoman world were constructed, negotiated, and disseminated.

2.4. Edward Said's Theory of Orientalism

Edward Said (1935-2003) was a literary critic, political activist, and an academic. He was born in Jerusalem, Palestine as the son of Wadie Said, a Palestinian American businessman and Hilda Said, a Palestinian housewife. He had education in Jerusalem, Cairo, and the US. He had a BA degree from Princeton University, and MA and PhD degrees in English Literature from Harvard University. He worked as Professor of English at Columbia University in the field of Comparative Literature (1963-2003). His first book is *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), which is a work derived from his PhD dissertation. He is the author of many books including *Intention and Method* (1974), *Orientalism* (1978), *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981), *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), *On Late Style: Music and Literature against Grain* (2006).

In his memoir, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999), Said points to his background and some difficulties he encountered in his life:

[...] it took me about fifty years to become accustomed to, or more exactly to feel less uncomfortable with, 'Edward', a foolishly English name yoked to the unmistakably Arabic family name 'Said'. True, 'Edward' was for the Prince of Wales who cut so fine a figure in 1935, the year of my birth, and 'Said' was the name of various uncles and cousins. But the rationale of my name broke down when I discovered no grandparents called 'Said', and when I tried to connect my fancy English name with its Arabic partner. For years, and depending on the exact circumstances, I would rush past 'Edward' and emphasise 'Said'; or do the reverse or connect the two to each other so quickly that neither would be clear. The one thing I could not tolerate, but very often would have to endure, was the disbelieving, and hence undermining, reaction: Edward? Said?¹⁰⁹

Said continues to his discussion:

The travails of bearing such a name were compounded by an equally unsettling quandary when it came to language. I have never known what language I spoke first, Arabic or English, or which one was mine beyond any doubt. What I do know, however, is that the two have always been

¹⁰⁹ Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 3.

together in my life, one resonating in the other, sometimes ironically, sometimes nostalgically, or, more often, one correcting and commenting on the other. Each can seem like my absolutely first language, but neither is.¹¹⁰

These passages lay bare Said's sense of cultural dislocation and identity dilemma, which he points out through explaining what his name represented for him and the language problems he experienced. He invites attention to both his internal struggle about belonging and identity, and the reactions he received. In this respect, it can be put forward that Said, as he himself explains, had difficulties regarding coming up to terms with his identity as a person belonging to diverse cultures. In this respect, it can be claimed that his firsthand experiences informed his writings. Said's pivotal works, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) provide insight into his understanding of the notions in relation to the East and West.

In his work *Orientalism* (1978), Said investigates the power dynamics between the "West" and "East" in literature and several other academic fields. Said problematizes the long-standing tradition of Oriental studies, contending that European Orientalist discourse holds the authority to name non-European societies as the "others." Said underlines that this scholarly tradition is traced back to antiquity and consistently reveal and represent Western views of the Orient.¹¹¹ Additionally, he invites attention to the fact that how this characterization also helped Europe to produce a definition for itself: "[T]he Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative."¹¹² He adds that "[t]he Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture" and it "expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles."¹¹³ In this respect, Said contends that the Orient is linked to Europe in the sense that it is embedded in European culture and material life. He invites attention to a process of construction of the Orient through a system that he names Orientalism. In this respect, Europe does not simply appear to investigate the Orient, but it shaped the Orient. So, the East is discerned and represented by institutions, language, and imagery. In doing so, the concept of the Orient is produced by European cultural and ideological frameworks, which is a means to empower Western authority and identity.

¹¹⁰ Said, *Out of Place*, 4.

¹¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

¹¹² Said, *Orientalism*, 1-2.

¹¹³ Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

Said defines Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’”¹¹⁴ Said underlines how “a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on.”¹¹⁵ Said does not highlight merely a neutral difference between East and West; rather, he demonstrates how this distinction is recurrently empowered through intellectual and cultural production. Orientalism is an embedded way of thinking which informs how the West come to terms with and represents the East, thereby transforming it into something established as the other, exotic, or even inferior. Said’s reference to the range of aforementioned significant figures points to the fact that they maintain this binary of the East and West, and it reveals that Orientalism does not appear to be an isolated concept; rather, it is intertwined with a dominant discourse of power. Hence, knowledge about the “Orient” is not purely objective; on the contrary, it is informed by Western perspectives and interests.

Said underlines that “the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either.”¹¹⁶ As “‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ are man-made,” “the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other.”¹¹⁷ Herein, it is significant to underline that how Said points to the fact that the Orient gains “reality” through the way it is described and imagined in Western thought. This reveals how power gives way to construction of the “reality.” Said also underscores the interconnectedness of the East and West in the sense that they are mutually constructed through the history of “thought, imagery, and vocabulary.”¹¹⁸ Said states: “The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be ‘Oriental’ in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it could be—that is, submitted to being-made Oriental.”¹¹⁹ And he adds:

There is very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never

¹¹⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

¹¹⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 2-3.

¹¹⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 4.

¹¹⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

¹¹⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 6.

spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was "typically Oriental."¹²⁰

In this excerpt, the instance of Flaubert and Kuchuk Hanem lays bare how the Oriental woman does not have authority to express herself; rather, she emerges to be a passive entity whose self-definition is carried out by a Western male. Flaubert's being advantaged in terms of his gender, race and economic situation allows him the opportunity to have an authority over Kuchuk Hanem and represent her in his own way. In that sense, Orientalism is much more than a set of stereotypes about the East; instead, it is a system in which the ones who have power can have authority to speak on behalf of the ones who are disadvantaged in terms of race, gender, and class.

Referring to Gramsci's understanding of how power operates within a society, Said invites attention to his division of society into two parts: political society consisting of institutions like army and police and civil society including institutions such as families and schools.¹²¹ Gramsci argues that culture works primarily in civil society through consent. People tend to normalize certain values and not embrace some others. Relatedly, hegemony is a significant concept, which stands for cultural dominance in Gramscian sense. In non-totalitarian societies, power operates through making certain cultural forms the norm. So, certain set of ideas supporting certain beliefs and values appear to be more effective. Said states the Western way of representing the East is linked with this cultural hegemony in the sense that set of ideas regarding Orientalism have managed to be dominant due to the fact that they ended up being widely accepted and normalized over time as it can be explained with Gramsci's argument.¹²² Referring to Hay's idea of Europe as a shared identity, Said underlines how identity in his understanding is constructed through a sense of superiority to others. He believes Orientalism is similar to this understanding as Europe has historically been considered itself superior to non-Europeans.¹²³ This kind of understanding became so powerful and embedded in the society that different perspectives did not have opportunity to come to the fore.

¹²⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 6.

¹²¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

¹²² Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

¹²³ Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

Said makes references to other names such as Chomsky.¹²⁴ He claims that although his work is supposedly objective research, it is linked with political power as stated: “Noam Chomsky has studied the instrumental connection between the Vietnam War and the notion of objective scholarship as it was applied to cover state-sponsored military research.” Then, Said touches upon the imperial powers like Britain, France, and the United States: “their political societies impart to their civil societies a sense of urgency, a direct political infusion as it were, where and whenever matters pertaining to their imperial interests abroad are concerned.”¹²⁵ He underlines how political society has an impact on civil society and politics informs other areas of a society. Said argues:

I doubt that it is controversial. for example, to say that an Englishman in India or Egypt in the later nineteenth century took an interest in those countries that was never far from their status in his mind as British colonies. To say this may seem quite different from saying that all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somehow tinged and impressed with violated by, the gross political fact- and yet that is what I am saying in this study of Orientalism.¹²⁶

In this respect, Said points out that India, Egypt were the places that were informed by the fact that there were British colonies. In this way, these places related to the imperial power; therefore, they were associated with Britain. In that sense, knowledge about these places does not seem neutral or pure, instead it is connected with political interests. Said adds:

For if it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, then it must also be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main" circumstances of his actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. And to be a European or an American in such a situation is by no means an inert fact. It meant and means being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important, that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient almost since the time of Homer.¹²⁷

Herein, Said connects this with Western scholarship and the notion of the Orient. He invites attention to the long history of connection with the Orient, going back to Homer, in terms of imperial and political aspects. In this sense, Western knowledge of the Orient is informed by these aspects. Regarding knowledge, Said sets another example. Drawing attention to Balfour,

¹²⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 11.

¹²⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 11.

¹²⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 11.

¹²⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 11.

he states how he defended British control of Egypt since he set a parallel between power and knowledge along with military or economic strength. He underlines the source of Britain's superiority which was its power to study and understand Egypt from its beginnings to its peak and decline. "To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for 'us' to deny autonomy to 'it'-the Oriental country-since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it."¹²⁸ So, "British knowledge of Egypt is Egypt for Balfour, and the burdens of knowledge make such questions as inferiority and superiority seem petty ones. Balfour nowhere denies British superiority and Egyptian inferiority; he takes them for granted as he describes the consequences of knowledge."¹²⁹

Said posits that "Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot to hold down the 'Oriental' world."¹³⁰ He explains that:

it is a "discourse that is by no means direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what "we" do and what "they" cannot do or understand as "we" do).¹³¹

This passage demonstrates how Said underlines that orientalism is a discourse informed by various forms of power. The Orient is created in a dialogue with political, intellectual, cultural, and moral forces. To exemplify, colonial institutions can inform the content of a study and academic disciplines can approve certain forms of interpretations and not approve some others. In this way, a distinction between "we" and "they" appears. The various sources of power inform how the Orient is represented.

Said also points to the nineteenth-century literature by naming the figures including John Stuart Mill, Arnold, Carlyle, Newman, Macaulay, Ruskin, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and invites attention to their Orientalist ideas and beliefs on imperialism and race.¹³² In this

¹²⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 32.

¹²⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 32.

¹³⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

¹³¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

¹³² Said, *Orientalism*, 14.

respect, he underlines the influence of imperialism on literature. This allows to observe that how culture operates within systems of power. Said claims how literature gains historical significance when examined in relation to the political discourses: “Even One or two pages by Williams on ‘the uses of the Empire’ in *The Long Revolution* tell us more about nineteenth-century cultural richness than many volumes of hermetic textual analyses.”¹³³ As Said underlines: “Orientalism, many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country is like this, or better, that it is colourful ... [T]he idea in either case is that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes”.¹³⁴

Said’s *Orientalism* is considered one of the most significant works exploring the historical relationship between the East and the West. It traces the development of Western representations of the Orient from the early colonial period to Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt and the emergence of modern encounters between Western Orientalists and Eastern societies. It is significant to underline that Said’s conception of the “West” primarily refers to the major colonial powers, particularly Britain and France. In the same vein, “the Orient” primarily refers to the Arab regions of the Near East, nevertheless, the term also encompasses various societies.¹³⁵ To Said, the historical relationship between these colonial powers and the Arab world was essentially unequal, and it was marked by Western political and cultural dominance. This situated the West as the stronger partner and the East as the weaker one.¹³⁶ Travel narratives, a vast number of which were produced by Europeans, can be explored through the lens of Orientalism. Orientalism has been a persistent practice in both Europe and the United States as it was rooted in the thinking of the eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century Western colonisers. Said invites attention to Europe’s political and imperial interests:

the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a

¹³³ Said, *Orientalism*, 14.

¹³⁴ Said, quoted in Kocabıyık, *Imperial Adventures*, 4.

¹³⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

¹³⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 40.

mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.¹³⁷

Herein, Said underlines that the Orient cannot be assumed as a distant or isolated geographical region. Instead, it is a notion that has been embedded in European history, culture, and identity. Since travel writing played a significant role in producing European representations of the East, Said's *Orientalism* provides a framework for examining travel narratives written by European authors about the Orient. European travel narratives often reveal an ambivalent attitude towards the East, combining feelings of anxiety and opposition with fascination, admiration, and curiosity towards Eastern societies and cultures. Also, European travellers have defined their own identity through the constructed representations of the Orient. It is significant to note that The Ottoman Empire occupies a distinctive position within Orientalist studies. Umunç notes: "his analyses of the Ottomans who have been the greatest power in the Orient throughout centuries remained on the surface level."¹³⁸ In *Orientalism*, Said does not particularly focus on the Ottoman Empire. It can be posited that the Ottoman Empire holds a different position in Orientalist discourse considering that it was not a colonized region. Throughout history, it emerged as a significant rival of Europe in terms of its political, military, and economic power. In this respect, European perceptions of the empire were not informed by colonial ideology. Instead, centuries of diplomatic, religious, commercial, and military connections affected the perceptions. Through textual representations of travels to the Ottoman Empire, the empire ended up being a significant part of Orientalist discourse as recurring images and meanings have been produced about it through conflict, trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange.

2.5. Harem

Harem has had a significant place in Western representations of the Ottoman Empire. The word harem was used to refer to private domestic spaces in a household reserved for women and their families. The Ottoman harem has long taken the attention of historians and scholars, particularly through accounts produced by European observers, including travellers and ambassadors. Several scholars have sought to define and conceptualize the notion of the harem by approaching it from historical, literary, and cultural perspectives. Ahmed, for instance, describes it as "[...] apartments that were most particularly forbidden to other men-those in

¹³⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 1-2.

¹³⁸ Himmet Umunç, "Doğu ve Ötekilik: İngiliz Seyahatnamelerinde Türk Kimliği (Lady Montagu ve Richard Chandler)," *Bilig* 66 (2013): 297-314, 298.

which [the women of the master] women resided.”¹³⁹ Peirce defines the harem as a restricted space where access is either prohibited or carefully regulated.¹⁴⁰ These definitions appear to underline that one of the central characteristics of the harem which is its restricted and inaccessible nature. Montagu and Vaka Brown’s gender and their being upper-class women enabled them to gain access to many domestic harems which were traditionally maintained by wealthy families. In Ottoman Empire, there were both domestic and imperial ones. The household harem is mostly polygamous. It is usually the four wives of the husband and the concubines. The imperial harem was much like the household harem, only more extensive and with a more highly articulated structure.¹⁴¹ Harem has historically been considered a site of mystery, seclusion, and eroticization for Western travellers. It is widely acknowledged that Western observers of Ottoman society and of Istanbul were captivated by stories about the harem and its mysteries. Said raises a series of fundamental questions regarding the representation of other cultures:

How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one’s own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the “other”)? ...How do ideas acquire authority, “normality,” and even the status of “natural” truth?¹⁴²

In European imagination, the harem has signified much more than a physical space in the sense that it became a symbol of mystery and eroticism through the Western representations of it. In this way, this representation has remained as an enduring image of the harem. Nevertheless, it is significant to add that since harem had a restricted nature, many Western accounts relied on speculation, hearsay, or imagination rather than direct observation. The study of the harem extends beyond its examination as a domestic institution, as it encompasses a range of concepts, including gender, power, and cultural difference, all of which play a significant role in contemporary harem scholarship. The harem and the Eastern woman have inspired various forms of cultural production including visual arts, literature, and other artistic representations. *La Grande Odalisque* (1814) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres is one of these.

¹³⁹ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 117.

¹⁴⁰ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

¹⁴¹ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 6.

¹⁴² Said, *Orientalism*, 325-326.



Figure 1. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque*, (1814).

La Grande Odalisque by Ingres is one of the most significant visual representations of the Orient in nineteenth-century European art. The painting is not based on direct observation by Ingres; it is an illustration of European imagination of the East and an Eastern woman. In this painting, the naked body of an Ottoman odalisque and her sensual pose take attention, which presents her as an object of gaze and erotic desire. Between the luxurious fabrics and accessories, the woman's reclining posture and gaze directed to the viewer contribute to the construction of an exotic atmosphere. The headscarf, an element associated with Eastern and Ottoman visual imagery, creates a contrast with her exposed skin. This empowers the tension between modesty and sensuality in the representation of the odalisque. In this respect, it can be posited that the painting portrays an odalisque as an object of desire and contemplation for the Western gaze through such a sensualized representation. This argument is in line with Said's statement that Orientalist representations frequently tend to produce the East as a site of fantasy and desire rather than presenting it as a historically accurate reality.

