

**Gendering East and West: Transnational Politics of Belonging in the Ottoman
Empire and France, 1718-1905**

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Eser Koker, whose hard work, perseverance, and courage inspire me every day.

*“iřte bir tanrı evi, kimler ki geerken uęruyorlar
sonra ılgınlar gibi kalabalıęa
belki de yarı kalmıř bir sevgiye kořuyorlar
belki de her boyun eędikleri, her diz öküř
yavařça bir ihtilal.”*

-Edip Cansever, Robespierre

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers how imperial subjects and citizens made claims to political belonging in the period prior to the consolidation of nationalism as an ideology. Focusing on French and Ottoman texts produced between 1718 and 1905 that narrate movements across geographic, political, and cultural borders, my study explores shifting dynamics of political identification and belonging that defy easy geopolitical narratives, either of long-standing confrontation between “East” and “West” or of cosmopolitan coexistence in “contact zones.” I argue that the relational and affective sensibility that characterizes belonging to a political community was cultivated and sustained through cross-cultural exchange: ideas and ideals of religion, geography, ethnicity, and most insistently, masculinity, femininity, and sexuality provided the terms of intelligibility through which imperial belonging was articulated, and imperial governance was defended and contested. This study contributes to the field of comparative political theory by bringing texts from the Ottoman Empire to the forefront of debates about political membership, identity, and belonging. Likewise, the theoretical framework I develop to navigate the historical and philosophical entanglements between Europe and the Middle East, Christianity and Islam, and Orient and Occident in the modern period challenges the primacy of Orientalism in accounting for the political and cultural construction of difference.

My theoretical framework identifies four modalities of political belonging, that is, four distinct linguistic and discursive fields in which gendered, geographic, religious, ethnic, and cultural differences were transformed into political ones. These four modalities - encounter, translation, conversion, and resistance - provide interpretive lenses through which I trace the generative role of what I call a transnational imaginary. Chapter one theorizes encounter, which makes foreign communities an indispensable yet distorting mirror for the communal self, through a comparative reading of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* and Mehmed Efendi's *French Embassy Letters*. Chapter two turns to Ignatius' Mouradega d'Ohsson's *General Sketch of the Ottoman Empire* to theorize translation. As a modality of political belonging, translation simultaneously affirms difference between natives and foreigners and highlights their capacity to achieve universal understanding. Chapter three puts the first Ottoman novel *Akabi's Story* in conversation with Chateaubriand's novella *Atala* and French-Catholic missionary reports from the Ottoman Levant to elucidate conversion as a modality of belonging contingent on the other's capacity to be radically changed. Chapter four analyzes a series of articles from the Ottoman women's periodical *Ladies' Own Gazette*, where resistance emerges as a modality of political belonging that entails both an identitarian attachment to community and a rejection of its exclusionary practices. A concluding chapter reflects on the sequencing of these modalities, the parallel consolidation of political belonging into nationalism and transnational entanglements into an East/West binary, and the potential contributions of interpretive categories developed in the dissertation to contemporary dilemmas of inclusion, exclusion, and globalization.

INTRODUCTION

“Oh, oh, Monsieur is Persian? What an extraordinary thing! How can one be
Persian?”

– Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, Letter 28, From Rica in Paris to Ibben in
Smyrna, the 6th moon of Chalval, 1712¹

“We shall not be the heirs of the bas-blues! We shall be the heirs of the famous
and well-known women who were the descendants of the successors of the earliest
followers of Islam.”

– Fatma Aliye, *Bablölerden İbret Alalim*, September 5, 1895²

Although we frequently hear that we are living in an age of globalization that is
unlike any other period in recorded history,³ the language we use to understand and make
political claims about belonging is deeply grounded in the long and complex history of
transnational interactions between the so called “East” and “West” in the modern period.
This project thus starts with three interrelated questions: How did the articulation of the
distinction between East and West change over the course of the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries? How did these changes shape, and how were they shaped by,

¹Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, “Lettres Persanes,” in *Œuvres Complètes de Montesquieu*, vol.1, ed. Jean Ehrard and Catherine Volpilhac-Auger (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2004), p.214. In the original text, the passage reads: “ah, ah, Monsieur est Persan? C’est une chose bien extraordinaire! Comment peut-on être Persan?” All translations from French are mine, unless otherwise noted.

²Fatma Aliye, “Bablölerden İbret Alalim,” *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, 24 Ağustos 1311/15 Rebûlevvel 1313/September 5, 1895, p.3. In the original text, the passage reads: “Biz bablölere halef olmamalıyız! Biz eslâf-ı İslamdan gelmiş olan meşahir ve namderân zenana halef olmalıyız!” All translations from English are mine, unless otherwise noted.

³For a critical analysis of the intersection of globalization, cosmopolitanism, and geography in the contemporary Western imaginary, see David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009).

shifting understandings of political membership, identity, and belonging? How did gender matter in these processes?

In this dissertation, I respond to these questions by turning to the movement of peoples and ideas across borders. Roxanne Euben suggests that “the motivations for travel as well as its consequences are various and unpredictable, a complex and mercurial interaction of the personal, cultural, historical, and institutional more suggestive of loose patterns than systematic paradigms.”⁴ As such, the texts that reflect on, or imagine, encounters with an unfamiliar people constitute compelling sites for studying political belonging, an affective sensibility whose articulations shift over time despite its close connection to seemingly fixed categories of identity.⁵ This focus on travel as a point of entry into political belonging raises a fourth question: How did interactions and exchanges across geographic and cultural borders impact the shifting articulations of political belonging (i.e. the meaning of being a proper subject or citizen, of making claims to be such a citizen, and of reinforcing or critiquing existing political institutions and ideologies)?

Using travel as a point of entry into thinking about political belonging seems counter-intuitive since travel is often associated with rootlessness and detachment from a place

⁴ Roxanne Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 189.

⁵ The term “traveling theory” was initially coined in Edward Said’s essay entitled “Traveling Theory.” Said’s use of the term “traveling theory” indicates a very particular understanding of theory as a systematic collection of ideas and arguments that seek to explain a social, political, economic or cultural phenomenon, and its travels as the ways in which this systematic collection of ideas circulates across different academic and intellectual contexts. As much as this understanding is interesting, it is not particularly helpful for capturing how ideas about political belonging have circulated between different cultural contexts. See Edward Said, “Traveling Theory,” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 226-247.

that can easily be identified as home. Texts that are products of movement across geographic and cultural borders include reflections on the meaning of home, identity attachment, and community almost as frequently as they include reflections on the meaning of travel, displacement, and foreignness. In this regard, I find Euben's definition of "theory" as the task of "examining and making explicit the assumptions and commitments that underlie everyday actions, a practice on which no time, culture, or institution has a monopoly" more generative. For Euben, "traveling theory" indicates how the articulations of these everyday assumptions and commitments change when one encounters assumptions and commitments that are different than one's own.⁶ Using travel as a point of entry allows me to develop an interpretive framework in which the locality of political belonging does not foreclose the cross-cultural concerns about identity and governance that helped forge its conditions of intelligibility.⁷

To examine the political work belonging does in the modern period and to better understand the ways in which it intersected with ideas and ideals of masculinity and

⁶ Roxanne Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 10.

⁷ "Comparative political theory" is often used as an umbrella term that captures two very different ways of thinking about why and how cultural and geographic difference matters to political theory. The first, exemplified by the works of Fred Dallmayr, approaches non-Western authors and texts as representatives of alternative, coherent traditions such as "Chinese" or "Islamic" political thought. This approach seeks to make non-Western traditions of political thought speak to presumably Western or Western-educated audiences, and to expand the geographical scope of the political theory canon. See Fred Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, No.2, (June 2004): 249-257. The second approach seeks the very distinction between "Western" and "non-Western" traditions of political thought as problematic. It seeks to critique and historicize this distinction, and to think about the ways in which authors and texts travel across geographic and cultural borders. Roxanne Euben, "Traveling Theories and Theorists," in *What is Political Theory?*, ed. Stephen K. White and J. Donald Moon, 145-173 (London: Sage Publications, 2004); Susan McWilliams, *Traveling Back: Toward a Global Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Murad Idris, "Political Theory and the Politics of Comparison," *Political Theory* (July 2016): 1-20, doi: 10.1177/0090591716659812. For a more detailed discussion of the key epistemological and methodological questions of comparative political theory, see Andrew March, "What Is Comparative Political Theory?," *The Review of Politics* 71, no. 4 (2009): 531-65.

femininity to generate visions of imperial political communities, I turn to five texts⁸ from France and the Ottoman Empire that narrate or imagine travels between Europe and the Middle East from 1718 until 1905. During this period, France and the Ottoman Empire were actively seeking to maintain or expand their imperial powers. Although political institutions, religion, and native language(s) differentiated France from the Ottoman Empire, their investment in imperial governance transformed political membership into a matter of international contestation. At the same time, a constant negotiation of the boundaries of public, private, and intimate spheres made it challenging to stabilize the meaning of categories such as “Frenchness” and “Ottomanness.”

In the dissertation, I develop four distinct interpretive categories to understand the politically and culturally fraught ways in which the distinction between self and other became juxtaposed with the distinction between “East” and “West” and “Islam” and “Christianity.” I call these categories “modalities of political belonging” as they capture the linguistic and discursive fields in which one’s reclamation of their status as an “Ottoman,” a “Frenchman,” a “European,” an “Easterner,” a “Muslim,” a “Catholic,” a “subject” or a “citizen” came to make sense.

I argue that these modalities capture the shared language of gender ideas and ideals used for international political contestation as well as domestic political consolidation, enabling the development of what I call a “transnational imaginary.” Specifically, I identify the notions of encounter, translation, conversion and resistance as four primary modalities for understanding the diverse, historically and textually specific ways in which

⁸ These are (in chronological order): Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721), Yirmisekiz Celebi Mehmed Efendi’s *French Embassy Letters* (1721), Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson’s *Tableau General de l’Empire Othoman* (1788), Vartan Paşa’s *Akabi Hikayesi* (1856) and a series of articles from the Ottoman women’s periodical, *Ladies’ Own Gazette* (1895-1905).

these concerns developed across geographic borders, and the East/West dichotomy was secured.

In what follows, I first situate the project in the larger debates on politics of citizenship and identity, the history of political thought, postcolonial theory, and transnational feminist scholarship. I then develop the overarching argument and methodology of the project by offering a discussion of how language, history, and ideology intersect in creating the modern grammar of political belonging. I conclude by providing brief outlines of each chapter.

Understanding Belonging as a Political Sensibility: Membership, Identity, and Political Claims-Making Beyond “Empire” and “Nation”

By virtue of the texts it examines, this dissertation moves through the conceptual fields of three different languages: French, Turkish,⁹ and English. Indeed, the word *belonging*, and its equivalents *âidiyyet* in Turkish, *appartenance* in French, have interesting variations in each of these three languages. However, they share three characteristics that allow for a more nuanced understanding of belonging as a political sensibility. First, belonging expresses a relation, whether that be to a group, a place, or an individual. In all three languages, this relation expresses a reciprocal bond between the subject and the object. Second, this relation is understood to be an affective one that is centered on some form of intimacy, even when it may have secondary meanings that are social, political, or material. The Oxford English Dictionary classifies *belonging* as a

⁹ For the purposes of this section, the distinction between Turkish in Arabic script (otherwise known as Ottoman Turkish) and Turkish in Latin script are overlooked. This is because the equivalent of belonging, *âidiyyet*, is one of the few words that have remained the same in both languages. The word comes from Arabic root “ء و ع” with the general meaning of returning or coming back.

subcategory of “love” and “friendship,” both of which are subcategories of “emotion or feeling.” Grand Larousse defines *appartenance* as “giving yourself to somebody else through love,”¹⁰ and the Ottoman-Turkish dictionary suggests that *âidiyyet* is synonymous with “being attached to somebody, especially a close acquaintance or relative.” Finally, in all three languages, belonging evokes the risk of being out of place that is mediated by one’s ability to be recognized as a proper or dependable visitor.

I propose the following definition of political belonging: It is an affective sensibility shared by members of a political community that enables them to make political claims about their rightful place in the community or about the ways in which they are being governed. Often, this process of interpellation requires the existence of an imaginary or imagined “Other,” whose presence outside the boundaries of the community make these boundaries visible and recognizable. This definition is deliberately agnostic about the institutional structures of governance (“empire” or “nation”), regimes of political power (“autocracy” or “democracy”), and the status of political actors (“subjects” or “citizens”).

The productivity of such agnosticism is two-fold. On the one hand, it circumvents the universalizing and totalizing thrust of identity (and its corollary, difference) by shifting the emphasis onto the historical and linguistic contexts in which political belonging is evoked and mobilized.¹¹ On the other hand, it allows us to think about the

¹⁰ The first meaning of the word is “being the property of someone.” It is interesting that the connections between “belonging,” “property,” and “love” appear in both French and English, but not in Turkish.

¹¹ In this regard, I find Etienne Balibar’s work to be theoretically productive because it often seamlessly alternates between contextual particularity and theoretical universality. See Etienne Balibar, *Citoyen Sujet et Autres Essais d’Anthropologie Philosophique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011); Balibar, *Identity and Difference: John Locke and the Invention of Consciousness*, ed. Stella Sandford (London: Verso, 2013); Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, tran. Christine Jones, James Swenson, and Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002).

continuities between “imperial subjecthood” and “national citizenship” without losing sight of critical differences among these two concepts. In this sense, political belonging is a sensibility that allows for historicizing what Engin Isin calls “acts of citizenship,” or “acts through which citizens, strangers, outsiders, and aliens emerge not as beings already defined but as beings acting and reacting with others.” Such acts need not be exclusively political; they can also be ethical, cultural, sexual, and social.¹² In Isin’s account, the empirical sites that allow us to think about political claims-making in terms of “acts” as opposed to legal, social, or political status is to be restricted to the fraught globalization of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Such a focus is predicated on thinking about political claims-making exclusively in terms of membership in and through the nation-state. As I hope to show later in this chapter and in the rest of the dissertation, it also ignores the ways in which imperial practices, institutions, and principles contributed to the emergence and development of nations and nationalisms.

In the last decade, the concept of empire has come to the forefront of critical-normative and historical studies in political theory.¹³ The latter proves to be a particularly rich site for this project because it offers invaluable insight into the connections between canonical works of political thought and the imperial/colonial orders that were emerging in the modern period. Specifically, this literature highlights that the key concepts of political modernity such as citizenship, tolerance, justice, and sovereignty were constitutive of, as well as constituted by, the debates on conquest, slavery, colonization,

¹² Engin Isin, “Theorizing Acts of Citizenship,” in *Acts of Citizenship*, ed. Engin Isin and Greg Nielsen (London: Zed Books, 2008), 39.