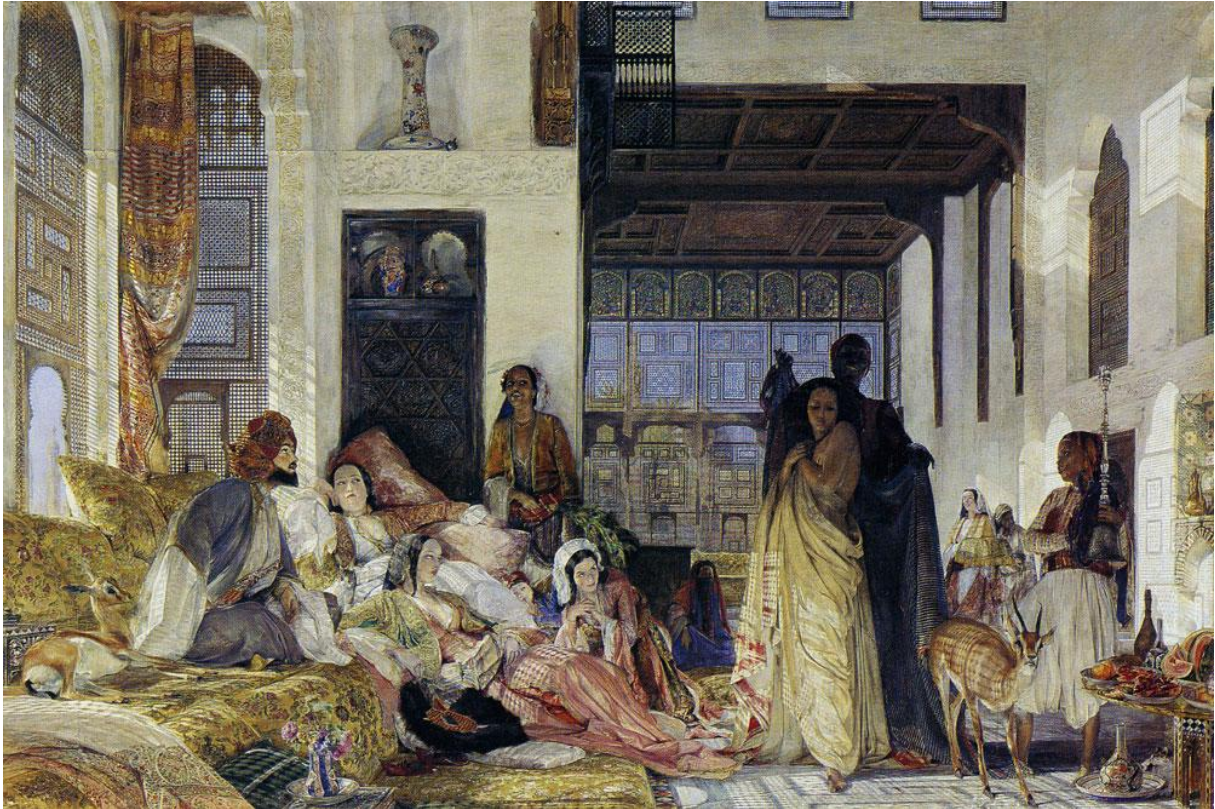


Figure 2. John Frederick Lewis, *The Harem*, c.1850.

The Harem by Lewis portrays presents the domestic atmosphere of the harem. The interior space is designed represented in a detailed way; elaborate decoration takes attention. The painting is imbued with luxurious textiles, patterned carpets, embroidered fabrics, cushions, and carefully arranged architectural details, all of which create an atmosphere of comfort and luxury. The women are situated within this richly ornamented setting; their traditional clothes and calm manner take attention. Their relaxed postures and the peaceful arrangement of the scene imply a private and secluded environment. The elaborate representation of objects and decoration invites attention to the material culture, thereby presenting the harem as a site of elegance, privacy, and visual fascination. Said highlights that Eastern spaces can be considered spectacles that are interpreted by Western perception. In this respect, although Lewis lived in a region close to the Ottoman territories and had the opportunity to observe Eastern societies, his work reflects the perspective and interpretation of a Western artist.



Figure 3. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pool in a Harem*, 1876.

Gérôme's *Pool in a Harem* portrays the harem in which there is a pool within an elaborately decorated interior. There is a group of women who have gathered around the pool. The painting is imbued with patterned tiles and an Eastern carpet, which create an atmosphere of the East. The women, whose bodies are partially nude, are portrayed in relaxed and passive poses, which underlines the private and secluded nature of the harem and contributes to a sensualized and erotic representation of it. The viewer is invited to observe an intimate space, which was traditionally considered inaccessible. In this respect, the harem turns into a spectacle for the Western gaze. The painting empowers assumptions about Eastern femininity and sensuality through an exotic portrayal. Thus, the harem emerges as a space through which the West projects its own fantasies and understanding of the East.

CHAPTER 3

***TURKISH EMBASSY LETTERS* (1763) BY LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU**

Turkish Embassy Letters (1763), a documentation of Montagu's experiences during her visit to the Ottoman Empire between the years 1716-1718, is one of the earliest and the most elaborated European accounts of Ottoman society and Turkish¹⁴³ women's lives within the harem. Montagu (1689–1762) was a prominent British aristocrat, intellectual, and writer of essays and letters. This chapter seeks to examine the tensions in Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* by contending that although she aims to shatter prevailing negative and stereotypical representations of Turkish women of her time, her narrative nevertheless remains shaped by the Orientalist discourse she attempts to transcend. Examining Montagu's representation of Turkish women in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, the following analysis seeks to shed light on the ways in which she simultaneously resists and reproduces Orientalist discourse.

Montagu was the daughter of Evelyn Pierrepont, a Whig politician, and Mary Fielding, “the only daughter of the third Earl of Denbigh.”¹⁴⁴ Her literary talent was significantly linked to the education she received during her childhood. As a member of an aristocratic family, she was educated at home, where she diligently studied poetry and Latin. Over time, she developed into one of the most cultured women of her era. She was married to Edward Wortley Montagu who was the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III (r. 1703–1730). In this respect, it can be posited that her husband's occupation led her to visit the Ottoman Empire frequently. Between the years 1716-1718, the couple visited the Ottoman Empire. As Edward Montagu's diplomatic mission proved unsuccessful, they left the empire after spending fifteen months there.¹⁴⁵ During their stay in the Ottoman Empire, while Edward Montagu sought to “negotiate peace between the Ottomans and the Austrians” and aimed to protect “British commercial and naval interests in the Levant,”¹⁴⁶ Montagu recorded her

¹⁴³ Notwithstanding the fact that this thesis generally employs the term *Ottoman women* to refer to women living in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu consistently employs the terms *Turkish women* throughout *Turkish Embassy Letters*. In eighteenth-century European usage, “Turkey” and “the Turks” often served as conventional designations for the Ottoman Empire and its Muslim ruling elite. In this respect, this thesis retains Montagu's original expressions in the examination of *Turkish Embassy Letters*, whereas *Ottoman women* is employed elsewhere as the more historically accurate and inclusive term.

¹⁴⁴ Donald T. Siebert, “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 101, no. 1, *British Prose Writers, 1660–1800* (Brucoli Clark Layman, 1991), 240–251, 241.

¹⁴⁵ Teresa Heffernan, “Feminism against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's ‘Turkish Embassy Letters,’” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 201–15, 201.

¹⁴⁶ Heffernan, “Feminism against the East/West Divide,” 201.

observations in a journal and wrote letters elaborating on the Ottoman society. Upon returning to England, Montagu revised these materials and turned them into a refined epistolary narrative of her journey. Montagu lived in England between 1718 and 1739, and then she lived in Italy for the rest of her life. It is acknowledged that her letters were not written to be published as Montagu composed her *Turkish Embassy Letters* as addressed to both identified and unidentified recipients. The inclusion of unnamed addressees may point to the fact that some of the letters can serve as pseudo-epistolary texts, thereby demonstrating that they were intended to be written as literary compositions instead of being written for actual delivery. Montagu is believed to have written the letters with the intention of informing her recipients about her visit in the empire and conveying her experiences. Notwithstanding her daughter, Mary Wortley Montagu, Countess of Bute, destroyed the original journal and had an attempt to hinder the publication of the letters, the work was eventually published in 1763, a year after Montagu's death.¹⁴⁷

A significant amount of the letters was translated and published in various articles and magazines throughout the period of its publication. The work quickly gained popularity and received high praise from prominent figures such as “Dr. Johnson, Voltaire, and Gibbon.”¹⁴⁸ Montagu's *The Turkish Embassy Letters* still remains an influential work that continues to be widely discussed and assessed by scholars. Barzilai-Lumbroso claims that letters serve as “important firsthand historical data on Ottoman women.”¹⁴⁹ He adds Erksan's comment on the work:

[T]he wife of Montagu, the great English Ambassador to Turkey, who achieved a masterpiece in the world of literature with her “Letters from the East,” went around and examined every corner of Istanbul, going from the palaces of the sultan to the humblest of Turkish homes.... This beautiful English woman, who established friendships with sultans and entered the palace harem, left very valuable documents concerning Istanbul at that time, in the famous letters she wrote to her friends in England during the year she lived in Istanbul (1717–1718).¹⁵⁰

Notwithstanding the fact that Montagu's work may include significant historical information about Ottoman history, it is significant to bear in mind that travel writings are narratives written by the subjective perspective of the observer and frequently narrated in the first person. They

¹⁴⁷ Heffernan, “Feminism against the East/West Divide,” 201.

¹⁴⁸ Heffernan, “Feminism against the East/West Divide,” 201.

¹⁴⁹ Ruth Barzilai-Lumbroso, “Turkish Men and the History of Ottoman Women: Studying the History of the Ottoman Dynasty's Private Sphere through Women's Writings,” *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 53–82, 75.

¹⁵⁰ Ersan, quoted in Barzilai-Lumbroso, “Turkish Men and the History of Ottoman Women,” 74.

reflect personal experience of a traveller. Therefore, travel writings may offer important insights into the historical contexts they describe; nevertheless, they require a cautious and critical reading due to their subjective nature.

The eighteenth century was an important period in the sense that power dynamics were in a change; while England was rising as an imperial power, the Ottoman Empire was in a period of decline. It is significant to invite attention to the period of Edward Wortley Montagu's diplomatic mission to Istanbul in which Montagu composed her letters. Following his appointment as Lord of the Treasury under George I, Edward Wortley Montagu succeeded Sir Robert Sutton as British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in April 1716. As ambassador, he represented the interests of the Levant Company, which dominated British commercial activities in the Near East. At the time of the Wortleys' journey, the Ottoman Empire was engaged in war with the Venetian Republic, while Austria was expected to support Venice. Britain sought to prevent Austrian intervention, as it needed Austrian military strength in the Mediterranean against Spain. Consequently, Edward Wortley Montagu was appointed to serve as England's intermediary. For this reason, Edward Wortley Montagu and Lady Mary Montagu travelled through Holland to Austria. In this context, it is significant to note that it was highly unusual for a woman to accompany her husband on such a long journey to regions perceived as culturally different. Montagu herself describes her journey as "a journey not undertaken by any Christian for some 100 years,"¹⁵¹ so inviting attention to the exceptionality of her travel. As opposed to the earlier travellers, Montagu gained access to the Ottoman Empire through her husband's official position, which provided her opportunities unavailable to many other travellers. Her desire to accompany her husband on a demanding diplomatic mission shattered expectations of elite women of the time who were frequently expected to remain in domestic spheres. Travelling across the Ottoman Empire, Montagu crossed geographical and social boundaries, thereby positioning herself as an active participant in a predominantly male sphere of mobility. In this respect, her travel led to the formation of a narrative that offers valuable insights into cross-cultural encounters from a female perspective.

Montagu addressed her letters to various correspondents, and she adjusted the content and form of the letters according to each recipient. Her letter to the Princess of Wales, to

¹⁵¹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 330.

exemplify, was written in a formal and diplomatic manner.¹⁵² On the other hand, the letters addressed to her sister, Lady Mar, focused on the social lives, customs, and experiences of Ottoman women. Additionally, her letters to Abbé Conti and Alexander Pope have an intellectual tone as she examines topics including religion, government, warfare, antiquities, architecture, and commercial and military affairs.¹⁵³ In this respect, Montagu's ability to adjust her narrative according to different recipients results in a multifaceted authorial identity. In addition, Siebert¹⁵⁴ notes: "During her stay, she studied Turkish language and literature and translated examples of Turkish poetry in accordance with English poetic conventions." "In Belgrade, besides reading poetry, she talked about religious issues with Ahmed Bey Effendi, a learned Turkish scholar, 'who charmed Lady Mary with his knowledgeable talk of the literature and culture of his land'" (Desai xvi). Additionally, Montagu demonstrated an interest in Turkish dress, as illustrated in Figure 4.

¹⁵² Katherine S. H. Turner, "From Classical to Imperial: Changing Visions of Turkey in the Eighteenth Century," in *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, ed. Steve Clark (London: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 124.

¹⁵³ Turner, "From Classical to Imperial," 124.

¹⁵⁴ Siebert, ed., "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," 245.



Figure 4. Gervase Spencer, *Portrait Miniature of an Unknown Woman (Thought to Be Lady Mary Wortley Montagu) Wearing Turkish Costume*, 1757. Enamel on metal.

The Ottoman Empire was a significant destination for British travellers. Gündüz¹⁵⁵ points to the beginning of the Grand Tour in the sixteenth century England, which covered the cities like “Rome, Florence, Venice, Paris, Geneva, Berlin, and Amsterdam.”¹⁵⁶ Korte underlines that the territories of the Ottoman Empire laid outside the customary scope of the Grand Tour, and she adds it attracted travellers whose intellectual curiosity extended beyond the limits of the standard itinerary.¹⁵⁷ In this respect, there were a considerable number of British travellers who visited the Ottoman Empire before Montagu did. Starting from the end of the sixteenth century, British curiosity about the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish people grew along with the increasing growing political and commercial connections. This curiosity lasted during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which led a number of travellers to visit the Ottoman lands. Those travellers produced influential accounts of their experiences. Umunç claims that in a number of travel narratives of the time period in the Ottoman Empire, there seems to come “an imperialist ideology” to the fore, “which becomes the framework of a dichotomy encompassing an imposing self and an othered Turkish environment with its people, culture, society, institutions, and landscape.”¹⁵⁸ Umunç notes that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European imperialist and colonialist practices informed travel writing, thereby leading it to incorporate various other and often antagonistic paradigms such as “otherness, discrimination, prejudice, racism, stereotyping, historical and ethnical antagonism, bigoted solipsism, indifference, condescension and so forth.”¹⁵⁹ These perspectives were reflected and constructed through the texts produced by British travel writers during these centuries. The eighteenth-century travellers who visited the Ottoman Empire frequently narrated their experiences from a hegemonic perspective according to some scholars. Their travel narratives “encode and privilege an imperialistic ideology” by constructing a dichotomy between a dominant European self and the other which may encompass its “people, culture, society, institutions, and landscape.”¹⁶⁰ Richard Chandler, to exemplify, has often been interpreted by scholars as portraying the Ottoman Empire as an uncivilised land inhabited by primitive, uneducated, and discourteous people. By contrast, Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* has generated more divided critical responses. Some scholars view Montagu’s work as

¹⁵⁵ Atalay Gündüz, *Turkey and Turks in British and American Travel Writing from 1850 to the Present* (PhD diss., Ege University, 2007), 25.

¹⁵⁶ Buzard, quoted in Gündüz, *Turkey and Turks in British and American Travel Writing*, 25

¹⁵⁷ Korte, quoted in Gündüz, *Turkey and Turks in British and American Travel Writing*, 44.

¹⁵⁸ Umunç, “Doğu ve Ötekilik: İngiliz Seyahatnamelerinde Türk Kimliği,” 7-8

¹⁵⁹ Umunç, “Doğu ve Ötekilik: İngiliz Seyahatnamelerinde Türk Kimliği,” 8-9.

¹⁶⁰ Umunç, “Doğu ve Ötekilik: İngiliz Seyahatnamelerinde Türk Kimliği,” 7-8.

a challenge to such representations while others contend that her narrative remains embedded in or only partially departs from Orientalist discourse.

It is widely acknowledged that before her travel to the Ottoman Empire, Montagu read the earlier works written on the Ottoman lands. At a number of points in her narrative, she underlines how earlier narratives represented the Ottoman Empire as an uncivilized state, and Turkish women as oppressed, passive, and secluded figures. There were several travellers who visited the Ottoman Empire before Montagu did. George Sandys (*A Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610*, 1615), Pietro della Valle (*Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino*, 1650), Paul Rycaut (*The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 1668), Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (*Les Six Voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*, 1676), Jean Chardin (*Voyages de Monsieur Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, 1711), Cornelis de Bruijn (*Travels into the Principal Parts of Asia Minor*, 1702), Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (*Relation d'un voyage du Levant*, 1717), and Richard Pococke (*A Description of the East, and Some Other Countries*, 1743–1745) are some of them. These traveller-authors produced significant travel accounts about the Ottoman Empire which contributed to the formation of Western perceptions of Ottoman society and Turkish women. Notwithstanding some of these travellers provided detailed observations of Ottoman institutions, culture, and social life, their narratives often reflected a Eurocentric perspective. In *Turkish Embassy Letters*, Montagu frequently seeks to challenge the stereotypes about Turkish women perpetuated by earlier travel narratives by referring to the representations that they present in their works. Herein, Said's statement in the introduction in *Orientalism* is significant to touch upon. Said points to the fact that how the Orient is informed by the writer's position and inherited knowledge about the Orient:

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-a-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf. None of this takes place in the abstract, however. Every writer on the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies.¹⁶¹

Said's statement is relevant to Montagu's narrative since her narrative recurrently positions itself in relation to earlier European accounts of the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the narrative, Montagu attempts to shatter previous travel narratives' portrayals of the Ottoman world,

¹⁶¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 20.

especially their representations of Turkish women as oppressed, ignorant, and confined. In this respect, Montagu participates in precisely what Said identifies as an inevitable feature of Orientalist writing, which is his argument that every writer on the Orient writes in dialogue with earlier representations rather than treating the East as a blank or unfamiliar space. Even in the situations in which Montagu problematizes the authority of her predecessors and presents herself as a more reliable observer, her narrative remains structured by the same discursive tradition due to the fact that the earlier representations provide the very framework against which she defines her own account. For this reason, her attempt to revise previous depictions does not situate her outside Orientalist discourse. On the contrary, it lays bare that her representation of the Ottoman world and Turkish women is produced through an ongoing engagement with the previously existing Western narratives about the Orient and Oriental woman.

In her narrative, Montagu points to the difficulty that travellers in general go through regarding the reception of their works:

We travellers are in very hard circumstances. If we say nothing but what has been said before us we are dull and we have observed nothing. If we tell anything new, we are laughed at as fabulous and romantic, not allowing for the difference in ranks, which afford difference in company, more curiosity, or the changes of customs that happen every twenty years in every company. But people judge of travellers exactly with the same candour, good nature, and impartiality they judge of their neighbours upon all occasions. ... But I depend upon your knowing me enough to believe whatever I seriously assert for truth, though I give you leave to be surprised at an account so new to you.¹⁶²

Montagu invites attention to the fact that travel writing tends to be conditioned by the reader's expectations and authorial presence of previous narratives. Montagu contends that travellers have difficulties in the sense that they cannot repeat what has already been written since they would be considered "dull;" additionally, in the case that they offer an unfamiliar observation, they can be dismissed as "fabulous and Romantic." Then, Montagu, inviting attention to the reader's scepticism about the information of the Orient, establishes her own authority by impying her position as an eyewitness who had direct access to elite Ottoman society. In this respect, she aims to persuade the reader that her account is much more credible than those of her predecessors. Herein, it can be claimed that Montagu's remarks empower Said's argument

¹⁶² Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, introd. Anita Desai (London: Virago Press, 1994), 118.

that every writer on the Orient positions themselves in relation to preceding representations. While describing her own observations, Montagu appears to be in dialogue with earlier accounts as she seeks to establish her narration as more authentic and reliable. Nevertheless, at this point, it emerges to be significant to return to an earlier passage in which Montagu states:

This is but too like says you, the Arabian tales; these embroidered napkins, and a jewel as large as a turkey's egg! — You forget, dear sister, those very tales were writ by an author of this country and excepting the enchantments, are a real representation of the manners here.¹⁶³

Herein, Montagu underlines the comparison between her descriptions and *The Arabian Tales*. Montagu appears to have anticipated that her descriptions may resemble *The Arabian Tales*. Yet, Montagu defends the accuracy of *The Arabian Tales* by claiming that these tales were written by an author “of this Country,” for this reason they reflect the reality. In this respect, drawing on *The Arabian Tales* and juxtaposing it with her narrative, Montagu aims to authenticate her narrative. In this respect, her so-called attempts to undermine earlier negative depictions of the Ottoman world seems to be problematic as she simultaneously approves a tale imbued with exoticism. Therefore, her defence of authenticity discloses the ambivalent nature of her narrative since it seeks to shatter hostile stereotypes while perpetuating a reliance on established Orientalist modes of representing the East as extraordinary, fascinating, and culturally distinct. Thus, her employment of Arabian Tales as an example of a credible narrative is problematic and unfolds the complex relationship between fiction and truth in representations of the Orient.

In Letter XXX, addressed to Lady Mar, Montagu discusses her observations regarding the clothing of Turkish women, particularly focusing on the *ferace*¹⁶⁴ and veil. Alimen notes about the ferace:

It was worn by both Muslim and non-Muslim men and women in the Ottoman era, from the fifteenth to the early twentieth centuries. For example, all Ottoman Jewish men were obliged to wear black feraces in the sixteenth century, and Sultan Abdulhamid I (r. 1774–89) was portrayed in a green ferace in *Costumes Turcs* Vol I (ca. 1790).¹⁶⁵

In this respect, the ferace was not exclusively a garment worn by women in the Ottoman context; men could also wear outer garments referred to as ferace or ferâce. Nevertheless, ferace

¹⁶³ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, 118.

¹⁶⁴ Ferace “refers to a long, loose, front-opening, ankle-length item of outerwear with long sleeves” (Alimen 24).

¹⁶⁵ Nazlı Alimen, “Stitching Tradition and Fashion: The Evolution of Ottoman Women’s Ferâces, from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century,” *Dress* 51, no. 1 (2025): 23–46, 24.

used to have different meanings and functions for men and women. As stated by Alimen¹⁶⁶, the female ferace was a long and loose outer garment, which was used in public spaces. Its purpose was to cover the body, and it was frequently used with a veil which covers the face and a head cover (see figure 5 and figure 6). On the other hand, the male ferace was similar to a long outer dress and was not accompanied by a veil or a garment to cover the head.



Figure 5. Levni, “*Bursa’nın Aşüftesi*” (*The Coquette of Bursa*), 1710s. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, H. 2164, fol. 5b.

¹⁶⁶ Nazlı Alimen, “Stitching Tradition and Fashion: The Evolution of Ottoman Women’s Ferâces, from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century,” *Dress* 51, no. 1 (2025): 23–46, 24.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. Arabe 6077

Figure 6. *Woman with Child*, Istanbul, 1710s. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 6077, fol. 13v.

As stated by Zilfi: “when in public, all women, regardless of religion, were supposed to dress as not to offend public [Muslim] standards of modesty.”¹⁶⁷ Alimen provides information regarding the use of the ferace by both Muslim and non-Muslim women:

Feraces were worn by people from any class, both commoners and royalty. Different fabrics were used for winter and summer: winter feraces were made of woolen cloth, such as cuha (a type of broadcloth, woven in a twill structure) and sof (camlet), while summer feraces were crafted from lighter materials, such as silk which was used for women’s feraces. In Ottoman society, as in other social contexts, socioeconomic status influenced the choice of the fabric quality, materials, and color. Higher-status individuals preferred bright hues, particularly those in the ranges of red and blue, such as carmine, lilac, violet, and cinnamon; while those of lower status opted for pale and darker shades like blue, greenish brown, and dark purple. However, in the Ottoman Empire, governed by Islamic law, religion took precedence over socioeconomic status in determining permissible materials and colors. Ottoman sumptuary laws adhered to

¹⁶⁷ Zilfi, quoted in Alimen, “Stitching Tradition and Fashion,” 25.

Islamic rules of modesty and emphasized the differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus, religious affiliation dictated the appropriate colors, forms, and materials for garments, headwear, and footwear. Non Muslims were required to wear fabrics and materials of lower quality in black and dark shades of blue, while Muslims could choose from a wider range of fabrics and colors, depending on their socioeconomic status.¹⁶⁸

As Zilfi points out, in the Ottoman Empire, women's clothing in public spaces was regulated by prevailing standards of modesty.¹⁶⁹ This points to the fact that women's clothing was firmly linked with patriarchal, religious, and social expectations. In this respect, it can be contended that the ferace can be considered one of the means to control women's visibility and mobility in public life. Nevertheless, herein, it is significant to underline that the employment of the ferace changed across time and regions, and distinctive styles and colours had different meanings and purposes.¹⁷⁰ In the figure 7, it can be observed that there are three women with different colours of feraces. Therefore, reducing the meaning of the ferace merely to a symbol of female oppression bears the risk to simplify the complex social realities in which this garment existed. The ferace did not appear solely as a means to impose upon women by male authority. It also took part in a wider social system where clothing communicated differences of class, wealth, religion, and status. A number of elements including the quality of fabric, choice of colour, and style of it portrayed socioeconomic distinctions among women; namely, there did not appear to have been only one identical experience of wearing a ferace for all women in the Ottoman Empire. The employment of the ferace revealed the distinctions and inequalities between women themselves. For instance, upper-class women could display their status by wearing feraces made of expensive fabrics and distinctive colours whereas women from lower social groups had access to different materials. In this respect, the ferace was both informed by patriarchal expectations concerning female modesty and also social hierarchies. Therefore, the use of the ferace should be explored from multiple perspectives considering the fact that it represents a complex cultural object informed by various social, religious, and gendered meanings.

¹⁶⁸ Alimen, "Stitching Tradition and Fashion," 24.

¹⁶⁹ Zilfi, quoted in Alimen, "Stitching Tradition and Fashion," 25.

¹⁷⁰ Alimen, "Stitching Tradition and Fashion," 24.



Figure 7. *Three Women Standing in Front of the Ibrahim Pasha Palace, in Dark Blue, Purple, and Dark Green Feraces. Hünername, vol. 2. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, H. 1524, fol. 250a.*

In *Turkish Embassy Letters*, regarding the use of ferace and veil, Montagu states:

Tis very easy to see they have more liberty than we have, no woman, of what rank so every being permitted to go in the streets without two muslins, one that covers her face all but her eyes and another that hides the whole dress of her head, and hangs half way down her back and their shapes are also wholly concealed by a thing they call a *ferace* which no woman of any sort

appears without ... You may guess how effectually this disguises them, that there is no distinguishing the great lady from her slave, and 'tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her, and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the Street.

This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their Inclinations without danger of discovery. The most usual method of intrigue is to send an appointment to the lover to meet the lady at a Jew's shop, which are as notoriously convenient as our Indian houses ... You may easily imagine the number of faithful wives very small in a country where they have nothing to fear from their lovers' indiscretion ... Upon the Whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the Empire.¹⁷¹

Montagu appears to have an interesting point of view about the practice of wearing *ferace* and veil. She praises the *ferace* and veil as enabling women's mobility and anonymity, through which women had the opportunity to commit adultery. In that sense, as opposed to the preexisting eighteenth-century European views regarding the use of veil and *ferace*, Montagu does not associate these garments with female oppression. Instead, these garments provide the opportunity to women to move through public spaces without surveillance as they appear to be "the only free people in the Empire." In this way, women can have liberty to have an affair out of marriage without being recognized, as she states: "This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their Inclinations without danger of discovery...You may easily imagine the number of faithful wives very small in a country where they have nothing to fear from their lovers' indiscretion." Montagu's views may appear different and, perhaps, challenging the conventional assumptions regarding the *ferace* and veil since she does not portray these as a tool of confinement. Nevertheless, if the complexity of the employment of *ferace* and veil in terms of the embedded social meaning it possesses is taken into consideration, Montagu's comments appear to be superficial and a reductive interpretation of the *ferace*. Stating that the *ferace* gives the opportunity to women to conceal their identities and be involved in illicit relationships without fear of discovery, Montagu appears to reduce a multifaceted cultural practice to an erotic intrigue for the Western reader. In that sense, the *ferace* and veil, which are conventionally inclined to be associated with the oppressed Eastern woman, transform into a symbol of mystery, disguise, erotic freedom, which is also another Orientalist stereotype. In this respect, Montagu ends up not shattering but participating in the Orientalist discourse by reproducing the romanticised and exotic image of the Turkish women.

¹⁷¹ Montagu, Turkish Embassy Letters, 71.

Furthermore, in celebrating the *ferace* as a symbol of freedom, Montagu overlooks the paradox that the very garment she praises as enabling women's mobility and anonymity was also embedded within a broader patriarchal system that regulated women's bodies, appearance, and presence in public spaces. As Alimen argues, "the public appearance of Ottoman women" was regulated "within a patriarchal social structure governed by religious rules and regulations."¹⁷² Therefore, while the *ferace* used to provide Ottoman women with a certain degree of privacy and autonomy within public life, it cannot be considered merely as an instrument of liberation. Concentrating primarily on the freedom that concealment provided, Montagu ignores the social structures and gendered restrictions that shaped the use and meaning of this garment. Moreover, associating freedom with adultery seems problematic in the sense that the kind of freedom that she posits is a very limited one. It does not include the freedom of education, political participation, legal equality, or emancipation from patriarchal authority. In this respect, reducing women's freedom to sexual liberty appears to be problematic. Also, the subsequent history of Turkish women's clothing in the late Ottoman and early Republican periods significantly undermine Montagu's point of view. Alimen points to the fact that "due to the growing influence of Western attire and the modernization reforms in the newly established states that replaced the Ottoman Empire, the prevalence of *feraces* significantly declined in the twentieth century, becoming largely confined to rural areas and sometimes even a signifier of 'rural' or 'non-modern' identity."¹⁷³ The Turkish Republic was established in 1923, whose "ideal" was "that women should stand as active and productive citizens and should have equal rights with men."¹⁷⁴ So, "[t]he change in women's fashion in Turkey had moved at a faster pace and more radical way compared to the change in men's fashion."¹⁷⁵

One of the interesting points in the narrative is Montagu's description of Fatima, the Grand Vizier's lady in the Letter XXXIV to Lady Mar. Upon Fatima's invitation for dinner, Montagu visits her house with a Greek interpreter. Montagu provides some information about the interpreter. She is described as "a very good woman, near fifty years old."¹⁷⁶ Her house does not appear to be luxurious although she has several slaves. She tells Montagu that she does not spend money on luxurious possessions; instead, she is devoted to God and engaged in charitable works. She also mentions her husband and explains that he, too, was devoted to God. A few

¹⁷² Alimen, "Stitching Tradition and Fashion," 25.