¹³ For two very different examples, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Seyla Benhabib, “Twilight of Sovereignty or the Emergence of Cosmopolitan Norms? Rethinking Citizenship in Volatile Times,” *Citizenship Studies* 11, no. 1 (2007): 19–36, doi:10.1080/13621020601099807.

and imperial rule that were taking place in early modern and modern Europe.¹⁴ In order to explore the different ways in which these debates were interwoven, scholars working within the framework of this literature either focus on the writings of canonical thinkers on slavery and empire,¹⁵ or on situating these thinkers within their intellectual context.¹⁶

As such, this literature is attentive to the ways in which the relations between imperial centers and peripheries were integral to the development of modern conceptions of citizenship and sovereignty. Moreover, it offers insight into how the meaning of “empire” and “imperialism” changed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For instance, according to Sankar Muthu, the eighteenth century was a “transitional period in the history of the concept of empire, for the traditional understanding of *imperium* as simply sovereign or military rule – or, at times, such rule over a fairly large, though contiguous territory – increasingly became mixed with the languages of colonization, conquest, and overseas commerce.”¹⁷ In turn, these languages

¹⁴ Sankar Muthu, ed., *Empire and Modern Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ For one of the most interesting illustrations of this approach, see Jennifer Pitts’ introduction in Alexis de Tocqueville, *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ This approach often highlights how the different strands of liberalism and conservatism in the modern period either challenged or justified imperial conquest and rule. For a compelling and detailed account of critiques of empire and imperialism within the Enlightenment, see Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). For a detailed intellectual history of critiques of imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain, see Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire 1850-1920, Ideas in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For an equally nuanced discussion of the justifications of imperial rule in nineteenth century British liberalism, and specifically of the affinity between universalizing assumptions of liberal philosophy and British/European superiority, see Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999). For a study that carefully explores the imperial paradoxes of liberalism in the context of interwar thought, see Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Muthu, ed., *Empire*, p.6

came to determine nineteenth century definitions of empire, and imperialism, and left a distinctive imprint on our contemporary political vocabulary and imaginary.

While the attentiveness to interactions between European and non-European peoples is valuable, the almost exclusive focus on canonical writers (such as Diderot, Kant, Tocqueville, J.S. Mill) and genres (such as treatises and essays)¹⁸ hinders our ability to think about the complexity of the socio-cultural and intellectual landscape in which much of these canonical works were produced, circulated and read. Relatedly, this literature almost exclusively engages European writers and thinkers' works on the non-European world. As such, the call for attentiveness to the relations between European and non-European peoples translates into a unidirectional interpretation of ideas about empire and imperialism. This is particularly problematic given that European nations were not the only imperial political orders in the modern period, and through conquest, commerce, diplomacy, or religious missions, they regularly interacted with non-European political orders. Although many of the canonical political thinkers were not involved in such direct contact, there were quite a few writers who documented and reflected on their contact with non-Europeans. There were also non-European writers who reflected on their encounters with European travelers, diplomats, missionaries, and soldiers, as well as on their own travels through Europe.¹⁹ If one is to take seriously the notion that the dynamics between European and non-European peoples shaped key concepts of modern

¹⁸ Here, two exceptions should be noted. Claeys' work is enriched by its focus on non-canonical writers, and its use of pamphlets and manuscripts. Similarly, Muthu (2003) uses Bougainville's *Voyage* as one of the key texts of late eighteenth century debates on empire and imperialism.

¹⁹ In the case of the Ottoman Empire and France, there is an extremely rich archive that documents such instances of contact. This "archive" is composed of documents that are spread throughout different repositories in contemporary France, Turkey, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.

political thought, such as citizenship, it is necessary to attend to how these moments of contact were articulated and represented.

Finally, while there is a growing body of historical and literary scholarship that documents the role gender played in the articulation and maintenance of imperial ideologies and in the simultaneous development of national identities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,²⁰ the historical literature on empire and imperialism in political theory does not seem to engage with gender as a way of signifying imperial power. For instance, during his voyage to Algeria in 1841, Tocqueville had remarked that Moorish architecture in Algeria “marvelously depict[ed] the social and political state of the Muslim and oriental populations: polygamy, the sequestration of women, the absence of any public life, a tyrannical and suspicious government that forces one to conceal one’s life and keep all affections within the family.”²¹ It is difficult to explore the implications of such an observation for conceptions of empire and political belonging without attending to the work the notions of family, monogamy, and household are doing in articulating the “tyrannical” nature of “Islamic” political rule, and in contrasting it to the social and political conditions prevalent in France.

In this regard, the field of postcolonial studies provides a more generative analytic framework for studying gender as “a primary way of signifying relations of power,”²²

²⁰ For two compelling examples, see Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) and Julia Clancy-Smith, and Frances Gouda (eds.), *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

²¹ Tocqueville, *Writings*, 37.

²² This a variation of Joan Scott’s influential definition of gender as an analytic category, which emphasizes that “attention to gender is often not explicit, but it is nonetheless a crucial part of the organization of equality and inequality.” See Thomas Kaiser, “The Evil Empire? The Debate on

particularly within the context of nineteenth century imperial interactions and exchanges. This is primarily because the field attends to language and historiography as key sites of political knowledge production while simultaneously highlighting the problematic centrality of European/Western theoretical formations for the inception of such sites.²³ In turn, this attentiveness leads to an understanding of the imperial and colonial encounters of the nineteenth century as moments of epistemic violence, i.e. moments during which European concepts, assumptions, and languages disfigured and muted non-European practices, and the concepts, assumptions, and languages in which they were embedded. For example, in her discussion of the abolition of *sati* (the ritual of widow sacrifice) by the British in India, Gayatri Spivak notes that “as one goes down the grotesquely mistranscribed names of these women, the sacrificed widows, in the police reports included in the records of the East India Company, one cannot put together a ‘voice.’ The most one can sense is the immense heterogeneity breaking through even such a skeletal and ignorant account.”²⁴ Given the impossibility of recovering the real voices of colonized subjects, scholars like Spivak turn to the various textual fragments of the imperial encounter (archival documents, newspaper clippings, folkloric songs, etc.) to unpack and critique historical and contemporary inequalities embedded in global power dynamics.

Turkish Despotism in Eighteenth-Century French Political Culture,” *The Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 1 (March 2000): 6–34, doi:10.1086/315928.

²³ For a compelling, yet dense, discussion of the problematic ways in which knowledge of non-Western cultures is mediated by Western/colonial concepts and language, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. For a sophisticated rethinking of history, historicity, and historicism through the lens of postcolonial studies, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²⁴ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 197

To understand the articulation and circulation of ideas about political belonging in the Ottoman and French contexts, postcolonial studies' emphasis on bringing a literary-historical sensibility to the study of the unequal nature of global circulation of ideas offers a productive methodological path. However, a postcolonial theoretical framework also makes it difficult to study the ways in which the articulation of ideas about political belonging before the establishment and consolidation of imperial and colonial institutions. This is partially because such a framework discounts the linguistic and ideological shifts that have happened over the course of the emergence and development of European imperial orders by turning to the late nineteenth century as the moment of inception of imperial rule. This periodization, in turn, leads scholars to neglect how justifications and contestations of conquest and rule were articulated throughout the eighteenth century, when many of the modern European imperial and colonial projects were still in their earlier stages of inception.

Second, the field of post-colonial scholarship often conceptualizes encounters between European and non-European nations as unidirectional. While it is essential to keep in mind the inequalities embedded in transnational dynamics, such inequalities do not necessarily indicate that members of non-European nations did not move around in the world or did not seek to conquer and rule over distant territories. More importantly, they should not obscure the empirical fact that non-European writers and thinkers were equally invested in understanding the ways in which their countries' encounters with European nations affected the organization of their own political communities.

In the context of the encounters between the Ottoman Empire and France, the frequently debated literature on *Orientalism* illustrates this shortcoming particularly well.

Edward Said's influential work defines Orientalism as a Western epistemic discourse, i.e. a discourse that articulates the very limits of what is politically, culturally, and morally knowable,²⁵ that was connected to an understanding of masculinity. Orientalism "was an exclusively male province; like so many professional guilds during the modern period, it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. This is especially evident in the writing of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy."²⁶ Leaving aside the argument that Said's work did not call into question how the gendered and sexualized imagery that was used to depict the Orient was a distinct epistemic discourse in and of itself,²⁷ it is important to note that this particular account of the intersection of Orientalism and sexism neglects that "the West was never the sole

²⁵ Here, Said's long definition proves to be particularly illuminating as to how orientalism works as a discourse. According to him, "[...] 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. It is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in 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)." Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books), 1979, 12. Emphases in original.

²⁶ Said, E., *Orientalisms*, 207

²⁷ For a compelling critique of Said's work from this perspective, see Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1998. In fact, subsequent historical and anthropological work certainly was able to weave together the insights of feminist scholarship and Orientalism. For a detailed, yet brief survey of the different ways in which Said's work has been interpreted, challenged, and reframed within the field of middle east feminist studies, see Lila Abu-Lughod, "'Orientalism' and Middle East Feminist Studies," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 1 (April 1, 2001): 101–13, doi:10.2307/3178451.

arbiter and owner of meanings about the Orient.”²⁸ Indeed, ideas about masculinity and femininity were constitutive of “Oriental” sociopolitical orders, including but not limited to the Ottoman Empire. More importantly, social, political, and cultural changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were also articulated, justified, or contested within the writings of “Oriental” men and women through a variety of gendered tropes and narratives.²⁹ While “the Oriental woman as the object of a Western male power-fantasy” was certainly one of the key tropes of the inequality between “Eastern” and “Western” sociopolitical orders, it was only one of the many themes and tropes with which this inequality was narrated.

Historically and culturally specific articulations of social and political difference through the lens of gender constitute the guiding concern of transnational feminist scholarship, which is the third literature that informs this project. While the very meaning of the term “transnational” is still contested within this field,³⁰ two of the fields’ insights are valuable for the study of ideas about political belonging in the Ottoman and French

²⁸ Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel, and the Ottoman Harem*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 1-2.

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of gender as a constitutive divide in late Ottoman society, see Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). As recent historical scholarship on gender in late Ottoman Society has shown, the increasing concerns with political reform in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were often accompanied by anxieties about regulating sexuality, particularly in the provinces. See, for example, Elyse Semerdjian, *“Off the Straight Path”: Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2008). Also see Karen M. Kern, *Imperial Citizen: Marriage and Citizenship in the Ottoman Frontier Provinces of Iraq* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2011). For an interesting discussion of how gender and sexuality shaped conceptions of cultural and political modernity in nineteenth century Iran, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³⁰ For a critical discussion of the key stakes of the debate on the meaning of the “transnational” for contemporary feminist scholarship and activism, see Leela Fernandes, *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, and Power* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

contexts. First and foremost, transnational feminisms are rooted in a theoretical (as well as practical) discontent with what can be called the “regional paradigm” in feminist scholarship. Even though there is an increasingly abundant literature on women’s movements and women’s history in diverse cultural contexts, much of this scholarship falls under the category of “Third-World” feminism.³¹ However, melting a plethora of different religious, national, ethnic, historical standpoints in one single pot, and studying them in relation to the “First World,” i.e. the “West” proves to be troublesome. Even those scholars who are comfortable with the use of the term “Third World” are aware of the difficulties of using it as a descriptive category because the term may express everything non-Western and non-White, which detracts from its contribution to the study of cultural specificity, and its usage is usually accompanied by important qualifiers.³²

In facing this discontent, transnational feminist scholarship aims to understand how one can move beyond such regional classifications that contain the risk of reifying cultural differences instead of critically mobilizing them for a rethinking of international solidarity among women. According to Kathy Davis, “this version of international feminist politics rejects binaries such as the West and the rest, global and local, and center and periphery, assuming instead that women are linked by globally structured

³¹ For an extensive collection of essays that address the issues of Third-World women, women of color, and intersections of gender, class and race, see Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third-World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

³² See especially, Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Tradition, and Third-World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), and Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). For a cogent critique of the use of the term, and of the generalizing tendencies of post-colonial branches of transnational feminism, see Judith Whitehead, Himani Bannerji, and Shahrzad Mojab, “Introduction,” in Bannerji, Mojab, and Whitehead, eds., *Of Property and Propriety: The Role of Gender and Class in Imperialism and Nationalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 4-33.

relations of power that influence their lives at every level in ways that are both varied and historically specific.”³³ As such, the first insight of transnational feminist scholarship is that it is possible to conceptualize the movement of peoples and ideas across geographic, political, and cultural borders as integral to the creation of political identities and alliances without ignoring how such movements are often fraught with inequalities and hierarchies.

The related, second key insight of this scholarship derives from its sustained attention to historicizing the nation as the primary unit of political belonging. Specifically, transnational feminist scholarship calls into question the presumed historical and political affinity between nationalist projects and (liberal) feminist movements (which is based on the development of feminist movements in Western countries) by defining and exploring what Chandra Mohanty calls “genealogies of community, home, and nation.” Accordingly, “genealogies that not only specify and illuminate historical and cultural differences but also *envision and enact common political and intellectual projects across these differences* constitute a crucial element of *the work of building critical multicultural feminism.*”³⁴ To fully grasp the movement of ideas and peoples across borders, it is equally necessary to recognize that these borders themselves are historical and cultural constructions.

As much as the term “genealogy” indicates a particular historical sensibility (one that takes some of its bearings from Michel Foucault), these genealogies, and

³³ Kathy Davis, *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 207.

³⁴ Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, 125. Emphasis mine. Here, it should be noted that Mohanty’s use of a slightly different terminology (“critical multicultural feminism” instead of “transnational feminism”) is indicative of the theoretical and practical disagreements that exist among feminist scholars of “the transnational.”

consequently the work of building a transnational (or, critical multicultural) feminism, often remain intimately connected to the feminist politics and practices of the present. Hence, they locate the earliest iterations of present connections between women's movements and "community," "home," and "nation" in the late nineteenth century. This, in turn, reinforces the existing chronology of women's movements in European and non-European contexts. More importantly, such genealogies reiterate the importance of modernization, and modern relations between states and citizens as they seek to unsettle their cultural specificity.³⁵

Here, I find Saba Mahmood's compelling argument in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and The Feminist Subject* regarding existing feminist theoretical accounts' inability to move beyond conceptions of agency as "resistance to social norms"³⁶ analogous to transnational/critical-multicultural feminisms' inability to move past late nineteenth century conceptions of "community," "home," and "nation." Despite the challenges they raise against the cultural specificity of "nation," and "national belonging," they do not call into question the temporal specificity of these terms. In this dissertation, I use a literary-historical lens to raise questions about how shared concerns

³⁵ This is not to dismiss the insights of transnational/critical multicultural feminist scholarship, but to highlight one of its theoretical ambiguities. The "limited" historical focus of such scholarship can be quite generative and productive, especially in the case of women's movements in the Middle East. Indeed, one of the most valuable books in this field almost exclusively focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

³⁶ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). As Mahmood herself remarks elsewhere, "[a]s in the case of liberalism, freedom is normative to feminism: critical scrutiny is applied to those who want to limit women's freedom rather than those who want to extend it." While different strands of feminism may define freedom in different ways, they nevertheless converge on the normative and political primacy of it. See Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (May 1, 2001): 202–36, doi:10.1525/can.2001.16.2.202.p.207

about political power, masculinity and femininity came to shape the transnational imaginary in which political belonging acquired its modern modalities. In the next section, I unpack this approach and illustrate it with a contemporary example.