¹⁷³ Alimen, "Stitching Tradition and Fashion," 45

¹⁷⁴ Fatma Koç and Emine Koca, "The Westernization Process in Ottoman Women's Garments: 18th Century–20th Century," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 13 (2007): 57–84, 79.

¹⁷⁵ Koç and Koca, "The Westernization Process in Ottoman Women's Garments," 79.

¹⁷⁶ Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, 87.

pages later, Montagu begins to narrate her first encounter with Fatima, starting with a physical description that extends over several paragraphs. The description is so elaborated that Montagu brings about her preoccupation of being “accused of extravagance in this description.”¹⁷⁷ She states that although she was warned of Fatima’s beauty before, she was so “struck” by her beauty that she could not manage to speak for a while, “being wholly taken up in glazing,”¹⁷⁸ as follows:

That surprising harmony of features! That charming result of the whole! That exact proportion of the body! That lovely bloom of complexion, unsullied by art! The unutterable enchantment of her smile! But her eyes! Large and black, with all the soft languishment of the blue! Every turn of her face discovering some new charm!¹⁷⁹

Montagu even goes further to claim that Fatima could easily be considered a queen in Europe, if she is “suddenly transported upon the most polite throne of Europe nobody would think her other than born and bred to be a queen, though educated in a country we call barbarous,” and she adds: “To say all in a word, our most celebrated English beauties would vanish near her.”¹⁸⁰ Montagu’s encounter with Fatima and her description appear to be significant. If her descriptions of the Greek interpreter and Fatima are juxtaposed, it becomes notable that there is a much stronger focus on Fatima’s physical appearance. Even though the interpreter is only a minor character, the reader learns more about her personality, values, and way of life. By contrast, Montagu provides little insight into Fatima’s character, ideas, social role, or individuality. Moreover, Montagu’s description of Fatima’s beauty is highly detailed and extravagant, which is a typical of Orientalist discourse. Fatima is portrayed almost as a sublime figure who leaves the narrator speechless. As a result, her portrait would have been highly appealing to a Western reader as she is presented as both intriguing and mysterious. Moreover, the fact that Montagu expresses her admiration for Fatima through a framework informed by European standards is striking. Fatima’s beauty is praised since she appears as if she were “born and bred to be a queen” in Europe. A similar instance appears elsewhere in the narrative. Montagu recounts a Greek lady’s reaction upon seeing the beauty of Sultana Hafise: “This is no Turkish lady; she is certainly some Christian.”¹⁸¹ Montagu also says to her: “if all Turkish ladies were like her, it was absolutely necessary to confine them from public view for the repose

¹⁷⁷ Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, 90.

¹⁷⁸ Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, 89.

¹⁷⁹ Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, 89.

¹⁸⁰ Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, 89.

¹⁸¹ Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, 119.

of mankind... what a noise such a face as hers would make in London or Paris.”¹⁸² These examples all are based on comparison, they and subtly consider European standards as the ideal. Therefore, they value Turkish women to the extent that they approximate those standards. In addition, the reference to her being educated in a country they “call barbarous”¹⁸³ maintains the broader stereotype of the East as uncivilized, thereby reinforcing the Orientalist framework. Although this comment appears to express admiration, it falls short of undermining an Orientalist perspective. In this respect, the passage discloses how Orientalist discourse can also operate through admiration, subtly preserving cultural hierarchies even while seemingly undermining them.

One of the points that takes attention in the narrative is Montagu’s visit to the Turkish bath. The Turkish bath, called as *hammam*, has been a notion of exoticism, eroticism, and fascination for the West along with harem. Kinsizer notes: “In the 18th and 19th centuries, Orientalist artists created compositions depicting “The Ottoman Harem and Turkish Bath” to satisfy the fantasies of the Western-male audience.”¹⁸⁴ Kinsizer notes:

French colonials have extensively explored Harem in the Ottoman Empire since the 17th century. However, the Harem doors are not open to everyone, especially men, as entry and exit are strictly regulated, and the Harem is considered a private and sacred area. Even though European men were not allowed to enter the Ottoman Harem, European artists used their imaginations and exotic fantasies to create Harem scenes in their paintings based on what they read or heard from Western female travelers.¹⁸⁵

In this respect, Kinsizer invites attention to a paradox, which is the production of depictions of harem by men notwithstanding the fact that they were largely excluded from the harem. This points to the fact that how in descriptions of private areas including harem and hammam imagination played a significant role. Imagination was also accompanied by second-hand accounts and prevailing Orientalist stereotypes to produce these visual depictions. It is widely acknowledged that these depictions tend to highlight certain notions such as eroticism, luxury, and passivity of women, thereby empowering the representation of Turkish women as exotic and mysterious. Kinsizer sets J.A. Dominique Ingres’ painting *Le Bain Turc* (The Turkish Bath) in 1862 at the Louvre Museum (see figure 8) as a main example of French Orientalism

¹⁸² Montagu, Turkish Embassy Letters, 119.

¹⁸³ Montagu, Turkish Embassy Letters, 89.

¹⁸⁴ Asli Kinsizer, “Women and Orientalism: An Examination of the Representations of the Harem in Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres’s *The Turkish Bath*” (2024), 1.

¹⁸⁵ Kinsizer, “Women and Orientalism,” 1.

as “French colonials have extensively explored Harem in the Ottoman Empire since the 17th century.”¹⁸⁶ The painting illustrates twenty-five women gathered inside a traditional Ottoman hammam. The work, revealing Ingres’ imagination, highlights some orientalist tropes such as the entertaining atmosphere of the bath as the acts of listening to music, dancing, eating, and drinking are portrayed, all of which underlines female passivity. Orientalist representations of the Turkish hammam frequently portray Oriental women as idle figures whose lives are devoted solely to leisure and pleasure in harems and hammams. This can be also observed in the painting as “the women are depicted as absent-minded, looking away, and passive.”¹⁸⁷ Kinsizer argues:

In the foreground of the picture, we see Turkish coffee and authentic cups, which are also unique to the East. In this work, in which real women are depicted by using oriental motifs, the white European man's ideal of women is described as passive, alienated, and almost slaves waiting to be rescued. Anatomical features depict many figurines in the picture. The woman is portrayed as a different entity, with the spine appearing too long as it has independent parts and the long differences in the arms and legs. It offers the audience an idealized standard of beauty. A woman is dancing in the background, and a woman in the foreground shows her back to us, playing a 'saz'.¹⁸⁸



¹⁸⁶ Kinsizer, “Women and Orientalism,” 1.

¹⁸⁷ Kinsizer, “Women and Orientalism,” 3.

¹⁸⁸ Kinsizer, “Women and Orientalism,” 3.

Figure 8. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Turkish Bath*, 1862. Oil on canvas. Louvre Museum, Paris, France.

In this respect, Ingres' painting appears to reinforce several Orientalist tropes. The painting includes various Orientalist motifs; Turkish coffee, coffee cups, and the *saz*, an Eastern musical instrument, can set examples to this. The inclusion of these motifs creates familiarity for the Western audience. Kinsizer emphasizes how female bodies are represented in a passive and idealized pose, which reflects their beauty and appeals to the senses. She also claims that women's long limbs, curved backs, and sensual gestures reflect Western aesthetic ideals rather than the physical realities of Ottoman women, which is a significant point in the sense that Ingres prioritizes the appeal of the Western audience. Additionally, women are portrayed as engaged in entertainment, playing music and dancing, which highly empowers the Orientalist fantasy of the hammam and harem as spaces devoted to pleasure and leisure. If considered in Said's Orientalism, it can be posited that Ingres constructs an imagined Orient shaped by Western fantasies of sensuality, passivity, and exoticism. The inclusion of exotic objects and eroticized female bodies presents the East and Eastern woman situated into a spectacle to be consumed by the Western gaze.

Kinsizer notes:

The main erotic element in the painting consists of two women hugging each other in an embrace. Pose while stroking the bare chest of the other. Their posing is quite intimate, with some even intertwining and lying upon each other to demonstrate a homoerotic ambiance. The art historian Roger Benjamin describes this ambiance as "an erotic site of unrelieved intensity" created by not only "the implied lesbianism of several foreground figures" but also "the dominating masculine voyeurism suggested by the construction of the picture as a peephole view onto a zone forbidden male access" (Benjamin, 2003, 15; Pasin, 2016). This erotically loaded painting was initially made as a square but later transformed into a circular form by the artist. This circular form creates a mysterious composition as if looking at the viewer through a keyhole. In this way, the erotic effect of the work increases. Thus, it allows the audience to spy on this particular area, where white European men or men are not allowed to enter.¹⁸⁹

Inviting attention to Benjamin's argument, Kinsizer underlines that the transformation of the form of the painting into a keyhole-like composition is significant since it symbolically grants European male viewers access to a space from which they were physically excluded. In this

¹⁸⁹ Kinsizer, "Women and Orientalism," 3–4.

passage, in addition, the depiction of homoerotic intimacy is significant to touch upon. The homoerotic intimacy between Eastern women is frequently imagined by the West as the private areas such as harem and hammam used to be frequently populated by women, and the entrance of the male was forbidden. In this respect, many Western artists, writers have emphasized this point in their works. To exemplify, Luigi Bassano, “who signed one of the most authoritative commentaries on the customs of the Ottomans, amongst whom he spent about eight years (1532-1540),”¹⁹⁰ describes the hammam in *Costumi et i modi particolari della vita dei Turchi* (The Customs and the Manners of the Turks, 1545) as follows:

[women would go to the hammam] with others, and they wash each other. It is common knowledge that as a result of this familiarity in washing and rubbing women fall in love with each other. Therefore it is common that a woman be in love with another woman. And I have met Greek and Turkish women who, on seeing a beautiful girl, seek occasion to bath with her, just to see her naked and touch her. That is why, though it is customary to go the neighborhood hamman, women would go to more distant hammams. Women’s bathing is a cause of much dishonesty.¹⁹¹

In this respect, lesbianism between the Ottoman women who enjoyed the hammam was an enduring stereotype, as Vanzan states:

The hammam was depicted as the place in which harem women, deprived of their freedom, could spend some time in lustful activities. The leitmotiv was that, being harem women frustrated in their sexual aspiration because many of them had to share only one man’s attentions, they were forced to turn to homosexual love affairs, and the hammam was the proper place in which these illicit relationships could be cultivated.¹⁹²

It is significant to note that Bassano’s comment is interesting in the sense that men were excluded from women’s hammams, which puts credibility of Bassano’s account into doubt and instead brings hearsays and second-hand information about hammams to the fore.¹⁹³ This reinforces the constructed nature of the representations of hammams.

In *Turkish Embassy Letters* Montagu’s description of the hammam is quite elaborated:

The first sofas were covered with cushions and rich carpets, on which sat the ladys, and on the second their slaves behind them, but without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in

¹⁹⁰ Anna Vanzan, “Turkish Hammam and the West: Myth and Reality,” *Acta Turcica* 2, no. 2 (2010): 1–12, 2.

¹⁹¹ Vanzan, “Turkish Hammam and the West,” 2.

¹⁹² Vanzan, “Turkish Hammam and the West,” 2.

¹⁹³ Vanzan, “Turkish Hammam and the West,” 2.

the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed. Yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them. They walked and moved with the same majestic grace which Milton describes of our general mother. There were many amongst them as exactly proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian, and most of their skins shineingly white, only adorned by their beautiful hair divided into many tresses hanging on their shoulders, braided either with pearl or ribband, perfectly representing the figures of the Graces. ... To tell you the truth, I had wickedness enough to wish secretly that Mr. Gervase could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very much improved his art to see so many fine women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions while their slaves (generally pretty girls of seventeen or eighteen) were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty manners. In short, tis the women's coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented, etc.¹⁹⁴

This passage provides rich imagery and offers a number of points to examine. To start with, Montagu's emphasis on leisure in the bath, particularly in her reference to women "drinking Coffee or sherbet" and "negligently lying on their Cushions while their slaves" attend to them, can be interpreted in relation to a recurring Orientalist trope. In a number of European descriptions of the harem and hammam, the emphasis on activities such as listening to music, dancing, eating, and drinking, together with portrayals of women as passive or idle, may have contributed to a broader Western perception of Ottoman women as confined to a life of leisure and inactivity. Montagu's description can therefore be seen as participating, to some extent, in this representational tradition, even though her portrayal also draws attention to the women's social interactions and activities within the bath. Another point that takes attention in Montagu's description is the narration of the beauty of Turkish women. Throughout the narrative, Montagu puts a considerable emphasis on physical description of women she meets; description of Fatima, as aforementioned, can set an example to this. In the same vein, in this passage it can be observed that her description of beauty of Oriental women is detailed and extravagant, which is a very typical of Orientalist contexts. She sets a connection between their movements and the three Graces from Greek mythology. Also, she refers to the works of 17th century Italian painter Guido Reni and Tiziano Vecellio, a renowned painter of the Renaissance. In this respect, it can be posited that beauty is inclined to be portrayed through European framework. The description of the beauty of women appears to be almost so sublime, unintelligible that it needs to be mediated and validated through European framework to the recipient of the letter. In this sense,

¹⁹⁴ Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, 59.

the passage reveals how Orientalist discourse can be subtly reproduced through admiration by sustaining cultural hierarchies between East and West even when it appears to challenge them.

In Montagu's description of the Turkish bath, another significant point is Montagu's claim that "there was 'not the least wanton smile or immodest Gesture amongst 'em'". This may refer to the female intimacy, which is a typical assumption about Turkish harem and baths, as it can be seen in Ingres' painting and Bassano's descriptions. As Montagu denies the existence of that kind of intimacy, it may be possible to claim that she is challenging the Oriental understanding. However, her reference to a previous Oriental discourse can be considered a way of reinforcing it as Said states: "Every writer on the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies."¹⁹⁵ In this respect, Montagu keeps the previous travellers' and writers' assumptions and ideas in circulation in her narrative by mentioning it. She still relies on the same assumptions and ideas so as to challenge them. In this way, through this repetitiveness, the narrative ends up contributing to the existence of the same understanding of the Orient although Montagu claims that she intends not to do so. Furthermore, although Montagu attempts to frame the hammam as a socially active female space marked by conversation and sociability, instead of being characterized by women's nakedness and physical proximity, her subsequent reference to Mr. Gervase's imagined pleasure in observing the naked women introduces the very male gaze and erotic potential that she initially appears to refuse. Moreover, in this passage, Montagu's emphasis on Turkish women's "shiningly white" skin takes attention. This focus on whiteness may suggest that whiteness functions as an important marker of beauty within her description, which Desai names "a fetishization of white skin" which is existing in Montagu's narrative.¹⁹⁶ It can be claimed that Montagu reproduces Orientalist discourse through the imposition of Western aesthetic standards onto Turkish women. The hammam emerges to be a site where women's bodies are interpreted through a Western aesthetic framework through European and classical ideals of beauty.

Following that passage, Montagu states:

The Lady that seemed the most considerable amongst them entreated me to sit by her and would fain have undressed me for the bath. I excused my self with some difficulty, they being however all so earnest in persuading me. I was at last forced to open my shirt, and show them my stays,

¹⁹⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 11.