Modern and Transnational Grammars of Political Belonging?

In the following chapters, I seek to unpack a modern and transnational grammar of political belonging, or the linguistic and conceptual structures that guide this relational sensibility which oscillates between “self” and “other.” I identify four distinct modalities and accompanying logics that structure the ways in which subjects and citizens were making claims to being members of a political community: encounter, translation, conversion, and resistance. Each of these modalities have a corresponding logic: seeing the other, speaking to (and sometimes with) the other, transforming the other, and rejecting the other.

In linguistics and semiotics, modality designates the ethical and epistemic possibilities of a given utterance. As such, it expresses a grammatical structure that contains different types of possible worlds. I use the term to refer to the grammatical and lexical frameworks in which who can, who may, and who must (and consequently, who cannot, may not, and must not) be “French” or “Ottoman” were articulated. Modalities of political belonging are the fields in which geographic, religious, ethnic, and cultural differences are transformed into political ones. They also contain potential ways of being or becoming members of the political community even when they clearly structure one type of affective attachment over another.³⁷ By contrast, the term logic points to a single,

³⁷ Some of the sources I draw on for this definition are Quentin Skinner, “On Performing and Explaining Linguistic Actions,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-) 21, no. 82 (1971): 1-21; Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and

or at least unified, interrelation between the subject and the object of a sentence. I use the term to single out specific dynamics of contact or exchange between “self” and “other” that is dictated by the modality of belonging.

The first of these modalities, encounter, has two constitutive principles. First, it requires there to be a community of foreigners, be it real or imagined, for the community of fellow subjects to be conceptualized as a political unit. Second, it requires a figural construction of this community so that it can be recognized as a “community of foreigners.” Translation, by contrast, imagines the relationship between self and other on a spectrum of human understanding. Within this modality, claiming one’s affective attachments to a political community requires acknowledging the possibility that there might be a universal ideal of understanding that goes beyond the limitations of specific political communities. Conversion, in turn, evokes one’s own community as the most righteous state of being, and casts the other as a *potential convert*. Resistance turns the communal gaze inward, and reimagines the political community as rejecting its imagined others to call for a self-referential critique and to make the case for political reforms. In each of these modalities, the boundaries between public, private, and intimate spaces are configured differently but questions of political power run through each of these spaces, often collapsing the conceptual differences.

Giroux, 1977); Eve Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); F.R. Palmer, *Mood and modality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Rod Girle, *Possible Worlds* (Chesham: Acumen, 2003); Bob Hale and Avi Hoffman, *Modality: Metaphysics, logic, and epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Sino Knuuttila, *Modern modalities: studies of the history of modal theories from medieval nominalism to logical positivism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988); Elizabeth Leiss and Werner Abraham, *Modes of modality: modality, typology, and universal grammar* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014).

I want to turn briefly to a contemporary example to elaborate the dissertation's larger contribution to thinking about questions of membership, identity, and belonging. Since the summer of 2015, the increasing numbers of people who have become refugees, internally displaced persons, or asylum seekers have sprung a renewed interest in the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. *New York Times* recently published a three-part series which explored the private sponsorship of Syrian refugees in Canada.³⁸ In the final installment of the series, we learn about the daily struggles of Bayan Mohammad, a 10-year-old girl and her parents, Abdullah and Eman Mohammad, who seek to build a new life in a country to which they had arrived less than a year ago.³⁹ Although the authors are careful not to traffic in easy stereotypes about life in Toronto versus life in small-town Syria, at the heart of the story are the clashing gender norms and roles. At the beginning of the article, we are told that the private sponsorship system that is in place is deeply "intimate" (the earlier articles compared this system to adoption) and that it "brings the tension between East and West so close."⁴⁰ This supposed tension between East and West manifests itself in Bayan's wishes to go on an overnight school trip, Eman's work outside the home, and Abdullah's involuntary status as a stay-at-home dad. We see a photograph of Eman helping Bayan put on a headscarf before going to Islamic school at a local mosque on Sunday. The dilemmas of displacement, resettlement, and integration that Muslim Syrian refugee families face collapse into the symbol of the

³⁸ Jodi Kantor and Catrin Einhorn, "Refugees Welcome," *New York Times*, June 2016-December 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/world/americas/canada-syrian-refugees.html?emc=eta>

³⁹ Kantor and Einhorn, "Wonder and Worry, as a Syrian Child Transforms," *New York Times*, December 17, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/17/world/americas/syrian-refugees-canada.html>

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

veil. “As they navigated the aisles, mother and daughters looked like members of two different families. Mrs. Mohammad wore her head scarf, neck-to-toe gown and shawl, while the girls were in leggings and skinny jeans.”⁴¹ Whatever the tension between East and West means, it only becomes recognizable when seen through women’s bodies, their clothing, their relationships with their husbands, fathers, and mothers. This tension also reflects a bifurcated geopolitical imaginary that associates the “East” with unfreedom and oppression and the “West” with freedom and human flourishing.

If we think of the transnational modalities of political belonging and their genealogies, this bifurcated geopolitical imaginary gives us pause and pushes us to ask further questions. Is the difference of clothing between Mrs. Mohammad and her daughters categorically distinct from, for instance, a generic Mrs. Smith who wears baggy sweaters and “mom jeans”? Does the language of intimacy when describing the experiences of “tension between East and West” faced by refugees and their sponsors perhaps mask our collective inability to speak about experiences of war and displacement? How would a New York Times article that does not trade in such tropes read? Could such an article even exist, given the long genealogies of the veil as a symbol of absolute difference? The goal of this dissertation is not to provide definite answers to these questions, but to highlight that “the tension between East and West” and its configuration through women’s bodies and actions has a long and fraught history, and to generate a space in which such questions can be asked and debated.

Chapter Outlines

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Chapter one develops “encounter” as a modality of political belonging through a comparative reading of two texts that were produced between 1718 and 1721:

Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes* and Ottoman ambassador Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi’s *Fransa Sefaretnâmesi*. Revisiting the historical and literary contexts in which these two texts were written and circulated, this chapter argues that during this moment, imagining the conditions of attachment between fellow subjects was dependent on the existence of a community of foreigners, be it real or imagined. In this chapter, I show how representations of feminine visibility were critical in narrating and negotiating the experience of contact with a cultural and political “other” whose internal and external boundaries remained nebulous. As a modality of political belonging, then, “encounter” prescribes that imagining the perspective and observational insights of this “other” was the precondition of understanding, critiquing, and governing the “self.”

Chapter two studies articulations of political belonging in the shifting landscape of late eighteenth century Franco-Ottoman relations through the lens of the life and work of Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson, the Ottoman-Armenian Catholic interpreter of the Swedish Embassy in Istanbul whose life ended while he was in exile in Paris. This chapter uses d’Ohsson’s multivolume *Tableau Général de l’Empire Othoman* to theorize translation as the interpretive lens for understanding political belonging in the context of the precarious and ephemeral cosmopolitanism of the late eighteenth century. I argue that translation captures the political and ethical dilemmas of seeking mutual understanding between self and other while preserving the particularities that distinguish them from each other.

Chapter three moves into the nineteenth century, and aims to understand how the shift from monarcho-imperial to national-imperial structures of governance impacted articulations of political belonging. Here, I focus on Ottoman-Armenian bureaucrat Vartan Paşa's novel *Akabi Hikayesi*, and I suggest that the logic of intelligibility for political belonging shifts again, from translation to conversion, experienced and understood through the lens of the converter (not the potential convert). Conversion as modality of political belonging captures an ardent belief in the righteousness of one's own community, whether it be an emerging "nation," an enduring "empire," or both, and a desire to bring others into this community by changing their beliefs and practices. It also entails an inherent skepticism of the (potential) convert's ability to see the necessity of such radical change, and to follow the newly acquired beliefs, spaces, practices, and community in the way that they are supposed to. In developing this argument, I show how the novels' plot of tragic love interweaves religious, familial, and political authority, often collapsing the distinctions between them.

The fourth and final substantive chapter analyzes a series of articles on women's socio-political condition and education, published in the Ottoman periodical *Ladies' Own Gazette*, whose contributors and editors were primarily Ottoman-Muslim women. Locating this periodical in the context of late-nineteenth century transnational women's writing, this chapter argues that the contributors of *Ladies' Own Gazette* articulated the subjectivity of the new "subject-citizen" in terms that I characterize (in dialogue with contemporary transnational feminist scholars) as the "non-pious believer." I argue that the religio-political reclamation of Ottomanness found in these popular cultural writings can be brought to focus if we develop resistance as a modality of political belonging.

Such a modality requires the coexistence of, on the one hand, an identitarian attachment to one's own community and, on the other, a desire to change at least some of its exclusionary norms, conventions, and practices. It is precisely in examining the paradoxes of being or becoming a "non-pious believer," I argue, that we see both the persistent instabilities and profoundly personal and political imperatives of resistance as modality of political belonging.

A concluding chapter reflects on the sequencing of these modalities, the parallel consolidation of political belonging into nationalism and transnational entanglements into an East/West binary, and the potential contributions of interpretive categories developed in the dissertation to contemporary dilemmas of inclusion, exclusion, and globalization.

CHAPTER 1. ENCOUNTER: POLITICS OF SEEING AND BEING SEEN

Introduction

“It is said that women are in charge, and that in fact France is the heaven of women because they do not have any labors and burdens, whatever they desire is realized immediately.”

Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, *Fransa Sefaretnâmesi* ¹

“It is the women who have instigated this revolt, who divide the entire Court, the entire Kingdom, and every family.”

Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, Lettre 22, Rica à Ibben ²

Ottoman ambassador Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi’s observation about the power women hold in French society in 1720-1721 echoes Montesquieu’s fictional Persian nobleman Rica’s observation about the undue influence women hold in Paris. Mehmed Efendi did not know the French language, and Montesquieu’s epistolary novel was going into publication as he started his long journey toward Paris. Echoes of Rica and Usbek’s thoughts in Mehmed Efendi’s ambassadorial report are not mere examples of life imitating art. Nor are they manifestations of a kind of “colonized psyche” *avant la lettre*, showing how the Ottoman-Turkish ambassador had internalized French epistemic

¹ “Avratların sözü geçer, hattâ Fransa avratların cennetidir, zira hiç zahmet ve meşakkatleri yoktur, istedikleri her ne ise hemen yerine getirilir deyu söylerler.” Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, *Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi’nin Fransa Sefâretnâmesi*, ed. Beynun Akyavaş (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1993), p.8. All translations from transliterated Ottoman Turkish are mine, unless otherwise noted.

² “[C]e sont les femmes, qui ont été les matrices de toute cette révolte, qui divise toute la Cour, tout le Royaume, & toutes les Familles.” Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, baron de, *Oeuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, ed. Jean Ehrard, Catherine Volpilhac-Augier, and Pierre Rétat, vol. 1 (Oxford and Naples: Voltaire Foundation and Istituto italiano per gli studi filosofici, 2004), p.194. All translations from French are mine, unless otherwise noted.

conventions about the ways “Easterners” think. Rather, as I argue in this chapter, these echoes are textual traces of a historical moment in which the terms of political belonging were articulated through the capacity to see a foreign community and to be seen by foreigners.

The second decade of the eighteenth century was a peculiar moment of contact between France and the Ottoman Empire. This was not the first time the two states had interacted with one another,³ nor was it the first time travelers from metropolitan France and Anatolia crossed paths.⁴ What made this decade unique was not the temporality of such interaction and exchange. Rather, it was how the meanings attached to these geographical spaces (metropolitan France and Ottoman territories including the capital, Istanbul) and to the political entities that were ruling over these spaces were changing. As the two imperial and dynastic monarchies sought to centralize and reform practices of governance, their subjects started looking outside the geographic boundaries of their states and empires to understand what it meant to be a rightful subject within those boundaries. Each country became a distorting mirror for the other. This meant that looking through France, the Ottomans could find ways to entertain themselves, to mask certain flaws while exaggerating others, and to think through changing dynamics of dynastic rule. Likewise, looking through the Turks, Persians, and to a lesser extent the

³ Diplomatic relations between the two monarchies date back to 1525. See Jean-Michel Casa, *Le Palais de France À Istanbul: Un Demi-Millénaire D’alliance Entre La Turquie et La France/İstanbul’da Bir Fransız Sarayı: Fransa İle Türkiye Arasında 500 Yıllık İttifak*, trans. Yiğit Bener (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1995); Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammond, Sinan Kunalalp, and Frédéric Hitzel, *Représentants Permanent de La France En Turquie (1536-1991) et de La Turquie En France (1797-1991)* (Istanbul and Paris: Éditions Isis, 1991).

⁴ Michèle Longino, *French Travel Writing in the Ottoman Empire: Marseille to Constantinople, 1650-1700* (New York: Routledge), 2015; Mehmet Ali Beyhan, *Geçmişten Günümüze: Seyahatnâmeler ve Sefaretnâmeler* (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları), 2013.

Russians, the French could redefine leisurely consumption, focus on the injustices of dynastic and despotic monarchies, and shrink the cultural and geographic challenges of an expanding empire.

The goal of this chapter is to explore this peculiar form of contact and to elucidate its implications for thinking about political belonging through a transnational framework. Specifically, this chapter argues that Mehmed Efendi and Montesquieu used representations of feminine visibility not only to demarcate the difference between European and Islamic political orders, but also to set the terms of possibility for being and becoming “Ottoman” or “French.” Further, this chapter suggests that this dialectic of demarcating difference and foreignness to reclaim identity and familiarity is best captured by the term encounter. In doing so, it theorizes “encounter” as a modality of political belonging, i.e. as a discursive and linguistic field in which the two entities act as distorting mirrors for one another.

The chapter proceeds as follows: First, I clarify what it means to think of encounter as modality of political belonging. Then, I offer a comparative history of France and the Ottoman Empire as two dynastic monarchies undergoing upheaval in this period. In the third section, I contextualize the literary genres of *sefaretnâme* and epistolary novel, taking up the formal configurations of visibility and secrecy. The final three sections offer comparative close readings of the text, focusing on the issue of feminine visibility.