¹⁹⁶ Heffernan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide," 202.

which satisfied them very well, for I saw they believed I was so locked up in that machine, that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my Husband.¹⁹⁷

Montagu shares with her addressee that how women try to persuade her to take off her clothes and join them, but she insists on not to undress. In this respect, she appears to maintain her sense of difference and distance. Her being covered can be considered an effort to preserve her sense of superiority, authority, and cultural distance, which can be linked with Said's statement: "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony."¹⁹⁸ Montagu underlines how the women assumed that she was physically unable to remove her clothes because her husband had devised a sort of contrivance to keep her confined within the stays. Here, it is possible to claim that Montagu reverses the conventional Orientalist gaze as this time she appears to be the one who is gazed by Turkish women as she appears to be the one who is unfamiliar to them and "the other." Despite the existence of this reversal, Montagu still draws the attention of the reader to the women's inability to comprehend Western way of dressing. In this respect, even in this moment of reversal of the traditional gaze, Montagu constructs Turkish women as culturally different and other. So, she does not necessarily depart from the Orientalist discourse.

In conclusion, the analysis has pointed out that Montagu's repeated criticism of earlier travel writers reflects an awareness of the prevailing representations of the Orient and Oriental women. While Montagu presents herself as a corrective voice offering a more accurate account, she frequently refers to these writers, thereby having remained constrained by the same discursive framework she sought to contest. Another significant conclusion is how Montagu's discussion of the *ferace* and the veil reproduces Orientalist assumptions. Since Montagu equates anonymity with women's freedom to deceive their husbands, she reduces a complex cultural and historical practice to a simplistic interpretation grounded in Western notions of female liberty. In the same vein, Montagu's portrayal of Ottoman women is consistently structured around ideals of female beauty, thereby reinforcing the Orientalist discourse. Additionally, a link between women's physical appearance and European artistic standards is frequently established. Furthermore, the description of Turkish hammam is in line with Orientalist descriptions since it is portrayed a site of exoticism. Her refusal to undress and participate fully in the women's communal practices establishes a symbolic distance between herself and

¹⁹⁷ Montagu, Turkish Embassy Letters, 59-60.

¹⁹⁸ Said, Orientalism, 13.

Turkish women. Thus, Montagu's narrative occupies an ambivalent position in the sense that it reinforces Orientalist discourse while attempting to undermine it.

CHAPTER 4

HAREMLIK: SOME PAGES FROM THE LIFE OF TURKISH WOMEN (1909) BY DEMETRA VAKA BROWN

Demetra Vaka Brown (1877-1946) was a Greek-Ottoman intellectual, journalist, and writer. She was born in Istanbul into a middle-class Greek-Ottoman family. She has several books on the Ottoman Empire; *Haremlik* is the most renowned one. She spent her childhood on the island of Büyükada (Prinkipo) in the Sea of Marmara, near Istanbul,¹⁹⁹ and in 1895 she immigrated to the United States. Vaka Brown was not a Muslim woman; she belonged to the Greek Orthodox millet, a minority community within the Ottoman Empire.²⁰⁰ Vaka Brown's father was "a bureaucrat of the Sublime Porte."²⁰¹ Therefore, it can be claimed that her "family belonged to the cosmopolitan culture of the Ottoman capital in addition to being part of the culture of the modernizing Greek bourgeoisie."²⁰² Following the unexpected death of her father and the financial hardships that affected her family, Vaka Brown had to discontinue her education in France and return home. Shortly afterwards, seeking to escape an arranged marriage, she left once again. Köksal notes that: "Embracing values of Enlightenment, Demetra was critical not only of the Ottoman system in which Greeks lived, but also the limitations put on women by her own Greek community. In her view, her Greek community was superior to Turks in many ways, but still Oriental in some areas."²⁰³ In 1894, at the age of seventeen, she travelled to the United States with the newly appointed Ottoman consul, an ethnic Greek, where she worked as the governess to his children. After arriving in the United States, Vaka Brown remained under the Ottoman consul's care only briefly. During the Armenian massacres of 1894–1895, the consul, who was himself an Ottoman Christian, faced increasing pressure to justify the Ottoman government's actions before the American public. Since he was unable to satisfy the expectations of the Ottoman authorities, the consul was recalled to Constantinople. Vaka Brown, however, chose to remain in the United States. She settled there and continued to

¹⁹⁹ Reina Lewis, "Telling Tales: Harem Literature from East to West," *The Edinburgh Review*, no. 125 (n.d.), accessed [8 August 2026], 3.

²⁰⁰ Lewis, "Telling Tales: Harem Literature from East to West," 3.

²⁰¹ Köksal, "Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul," 253.

²⁰² Köksal, "Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul," 253.

²⁰³ Köksal, "Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul," 256.

work as a journalist and teacher. She got married to the American writer Kenneth Brown; she “started a literary career in America, writing and publishing in English.”²⁰⁴

Köksal provides information regarding Vaka Brown’s family:

Demetra’s father is at the center of her narrative; by holding a bureaucratic position, he is her link to the Muslim families and way of life. He is the one who cares about Demetra’s learning Turkish, and as a politically moderate figure he was perhaps closer to Ottomanism than Greek nationalism. Demetra’s mother, in contrast, does not speak Turkish and rejects socializing with Turks. Demetra’s rare accounts of her mother are usually in relation to the Orthodox religious rituals that she performs, her disciplining presence and her bourgeois sensitivities.²⁰⁵

Notwithstanding the fact that Vaka Brown grew up in a family with a great sentiment of Greek nationalism, most of her childhood friends and acquaintances were Turkish Muslim people, which situate her as a writer within a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Vaka Brown’s childhood emerges to be significant in terms of formation of her ideas. Her views on children, women, family, marriage, and social and political issues appear to have been informed by her childhood “within the modernizing Greek community of the Empire, and her encounters with an Oriental (i.e. Muslim) childhood.”²⁰⁶ Köksal adds: “Living in a time of political turmoil and dissolution of the Empire, her childhood was under the multiple influences of the Greek nationalism of her uncle, the Phanariot culture of a distant aunt and the late Ottoman cosmopolitanism of her father.”²⁰⁷ In this respect, it can be posited that “[h]er ideological formation is a mixture of Greek nationalist ideas that she received from family members, a soft Ottomanism that she inherited largely due to her father’s bureaucratic post in the Ottoman administration and a critique of modernity that she developed in her later life, especially while living in the United States.”²⁰⁸ Her works are informed by “retrospective examination[] of the nationalist strife, imperialist projects, modernization currents and social transformation experienced in the last decades of Ottoman Empire.”²⁰⁹

After years she spent in the US, Vaka Brown returned to Istanbul in 1922 on the eve of the establishment of the new Turkish Republic. Vaka Brown frequently wrote her works in English for Anglo-American audiences. She focused on topics including Greek nationalism,

²⁰⁴ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 254.

²⁰⁵ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 254.

²⁰⁶ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 252.

²⁰⁷ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 253.

²⁰⁸ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 251.

²⁰⁹ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 251.

politics, and society of the Ottoman Empire, particularly the late Ottoman Empire. She dedicated her book *Haremlik* to the unsuccessful Ottomanist leader, Prince Sabbahedine. In this respect, it is also significant to note that Vaka Brown was “yearning for the Ottoman dream of inclusivity over the more narrow nationalisms.”²¹⁰ This desire of her can be traced in a number of her works; “Vaka seems to wish that the Muslim Orient she depicts to western audiences would never change,”²¹¹ namely, remaining untouched by the political, social, and cultural transformations that accompanied the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the modern Turkish Republic. Her novella *Bribed to be Born* (1951), published posthumously in 1951 upon Vaka Brown’s husband’s discovery of the work among her notes,²¹² and her autobiographical work *A Child of the Orient* (1914), in which she “put[s] herself in the shoes of an Orientalist writer”²¹³ are among her famous works. *A Child of the Orient* focuses on a story of a Greek girl from Istanbul. It makes use of Vaka Brown’s own life story and background. Köksal states:

The book introduces the Orientalist stereotypes drawn from her childhood. Turks are described as an Asiatic people, associated with slavery, despotism, military aggression, polygamy, suppression of women, indulgence of the senses, etc. As the book unfolds, though, these negative traits ascribed to Turks are often counterbalanced by such positive characteristics as spontaneity, delicacy, emotionality, hospitality or practicality, which Demetra experienced in her everyday contacts with Muslim people.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Lewis, “Telling Tales: Harem Literature from East to West,” 3.

²¹¹ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 252.

²¹² Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 250.

²¹³ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 252.

²¹⁴ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 256.



Figure 9. Demetra Kenneth Brown (1877–1946), photograph from a 1907 publication. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

In this respect, Vaka Brown's ideas regarding Turks and the Ottoman Empire are usually considered ambivalent and challenging to interpret. Although her individual experiences with Ottoman Muslims challenge the stereotypes she inherited in childhood, she still perpetuates using these stereotypes in her works. Yet, at the same time, her works balance negative assumptions with positive observations, presenting Turks as hospitable, emotional, and practical while still treating them as a distinct group. As a result, her works frequently move beyond purely negative stereotypes but remains informed by an Orientalist framework. In her writings, "She did not hesitate to present herself as an Ottoman woman from Istanbul to a western readership, and enjoyed the insider's position this identity provided her as a writer."²¹⁵ "Her Istanbulite credentials, it seems, permitted her to write in a much more authoritative voice

²¹⁵ Köksal, "Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul," 256.

and distinguish herself from the vast literature depicting the Ottoman Orient.”²¹⁶ In 1923, she produced *The Unveiled Ladies of Stamboul*, a follow-up to *Haremlik*. In this work, she pointed out the changes in the late Ottoman society just before the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and before the final expulsion of Greek Christian population from Asia Minor.

In *Haremlik: Some Pages From the Life of Turkish Women*, Vaka Brown describes her return journey to Istanbul after six years that she spent in the United States. As in reality, in her narrative, Vaka Brown defines her identity as Greek-Ottoman, thereby occupying a dual position both as an insider and outsider. She situates herself among the Turkish women she describes, making use of her Oriental identity and childhood memories so as to construct a perspective that is simultaneously personal and observational. In the early pages of the narrative, in chapter one “Coming Home to Turkey,” Vaka Brown invites attention to her main aim to visit:

I returned to my native land with new ideas and a mind full of Occidental questioning, and I meant to find things out. Many of my childhood friends had been Turkish girls: them I now looked upon with new interest. Before I had taken them, and their way of living as a matter of course. Generations of my ancestors had prepared me for them, and I had lived among them, looking upon their customs and habits as quite as natural as my own. But during my stay in America I heard Turkey spoken of with hatred and scorn, the Turks reviled as despicable, their women as miserable creatures, living in practical slavery for the base desires of men. I had stood bewildered at this talk. Could it possibly be as the Americans said, and I never have known it?

Now, I was to see for myself, and not only to see but to talk with the women, to ask them their thoughts about their lives and their customs.²¹⁷

As this passage reveals, Vaka Brown intends to confront and correct prevailing misrepresentations of a culture she believed she could understand more authentically than Americans did, as a Greek-Ottoman woman, thereby appearing to have embraced a political aim. Notwithstanding the fact that Vaka Brown presents herself as someone determined to challenge Western misconceptions about the Ottoman Empire as she states in this passage, this thesis argues that Vaka Brown ultimately reproduces the same Orientalist mode of observation found in *Turkish Embassy Letters* by Montagu. Being an Ottoman-Greek woman and thereby positioning herself as an insider capable of correcting earlier representations of the Ottoman

²¹⁶ Köksal, “Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” 256.

²¹⁷ Demetra Vaka (Mrs. Kenneth Brown), *Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), 12-13.

world, Vaka Brown ultimately remains embedded within the very Orientalist discourse it seeks to contest in several ways, which the following analysis seeks to explore. This can be observed starting from this passage that she wrote at the beginning of her narrative. Vaka Brown initially appears to reject the American portrayal of the Turkish as “despicable” and Turkish women as “miserable creatures,” nevertheless, her question, “Could it possibly be as the Americans said, and I never have known it?” implicitly grants authority to the Western discourse she claims to shatter. Instead of dismissing these stereotypes outright, she accepts them as hypotheses requiring verification, thereby privileging Western knowledge over her own lived experience. Also, by incorporating pre-existing Orientalist assumptions into her narrative so as to challenge them, Vaka Brown paradoxically keeps them in circulation. As Said argues, “the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either”²¹⁸; rather, it is a construct continuously produced and sustained through cultural representations. So, it can be posited that even as Vaka Brown seeks to undermine inherited stereotypes, her narrative inadvertently contributes to their continued reproduction.

Vaka Brown’s narrative begins with her description of “Constantinople”:

THE mist was slowly lifting — so slowly that one could imagine an invisible hand to be reluctantly drawing aside veils from the face of nature. As the air became clearer, the slender minarets were seen first above the other buildings; and then, little by little, Constantinople, Queen of Cities, revealed herself to our hungry eyes. And as if Nature were but Constantinople's handmaiden, the last of the fog was suddenly transmuted to glorious sunshine, that we might the more surely be surprised and dazzled with the beauty of the Sultan's capital.²¹⁹

In this passage, the portrayal of “Constantinople” takes attention, which is described as “Queen of Cities,” namely as a woman. The metaphor of mist concealing the city resembles a veil, obscuring Istanbul until it gradually “revealed herself.” Through personification of Istanbul as a woman emerging from behind a veil, Vaka Brown makes use of the Orientalist trope of the East as feminine, mysterious, and awaiting discovery by the observer’s “hungry eyes.” In this respect, Istanbul emerges to be feminine and available for visual consumption of the Western spectator; and the narrator provides a highly aestheticized and romanticized description of it by presenting it as a spectacle intended for the Western gaze. Furthermore, the inclusion of the veil imagery contributes to the Orientalist discourse significantly as an element that is firmly associated with the East and evokes mystery and sensuality. In that sense, this portrayal seems

²¹⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 4.

²¹⁹ Vaka Brown, *Haremlik*, ” 1.

shaped to appeal to and satisfy the exoticized expectations of a Western readership. These imageries also anticipate Vaka Brown's representation of Turkish women in the following parts of the narrative, who similarly are represented as subjects to be observed, interpreted, and made legible for a Western audience in her narrative. Moreover, in this passage and throughout the narrative, Vaka Brown's preference to refer to *Istanbul* as *Constantinople* takes attention. Notwithstanding the fact that Istanbul used to be the name that was commonly used to refer to the city by the Turkish society living there, the employment of the word Constantinople in the narrative points to a conscious engagement with a European readership, invoking the city's historical and mythic resonance in Western imagination, rather than representing its contemporary, local identity. The term Constantinople possesses significant historical associations since the term did not appear to be solely a geographical designation, but it was a term connected to ideas of ancient civilization, Christianity, imperial power, and the long-standing political and cultural encounters between Europe and the Ottoman world. In this respect, the employment of the term Constantinople instead of Istanbul invokes a historically layered and Western-mediated image of the city, namely, one informed by European narratives of empire, antiquity, and the exotic Orient. Additionally, by preferring to use Constantinople, Vaka Brown aligns her narrative with Western conventions of representing the city rather than privileging the local perspective. Thus, it can be posited that her preference can reveal her orientation towards a Western readership and empowers her position as a cultural mediator who translates the Ottoman world into terms already familiar to the West. Thus, even before starting to present her exploration of Turkish women, Vaka Brown frames them within a romanticized and aestheticized vision of the East. Notwithstanding the fact that she seeks to shatter European constructed stereotypes of Turkish women as oppressed and passive, Vaka Brown maintains to situate women in an Orientalist framework in which the Ottoman Empire, and by extension the empire's women are portrayed as mysterious and available for interpretation by the Western reader.

The Ottoman harem has long taken the attention of historians and scholars, particularly through accounts produced by European observers, including travellers and ambassadors. Vaka Brown's gender and her being an upper-class woman enabled her to gain access to many domestic harems which were traditionally maintained by wealthy families. As harem is traditionally represented a site of intense curiosity, desire and female idleness, many European travellers were fascinated by stories about the harem and its mysteries. This fascination is also reflected in literature, for instance, in Selma Ekrem's *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish*

Girl (1930) one of the foreign female characters expresses her desire to imitate the girls in the harem, imagining how they “lie on silken cushions, eat sweets, and watch the dancing of the slave girls.”²²⁰ In Vaka Brown’s narrative, it can be claimed that a similar fascination is evident, as she observes and describes the secluded spaces and daily lives of women through an emphasis on mystery and intimacy. Vaka Brown spends ten days moving between different households, beginning her mornings by bathing alongside her female companions. Throughout the day, she lounges on sofas and reads, plays cards and backgammon, and listens to entertaining stories. In *Haremlik*, it is stated: “During my girlhood, although I had been in many haremliks, I had never happened to be in one where more than one wife was living, and they had all been somewhat Europeanised. Selim Pasha’s was the first old-fashioned harem which was opening its doors to me.”²²¹ Vaka Brown’s narration here generates a sense of anticipation and curiosity, as the narrator expects to witness a social arrangement that aligns more closely with the conventional image of the Ottoman harem, since it is a polygamous one, and the novelty of encountering what she perceives as a more “authentic.” The description of the atmosphere and the dance scene in Selim Pasha’s harem draws attention to the presence of “the music of the East” in the background:

After I had rested, I went down to the garden, where Djimlah presented me to the other three wives of Selim Pasha, their ladies-in-waiting, and a few guests. We were twenty-seven in all, and we reclined under a canopy of flowers, and waited for the coming sunset. A high wall hid us from the outside world, and a pergola, covered with pink and purple wistaria, protected us from any masculine eyes which might chance to look over from the side of the palace reserved for men. I took my seat by Djimlah, on a lot of cushions.

Presently one of the women reached up a bare arm, plucked a bunch of wistaria, and threw it at another woman. Simultaneously several bare arms went up, and pink and purple wistaria went flying right and left, so that in a few minutes the ground and the Turkish rugs on which we were reclining were covered with flowers.

"Give us some music, beautiful ones," said the first wife, who was the head of the household, and who was addressed as Valide Hanoum. Some of the young slaves picked up their zithers, and the music of the East charmed our ears for a few minutes.²²²

In this passage, it can be observed that Vaka Brown provides an aestheticized image of harem, which is similar to traditional harem descriptions. The harem is represented as an idyllic and

²²⁰ Selma Ekrem, *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1930), 311.

²²¹ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 63.

²²² Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 66-67.

enclosed paradise. The images that take attention are flowers, cushions, Turkish rugs, music, and female companionship, all of which is in parallel with the romanticized harems long depicted in Orientalist paintings and travel narratives. The focus on the women's "bare arms," the floral imagery, and the leisurely flower-throwing scene reinforce a highly feminized and sensual representation that empowers the Orientalist association of the harem with beauty, pleasure, and leisure. In this respect, harem appears to be a quite exotic space. Moreover, the "high wall" and "pergola" that "protected [them] from any masculine eyes" underline the exclusive nature of the harem. Vaka Brown's representation emerges to invite the Western reader to participate in the exploration of this secret place, which is in parallel with Said's identification of the Orientalist desire to unveil and make accessible spaces imagined as hidden from the West. Additionally, the presence of "the music of the East" empowers the exotic atmosphere of the harem. This passage can be read as an Orientalist depiction of the harem, as it emphasizes its exotic and sensational qualities for a Western audience. In addition, it is also striking that notwithstanding the fact that female slaves are present in this scene, and throughout the narrative, the narrator gives them no agency or personal perspective. Any information regarding their lives, feelings, or motivations is not provided; they appear merely to entertain the female Sultans and give compliments to them, and to serve as participants in visual displays, such as the flower-throwing activity. Therefore, by merely focusing on the kind of details that would create fascination for the Western reader, Vaka Brown's narrative aligns with the Western fascination with the harem as a site of aesthetic pleasure and exoticism. In this respect, it can be argued that Vaka Brown does not appear to dismantle stereotypical Western views of the harem and women inside; she does not emerge to provide a more nuanced portrayal of the harem and women living there.

In relation to the absence of information regarding the lives of female slaves, it is significant to underline that throughout the narrative the women that Vaka Brown meets are Turkish women of upper-class who frequently lived in harems. Therefore, the qualities she attributes to harem women such as happiness, comfort, and a life of luxury can reflect only the experiences of this particular social group in the Ottoman society. Nevertheless, "[h]arems were only common among the wealthy and upper class in Istanbul, and unlike the common belief, it did not penetrate to the rural areas in Ottoman society."²²³ Turkish women living in that era were not limited to the elite circles of the harem; many lived in rural areas and did not enjoy

²²³ Eda Ünlü Yücesoy, *Everyday Urban Public Space: Turkish Immigrant Women's Perspective* (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2006), 11.

the privileges and relative ease associated with harem life. The everyday realities of peasant women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Ottoman Empire were far more demanding; it is widely acknowledged that many women in all parts of the empire were in the position of producers. Peasant women were not only involved in domestic tasks like collecting water and caring for their children, but they also undertook a number of forms of low-paid or manual labour.²²⁴ Their daily routines were largely shaped by continuous work; even their limited free time was often spent spinning wool to produce clothing for their families. Furthermore, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many women, particularly young women, were employed in factories, where industries took advantage of inexpensive female labour. In the same vein, Karta notes:

Most of the time, women in Ottoman State was described considering the framework of harem ... When the Ottoman records are analyzed, the great economic contribution of Ottoman women to the family and social life has been seen. Of course during the classical period of the Ottoman empire, the given roles to the women is much more limited than the given roles to the men in the social , economic and politic fields. However in the Ottoman social life, the contribution of women to the family budget, the roles in the working life were so important which were thought. The women in Ottoman period have a significant role in the agricultural sector. When the archive documents checked, it has been countered that the women in Ottoman state were involved in agriculture and animal husbandry, gave the direction to the society during the war and peace, worked in the textile industry, home economics ...²²⁵

Gerber invites attention to the same point: “Women, it was supposed, were often secluded in harems and, therefore, were barred from participating in public life, which meant that they could not pursue economic occupations, or go to court to defend their interests and legal rights.”²²⁶ For instance, women played a significant role in Bursa's silk industry, as the city was “the foremost commercial center of Anatolia at the time.”²²⁷ As Gerber explains, “One extremely rare and valuable document gives a survey of silk-spinning implements (*mancinik*) in Bursa in 1678. Of a total of about 300 such implements in the city, as many as 150 were owned and/or operated by women.”²²⁸ This evidence demonstrates not only women's active participation in silk production but also their economic agency through ownership and management of

²²⁴ Godfrey Goodwin, *The Private World of Ottoman Women* (London: Saqi Books, 1997), 185.

²²⁵ Nurullah Karta, “The Economic Activities of Women in Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Economics, Finance and Accounting* 3, no. 2 (2016): 142–155, 142.

²²⁶ Haim Gerber, “Social and Economic Position of Women in an Ottoman City, Bursa, 1600–1700,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 3 (1980): 231–244, 231.

²²⁷ Gerber, “Social and Economic Position of Women,” 232.

²²⁸ Gerber, “Social and Economic Position of Women,” 237.

production equipment. Gerber further emphasizes that “[a] large number of women in Bursa were involved in business,”²²⁹ illustrating that Turkish women were engaged in a wide range of commercial activities beyond the domestic sphere. These examples demonstrate that the experiences of Ottoman women were far more diverse than the elite, harem-centred perspective presented in Vaka Brown’s account. The majority of women neither lived in the luxury associated with the harem nor possessed slaves or servants to perform domestic labour. Such idealized portrayals of harem life do not reflect the experiences of a majority of Ottoman women; instead, they emphasize the Orientalist imagination and highlight exoticism and leisure while obscuring the labour and hardship of women’s real lives in the Ottoman Empire.

In the narrative, the portrayal of the East and West also takes attention. Vaka Brown states in the early parts of the narrative: “I returned to my native land with new ideas, and a mind full of Occidental questioning, and I meant to find out things.”²³⁰ Throughout the narrative, the Occidental’s mindset is marked by rationalism and scepticism. On the other hand, there can be seen a tendency to associate Orientalism with sublime and mystery, thereby presenting it as incomprehensible. Said argues:

Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison.) with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter.²³¹

Throughout *Haremlık*, Vaka Brown emphasizes her Oriental identity, as a Greek-Ottoman woman, so as to claim that she understands Orientals far better than Occidentals, as follows: “I was talking about the Turks, lately, with some very intelligent American men, and it was only then I fully realized the impossibility for the Occidental mind, and especially for the active and restless American mind, to comprehend the Turkish temperament.”²³² In this respect, presenting herself as uniquely qualified to interpret the Orient, “its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny”²³³ for

²²⁹ Gerber, “Social and Economic Position of Women,” 237.

²³⁰ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlık*, 12.

²³¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

²³² Vaka-Brown, *Haremlık*, 221.

²³³ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

Western audiences, she establishes a clear division between the East and West. This distinction points to a central idea of Said's Orientalism, where the Orient is framed as fundamentally different from, and ultimately inaccessible to, the rational West. In this respect, "the Orient" also "help[s] to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."²³⁴ Notwithstanding the fact that Vaka Brown situates herself as culturally closer to the East than other Westerners, her narration reproduces Orientalist binaries that define the Orient as a distinct and essentialized cultural sphere, which is in line with Said's argument. This can be traced particularly Vaka Brown's representation of Turkish women, as follows:

Orientalism was like a labyrinth: the more I advanced in it, the more entangled I became. One woman after another was confronting me with a new problem, a new phase of life; and I felt stupid and incapable of understanding them. It hurt my vanity, too, to find how small I was in comparison with them. I should have liked really to sell myself to them for a year, merely to be able to live with them continuously, to try to understand a little more of their lives. They interested and charmed me: they were so much worth understanding. There was so much of the sublime in them, which is lacking in our European civilization.²³⁵

This passage can be considered another example that illustrates how while the narrator expresses her admiration for Turkish women, she still ends up framing them through an Orientalist lens. The narrator presents the encounter with the Orient as a "labyrinth," thereby pointing to the fact that the more she tries to understand it, the more complex and confusing it becomes. Such imagery empowers the idea that the lives and inner worlds of Turkish women are fundamentally inscrutable and difficult for an outsider to grasp. This depiction is in parallel with the dynamic Said points out in which the Orient is frequently portrayed as mysterious, enigmatic, and ultimately resistant to Western comprehension. Furthermore, the passage idealizes Turkish women by attributing to them a kind of "sublime" quality, which, according to Vaka Brown, lacks in European civilization. This is remarkably similar to Montagu's description of Turkish women, who appear to be almost sublime figures. In this respect, it can be claimed that although Vaka Brown attempts to point out her fascination for Turkish women, her portrayal ends up presenting Turkish women as fundamentally different from, and ultimately beyond the full understanding of Europeans, which reinforces the Orientalist discourse.

²³⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 1-2.

²³⁵ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 127.

Vaka Brown's portrayal of Turkish women is significant to mention at this point. As it is the case in Montagu's narrative, it takes attention that throughout Vaka Brown's narrative the emphasis falls on the beauty, appearance, and physical allure of Turkish women. Vaka Brown employs detailed and often sensual descriptions of Turkish women that are imbued with delicate and almost erotic imagery. Lewis observes, "the sexualized display of the Oriental female body is a central strand of Western Orientalism, fully developed and well-known by the second half of the nineteenth century."²³⁶ In this respect, as Vaka Brown's portrayals can be considered in parallel with this argument. To exemplify, her description of her friend, Djimlah is significant to touch upon:

While speaking, she would clasp her hands above her head, the sleeves falling away from her white arms; she would half close her eyes, in a way that made the light shining through them softer; and her lips forming her words were fresh and crimson, like a rose with the dew on it.²³⁷

Vaka Brown provides a portrayal of her by drawing attention to the details such as the "white arms," the "soft" light in her eyes, and the "fresh and crimson" lips, all of which contribute to create an image that is delicate and eroticized. The attention drawn to bodily features empowers the Western fascination with the exotic representation of Eastern women, reducing them to a spectacle for the observer, namely for the Western reader. The narration is imbued with those kinds of portrayals; for instance, the young woman Halil Bey was to marry is "a very pretty brunette, with large violet eyes, and such a lovely, kissable mouth."²³⁸ In the same vein, the narrator's portrayal of her friend, Houleme, is also significant to touch upon:

It was a strange night, and that Mahometan girl standing next to me in her glorious beauty, and talking a language mysterious as the East, captivated my imagination. As I looked at her, at her large black eyes and arched eyebrows, her ivory complexion and her lovely mouth, I felt that she could do things that an ordinary woman could not. And the night had loosened her tongue, as it had the nightingale's.²³⁹

This passage sets another example to the Orientalist fascination with the Eastern woman by pointing to her beauty, mysteriousness, and here, in this example, almost supernatural qualities are present. The focus on her "large black eyes," "arched eyebrows," "ivory complexion," and

²³⁶ Reina Lewis, "Cross-Cultural Reiterations: Demetra Vaka Brown and the Performance of Racialized Female Beauty," in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999), 57.

²³⁷ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 61.

²³⁸ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 178.

²³⁹ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 133.

“lovely mouth” underlines a sensualized image which is conventionally associated with Eastern women. Moreover, the comparison of her speech to the nightingale evokes a sort of exoticism. Vaka Brown’s claim that she “could do things that an ordinary woman could not” further attributes otherness and sublimity to Houleme, which appeals to Western fantasy and imagination.

Among the women, the narrator places particular emphasis on the appearance of an unnamed woman whom the narrator calls her “Rossetti lady” since she “looked like a Rossetti painting.”²⁴⁰ She is a kind of woman that the narrator “never met in flesh and blood before.”²⁴¹ The moment the narrator lays eyes on her, she recites a poem by Rossetti:

Her body bore her neck as the tree's stem
Bears the top branch; and as the branch sustains
The flower of the year's pride, her high neck bore
That face made wonderful with night and day.²⁴²

The narrator continues to talk to the Rossetti lady:

"Why do you say those lines?" my hostess asked. "Because you make me think of them." "Do you mean that I look like Rossetti's paintings?" "I rather think you look like his poems: you are the embodiment of them." "And am I this to you?" "Yes, you are this to me. Ever since I first saw you I have been drawn to you. By rights I ought to be somewhere else to-night, but I am with you. It was of you I was thinking when you came into my room. Do you know, I do not even know your name. That does not matter, though, for to me you are my Rossetti lady."²⁴³

The poetic language contributes to highlight the physical beauty of the Rossetti lady through highly aestheticized and naturalized imagery. Her neck is compared to a tree’s stem and her face to a flower “of the year’s pride.”²⁴⁴ So, the narrator transforms her body into a visual spectacle which is framed in delicate and ornamental beauty, thereby mystifying her. In the following pages, the narrator mentions the Rossetti lady again:

It seemed all in keeping with the night and the woman, looking more than ever like the embodiment of a poem, a greater poem now than Rossetti ever wrote. She was the East itself: the mysterious East, with its strange ideas of love, and death, and of religion.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ Vaka-Brown, Haremluk, 234.

²⁴¹ Vaka-Brown, Haremluk, 234.

²⁴² Vaka-Brown, Haremluk, 251.

²⁴³ Vaka-Brown, Haremluk, 251-252.

²⁴⁴ Vaka-Brown, Haremluk, 251.

²⁴⁵ Vaka-Brown, Haremluk, 268.

This passage is significant in the sense that it illustrates the Orientalist tendency to associate the Eastern woman with the exotic and mysterious East itself. Vaka Brown represents the East as feminine and through a familiar, idealized Western image. By positing that “she was the East itself,”²⁴⁶ the narrator imposes cultural and mystical qualities on the Rossetti lady. This reflects a broader pattern in Western Orientalism in which the Eastern woman is sexualized, mystified, and instrumentalized as a symbol of an exoticized culture. Considering all of the aforementioned representations of Turkish women, it can be claimed that Vaka Brown aligns with the conventions of Orientalist representation, reproducing its fascination with exoticized and sexualized depictions of Turkish women, rather than seeking to challenge or subvert these tropes.