Encounter as Modality of Political Belonging

There is a rich literature on the long history, or histories, of imperial and colonial encounters, as well as their historical and epistemological reverberations for

conceptualizing transnational and global relations. Historians Antoinette Burton⁵ and Mary Louise Pratt⁶ examine how European conquests and settlements in the Atlantic world and Southeast Asia have shaped the ways in which native populations conceived their identity. Roxanne Doty⁷ offers a critical genealogy of the North-South divide and argues that imperial encounters have discursive as well as empirical reverberations in contemporary debates on global justice. Talal Asad⁸ articulates the role of social sciences in institutionalizing the epistemology of such colonial encounters.

Much of this scholarship, however, takes the term “encounter” to be self-evident, even when discussing contexts where the rules of interaction and exchange are not shaped by imperial or colonial paradigms of rule. This is partially related to the prominence of Edward Said’s work in setting the stage for understanding the discursive aspects of encounters between European and non-European countries. Although Said’s approach to the relationship between literary-cultural representation and imperial rule created a groundbreaking paradigm for examining the discursive dimensions of modern imperial ideologies, the definition of encounter that this approach entails is not a particularly nuanced one. In *Orientalism*, Said offers a very detailed and critical genealogy of the ways in which European imperial conquests were accompanied and facilitated by an “imaginative geography” in which “the Orient and Islam are always represented as outsiders having a special role to play inside Europe.”⁹ The “Orient” and

⁵ Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷ Roxanne Lunn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

⁸ Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (New York: Humanities Press, 1973)

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 71.

its corollary, “Islam” are rendered ahistorical, immutable, and innately foreign for the purposes of making claims about Europe and the “Occident.” Later, in *Culture and Imperialism*, he pushes this argument further to suggest that “interaction between Europe or America on the one hand and the imperialized world on the other is animated, informed, made explicit as an experience for both sides of the encounter.”¹⁰ Within such a framework, the term encounter engenders an imaginative geography that mirrors that of Orientalism. The world consists of two poles: the imperial powers, i.e. Europe and North America, and the imperialized world, i.e. Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. Perhaps more jarring is the emphasis on the qualitative singularity of interaction and exchange between the two poles.

Each of these two presuppositions is problematic for understanding the contact between the Ottoman Empire and France in 1720s (albeit for different reasons). First, the Saidian notion of encounter requires a unilateral relationship between the imperial centers of power and the “imperialized world.” Despite the shifting international and domestic power dynamics, the two sides of the Franco-Ottoman contact were imperial powers governing distinct territories with two very distinct ideologies of political rule. Second, and relatedly, this account of encounter requires fixed and impermeable geographic boundaries between Europe and non-Europe. In the first two decades of the eighteenth century, these boundaries were rapidly changing along with the meanings attached to them. The notion of encounter as a moment of exchange whose discursive terms were set by the imperial power and accepted by the imperialized does not capture the historical and discursive intricacies of Mehmed Efendi and Montesquieu’s work.

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf 1993), 21.

This chapter offers a different account of the term “encounter” by approaching it as a modality of political belonging. In this sense, encounter is the parameter that shapes the discursive field in which conditions of attachment between fellow subjects is articulated and contested. This parameter has two constitutive principles. First, it requires there to be a community of foreigners, be it real or imagined, for the community of fellow subjects to be conceptualized as a political unit. This dialectic dependence between a communal “self” and a communal “other,” in and of itself, is not particularly unique to the early eighteenth century. Despite its transformations throughout the modern period, it has been a constitutive element of political thought in both European and Islamic contexts. What distinguishes encounter as a modality of political belonging is a distinct way of seeing and being seen by the foreigner that accompanies the demarcation of self in reference to the other. Specifically, this second principle dictates that the communal self must see the communal other as a figure, or as Sara Ahmed calls it, “a shape with linguistic and bodily integrity.”¹¹ This necessitates the existence of a set of referents (a lexicon of sorts) to be mobilized during the moment of contact to identify the other party as “foreign.”

While this dual logic of encounter sets the discursive conditions of possibility for being or becoming subjects, the languages of attachment vary across countries, nations, and empires. To understand the play of overarching discursive and linguistic structures that generate the conditions of possibility for belonging and specific languages and practices that give content to these conditions, it is necessary to revisit the historical and literary contexts of the two sides of the encounter, without losing sight of the larger cross-

¹¹ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 22.

cultural dynamics that are at work in bringing them together. Leela Fernandes' analysis of the relationship between the "colonial encounter" and transnationalism offers a productive point of departure for further elucidating the theoretical stakes of understanding "encounter" as a modality of political belonging. Fernandes suggests that the colonial encounter is a presumed "originary point of history in postcolonial contexts" and that the transnational is a social-scientific and humanistic paradigm that obfuscates the gendered and racialized hierarchies created by this encounter in non-Western contexts.¹² She argues that this is because as a paradigm, the transnational is often used to signal something about global relations in our present moment. For Fernandes, transnational scholarship on women and gender remains problematically ahistorical and anachronistic because it unwillingly reproduces national borders and attachments. Perhaps more importantly, it keeps the epistemological primacy of the West intact because of where such scholarship is produced and how it is circulated.

In what follows, I will further complicate this relationship between the transnational as an epistemological paradigm, gender studies and the colonial encounter by turning to the very historical and literary contexts in which *Fransa Sefâretnamesi*¹³ and *Lettres Persanes*¹⁴ were produced. I will offer a joint reading of these two contemporaneous texts using a transnational perspective to unpack how the early eighteenth century Franco-Ottoman contact engendered a particular way of seeing and being seen as political subjects and how this way of seeing and being seen was connected

¹² Leela Fernandes, *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, and Power* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 181-182.

¹³ "FS" in the rest of the text.

¹⁴ "LP" in the rest of the text.

to the configuration of a dialectic dependence between “self” and “other.” Specifically, I will argue that these two texts weave visibility of political power, social participation, and desire to demarcate the difference between European and non-European political orders. Despite significant differences in genre and sociocultural frames of reference, both texts use women’s literal and symbolic presence in political, sociocultural, and intimate spheres as the lynchpin of politico-cultural difference between “East” and “West.” It is this lynchpin that allows them to draw the borders of this imaginary geography.

A Tale of Two Monarchies

The decades leading up to the publication of *LP* (1721) and *FS* (1720) were tumultuous for the Bourbon and Ottoman dynasties, who were trying to hold on to their monarchical power while preserving their kingdoms’ territorial integrity and imperial presence. In both cases, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had brought about important political, social, and cultural challenges that seemed to demand a new approach to monarchical rule. While these dynasties maintained their rights of succession in their respective countries, the rulers of France and Ottoman Empire were finding it increasingly difficult to govern their subjects, albeit for different reasons. In this period, the question of how to govern was embroiled in the question of who was being governed. The main challenge these two dynastic-imperial monarchies faced during the first three decades of the eighteenth century was to bridge the gap between existing ideologies of statecraft and changing socioeconomic dynamics. While existing ideologies of statecraft were centered on the divine legitimacy of the monarch, the changing socioeconomic dynamics presented themselves as popular rebellions that shook the foundations of this

legitimacy. The lengthy wars that were sometimes followed by loss of territory certainly did not help reinforce the legitimacy of the monarch.¹⁵ In France and Ottoman Empire alike, refashioning and reclaiming the legitimacy of monarchical rule thus became a priority for the ruling elite, themselves often a mix of dynastic insiders and outsiders.

It is within this quest for new foundations of monarchical legitimacy that the collective identities of the monarch's subjects became salient features of political contestation. Specifically, subjects often used religious terms to express their discontent about their conditions of subjection. The diversity of these religious terms, and the collective identities they mobilized seemed to be in direct opposition to the King or the Sultan's political authority. As such, they constituted a powerful, potential threat that needed to be subdued. By the early 1730s, the French monarchy successfully controlled religious affairs through a mix of increased centralization in the metropole and ambitious colonial expansion in the Atlantic world. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, however, the monarchy's efforts to control religious affairs were circumvented by growing economic inequality between the court and its subjects and ongoing military losses, as well as a cultural shift initiated by the Sultan and his Grand Vezir.¹⁶ In what follows, I discuss and contrast two threads that seem particularly relevant to understanding the politico-cultural context in which Mehmed Efendi and Montesquieu came of age and produced their works: challenges to the monarch's authority that are expressed in religious terms and fascination with the ways of living and being of communities outside the territorial control of the monarch. In doing so, my goal is neither to provide a detailed

¹⁵ Unlike the Ottoman Empire, France managed to start expanding its colonial presence outside metropolitan France in 1710's. See further discussion below.

¹⁶ The grand vizier was the highest ranked officer of the Ottoman court after the Sultan. He was only dismissible by the Sultan himself. In many cases, he was also the son-in-law of the Sultan.

historical narrative of events, nor to offer causal explanations about shifting ideas and practices of monarchical rule. Rather, it is to sketch out the contours of the complex historical moment in which *FS* and *LP* were written and circulated.

At the turn of the century, the Ottoman Empire was in the process of negotiating treaties with their military rivals, Habsburg, Austria, Poland, Venice, and the Russian Empire. The resulting Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) was a turning point in Ottoman statecraft because it dictated the creation of strict, linear boundaries as well as the cessation of hostilities for longer than eight years.¹⁷ It was the first peace treaty that the Ottomans had negotiated and signed since the inception of the Ottoman state in 1299. This indicated a fundamental ideological shift in the Ottoman dynasty's approach to imperial rule. Until the treaty of Karlowitz, the notion of an open frontier was a cornerstone of Ottoman imperial ideology and practice, often justified by the distinction between the abode of Islam (*dār al-Islām*) and the abode of war (*dār al-harb*). The former referred to territories in which Islam was established both as a set of religious beliefs and as the guiding rules and principles of governance. The latter, on the other hand, referred to territories in which Islam was not yet established. These spaces didn't merely serve as an oppositional referent. Rather, the term "abode of war" suggested that non-Islamic territories were sites of potential and legitimate conquest.

The Ottoman interpretation of this critical dichotomy of Islamic political thought was more strategic and pragmatic than strictly normative. It served as an instrument of military recruitment for the Empire's westward expansion. For the ruling elite, the practical and ideological pull of geographic expansion was stronger than that of piety, as

¹⁷ Rifa'at Abou-El-Haj, "Formal Closure of the Ottoman Frontier in Europe," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 89, No.3 (Jul-Sep, 1969): 467-475.

the Ottomans repeatedly fought with other Islamic empires, including those with whom they shared a sect. However, the distinction between *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-harb* had become an important part of the Muslim-Ottoman subjects' imaginary. In this imaginary, this distinction was inextricably linked to the legitimacy of the Ottoman Sultan. The Sultan's agreement to the terms of a peace agreement with non-Muslim states "was seen as a betrayal of the faith and the state (*din-u devlet*), a charge which was corroborated by the government's readiness to meet both the spirit and the letter of its treaty obligations."¹⁸ The creation of the Empire's new borders was completed in early 1703, and the Sultan, Mustafa II, moved his primary palace from Istanbul to Edirne. Identified as a corrupt religious leader who meddled in matters of governance, the childhood tutor of Mustafa II, Şeyhülislam Feyzullah Efendi became a target for the religious intellectuals (*ulema*), merchants of Istanbul, and members of the military. Shortly after, an uprising, known as the *Edirne Vakasi* (The Event of Edirne) formed in the ranks of the military. Over the course of this episode, the rebels referenced *shari'ā* (customary law) and *fikh* (Islamic jurisprudence) as the basis of their grievances against the Şeyhülislam. They called on the Sultan to allow him to stand trial. When the Sultan refused, the uprising grew into a multi-faction rebellion with the support of the *ulema* (religious intelligentsia) and which ended with the decapitation of Feyzullah Efendi and the replacement of Mustafa II by his younger brother, Ahmed III.

In the same period, the French monarchy was also embroiled in conflicts with long term military rivals. In the aftermath of the Nine Years' War, the treaty of Ryswick (1687) had caused the borders of metropolitan France to shrink.¹⁹ It had also forced Louis

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.475

¹⁹ Here, I use the adjective "metropolitan" to refer to France's non-colonial territories.

XIV to recognize William of Orange as King of England. While the territorial losses in and of themselves didn't compare to the territorial losses suffered by the Ottoman Empire, the symbolic loss of the *Roi très chrétien* against a primarily Protestant political and military alliance was a cumbersome one. The King's desire to eradicate Protestantism from metropolitan France became evident with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes two years before the signing of the treaty of Ryswick. The precarious condition of Huguenots was not part of the negotiations, much to the dismay of many French protestants. It was around this time that debates about despotism took hold in French literary and political circles.

Beyond the international conflicts, the Bourbon monarchy was also facing a local uprising which didn't directly challenge the legitimacy of Louis XIV. Rather, it called into question the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. This uprising came not from within the capital but the southeastern regions of Cévennes and Languedoc. It was primarily the reaction of Protestant peasants to the revocation of the edict of Nantes. The *Camisard* were Protestants who were too impoverished to leave these regions. Unlike many other French Protestants, they were unable to settle in either La Rochelle or England or America after the Revocation. They also constituted a majority of the population in Cévennes and Languedoc. Starting in 1685, they were subjected to forced conversion campaigns, torture, and *dragonnades* by the King's orders. A resistance movement formed in reaction to this campaign of eradication, the *Camisard* revolt started as a series of prophecies, uttered by adolescent boys and girls in the mountain towns in the Cévennes.²⁰ *Camisard* rebels demanded the reestablishment of the edict of Nantes.

²⁰ Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 31.

They also targeted Catholic places of worship. The unsuccessful rebellion continued until 1710. As the French monarchy sought to repress it, the interests of the court became further enmeshed with the interests of the Roman Catholic Church.

Just as the French monarchy was going through a rapprochement with the Roman Catholic Church, the Ottoman sultan was seeking out new allies. After a few unsuccessful military campaigns, Ahmed III and his Grand Vezir (and son-in-law), Nevşehirli Damad Ibrahim Pasha, became acutely aware of the cultural isolation of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in relation to its European allies and enemies. Ariel Salzmänn remarks that under the reign of Ahmed III and Ibrahim Pasha, “the state embarked on new policies and programs. Istanbul dispatched diplomats to European capitals, established the first Ottoman language printing press, and promoted commerce and industry.”²¹ Indeed, during the final twelve-year period of his reign (1718-1730), which came to be known as the Tulip Era (*Lale Devri*), the Ottoman court invested an extraordinary amount of money to change the socio-cultural map of the imperial capital. The number of palaces throughout the city increased, tulip-filled gardens were built inside and outside these palaces, secular holidays were created, and public celebrations of both religious and secular holidays became a regular occurrence.²² The spectacle-like displays of openness, consumption, and pleasure replaced the more common displays of piety, loyalty to the sultan, and of obedience to imperial power.

²¹ Ariel Salzmänn. "The Age of Tulips: Confluence and Conflict in Early Modern Consumer Culture, 1550–1730" in *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922: An Introduction*, ed. Donald Quataert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 83.