Köksal invites attention to Nandy’s argument: “Orientalist literature representing Oriental people as “childlike” is “a characteristic that has been often noted” (260). This emphasis on naivete, childlikeness, and purity can be traced in a number of accounts of Western travellers; for instance, Grace Ellison (1880-1935), a writer and journalist, who fostered communication and exchange between Turkish and British women in the early twentieth century, notes as follows: “Turkish women “are more pure-minded... than the women of any other nation.”²⁴⁷ In the same vein, Vaka Brown’s statements take attention:

Turkish women in some ways are very different from the women of other races. They may be more educated than our college girls, they may speak four or five languages, and read the masterpieces of each of these languages, but they remain children of nature, as we do not. If you spend a day with them and they love you, you will know their hearts and minds as they truly are. There is no false shame or prudery about them. They speak as they think and feel.²⁴⁸

The narrative is imbued with comparisons of Turkish women and children in terms of innocence and some other qualities. At a number of points in the narrative, Vaka Brown underscores the women’s apparent contentment and satisfaction with daily life as they are “happy,”²⁴⁹ “too healthy and happy,”²⁵⁰ “gay, full of life,”²⁵¹ “gigl[ing],”²⁵² and similar to “natural comedians.”²⁵³ Furthermore, Vaka Brown frequently draws attention to their qualities of being

²⁴⁶ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 268.

²⁴⁷ Döşkaya and Kaçmaz, “Depiction of Turkish Women,” 313.

²⁴⁸ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 134.

²⁴⁹ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 14, 20.

²⁵⁰ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 29.

²⁵¹ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 15.

²⁵² Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 134.

²⁵³ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 17.

“good mothers” and making “one man blissfully happy.” Vaka Brown’s representation of Turkish women and her comments show similarity with those of Hester Donaldson Jenkins, who was an American professor at the American College for Girls in Istanbul from 1900 to 1909. Although they had diverse backgrounds, both writers describe Turkish women in a similar way, as Jenkins states: “What are a Turkish lady’s duties? She has but two: to be attractive to her husband and to bear him children” (qtd. in Burçak 346). In this respect, notwithstanding the fact that Vaka Brown appears to admire Turkish women by underlining their education and multilingualism her description cannot avoid truly from the Orientalist discourse. Referring them as “children of nature,” she portrays Turkish women as instinctive and innocent. They appear to be governed by emotion rather than rationality according to Vaka Brown. This comment appears to be problematic in the sense that it empowers the binary between the West and East; that is to say, while the West is traditionally associated with rationality the East is considered natural and impulsive. It is also remarkable that Vaka Brown tends to produce generalizations instead of considering these qualities, such as sincerity, changeable from person to person. Furthermore, Vaka Brown frequently highlights women’s roles of being mothers and wives. These descriptions all emerge to be problematic if Vaka Brown’s aim is to shatter traditional tropes about Turkish women as she claims. Because in this way of representations, she merely appears to reduce Turkish women to static, ornamental figures, whose value lies in their obedience, simplicity, and ability to entertain or please.

Another observation of Vaka Brown about the women she met in one of the harems takes attention: “Thus in my first harem visit I saw nothing but pleasant relations existing between the various women dwelling under the same roof.”²⁵⁴ Throughout her narrative, at several points Vaka Brown invites attention to the happiness and comfort of women living in harems. She also invites attention to the luxury inside harems: “A French maid received me and helped me off with my wraps, and then a slave conducted me to the Turkish bath, that I might rid myself entirely of the dust and fatigue of the short journey. After I had been thoroughly scrubbed and put into clean clothes, another slave brought me a cup of black coffee.”²⁵⁵ The narrative is replete with images of harem luxury including daily rose baths, lavish dinners, and the scenic beauty of the sea and gardens. In the same vein, Jenkins also contends: “Turkish women are not involved in any activities, and they just sit.”²⁵⁶ Such perceptions of Turkish women extended beyond travel writing and found visual expression in Orientalist art in which

²⁵⁴ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 27.

²⁵⁵ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 15.

²⁵⁶ Jenkins, quoted in Döşkaya and Kaçmaz, “Depiction of Turkish Women,” 315.

representations of the harem and Ottoman women often reinforced images of passivity and idleness (see figure 10 and figure 11). These claims appear to be controversial in the sense that Ottoman harems were often sites of intense contestation and power struggles between women; making such straightforward claims are problematic in the sense that it can underestimate the complexity of women's experiences there. Vaka Brown's perspective tends to simplify and idealize the lives of Eastern women, overlooking both the hardships and the complexity of harem life. Furthermore, the narrator adds about the women:

They were entirely natural and spontaneous. They did not pretend to be anything that they were not. They were as happy and merry as little brooks, whose usefulness was limited, but who at least had no aspirations to pass for rivers. They were good mothers, and made one man blissfully happy. They read a lot of French novels, without pretending that they did it for the sake of "culture." They took everything naturally, and enjoyed it naturally. There was no unwholesome introspection- that horrible attribute of the average half-educated European and American woman. They never dreamed of setting the world aright... ²⁵⁷



Figure 10. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Odalisque*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

²⁵⁷ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 28.



Figure 11. John Frederick Lewis, *The Siesta*, 1876.

In this passage, she once again describes Turkish women as possessing qualities of innocence and spontaneity. Turkish women emerge to be represented as domestic people who merely have traditional roles that prioritize obedience, passivity, and family duties. Nevertheless, in the narrative, an event takes place which challenges these assumptions and clearly reveals Vaka Brown's position within Orientalist discourse, which is the appearance of the emerging feminist women movement. Vaka Brown attends to a secret meeting held by upper-class "forty-odd women, ranging in age from seventeen to forty."²⁵⁸ The women in the meeting claim that "[they] are the givers of life; [they] must be the rulers and lawmakers as well."²⁵⁹ The meeting in general highlights the significance of acknowledging women's abilities, which had historically been ignored or underestimated by men, and called for granting women greater freedom in many areas of social and public life. The narrator's reaction to these women and to the meeting itself is particularly striking, as it lays bare her strong disapproval of this meeting:

I was utterly disgusted at the whole meeting. I might just as well have been in one those silly clubs in New York where women congregate to read their immature compositions. There were

²⁵⁸ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 167.

²⁵⁹ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 165.

totally lacking the sincerity, the spontaneity, and the frankness which usually characterize Turkish women.²⁶⁰

This passage invites attention to the narrator's Orientalist assumptions about Turkish women, whom she imagines as "childlike"²⁶¹ and "never dreamed of setting the world aright," are challenged by what she witnesses. Confronted with women who articulate political and social demands, she appears preoccupied and struggles to reconcile this reality with her preconceived notions. Consequently, the meeting becomes a moment of disillusionment for her. During the discussion, the women argue that they should be able to choose their own partners and possess the right to divorce; however, the narrator dismisses these claims, attributing these ideas to the influence of French novels,²⁶² and quickly ignores them. In this sense, the meeting also undermines the Vaka Brown's earlier portrayal of the harem as a space where women live contentedly within polygamous relationships and harmonious family structures. Speaking from the perspective of a Western woman, the narrator offers advice to them and ultimately asserts that: "Really, your troubles are not so serious as those of European women."²⁶³ At this point it is significant to underline Said's argument: "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony."²⁶⁴ In that sense, it can be claimed that the narrator implicitly positions Western women's experiences as the universal and powerful one against which the struggles of other women are measured. This can be claimed to point to an Orientalist hierarchy in which experience of Western women is privileged, whereas the realities of Eastern women are underestimated or neglected. If this is considered from within the context of third-world feminism, it can be posited that a Western woman, who is Vaka Brown in this case, assumes the authority to define and evaluate the conditions of non-Western women, namely Turkish women. In the narrative, Vaka Brown does not appear any meaningful attempt to recognize the historical, cultural, and social contexts that shape the lives of Turkish women. Instead, she approaches the women's desire for greater rights and social change with considerable prejudice as she considers these not meaningful aspirations. This can be linked with the argument that was aforementioned in the early pages of this chapter, which is Köksal's argument: "Vaka seems to wish that the Muslim Orient she depicts to western audiences would never change."²⁶⁵ Her resistance to change and nostalgic

²⁶⁰ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 166-167.

²⁶¹ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 17.

²⁶² Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 170.

²⁶³ Vaka-Brown, *Haremlik*, 175.

²⁶⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

²⁶⁵ Köksal, "Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul," 252.

attachment to the Ottoman past can also be perceived in *Haremlik* as it is observed. Thereby, Vaka Brown contributes to the understanding that constructs Eastern women as passive subjects whose voices and experiences are overshadowed by Western interpretations.

Notwithstanding the fact that Vaka Brown dismisses the legitimacy of Turkish women's concerns, the early twentieth century, prior to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, was a significant period for the emergence and development of women's feminist movements. It is significant to note that the reformist ideas can be traced to the Tanzimat era (1839–1876). These reforms led to significant transformations not only in administrative, political, and economic structures but also in social and cultural life.²⁶⁶ Abadan-Unat²⁶⁷ traces the emergence of women's demands to ask for more independence as earlier as the first half of the nineteenth century:

Indeed, emancipation of women began in Turkey in the first half of the nineteenth century. Those in favor of radical Westernization of Turkish society asked for the introduction of monogamy into the Imperial Household, including the elimination of the Sultan's *odalık* (concubine); free choice of feminine garments; non-interference by the police in the private lives of women; greater consideration toward women in general; freedom of choice in matters of marriage; the suppression of intermediaries in marriage arrangements; the creation of a medical school for girls, the adoption of a European civil code; the abolition of polygamy in general and the outlawing of repudiation, that is, arbitrary and summary divorce.

In this respect, it can be observed that the ideas that Vaka Brown dismisses in her narrative can be seen as having laid the groundwork for the emergence of a range of women's rights in the years that followed. The status of women in the Ottoman Empire was already undergoing significant transformation during the nineteenth century, thereby dismantling the Orientalist assumption that Turkish women were static and resistant to change. The rights that were asked by Reformist intellectuals included a wide range of legal and social reforms for women such as the abolition of polygamy, educational opportunities for women, freedom in marriage, and the adoption of a European-inspired civil code. Among these demands there was the elimination of the Sultan's *odalık*. Gökçe provides information about the *odalık*:

In Ottoman Istanbul, Circassian and Georgian women mostly served as concubines. Circassian women often reached the harems of the urban upper class of the Empire, not infrequently

²⁶⁶ Sema Keleş Yıldız, "An Examination of the Socio-Economic Representation of American Women in Ottoman Women's Periodicals," *Journal of Ottoman Civilization Studies* (2024), 118.

²⁶⁷ Nermin Abadan-Unat, "The Modernization of Turkish Women," *Middle East Journal* 32, no. 3 (1978): 291–306, 291.

attaining positions of prestige and comfort as wives of middle and upper-level functionaries. These concubines are called *odalik*, sometimes spelled *odalique* or *odalisque* by European writers. According to Pardoe, a Turkish man, “usually marries a woman of his own rank; after which, should he, either from whim, or for family reasons, resolve on increasing his establishment, he purchases slaves from Circassia and Georgia, who are termed *Odaliques*.”²⁶⁸

The presence of the *odalik* system came to be controversial particularly during the late Ottoman period since it was perceived as incompatible with the ideals of modernization and women's rights promoted by many reformers. As intellectuals advocated monogamy, legal reform, and greater equality for women, the institution of concubinage came to be regarded as an outdated feature of the imperial order. The late nineteenth century was marked by the “woman question” attracted increasing attention, as both female and male authors examined and debated women’s roles and conditions in women’s journals as well as in the wider public press.²⁶⁹ Strauss states “[t]he second half of the century witnesses the beginning of “first-wave feminism,” during which “women began establishing women's associations and publishing periodicals as an extension of the Ottoman Women's Movement.”²⁷⁰ Çakır notes:

Poet Nigâr Hanım (1862-1918), Fatma Aliye (1862 1936), Halide Edip (1882-1964), Nezihe Muhittin (1889-1958), and Emine Semiye (1868-1944) were the women who left their mark on the period. Influenced by the ideals of freedom that developed in the Ottoman Empire, these women, especially Fatma Aliye and Emine Semiye, advocated for women through their writings and speeches.²⁷¹

Poet Nigâr Hanım (1862-1918), Fatma Aliye (1862 1936), Halide Edip (1882-1964), Nezihe Muhittin (1889-1958), and Emine Semiye (1868-1944) were significant women figures who were inspired by the reformist atmosphere of the Tanzimat period. They were involved in literature and journalism so as to advocate for legal and social equality for women along with educational rights. While Halide Edip and Nezihe Muhiddin were leading voices in the struggle for women's civic and political rights by giving public speeches, Fatma Aliye and Emine Semiye contributed to this through their writings. Abadan-Unat also adds:

²⁶⁸ Zeynep Yeşim Gökçe, “Reading Asymmetrical Dependencies in the Narratives of Nineteenth-Century Women Travelers in Ottoman Lands,” in *Narratives of Dependency: Textual Representations of Slavery, Captivity, and Other Forms of Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies*, ed. Elke Brüggem and Marion Gymnich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), 314.

²⁶⁹ Keleş Yıldız, “An Examination of the Socio-Economic Representation of American Women,” 118.

²⁷⁰ Strauss, quoted in Keleş Yıldız, “An Examination of the Socio-Economic Representation of American Women,” 118.

²⁷¹ Çakır, quoted in Keleş Yıldız, “An Examination of the Socio-Economic Representation of American Women,” 118.

During this period women started to organize themselves. The first women's club, *Taali Nisvan*, not only invited lecturers and opened courses, but founded, under the vigorous and energetic leadership of Halide Edib, the famous writer, day care centers for children. During the Balkan war, the women's section of the Red Crescent, founded in 1877, trained the first nurses. After the creation of a kind of "women's university" (Nisvan Darülfünun), regular courses for women students were started on February 7, 1914, at the University of Istanbul. In January 1914 the first seven Muslim female employees were recruited by the telephone company in Istanbul.²⁷²

In this respect, notwithstanding the fact that Vaka Brown touches upon a significant event of growing feminist movement of the time in her narrative, she appears to have engaged much more with her own idealized and mysterious portrayal of harem life rather than paying attention to the feminist movement as its depiction appears to remain at the background and is dismissed by Vaka Brown as an unnecessary event. This creates a paradox with Vaka Brown's claim that she aims to shatter the Orientalist view of Turkish women; because, instead, she herself participates in a discourse that overlooks women's attempts to redefine their roles.

In conclusion, the analysis has revealed that Vaka Brown's descriptions of Turkish women remain predominantly centred on physical beauty, often reducing them to aesthetic objects, which is the case in Montagu's narrative, as well. Furthermore, the analysis pointed out that Vaka Brown recurrently attributes several characteristics to Turkish women such as their being childlike, carefree, passive, and unconcerned with the realities surrounding them. Also, the harem is represented purely as a site of idleness and comfort. These representations appear to be problematic. It is also significant to note that Vaka Brown portrays only a narrow social group of Turkish women, who were upper-class women. In doing so, she fails to provide diverse experiences of women. Another significant point is Vaka Brown's representation of women as largely static figures resistant to social and historical change. Notwithstanding the fact that she witnessed a period in which Ottoman women increasingly demanded greater educational opportunities, legal reforms, and broader participation in public life, she frequently minimizes the significance of women's aspirations for change, reinforcing the perception that Ottoman society remained culturally fixed and unchanging. In this respect, Vaka Brown's claim to offer an authentic account of women ultimately remains constrained by the same Orientalist discourse that shaped earlier Montagu's account and European travel writing in general.