²² For much more detailed histories of the urban, social, and cultural transformation of Istanbul during the Tulip Era, see Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul: 1700-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) and Donald Quataert, “Clothing Laws, State, and Society in the Ottoman Empire, 1720-1829,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 3 (August 1997): 403-425.

While the lavishness of Ottoman elites' consumption habits was not new in and of itself, displaying this lavishness to the subjects living in the imperial capital was a new practice. Often, these displays of riches, leisure, and pleasure did not improve the conditions of the sultan's subjects who often lived in conditions of poverty and misery. Instead, they demarcated the sharp contrast between the life of the dynasty and the lives of ordinary subjects.²³ The Ottoman ruling elite's investment in creating and cultivating spaces of leisure and pleasure had not put an end to the military pursuits on the eastern borders of the Empire. Between 1724 and 1730, the Ottoman military were fighting against Iran and Russia, without much success. These wars, aimed at expanding the Empire eastward, had not only strained the court's budget. They had also created a significant number of refugees and unemployed *janissaries*, who settled in Istanbul without much opportunities for work or shelter.

Given these conditions, it is not entirely surprising that the Tulip Era came to an end with a popular revolt.²⁴ On the one hand, it is possible to say that the cultural opening of the Tulip Era had left a positive imprint on Ottoman diplomatic practice. Over the course of the eighteenth century, ambassadors were sent on missions to England, France, Sweden, Russia, Austria, Naples, Morocco, Iran, and India.²⁵ The ambassadorial letters from these missions reflect a more critical understanding of the Ottoman Empire's place in the world than those that were written prior to the eighteenth century. On the other hand, as the troubled Ottoman historiography of the Tulip Era demonstrates, the imprint

²³ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 214.

²⁴ Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 55.

²⁵ Faik Reşit Unat and Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, *Osmanlı Sefirleri ve Sefaretnameleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2008).

of this period on the socio-cultural imaginary of the Ottomans was largely negative. As Madeline Zilfi aptly notes, the prevailing interpretation of the Tulip Era in Ottoman historiography was that it was a “a lost opportunity, when the Ottomans might have prepared against later Western and Russian encroachment. Instead, it is argued, the leadership wasted itself on frivolity that squandered energies and resources.”²⁶ The period’s cultural opening and changing displays of political power that it brought were overshadowed by the presumed superficiality of “cultural interaction” with the “West.”²⁷

In France, the early eighteenth century fascination with Turkish influences²⁸ has a similarly conflicted history and historiographical legacy. While the term *la turquerie* first appeared in the sixteenth century, over the course of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it took on a more overtly political meaning in France, particularly in the context of the debates about monarchy and despotism. Coined in the 1690’s, the term *despotisme* was used by those who were critical of the increasingly arbitrary power of Louis XIV as a way of naming their critique of the French king. When writers like Fénelon sought to revive the term from its Greek origins, they were aware of its simultaneously geographic and political connotations. More importantly, “[t]hey were quite content, even eager, to suggest that *despotisme* was a political system appropriate to Asians and barbarians, especially to Chinese and to Turks. And thus, by warning that the

²⁶ Madeline C. Zilfi, “Women and Society in the Tulip Era, 1718-1730,” in *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, ed. Amira El Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 291.

²⁷ Much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Ottoman historiography uses terms like “borrowing the lavishness and immorality of the West” to refer to what was happening in this period. However, as recent historical scholarship has demonstrated, this period was particularly rich in its literary, intellectual, and cultural output. The reorganization of social life in and outside of the courts also entailed a rethinking of the meaning of political power.

²⁸ Nebahat Avcioğlu, *Turquerie and the Politics of Representation, 1728-1876* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publications, 2011), 4.

French monarchy was becoming a despotism, they were suggesting that France was marching toward the alleged absolutism and unthinking uniformity of Asiatic servitude.”²⁹ In the context of eighteenth century critiques of the monarchy, *turquerie* manifested itself in recurring references to a corrupt political system, one that tethers on the brink of anarchy and chaos.

However, following the diplomatic rapprochement with the Ottoman Empire in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, there was also an increasing number of literary works that tried to depict the figure of the Turk and the mannerisms of the Ottomans in a truthful fashion. Often, this translated into a conscious effort to use tropes, images, and language that were familiar to the French readers (and audience) through the travel narratives of Jean Chardin³⁰ and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier.³¹ The main purpose of these works was to show the ways in which religious and customary laws reigned over the land of the Ottomans, and to undermine the claim that the Sultan of the Turks, the despot par excellence, ruled purely based on his arbitrary whims and caprices. While the exact accuracy of such representations can be debated, what is particularly interesting in this manifestation of *la turquerie* was the way in which the language of similarity between the French and the Turks was used to make a domestic political claim about the logical absurdity of charges of despotism against Louis XIV. As Thomas Kaiser points

²⁹ Roger Boesche, “Fearing Monarchs and Merchants: Montesquieu’s Two Theories of Despotism,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (December 1990), 742.

³⁰ Catherine Volphillac-Augier and Jean Erhard note that many details of Usbek’s seraglio and life in Persia were drawn from Jean Chardin’s *Voyages*. See Jean Chardin, *Voyages de Mr. le chevalier Chardin, en Perse, et autres lieux de l’Orient* (Amsterdam, Jean Louis de Lorme 1711).

³¹ Tavernier’s relation de voyage was one of the earliest French-language travel writing on the Ottoman Empire. See Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Nouvelle Relation De L’interieur Du Serrail Du Grand Seigneur: Contenant Plusieurs Singularitez Qui Jusqu’icy N’ont Point Esté Mises En Lumière* (Paris: Chez G. Clouzier, 1675).

out, “while critics of monarchy sharpened the cutting edge of ‘despotism’ as a political category, the truly fundamental reconceptualization of Ottoman society and government during the eighteenth century came not from their camp, but from the defenders of the royal prerogative.”³² If the quintessential representative of a “corrupt absolute monarchy” is bound by rules and laws that are beyond his individual will, then even he cannot be a despot. More importantly, one cannot charge the King of France with being or becoming one.

Within this shifting and contentious politico-cultural context, Montesquieu and Mehmed Efendi both sought to make sense of the strange amalgam of cross-cultural interaction, religious difference, and political power. The former is a fictional travel narrative, and the latter is an ambassadorial report, initially designated for the Sultan and his Grand Vezir. In the broadest sense, then, the former is designated for consumption by readers unknown to the author while the latter was intended to be a secret document read by the two most powerful members of the Ottoman ruling class. Before moving on to the three threads that connect these texts’ configurations of contact, identity, and power, I will discuss the literary contexts in which they were composed and read.

Epistolarity, Secrecy, and Visibility

At first blush, there are some interesting formal similarities between *FS* and *LP*. Both texts share an epistolary format. The former is written as a long letter aimed to capture the details of Mehmed Efendi’s travels to and in France. The latter is written as a series of letters aimed to offer a credible narrative about two imaginary Persian travelers’ journey to France and the life they leave behind. There are also moments in both texts

³² Thomas Kaiser, “The Evil Empire?” 15.

where the authors remark on same points of difference between France and the Ottoman Empire (*Osmanlins*, as Montesquieu's characters calls them). Indeed, the use of comparison as instrument of critical rethinking is possibly the most compelling similarity between *FS* and *LP*, two texts that reverse "the structure of cultural voyeurism upon itself" by engaging their "readers as both observing subjects and observed objects, simultaneously critics and the focus of critique."³³ In this rethinking of the self through the narration of the other, gendered imagery plays a crucial role. Despite these similarities and echoes, however, the two texts are bound by two distinct sets of literary conventions. In order to better understand the connection between power, visibility, and gendered imagery in each of these texts, it is crucial to first elucidate these conventions and the different forms of critique that are enabled by them.

The genre of *sefaretnâme*, or ambassadorial letters, carried with it an assumption of secrecy, at least during the writing of the letter. They were addressed first and foremost to the Ottoman sultan, and occasionally to the Grand Vizirs. Given the temporary nature of Ottoman ambassadorial missions until the early nineteenth century, these letters were aimed at either giving a description of the place the ambassador was visiting, or a statement regarding the success of the mission, or lack thereof.³⁴ Among the existing forty-one *sefaretnâmes*, only a few were published, often a few decades after the ambassadorial mission had ended. One could say that these ambassadorial letters are more accurately described as ambassadorial "reports," as they are often very descriptive writings that established a hierarchical relationship between the author and the reader by

³³ Elizabeth Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 43.

³⁴ See Unat and Baykal, *Osmanli Sefirleri*, p. 14-46 for a detailed survey of the different functions of *sefaretnâme*.

the sheer virtue of their intended audience. In this particular context, the author was subordinate to the reader, and as such, he was not a sovereign subject. However, the literary conventions of Ottoman formal correspondence in the eighteenth century were imbued with expectations about the author's literacy and sophistication, which were measured by the author's capacity to integrate poetic and Quranic verses into the text itself to leave room for interpretation and multiple meanings. This textual openness, demanded by the literary conventions of the genre as well as the cultural conventions of the time, created a space in which the author could temporarily act as a sovereign subject without subverting the hierarchical relationship between him and the Sultan.

Although *FS* was a descriptive text on its surface, its author also aimed to show the wonders of France to Ahmed III, and to assure him of the validity of pursuing a cultural and diplomatic rapprochement with France without completely dismissing the notion of Ottoman political and cultural superiority. Twentieth century novelist and literary scholar Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar remarks that “in every single line of this little *sefaretnâme*, which leaves the impression of *Thousand and One Nights* in reverse, there are traces of a secret idea of comparison.”³⁵ The secrecy of comparisons in the text itself mirrors the presumed formal secrecy of the document, which was meant to be a hidden correspondence between the ambassador and the Sultan. The correspondence was not a “private” one because both the author and the recipient are interpellated as representatives of the Ottoman state. For instance, Mehmed Efendi rarely uses the first person singular (*ben*) in describing his actions, and always uses the second person plural in referring to the Sultan (*siz*) and his formal titles, never his name. Neither was it a

³⁵ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *On Dokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2012), 61.

“public” correspondence, since it was not meant to be read by anyone other than the Sultan or the Grand Vezir. The text was not published in Ottoman Turkish until more than a century after it was written. The first publication was a French translation of a copy included in one of the official histories of the Empire (*Tarih-i Raşid*).³⁶ *FS* was an official and confidential document that exhibited the characteristics of a literary text.³⁷ As a genre, then, the *sefaretnâme* allowed its author to simultaneously perform sincere curiosity towards the foreign community, admiration and loyalty towards the Ottoman court, and tacit critique of Ottoman political developments. Mehmed Efendi made use of the genre’s juxtaposition of literariness, confidentiality, and state authority to see and to show the foreignness of French society and culture. Furthermore, he molded this foreignness into a mirror for the Ottoman monarchy.

The *LP*, by contrast, was a fictional text that appropriated the generic conventions of the oriental tale and the epistolary novel. Unlike the non-fictional genre of *sefaretnâme*, these two fictional genres were plot driven. They also left room for more creativity in the construction of characters, spaces, and various plot points. As popular genres in eighteenth century France and England, the oriental tale and epistolary novel intersected with each other in interesting ways. The oriental tale often traced heroes and villains in their adventures in the “East,” an imagined and largely imaginary space that

³⁶ Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 139. The afterlives and publication history of *FS* is an interesting and contentious topic that is beyond the scope of this chapter. There is perhaps a point to be made about the power inequalities between Ottoman and French states that derives from the fact that the French ambassadors could access, translate, and reproduce a text that was deemed to circulate only among the members of the Ottoman court.

³⁷ For an interesting discussion of the intersection of literature and diplomacy in the eighteenth century see Christopher Warren, *Literature and the Law of Nations, 1580-1680* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

encompassed territories from the Ottoman Empire to China. Through the oriental tales, the East became simultaneously familiar and foreign. The foreign familiarity, and the familiar foreignness of the East allowed the authors of oriental tales to develop moralistic stories that often satirized or critiqued “Europe”³⁸ and European social, political, and cultural practices. Srinivas Aravamudan has suggested that this genre is “best approached as an artifact written to the specifications of the folktale but with the aims of modernity in mind.”³⁹ Indeed, oriental tale’s emergence coincided closely with Antoine Galland’s translation of *A Thousand and One Nights* in 1704. Many of the examples of the genre also drew from the travel narratives of Jean Chardin and others. What enabled the success of the narrative was the *vraisemblance* of the story’s geographic and spatial setting, that is, its authors ability to recreate the “East” in its familiar foreignness.

Just as oriental tales were identifiable by their ability to convincingly replicate the authentic foreignness of places like Anatolia, Persia, and China, the epistolary novels were identifiable by their ability to approximate the intimacy of letter writing. In the context of early eighteenth century France, the letter was a communicative device that presupposed a relationship of transparency, confidence, and secrecy between the letter writer and her addressee. *A correspondance de lettres* indicated relations of sympathy, conviviality, and mutual understanding between two individuals.⁴⁰ As such, it casts the writer and reader as equals. Nonetheless, epistolary practice remained closely attached to visions of aristocratic sociability and absolutist rule. The first vision required the letter

³⁸ Peter Burke, “Did Europe exist before 1700?” *History of European Ideas* 1, No.1 (1980): 21-29.

³⁹ Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 17.

⁴⁰ *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française*, 1st Edition (1694), s.v. « correspondance de lettres. »

writer to conform to the ways of Parisian aristocrats. Perhaps not surprisingly, it also imagined the letter writers “almost exclusively as aristocrats or as persons writing to aristocrats.”⁴¹ In the context of epistolary novels in France, even the fictional representations of letter writers were replicating a courtly style that conformed to the letter writing manuals of the time. As Janet Altman notes, these novels represented “very few servants as letter writers, but when they do write, they write love letters in the same style as their masters, which is in turn always close to the language of letter manuals.”⁴² The intelligibility, reception, and reciprocation of a letter’s intimacy, i.e. the creation of an authentic *correspondance de lettres*, depended on the letter writer’s ability to identify a worthy addressee as well as her ability to master the stylistic norms and conventions of courtly writing.

It is this individual mastery of the written word that made the letter form simultaneously an instrument of absolute power and potential weapon against absolutist monarchy. As the eighteenth century progressed, the act of letter writing took on a more explicitly threatening character for the Bourbon monarchy because, as Elizabeth Wingrove aptly observes, “the poetic practices of letter writers inculcated a sovereign disposition, an appropriation of the power of address through which their speech acts might become political events.”⁴³ This sovereign disposition seems distinct from the kind of sovereign subjectivity enabled by the *sefaretnâme* in that it contains a potential yet strong affective bond between the letter writer and her reader. While the latter enables the

⁴¹ Janet Altman, “Teaching the ‘People’ to Write: The Formation of a Popular Civic Identity in the French Letter Manual,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 22, 1993 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 153

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.158

⁴³ Elizabeth Wingrove, “Sovereign Address,” *Political Theory*, Vol.40, No.2 (April 2012), 156.

writer to address the Sultan without offending him, the former enables her to (re)claim part of the sovereign power of the King.

In the *LP*, Montesquieu was able to weave together the authenticity of Persian travelers to France, the world they left behind, and the sovereign potential of the intimacy of letter form by constructing what he later identified as a “chaîne secrète,” a secret chain that remained “in some ways unknown.”⁴⁴ There is a vast secondary literature on the seemingly surprising juxtaposition of the intrigues of the seraglio and the travels of Usbek and Rica (which are supplemented with letters from their friends in Smyrna, Moscow, and Venice). For instance, Judith Shklar suggests that the seraglio and the Orient that it represents is a “nightmare territory of the mind in which all the worst human impulses govern.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Mary Lyndon Shanley and Peter Stillman argue that “Montesquieu uses the “harem sequence” to show how political and marital despotisms share certain characteristics of jealousy, falsehood, distrust, and hatred.”⁴⁶ In such interpretations, the secret chain becomes Montesquieu’s authorial will to critique and satirize the abuses of monarchical and clerical power in France. These interpretations also establish a secret chain of their own between the *LP* and Montesquieu’s canonical treatise, *L’Esprit Des Loix*. *LP* becomes the youthful and playful precursor to the comparative-historical theories of liberty, despotism, justice, and political authority found in *L’Esprit des Loix*. There are certainly some continuities between the two texts,

⁴⁴ See “Quelques Reflexions Sur Les Lettres Persanes,” in *LP*, 567-569. For a concise yet detailed summary of the various interpretations of this secret chain, see Theodore Braun, “La Chaîne Secrète: A Decade of Interpretations,” *French Studies*, Vol. XLII, No.3 (1988): 278-291, doi: 10.1093/fs/XLII.3.278

⁴⁵ Judith Shklar, *Montesquieu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 46

⁴⁶ Mary Shanley and Judith Stillman, “Political and Marital Despotism: Montesquieu’s Persian Letters,” in *The Family in Political Thought*, ed. Jean Bethke Elshtain (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 66.

particularly in terms of depicting conditions of political liberty. However, the interpretive impulse to connect the two texts and to uncover what Alan Macfarlane has called “Montesquieu’s support for liberty”⁴⁷ overlooks the different literary and historical contexts in which each text was produced. These interpretations also often overlook the open-ended character of the text’s so-called “secret chain” and its relationship to changing practices and ideologies of political power in the first decades of the eighteenth century.

In the following three sections, I will offer a comparative reading of *FS* and *LP*. In order to capture and narrate how such power constantly circulated in and through what we, looking back from the twenty-first century, too easily identify as public, private and intimate spheres, both texts use the symbolic and physical visibility of women as anchors that mark points of absolute difference between self and other. In the first section, I will discuss how women’s bodies act as symbols of illusory power. In the second section, I will examine two passages that touch on French women’s piety to illustrate the different ways in which Montesquieu and Mehmed Efendi narrate women’s participation in French sociocultural life as agentic subjects. Finally, I will turn to the specter of the harem that seems to course through both texts to identify similar patterns of seeing women as objects of sexual desire.

Illusions of Power: Seeing a New Land Through Women's Bodies

⁴⁷ Alan Macfarlane, *The Riddle of the Modern World: Of Liberty, Wealth, and Equality* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 68.

Mehmed Efendi and his retinue arrived in Toulon after forty-fives days at sea on November 22, 1720.⁴⁸ Their galley moored at the port of Lazaret, and they were greeted by one of the captains in charge of the port. To Mehmed Efendi's surprise, the captain addressed them from a small boat and refused to come on board. "In these people's lands, when there is an infectious disease outbreak, they stay away from those who come from other lands for some time, and should they talk to them, they only do so without touching them. [...] They call this nazarto or quarantine."⁴⁹ Mehmed Efendi's lack of familiarity with quarantine practices coupled with misinformation and mistranslation by the captain at Lazaret made his first two months in France an unpleasant one. While he had thought the initial two week stay in Lazaret was the end of their quarantine, the forty-day quarantine took place in Maguelone (Hérault), a small and isolated island close to Montpellier that harbored only the ruins of a cathedral. "Since these people are terribly scared of disease, and since that place was empty and without any visitors, they found it suitable for a quarantine."⁵⁰ Upon discovering that he, his retinue, and seventeen foreigners⁵¹ that he had taken into his protection in Toulon were going to have to spend forty days "in that forsaken and exasperating⁵² place," the ambassador contemplated going back, but decided that there was no feasible way to do that. "We could not find a better solution than to remain patient."⁵³

⁴⁸ Mehmed Efendi uses the "hicri calendar" and his dates don't always correspond to the right dates in the Gregorian calendar. See Gilles Vienstein's introduction and notes in Mehmed Efendi, *Le Paradis des Infidèles*, ed. Gilles Vienstein (Paris: Maspero, 1981).

⁴⁹ *FS*, p.3. "Nazarto" is an Ottomanized version of Lazaret. Here, as Gilles Vienstein notes, Mehmed Efendi confuses the name of the location with the name of the practice. See *Le Paradis des Infideles*, 64, fn.35.

⁵⁰ *FS*, p.6.

⁵¹ *Le Paradis des Infidèles*, 67, fn. 45.

⁵² Tr. "sıkıntı verici yer."

⁵³ *FS*, p.6.

The frustration of a long and unexpected quarantine, as well as the subtle anger at the deception of his hosts frame the ambassador's first experience of seeing a new and foreign land. Indeed, Mehmed Efendi was convinced that he had been lied to by the Frenchmen who greeted him and hosted him in Toulon. "We had been told that there would be a nobleman who would bring all our needs from Paris and who would greet us in Montpellier but there was no truth whatsoever in this."⁵⁴ Given the official and classified nature of the document, it is not entirely surprising that the ambassador did not delve into the extent of his personal feelings. However, this expression of frustration and anger is followed by a discussion of their first interaction with French locals, including the commoners of Montpellier who had lined up the streets to see the ambassador and his retinue. "One cannot describe the great numbers of men, and particularly the great numbers of women who were on the streets. We rode to our palace, watching the people."⁵⁵ Women's bodies in the crowd seemed to add to Mehmed Efendi's frustration and anxiety about his initial welcome.

This discomfort with seeing women's bodies on the streets is not because Ottoman women were constantly secluded in their homes. In fact, life confined to the household was often a sign of economic and social status because it often entailed having multiple servants.⁵⁶ This is not to argue that there were no restrictions on women's public presence and behavior in eighteenth century Ottoman society. Rather, seeing women's bodies on the streets was a signifier of a type of power that was simultaneously new and unsettling to the eighteenth-century Ottoman diplomat. The Ottoman Empire was

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁵⁵ FS, p.7.

⁵⁶ Zilfi, "Women and Society in the Tulip Era," p.299.

founded upon an understanding of its territories as the extended domestic space of the sultan, who ruled over these territories as the head of the household and family. This notion of “the empire as domestic space”⁵⁷ was coupled with the understanding of political power as rooted in the patrilineal dynastic family.

Whereas the empire was previously the domestic space of the Sultan and his sons as heirs to the throne, by the early eighteenth century the seniority principle had gained absolute legitimacy in shaping the line of succession. This meant that the empire became the domestic space of the oldest living male member of the Ottoman dynasty. It also meant that political maturity became synonymous with sexual maturity because the Sultan’s sons were no longer allowed to run their own households as princes. Indeed, the abolishment of princely governorates and confinement of princes to the palace in Istanbul was accompanied by the increasing control of queen mothers over the imperial household. Princes were no longer deemed to have the political and sexual maturity to lead their own households as princely governors, and they had to live in the Sultan’s household. By contrast, the princes’ mothers who now lived in the same household as the queen mother still had a legitimate claim to political status and authority as “royal mothers.”⁵⁸ As the line of succession moved from one brother to another, occasionally to

⁵⁷ Zilfi, *Women and Slavery*, 7. Zilfi specifically notes that “in the eighteenth century, as foreign enemies ate away at the empire’s territories, the state’s diminished martial stature was offset by a compensatory investment in the domestic order and the empowering authority of social control.”

⁵⁸ Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 24. The developments leading to this shifting configuration are beyond the scope of this chapter. Leslie Pierce’s work offers a marvelously rich account of these developments and how they changed the main locus of political power in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries.

a paternal cousin, the relationship between mothers and sons transformed from one of the informal political bonds in the Ottoman dynasty to an institutionally recognized one.⁵⁹

With the start of the Tulip Era, displaying the dynastic family in front of the Sultan's subjects and celebrating it through religious and secular festivities had become commonplace. For many, including bureaucratic members of the Ottoman court, this shift in the visibility of the dynastic family created much anxiety over the durability of the Ottoman dynasty, and the Sultan's ability to maintain his political power, precisely because it exposed the locus of power, the imperial household, to the eyes of guests, foreigners, and non-blood relatives. The *harem*, regardless of its political and institutional power, was meant to remain *mahrem*, i.e. hidden from the sight of dynastic outsiders. The demands of reform inspired by countries like France required making the harem *nâmahrem*, i.e. open and visible to strangers, even if those strangers were the Sultan's subjects. In this context, female bodies seen on the streets of Montpellier became symbols of a monarchical power anchored in the visibility of the monarch and the aristocracy. Mehmed Efendi's discomfort with their visibility signifies an uneasy recognition that the organization of dynastic monarchical power in the Ottoman Empire was increasingly resembling that of France.

Furthermore, throughout the *FS*, women's bodies became a measure of status and their visibility was used for implicit and explicit comparisons of might, beauty, and riches. Mehmed Efendi exclusively used colloquial variations on the word "woman" to emphasize their ordinariness and lack of status, even if the women who came to greet him were noblewomen. These were "kadın," (woman) "kari," (broad) and "avrat" (person of

⁵⁹ Pierce, *The Imperial Harem*, 113-149

sex). Their ordinariness undermined any potential or actual power or status these women might have had, and reduced them into mere object-bodies,⁶⁰ acting as weights on a pair of scales. For instance, when comparing Paris to Istanbul, Mehmed Efendi wrote:

“The city of Paris is actually not as big as Istanbul. However, its buildings are three or four stories high, and it has plenty of seven story homes. On each story, a large family lives together with their children. Its streets seem crowded because women (*avrat*) travel from one house to another, and they never sit at home. Since men and women are always together on the city streets, the city seems densely populated. It is women who sit in shops, make purchases and negotiate prices, and these shops are filled with rare and unique goods. If we don’t take Istanbul into account, Paris is an exceptional city.”⁶¹

The mixing of men and women on the streets and in various shops creates a sense of liveliness that could easily be mistaken for unparalleled beauty by observers and travelers. Here, the ambassador does not seem discomforted by women’s presence in the streets. Rather, he uses their visibility and mobility throughout the city to suggest that they are the reason Paris seems deceptively livelier and more crowded than Istanbul. Women’s bodies in the French capital generate and maintain a false aura of superiority that travels through the European continent into the Ottoman lands. They are objects that allow the ambassador to compare and measure the international standing of the French against that of the Ottomans.

Nowhere in the *FS* is the connection between women’s object-bodies and the international hierarchy more apparent than in the ambassador’s reflections on the trip from Maguelone to Montpellier, and the discomforting sight of crowds of women lined up on the streets to see his retinue travel to their temporary residence.

⁶⁰ Here, what is important is the physical presence of bodies that are easily identifiable as female bodies rather than the question of (hetero)sexual desire. These “object-bodies” indicate hierarchical difference between Ottoman Empire and France.

⁶¹ *FS*, 43-44.

“In France, men show great respect for women; this is why women do whatever they wish and go wherever they desire. Even the greatest nobleman would show inordinate amounts of respect and obedience for a woman of lowest status. Many say that the country is ruled by women’s commands; in fact, France is heaven for women because they have no troubles or duties, their every wish is instantly realized.”⁶²

After the unexpected and bothersome quarantine on an isolated island, the ambassador perceived his French hosts as deceptive and inhospitable. He was also taken aback by this perceived inhospitality. Judith Still suggests that “being someone’s guest was perceived both by the ambassador and by the French aristocracy as putting yourself in their power to some extent.”⁶³ In fact, the ambassador felt that he was at the mercy of French aristocrats during and immediately after the quarantine. This was one of the earliest instances in which a representative of the Ottoman state explicitly experienced a sense of inferiority in interacting with Europeans. For Mehmed Efendi, women’s perceived power over men in France made the French state’s growing international superiority in relation to the Ottoman Empire an illusion. Just as women’s bodies can deceptively reflect an aura of cultural superiority, they can also deceptively generate a sense of political superiority.

In the *LP*, visibility of women’s bodies also becomes a measure for cross-cultural comparison, albeit questions of desire, virtue, and admiration become more explicitly pronounced in Montesquieu’s narration of this visibility. After traveling through Persia and the “Empire of Osmanlins,” the first letter Usbek pens from the European continent is from Livorno, Italy. Writing to his friend Ibben in Smyrna, which happens to be “the only rich and power city in the Empire of Osmanlins: it is made so by the Europeans and

⁶² *FS*, p.8.

⁶³ Judith Still, *Enlightenment Hospitality: Cannibals, Harems, and Adoption* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011), 207.

the Turks have nothing to do with its singularity,”⁶⁴ Usbek raves about Livorno, this new and flourishing “Christian city” and immediately remarks that “the women here enjoy a great liberty: they can see the men through certain windows they call “jalousies”⁶⁵; they can go outside accompanied by older women; they only wear a single veil.”⁶⁶ The editors of the volume, Jean Erhard and Catherine Volphillac-Auger remark that in Italy, the veil was particularly required for married women so that “they could go out decently.”⁶⁷ Women’s bodies are shielded from the gaze of strangers by blinds, a veil, or by other, older women’s bodies, which depicts a world in which a female body can evoke jealousy because of its youth and presumably its ability to bear children. Despite these shields, however, Usbek tells us that women can see without being seen, which gives them a great amount of power and freedom. The letter is brief, and doesn’t contain any other measures of comparison, such as buildings, clothing, and customs “because these can be seen by anyone.”⁶⁸ Hence, for a foreign observer from imagined Persia, women’s ability to see without being seen is not just a cultural curiosity but the most distinguishing marker of the genius of the “the Dukes of Tuscany”⁶⁹ who turned a swamp into a flourishing and bustling city.

⁶⁴ *LP*, Letter 18, ln.28-30, 182.

⁶⁵ A blind or shutter made of a row of angled slats. The word is derived from “jealousy,” which is etymologically connected to “zeal.” I will discuss the connection between women’s presence as sociocultural actors and piety in the next section.