²⁷² Abadan-Unat, "The Modernization of Turkish Women," 292.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analysed the representation of Ottoman women in European travel writings *Turkish Embassy Letters* by Lady Mary Montagu and *Haremlik* by Demetra Vaka Brown in the light of Edward Said's Orientalism. It has been argued that both works remain deeply embedded within Orientalist discourse although the traveller-writers state their intentions to challenge prevailing stereotypes about Ottoman women. Exploring *Turkish Embassy Letters* and *Haremlik* through the theoretical framework of Edward Said's Orientalism, this study has pointed out that both writers claim to offer a more authentic account of Ottoman society than earlier European travellers. Nevertheless, their narratives reproduce many of the characteristic representations of the Orientalist discourse. Rather than fully undermining Western misconceptions, both writers participate in constructing an image of Eastern women that aligns with patterns of Western fascination and objectification. Therefore, their representations contributed to the circulation and legitimisation of ideas about Ottoman women, many of which has continued to reinforce the distinction between a progressive, rational West and an exotic, culturally distinct East. The thesis also invites attention to the fact that how travel writing genre informs European perceptions of the Ottoman Empire. Travel narratives do not function solely as personal accounts of the traveller, rather, they have played a significant role in shaping European readers's perceptions of the East and the people of the East. Although Montagu and Vaka Brown claim that they attempted to correct earlier misconceptions, their narratives remain informed by the travel writing tradition that had long shaped European perceptions of the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, it is remarkable that although Vaka Brown's work was written almost two centuries later than Montagu's account, and the profound transformations occurred within the Ottoman Empire over the past two centuries, Vaka Brown's work continued to operate within the Orientalist framework, approaching Ottoman women through familiar representational patterns. In this respect, the Orientalist travel discourse has remained remarkably resilient by reproducing many of the same assumptions across generations of travel writers.

If Said's *Orientalism* is brought into dialogue with the narratives of Montagu and Vaka Brown, it can be posited that Orientalism functions through the power to define and represent the East. Both Montagu and Vaka Brown, as Western women traveller-writers, claim that they

attempted to mediate Turkish women's lives for a Western readership by selecting and interpreting the scenes from their lives. Nevertheless, representations produced by Montagu and Vaka Brown appear to reproduce unequal relations of knowledge between themselves as Western women and Turkish women. In this respect, it can be contended that *Turkish Embassy Letters* and *Haremlik* confirm the fact that the Western gaze evolved over time in the sense that both writers employ more nuanced approaches to interpreting other cultures by appearing to empathise with Turkish women instead of relying on direct and explicit forms of exoticisation. Yet, the Turkish woman is represented as a fixed and unified subject whose identity can be authoritatively defined by outsiders. Therefore, the Western gaze identified by Said has not disappeared but has become more subtle in these narratives compared to their predecessors. In doing so, both narratives continue to inform contemporary understandings of the East through selective representation and cultural translation. Thus, this thesis has argued that the Western gaze did not disappear from these two narratives, despite their claim to challenge it, as the authority of Western women to construct knowledge about the East and Ottoman women remains apparent.

Chapter One has introduced the aim of the thesis, defined the main arguments, and presented the methodological approach. Additionally, the research is presented within the existing body of scholarship. Chapter Two provided the historical and theoretical context necessary for the analysis of travel writings of Montagu and Vaka Brown. The chapter has traced the development of travel writing as a literary genre and explored the relationship between travel writing and gender. The chapter also explores the narratives within the broader historical context of European travel to the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the chapter presents Edward Said's theory of Orientalism as the main framework and deals with the historical and symbolic significance of the harem in the European imagination. Chapter Three has underlined notwithstanding the fact that Montagu attempts to undermine the negative and stereotypical representations of Turkish women, *Turkish Embassy Letters* does not emerge as entirely free from the Orientalist framework she seeks to problematize. While Montagu attempts to present a more favourable and nuanced image of Ottoman society, particularly through her portrayal of Ottoman women, her narrative recurrently reproduces the very structures of representation associated with Orientalism. Her representation of Turkish women, together with her portrayal of culture and many other aspects of Ottoman life, aligns with elements of Oriental romanticism, through which the Ottoman Empire is portrayed as an object of fascination, admiration, and aesthetic appreciation rather than a fully independent cultural reality. Chapter

Four has revealed that *Haremlik* shares several similarities with Montagu's narrative in terms of its reliance on Orientalist discourse. Moreover, it can be posited that Vaka Brown's position as a Greek-Ottoman writer did not result in a more nuanced perspective. Vaka Brown's narrative is deeply shaped by pre-existing Western ideas about the Orient, through which she constructs her own imagined Orientalist representations. Notwithstanding she recurrently insists that her account is factual and aims to correct Western misunderstandings of Ottoman women, the narrative ultimately reproduces many of the same discursive patterns found in earlier European writings about the East.

This study aims to contribute to the scholarship both on these travel writings and travel writing genre in general by examining representations of Ottoman women in the light of Said's Orientalism. In this regard, further research can be made on the examination of representations of women in the works of other European travellers, which can allow for a broader comparative analysis of Orientalist discourse across different national and cultural contexts. In addition, comparative studies can be carried out by examining works of male and female writers, which can provide the opportunity to explore if gender significantly informs the construction of Orientalist representations of Ottoman women. Moreover, some further research can be made to explore how Ottoman women represented themselves through memoirs, letters, and other autobiographical writings, thereby juxtaposing self-representation with European travel narratives. Furthermore, as this thesis has touched upon some significant works of visual culture, some further research can be made by embracing interdisciplinary approaches such as juxtaposing literary analysis with a work of visual culture so that how European perceptions informed the representation of women in travel writing genre and visual art paintings collectively can be explored.

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, <i>La Grande Odalisque</i> , (1814).....	48
Figure 2. John Frederick Lewis, <i>The Harem</i> , c.1850.....	49
Figure 3. Jean-Léon Gérôme, <i>Pool in a Harem</i> , 1876	50
Figure 4. Gervase Spencer, <i>Portrait Miniature of an Unknown Woman (Thought to Be Lady Mary Wortley Montagu) Wearing Turkish Costume</i> , 1757. Enamel on metal.....	55
Figure 5. Levni, “ <i>Bursa’nın Aşüftesi</i> ” (<i>The Coquette of Bursa</i>), 1710s. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, H. 2164, fol. 5b.....	60
Figure 6. <i>Woman with Child</i> , Istanbul, 1710s. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 6077, fol. 13v.....	61
Figure 7. <i>Three Women Standing in Front of the Ibrahim Pasha Palace, in Dark Blue, Purple, and Dark Green Feraces</i> . <i>Hünername</i> , vol. 2. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, H. 1524, fol. 250a.....	63
Figure 8. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, <i>The Turkish Bath</i> , 1862. Oil on canvas. Louvre Museum, Paris, France.....	68
Figure 9. Demetra Kenneth Brown (1877–1946), photograph from a 1907 publication. Source: Wikimedia Commons.....	77
Figure 10. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>Odalisque</i> . National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.....	90
Figure 11. John Frederick Lewis, <i>The Siesta</i> , 1876.....	91

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abadan-Unat, Nermin. "The Modernization of Turkish Women." *Middle East Journal* 32, no. 3 (1978): 291–306. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4325769>.

Ahdifard, Unita. "'Each Race in Its Proper Sphere': Understanding Ottoman Nation, Race, and Class in the Travel Narratives of Demetra Vaka Brown (1877–1946) and Leila Ahmed (1940–)." *Studies in Travel Writing* 25, no. 1 (2021): 50–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2021.1975368>.

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992.

Alimen, Nazlı. "Stitching Tradition and Fashion: The Evolution of Ottoman Women's Ferâces, from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century." *Dress* 51, no. 1 (2025): 23–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03612112.2024.2419754>.

Arapoglou, Eleftheria. "Vaka Brown: The Historicized Geography/Geographic History of an Immigrant." *Journal of Modern Hellenism*, no. 21/22 (2004): 83.

———. *Mapping Literary Identities: Space Trans-actions and Inter-actions in the Works of Mark Twain, Henry James, and Demetra Vaka Brown*. PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2004.

Aravamudan, Srinivas. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the Hammam: Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization." *ELH* 62, no. 1 (1995): 69–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30030261>.

Bakay, Gönül. "The Turk in English Renaissance Literature." *openDemocracy*. February 14, 2003. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article-982jsp/>.

Barnes, Diana. "The Public Life of a Woman of Wit and Quality: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Vogue for Smallpox Inoculation." *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 2 (2012): 330–362.

Barzilai-Lumbroso, Ruth. "Turkish Men and the History of Ottoman Women: Studying the History of the Ottoman Dynasty's Private Sphere Through Women's Writings." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 53–82. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/262355>.

Bassnett, Susan. "Travel Writing within British Studies." *Studies in Travel Writing* 3, no. 1 (1999): 1–16.

———. "Travel Writing and Gender." In *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, 225–241. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

———. "Introduction." In *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Jennifer Speake, xi–xv. Vol. 1. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Blanton, Casey. *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997.

Çoban Döşkaya, Füsun, and Ercan Kaçmaz. "Depiction of Turkish Women and the Harem Life in the Memoirs of Some Women Writers in the Early 20th Century." *Journal of History School* 9 (2016): 311–326.

Ekrem, Selma. *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl*. New York: Ives Washburn, 1930.

Eravcı, H. Mustafa. *Avrupa'da Türk İmajı: XVI–XIX. Asır İngiltere Örneği*. Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2010.

Faruqi, Suraiya. *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Fortna, Benjamin C., ed. *Childhood in the Late Ottoman Empire and After*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h1jx>.

Foster, Shirley. "Colonialism and Gender in the East: Representations of the Harem in the Writings of Women Travellers." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 34 (2004): 6–17.

Goffman, Carolyn. "Authenticity, Orientalism, and the Female Traveler: Writings from Inside the Harem." *The Turkish Studies Association Journal* 29, no. 1/2 (2005): 91–104. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43383734>.

Goodwin, Godfrey. *The Private World of Ottoman Women*. London: Saqi Books, 1997.

Gökçe, Zeynep Yeşim. "Reading Asymmetrical Dependencies in the Narratives of Nineteenth-Century Women Travelers in Ottoman Lands." In *Narratives of Dependency: Textual Representations of Slavery, Captivity, and Other Forms of Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies*,

edited by Elke Brüggem and Marion Gymnich. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111381824-014>.

Gündüz, Atalay. *Turkey and Turks in British and American Travel Writing from 1850 to the Present*. PhD diss., Ege University, 2007.

Halsband, Robert. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as Letter-Writer." *PMLA* 80, no. 3 (1965): 155–163. <https://doi.org/10.2307/461262>

Heffernan, Teresa. "Feminism against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's 'Turkish Embassy Letters.'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 201–15.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30053682>.

Jones, Virginia Kay. "Travel in Great Britain and Beyond: Locations from British Travel Literature." *Houston Teachers Institute Curriculum Unit 04.02: Beyond Houston*. Houston: Houston Teachers Institute, 2004.

Karta, Nurullah. "The Economic Activities of Women in Ottoman Empire." *Journal of Economics, Finance and Accounting* 3, no. 2 (2016): 142–155.
<https://doi.org/10.17261/Pressacademia.2016219776>

Keleş Yıldız, Sema. "An Examination of the Socio-Economic Representation of American Women in Ottoman Women's Periodicals." *Journal of Ottoman Civilization Studies* (2024).
<https://doi.org/10.21021/osmed.1462236>.

Kietzman, Mary Jo. "Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters and Cultural Dislocation." *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 38, no. 3 (1998): 537–551. <https://doi.org/10.2307/451062>

Kinsizer, Asli. "Women and Orientalism: An Examination of the Representations of the Harem in Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *The Turkish Bath*." 2024.
<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.22388.56967>.

Kocabıyık, Orkun. *Imperial Adventures: Accounts of Izmir as the Oriental Other in British Travel Writing Tradition*. PhD diss., Ege University, 2022.

Koç, Fatma, and Emine Koca. "The Westernization Process in Ottoman Women's Garments: 18th Century–20th Century." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 13 (2007): 57–84.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2007.11666035>.

Köksal, Duygu. "Escaping to Girlhood in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Demetra Vaka's and Selma Ekrem's Childhood Memories." In *Childhood in the Late Ottoman Empire and After*, edited by Benjamin C. Fortna, 250–273. Leiden: Brill, 2016.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004305809_012.

Lewis, Reina. "Cross-Cultural Reiterations: Demetra Vaka Brown and the Performance of Racialized Female Beauty." In *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, edited by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, xx–xx. London: Routledge, 1999.

———. "Harems and Hotels: Segregated City Spaces and Narratives of Identity in the Work of Oriental Women Writers." *Journal of Gender Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 165–177.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589230050078848>.

———. *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

———. "Telling Tales: Harem Literature from East to West." *The Edinburgh Review*, no. 125.
<https://edinburgh-review.com/back-issues/more/issue-125-turkey/article-reina-lewis/>.

Lowe, Lisa. *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Macfie, A. L. *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1923*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley. *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Edited by Robert Halsband. Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965. 3 vols.

———. *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. Edited by Malcolm Jack. Introduction by Anita Desai. London: Virago Press, 1994.

Marrone, Claire. *Female Journeys: Autobiographical Expressions by French and Italian Women*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Meriwether, Rae Ann. "Transculturation and Politics in the Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu." *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 53, no. 3 (2013): 623–641.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24510548>.

Micallef, Roberta. "Identities in Motion: Reading Two Ottoman Travel Narratives as Life Writing." *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 2 (2013): 85–110. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2013.0023>.

Nittel, Jana. *Wondrous Magic: Images of the Orient in 18th and 19th Centuries' British Women Travel Writing*. Berlin: Galda & Wilch, 2001.

Patrona, Theodora D. "The Forgotten Female Voices of the Greek Diaspora in the United States." *The Journal of Modern Hellenism* 31 (2015): 87–100.

Peirce, Leslie. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Porter, Dennis. *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

———. *Out of Place: A Memoir*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.

Secor, Anna. "Orientalism, Gender and Class in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters: To Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters &c.*" *Ecumene* 6, no. 4 (1999): 375–398. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096746089900600401>.

Sherman, Sandra. "Instructing the 'Empire of Beauty': Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Politics of Female Rationality." *South Atlantic Review* 60, no. 4 (1995): 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3201233>.

Sherman, William H. "Stirrings and Searchings (1500–1720)." In *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, 17–36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Siebert, Donald T., ed. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 101, no. 1, *British Prose Writers, 1660–1800*. Brucoli Clark Layman, 1991. 240–251.

Spackman, Barbara. *Accidental Orientalists: Modern Italian Travelers in Ottoman Lands*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ps3258>.

Stanski, Julia. “Dangers, Delights, Development: Female Travel in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Turkish Embassy Letters*.” *Spectrum*, no. 8 (2022).

Umunç, Himmet. “Doğu ve Ötekilik: İngiliz Seyahatnamelerinde Türk Kimliği (Lady Montagu ve Richard Chandler).” *Bilig* 66 (2013): 297–314. <https://doi.org/10.12995/bilig.2013.6613>.

Uzunçarşılı, İ. Hakkı. “On Dokuzuncu Asır Başlarına Kadar Türk-İngiliz Münasebâtına Dair Vesikalar.” *Belleten* 13, no. 51 (1949): 573–648. <https://doi.org/10.37879/ttkbelleten.1347826>.

Ünlü Yücesoy, Eda. *Everyday Urban Public Space: Turkish Immigrant Women's Perspective*. PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2006.

Vaka, Demetra. *Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909.

Vlami, Despina. *Trading with the Ottomans: The Levant Company in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.

Youngs, Tim. *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.