⁶⁶ *LP*, Letter 21, ln.4-6, 188.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, fn.3, 188.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, ln. 10, p.189

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, ln. 2-3, p.188

In his first and only letter individually addressed to Roxane, his fourth wife whose name forecloses tragedy for early eighteenth century readers of Racine,⁷⁰ Usbek furthers this connection between seeing and being seen by suggesting that she lives in a state of “innocence, happiness, and fierce virtue”⁷¹ thanks to her absolute seclusion in the seraglio in Ispahan. He complains to Roxane that the “happy impossibility of failing”⁷² such seclusion affords women of the seraglio cannot be found anywhere in France. Coupling seclusion and fierce virtue, he goes on to recall how Roxanne resisted his efforts to see her and to consummate their marriage with delight and admiration. He explains how he felt “infatuated by the greatest of favors, without having received any of them.”⁷³ Roxane’s insistence on not being seen by her husband becomes a sign of her indestructible will to remain virtuous. Editors Erhard and Volphillac-Auger quote a passage from Jean Chardin’s travels to Persia that describes a Persian custom that dictates that a husband could only see his wife’s face after a marriage was consummated. In turn, the marriage could only be consummated a few days after the wedding ceremonies and the bride’s move into the groom’s household. The bride would hide among the women of the household, or would not let her husband approach him for a few days. This custom, also quoted in Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* under the article “Mahomet,” seems to be connected to larger questions about the place of women in Islamic history, law, and practice.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Although “Roxane” is a Persian name, it is associated with the leading character of Racine’s play *Bajazet*, which tells the tragic tale of courtly intrigue that takes place in the Ottoman Empire. See Jean Racine, *Bajazet: Tragédie*, (Paris: Unknown Publisher, 1690).

⁷¹ LP, Letter 24

⁷² *Ibid.*, ln.5, p.198

⁷³ *Ibid.*, ln.32-33, p.199

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 198, fn.5.

On one reading, then, this letter might be read as a humorous retelling of a curious cultural practice. However, the letter also weaves in Usbek and Roxane's tale of marriage with French women's desire to be seen and to be pleasing to men to accentuate Usbek's comical sense of vanity and self-importance as the prince of the seraglio. The following passage about what Roxane might think about women's condition in France is particularly illustrative of this:

“If you were raised in this country, you wouldn't be so troubled [by my wish to consummate our marriage]: women here have lost all restraint: they present themselves in front of men without anything to cover their face, as if they wish to ask for their own downfall: they look for men with their own gaze: they see them in the Mosques, the promenades, their own homes: they don't know anything about the services of Eunuchs: instead of the noble simplicity and lovable modesty that reigns among you; one sees a brutal immodesty to which it is impossible to get accustomed.

Yes, Roxane, if you were here you would feel outraged by the atrocious humiliation into which your sex has fallen: you would flee these abominable lands and you would sigh with relief for the gentle haven where you find innocence; where you are sure of yourself; where no danger can make you tremble with fear; where finally you can love me, without ever worrying that you will lose the Love that you owe me. [...]

But what can I think of these women of Europe? The art of painting their skin, the ornaments with which they don themselves, the care they take of their own person, their constant occupation with their continual desire to please, not only stains their Virtue but outrages their spouses.”⁷⁵

For Usbek, Roxane's sense of self, security, and safety are inherently connected to the “Love” she “owes” him (*l'Amour, que vous me devez*). The reason French women are living in a state of “atrocious humiliation” is not only because their bodies can be seen roaming through the streets. It is because they want to be perceived as objects of

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, ln.34-45, and ln.55-57, 199-200.

sexual desire by everyone. More importantly, they don't worry about losing the love they "owe" their spouses. They actively seek out the male gaze in and outside the home (even in places of worship) whereas a modest and virtuous woman would travel through these spaces guarded by a eunuch (or, at the very least, in the company of an older woman and wearing a face veil, like the women of Livorno). Roxane is Usbek's favorite because she guards her modesty and virtue even from her husband. She actively seeks seclusion and protection from the male gaze, or so Usbek thinks. Roxane never responds to this letter. She only writes back to Usbek seven years later after her affair(s) with the eunuch(s) have been discovered. In the first letter, she decries the collective punishment they had received in the seraglio. In the second and final letter, which is also the final letter of the novel, she exposes his self-centered delusions ("how did you think that I was naïve enough to think that I was only put on this earth to admire your caprices?").⁷⁶

Given this context, it is impossible to read the long passage above as anything other than an early indication of Usbek's delusion about his reign over the seraglio. It is also an ironically unreflective self-criticism, or a criticism of monarchical power that can be called "oriental despotism." In a letter to Rhedi, who is a fellow Eastern traveler in Europe, Usbek tries to explain the illusions of grandeur that he observes in the members of the clergy, noblesse de robe and noblesse de l'épée in France by giving examples from around the world. One of his examples is about a king of a small village off the coast of Guinea, who sits on a single wooden log yet thinks of himself as the richest and most powerful man on earth. "He thought that his name was known all the way from one pole to the other."⁷⁷ Unless he is writing to his seraglio, Usbek is openly and highly critical of

⁷⁶ *LP*, letter 150, ln.7-8, 544.

⁷⁷ *LP*, letter 42, ln.19-20, 244.

princely and kingly vanity. He mocks the monarchical and aristocratic preoccupation with being seen and ridicules the unwitting vanity to which this preoccupation leads. In this regard, the “atrocious humiliation” of French women who dress up to be seen serves as a harbinger for the humiliation of monarchs, aristocrats, and clerics who seek the absolute admiration of their subjects.

Usbek also associates visibility with obedience. Just as women of Persia are distinguishable from women of Europe (and France) by their absolute seclusion from the male gaze, monarchs of Persia (and Asia) are distinguishable from monarchs of Europe (and France) by their absolute seclusion from their subjects. What differentiates women from monarchs is the latter’s need for his subject’s obedience. While his visibility does not guarantee obedience of all his subjects, it changes how they perceive the monarch’s power. In one of the three letters to Ibben that specifically compares the strength of European states and the causes and consequences of rebellion,⁷⁸ Usbek recounts the thoughts of a European *assez sensé* (sensible enough), who says that “the worst thing Princes of Asia could do is to hide like they do.”⁷⁹ When the subjects don’t see the monarch who governs them, they will neither understand nor respect the institution of monarchy. The ambitious and discontented ones will also find it easy to identify the culprit who is responsible of their misery since the King “only has one head.”⁸⁰ While the desire to be seen makes a monarch laughable, the desire to remain in absolute seclusion from his subjects makes him lose his life. Just as women’s seclusion breeds suicide in the seraglio, the monarch’s invisibility breeds regicide in the absolute monarchy. It is left to

⁷⁸ *LP*, letter 99, 100, and 101, 408-415.

⁷⁹ *LP*, letter 100, ln. 3, 412.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, ln.33, 413.

the reader to contemplate whether the loss of virtue and modesty that comes with a woman being seen is ethically or politically equivalent to the rebellion of discontented subjects who “try to obtain some secret intelligence; to throw himself at the enemy; to seize some fort; to start some futile gossip among the Subjects.”⁸¹

Montesquieu uses Usbek’s character as mirror that reflects the dilemma of absolute monarchies. A monarch can easily become vain and demand either the absolute admiration or the absolute obedience of his subjects. In one case, he will become laughable. In another case, he will become a despot. Neither would provide good and durable institutions of governance, as both will lead to a kind of despotism which is arbitrary and fleeting. Like Mehmed Efendi who perceives women’s bodies as symbols of deceptive arrangements of international political power, Montesquieu crafts women’s bodies as symbols of the trappings of despotism.

Piety and Irreverence: Women as Social, Cultural, and Religious Actors

In addition to narrating women’s bodies as symbols of illusions of political power, both *FS* and *LP* occasionally feature reflections on women as actors in French social and cultural life. Müge Göçek remarks that Mehmed Efendi “had frequent associations with French women” and “had no difficulty in adapting to the social participation of women.”⁸² We learn about these exchanges through secondary sources as the ambassador does not mention them in any detail in his ambassadorial report. Montesquieu’s travelers Usbek and Rica also have repeated exchanges with French women. Unlike Persian women, French women never pen any letters themselves, so their “voice” is primarily

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, ln.28-30, 413.

⁸² Göçek, *East Encounters West*, 45-46.

mediated through that of Rica.⁸³ In both texts, instances in which women claim sociocultural and political agency are attached to religious practices. While Mehmed Efendi sees the piety of French women as a factor that alleviates their cumbersome curiosity, Montesquieu's characters raise questions about the validity of social, cultural, and political claims that are grounded in religious appeals.

As much as the Ottoman ambassador is impressed with the artistic and scientific developments and innovations he observed throughout France, he remains suspicious of the sociopolitical organization in which these were generated. After arriving to his temporary residence in Paris, l'Hôtel des Ambassadeurs on the Rue de Tournon,⁸⁴ Mehmed Efendi received requests for an audience. He writes:

“Once again men and women inundated our residence with requests to see us for ceremonies and compliments. They especially wanted to see how we would dine. We would be asked that the daughter of so and so, or the wife of so and so was requesting our permission to watch us dine. We would not be able to turn some of these away and would helplessly give our permission. Since our meals coincided with their Lent, they would not eat, they would surround the table and watch us eat. Since we were not used to such a state, we would be greatly

⁸³ Rica's perspective is often overlooked in the secondary literature on LP. There are two exceptions to this: Shklar argues that Rica remained Montesquieu's model for philosophical inquiry even though the political and ethical value of such inquiry is called into question when despotism approaches. See Shklar, *Montesquieu*, 33-34, and 47-48. Diana Schaub, on the other hand, argues that Rica's observations about daily life in Paris that range from matters of fashion to matters of religion and politics show self-reflexivity and cultural flexibility. These counter Usbek's rooted attachments in the seraglio. See Diana Schaub, *Erotic Liberalism: Women and Revolution in Montesquieu's Persian Letters* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 109-131. There is a fascinating similarity between Mehmed Efendi and Rica's tone in describing French innovations, and it is perhaps not a coincidence that Rica's name is one of the twenty-five Ottoman provinces listed under “Turquie” in Louis Moreri's “Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique.” Although it's unclear where this province is, the spelling conventions would suggest it is the province of Raqqa, which encompassed parts of present day Turkey and Syria. See Louis Moreri, “Turquie,” in *Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique, ou le Mélangé curieux de l'Histoire sacrée et profane, etc.*, ARTFL Reference Collection, <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaire-de-moreri>. The Arabic root of the word means tenderness.

⁸⁴ See Veinstein's note in *Le Paradis des Infidèles*, 94, fn.113

annoyed. We would persevere out of consideration. However, they were used to watching people dine. Supposedly, it is their custom to allow those who would want to watch the King dine. Even more oddly: They would go watch the King get out of bed and get dressed. Because of this, they annoyed us by making similar requests.”⁸⁵

In one way, Mehmet Efendi’s discomfort with the requests to watch him dine with his retinue is related to his discomfort with the way monarchical power is made visible in France. In this particular passage, however, we find a representative of a state who is trying to accommodate peculiar practices of his hosts and guests without fully understanding the reasons behind them.⁸⁶ Women’s presence as simultaneously pious and social actors enables what Still identifies as the ambassador’s willingness to “consider the factor of cultural difference to excuse the rudeness of the French - both his hosts in general, and his guests when they enter his official residence to observe him.”⁸⁷ On the one hand, Mehmed Efendi is unwilling to acknowledge the status of his visitors by calling them “the daughter of so and so or the wife of so and so.” Not acknowledging his guests’ names and status allows him to undermine his own subjection to the exoticizing gaze of strange women. On the other hand, he remarks that these guests were not eating with him and his retinue because their dinners coincided with Lent, when his Christian guests were expected to fast. The ambassador’s familiarity with fasting as a religious practice seems to direct him to consider explanations for what he perceives as an inconvenience. Indeed, this doesn’t detract from his annoyance and sense of discomfort, but it makes the strangeness of the cultural practice of observing representatives of state

⁸⁵ *FS*, p.20

⁸⁶ One of the biggest worries Mehmed Efendi had during his stay in France was the ways French treated guests who were representatives of another King or State. The financial burden of the stay was largely on the guest (the ambassador) whereas the opposite was commonplace in the Ottoman Empire. See Göçek, *East Encounters West*, 20

⁸⁷ Still, *Enlightenment Hospitality*, 206

perform mundane acts more palatable. In a sense, Mehmed Efendi reveres the piety of the French women who become his guests.

French women's piety is configured in a more intricate way in the first letter attributed to Rica, the younger one of Montesquieu's two Persian travelers whose reflections on French society almost always are lengthier and more self-aware than that of Usbek's. Writing to Ibben in Smyrna after his first month in Paris, Rica declares that he "only has a faint idea of the foundations of European mores and customs" and that he has "barely had the time to be surprised by them."⁸⁸ One thing he has had the time to notice, however, is the inner strife that seems to be going on in the kingdom of the most "powerful prince of Europe," Louis XIV. This strife does not seem to refer to the revolt of the Camisards, but rather to the clash between the King and Janséniste religious orders that was renewed after the papal bull *Unigenitus* was issued in 1713.⁸⁹ The bull condemned as heresy the hundred and one propositions in Pasquier Quesnel's "The New Testament in French"⁹⁰. One of these propositions specifically pertained to women's exclusion from reading the Bible themselves.⁹¹ Here is Rica's perspective on this:

⁸⁸ *LP*, Letter 22, ln. 21-23, 191

⁸⁹ Brian Strayer notes that "just as the persecution that followed the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685 (which revoked the civil and religious rights of the Huguenots) had strengthened French Calvinism, so the papal Bull *Unigenitus* in 1713 gave Jansenism a second wind and transformed a religious controversy into a major affair of the state." Brian Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionnaires in France, 1640-1799* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 156.

⁹⁰ *LP*, Letter 22, fn.14, 193. Also see Quesnel, *Le Nouveau Testament en François, avec des réflexions morales sur chaque verset*, 8 vols. (Nouvelle édition à Amsterdam: aux dépens de Joseph Nicolai, 1736).

⁹¹ Quesnel, *Le Nouveau Testament*, Vol. 4, 64. Quesnel writes that "it is only an illusion to think that the mysteries of religion should not be communicated to this sex [women] through the reading of holy books, given this example of how Jesus trusts this woman. It is not the simplicity of women but the arrogant science of men that created the abuses of scriptures and heresies." There is a long history of disagreement and conflict between the French monarchy and women religious, most notably the order of nuns at Port Roya. For a concise historical account of this, see Danielle Kostroun, "La Querelle des Femmes au Cœur du Jansénisme," *Histoire, Économie & Société* 2011/2 (30^e année) : 47-61. DOI 10.3917/hes.112.0047.

“It is the women who have instigated this revolt, who divide the entire Court, the entire Kingdom, and every family. This constitution forbade them to read a book that all the Christians say is brought from Heaven: it is practically their Alcoran. The women, indignant by the this insult on their Sex, have all risen against the Constitution: they have recruited men to join their ranks, men who no longer wanted to have any privilege. It must be said that this Moufti’s reasoning is not all wrong in this case; and by the great Hali, he must have been instructed by the principles of our Holy Law: since women’s creation is inferior to ours, and our Prophets tell us that they won’t be able to get into Paradise; why should they occupy themselves with reading a Book, which is only done to learn about the road to Paradise.”⁹²

This passage juxtaposes a particularly satirical interpretation of Catholicism (especially the relationship between the Pope and the French King) with an equally satirical interpretation of Shiite Islam. Its satire and irreverence is not unique in the LP. Thomas Pangle argues that throughout this work, Montesquieu uses “his powers as a comic allegorist to bring to ridiculous light the profound as well as petty absurdities to which he believes suprarational revelation leads.”⁹³ I propose that we read Rica’s analogy between Catholic institutions and Islamic institutions not as an example of Montesquieu’s critique of the outcomes of religious belief, but of his suspicion of the socio-political value of religious belief itself. Describing the Pope (“this Moufti”) as a “magician who convinces people that three is nothing but one, that the bread we eat is not bread, nor the wine we drink is wine, and thousands of other things like these,”⁹⁴ the passage highlights the common principles and institutional structures of Abrahamic religions. It also ridicules how religious belief makes literacy into an instrumental act that is “only done to learn about the road to paradise.”

⁹² *LP*, Letter 22, ln.50-60, 194-195.

⁹³ Thomas Pangle, *The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity in Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 5.

⁹⁴ *LP*, letter 22, ln. 40-42, 193.

This critique makes it difficult to read the passage above as satirizing merely those who exclude women from religious literacy. It also ridicules any individual, men or women, who thinks they can learn about the road to Paradise. Montesquieu's skepticism of women religious is also apparent in two subsequent letters. In Usbek's letter to Roxane, he replicates the language of seventeenth and early eighteenth century texts about cloistered religious life in describing life in the seraglio/harem.⁹⁵ Much later, in a letter to his friend Mirza in Ispahan, he describes religious devotion as "blind devotion,"⁹⁶ a way of being in the world that is incompatible with the European political subjectivity depicted in the LP. Mita Choudhury remarks that "the cloister and the lives of women religious naturally dovetailed with the incendiary issues of power and sexuality that dominated eighteenth-century political culture."⁹⁷ For Montesquieu, women's exclusion from religious practices could be seen as unjust, but the very essence of religious belief was incompatible with a just sociopolitical order. Hence, discussions of "justice" in relation to "religious practice and belief" could only make sense under a despotic regime.

Mehmed Efendi recognizes French women's displays of piety as a familiar trait that partially alleviates his discomfort in being the object of female foreigners' gaze. Montesquieu, however, narrates French women's demands to be recognized as pious subjects as misguided attempts to be included in a sphere of sociocultural life that should not have importance in a European political order. These demands are corollaries to the French monarchy's increasingly unchecked political power. They are also potentially

⁹⁵ *LP*, letter 24, fn.2, 198.

⁹⁶ *LP*, letter 83, ln.5, 365.

⁹⁷ Mita Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 22.

disruptive for the integrity of existing political institutions. While French women's piety is depicted as irrelevant and irreverent through the eyes of Rica, the imagined foreigner, it is noted as a quaint and familiarizing detail through the eyes of Mehmed Efendi, the nonfictional foreigner.

Foreigners at the Opera: Spectacles of Love and Desire

A third thread that connects the narratives of contact, identity, and power in *FS* and *LP* is how love and desire become objects to be displayed and consumed, at least by those who are wealthy enough to do so. As a space of entertainment and sociability, the opera is not as central to either Mehmed Efendi or Montesquieu's portrayals of French society as theater is to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's in *Letter to d'Alembert*. Yet both authors remark on the mesmerizing and strange world of human emotions displayed on and around the stage. More importantly, in each text, such displays are intimately connected to displays of power, narratives of romantic love, as well as of women's bodies as objects of desire.

On March 27, 1721, Mehmed Efendi was introduced to "an entertainment unique to the city of Paris," the opera. His first impressions of the Salle du Palais Royal were that it is a lavish and hierarchical space. "Countless candles were lit" to keep the closed space bright enough an hour before sunset, "over a hundred types of instruments were ready," "everybody is seated according to rank," and "the King's seating area was covered with red velvet."⁹⁸ While this was neither the first nor the only time in the *FS* that Mehmed Efendi wrote about practices that were entirely unknown to the Ottomans in the early eighteenth century, his reflections on the opera as well as the performance on

⁹⁸ *FS*, 32

stage suggest that he was emotionally struck by the vivacity of the performance. That evening, he was watching *l'Académie Royale de Musique*'s performance of Jean-Baptiste Lully's adaptation of *Thésée* (Theseus), the tragic love story of Theseus and Aegle as narrated by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*. The performance was fascinating in many ways. Changing set designs meant that "the palace that was right in front of us turned into an orchard filled with citrus trees in an instant."⁹⁹ But the love story was all too familiar, and all too real: "There was a sultan (*padişah*) who fell in love with another sultan's daughter and asked for her hand in marriage. But the girl was in love with another sultan's son. They showed their mutual adventures exactly as they happened."¹⁰⁰ Despite the tricks on stage, the emotions expressed by the performers seem to have touched Mehmed Efendi's heart. The performers "portrayed what love meant so vividly that one's heart would ache to see the sultan's (*padişah*), the girl's (*kız*) and the prince's (*şehzâde*) gestures and moods."¹⁰¹ The expensive art of opera entertains respectable residents of Paris by showing them the real meaning of love and by making them feel compassion for those who suffer from it.

For Mehmed Efendi, the value of the opera as a form of entertainment came from its clear demarcation as a space of aristocratic sociability. Indeed, the ambassador does not seem concerned with the potential inauthenticity of the compassion one feels towards actors on a stage. Neither is he bothered by the way in which this form of entertainment only caters to those who are "respectable and from high classes."¹⁰² His infatuation with the lavishness of spending encapsulated in the theater space is accompanied by an

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32-33

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 32

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 33

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 33

infatuation with women who have come to watch the performance “all dressed in ornate silk and jewelry, brightly shinning alongside the candles.”¹⁰³ During his stay in Paris, Mehmed Efendi would attend performances he calls “opera” two more times: he would see a comedic ballet, Sacron’s *Dom Japhet de l’Arménie* and a tragic opera, La Mothe’s *La Tragédie d’Omphale*. While the latter is not narrated in the *sefaretnâme*, the former was memorable enough to be recounted because the ambassador was sitting right next to the King who arrived with “the daughter of his uncle, a moon-faced beauty (*mehpâre*) named Mademoiselle de Charolais-Condé to his right, and another daughter of his uncle, a delicate and charming beauty (*nâzenin*) named Mademoiselle de la Roche-sur-Yon-Conti to his left.”¹⁰⁴

Certainly, part of this infatuation with the King’s cousins is the ambassador’s own proximity to the King’s relatives as they are seated in the same space. As Müge Göçek remarks, Mehmed Efendi was also particularly comfortable engaging with women in polite society.¹⁰⁵ However, the point I want to make here is more about the textual narration of beauty and admiration. In the rest of *FS*, the ambassador only uses terms like *mehpâre* or *nâzenin* to describe women who are servants in his household. The beauty they indicate is conditional on women’s bodies being in the appropriate place at the appropriate time. While the female servants become beautiful as they serve the ambassador and his retinue, the female aristocrats become beautiful as they sit alongside their cousin the King to watch a touching love story or a funny dance performance. By contrast, the women who request an audience with him never earn nouns or adjectives

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 32

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 33-34; cf. *Le Paradis des Infidèles*, 117-119.

¹⁰⁵ Göçek, *East Encounters West*, 45-46

that refer to beauty, they remain the wife or the daughter of yet another so and so. The hierarchical way the *salles* at Palais Royal or Louvre create conditions of enclosed aristocratic sociability appeals to Mehmed Efendi precisely because it resonates with Ottoman norms of consuming beauty and displaying admiration and affection.

Mehmed Efendi's description of opera as simultaneously a form of art that cultivates emotions compatible with monarchical sensibilities and a space of aristocratic sociability is echoed in Rica's letter to an unknown recipient that discusses this "rather unique thing that happens every day in Paris."¹⁰⁶ In a recent article on theater and sociability in eighteenth century French political thought, Vickie Sullivan and Katherine Balch argue that this letter is emblematic of what Montesquieu later praises in the *Spirit of the Laws* through "his depiction of a society that exults in a striking 'une joie dans la vivre,' where men and women mingle together freely."¹⁰⁷ Certainly, the letter contains praises of the affective dispositions generated by theater, including "a certain tenderness"¹⁰⁸ in the actresses "whose slightest acquaintance can bring a man to strangle another."¹⁰⁹ However, I would also like to suggest that given the way this story is set up and the closely knit plots of travel narrative and *roman du sérail* in the *LP*, Rica's oscillation between admiration and satire should be read as a much more explicit manifestation of the ways in which visibility, desire and power are textually interconnected.

¹⁰⁶ *LP*, letter 26, ln. 1, 204

¹⁰⁷ Vickie Sullivan and Katherine Balch, "Spectacles and Sociability: Rousseau's Response in His Letter to d'Alembert to Montesquieu's Treatment of the Theatre and of French and English Society," *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 41, No.3, 363, doi: 10.1080/01916599.2014.974921

¹⁰⁸ *LP*, letter 26, ln.25, 205

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, ln. 24, 205

Rica's letter follows Usbek's letter to his friend Nessir in Ispahan, comparing his failing health to Rica's youth, health, and happy predisposition.¹¹⁰ In this letter, Usbek asks Nessir to make sure that his wives don't hear about any of this. "If they love me, I want to spare them their tears; and if they do not love me, I certainly don't want to encourage their audacity."¹¹¹ He also expresses worry that if his eunuchs find out about his condition, they will soon "cease to be deaf to the flattering sounds of this Sex."¹¹² Usbek's ability to retain his power over his seraglio is based on a quasi-theatrical deception; it also has the makings of a comedic or tragic prelude. The comparison of the two main characters' ability to endure a long voyage and to learn the ways of the new lands they visit functions as a prelude into Usbek's doubts about his masculinity.

More importantly, Usbek's letter sets the stage for an unexpected turn in Rica's letter on the theater and opera, and for the only instance in *LP* in which the reader hears from a French woman. Rica suggests that the ones who care the most about the opera are those who are in the audience, who "are obliged to be everywhere"¹¹³ and who enact "une Comédie particulière."¹¹⁴ This comedic play consists of rites of heterosexual flirtation and seduction. Taken to meet an actress in her dressing room by a friend, Rica becomes an actor in this play. After "getting to know each other so well,"¹¹⁵ Rica receives a letter from the actress that details her unhappiness. The letter details the actress's rape by a young priest who had promised to marry her, her poverty working in the Opera, and

¹¹⁰ *LP*, letter 25, 202-203. "My failing health makes me turn towards my Fatherland & makes this country even more foreign to me."

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, ln.15-16, 202

¹¹² *Ibid.*, ln.19, 203

¹¹³ *LP*, letter 26, ln. 17, 204

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ln. 23, 205

¹¹⁵ "nous fimes si bien connoissance." *Ibid.*, ln. 33, 205

her wish to be taken to Persia alongside Rica to become a dancer. Rica never comments on the letter, and the actress does not make a second appearance in the text. In the rest of the text, Montesquieu repeatedly reminds readers of the conditions of absolute unfreedom in the seraglio, and contrasts these with the conditions of free sociability from which French women benefit. In this letter, however, the juxtaposition of erotic intimacy, seeing a comedy on stage, and enacting one in real life enables a reversal of cross-cultural comparison and critique. The actress' story connects sexual violence and social injustice endured by French women, and leaves the reader questioning the limits of "free sociability" in a strictly gendered social order.

To further elucidate the connection between desire, visibility, and power, I want to briefly consider two letters from the Grand Eunuch. In a letter to Usbek in Paris, the Grand Eunuch describes the process through which Usbek seems to buy his wives. Finding a young Circassian slave at the market, the Grand Eunuch, whose gaze is masculine yet feminized, thoroughly examines her body. "She blushed when she found herself naked, even in front of me, [...] who carries nothing but chaste looks and who can't inspire anything but innocence."¹¹⁶ As soon as he deems her worthy of Usbek, he lowers his eyes and averts his gaze. Almost a year later, another "wife" is bought from merchants traveling from Visapour after the Grand Eunuch examines her and deems her worthy of his master.¹¹⁷ In a seraglio, desire is contingent on the absolute objectification of women's bodies and of feminized masculine intermediaries who judge these bodies with their sight. In a theater, desire is contingent on the arousal of emotions in the audience which occurs through the display of women's bodies and emotions on stage.

¹¹⁶ *LP*, letter 77, ln. 5-7, 351

¹¹⁷ *LP*, letter 91, 389-391

Conclusion: Mapping East and West Through Women's Bodies and Actions

Montesquieu's *LP* and Mehmed Efendi's *FS* are two contemporaneous texts that narrate the imagined and factual story of a moment of contact between European and Islamicate orders. In the case of *LP*, the contact is primarily between France and an imagined yet realistic Persia. Places like the "Empire of Osmanlins," "Moscovie," "Erivan (Armenia)" also make recurring appearances in the text. In the case of *FS*, the contact is primarily between the French and Ottoman monarchies. Places like Toulon, Montpellier, and Bordeaux also make an appearance in the narrative. Both texts make use of the epistolary form, albeit the expectations of secrecy or publicity is different for each author. Both texts approach political power as a matter of seeing and being seen and use the way in which visibility is configured in the "other" political order to examine and critique their own. More importantly, they each turn to women's bodies and actions when they seek to highlight the cultural differences between European and Islamicate states and societies.

In this chapter, I argued that Montesquieu and Mehmed Efendi unknowingly developed shared patterns of differentiation between "East" and "West." These patterns made it possible for each author to configure cultural difference as a mirror for the relationship between political power and visibility under dynastic and absolute monarchies. For Montesquieu, France in the early eighteenth century was a monarchy on the verge of despotism. The "Asian" empires (namely Persia, but also the Ottoman Empire) represented what France could become if it descended into despotism. For Mehmed Efendi, the Ottoman Empire was an Islamic monarchy on the verge of lawless dynastic rule. While he was genuinely intrigued by and impressed with some scientific

and cultural innovations, France remained part of the land of war (*dar al-harb*). Its preoccupation with the gaze of strangers represented a perversion of Ottoman-Islamic norms of governance, social relations, and beauty. In this context, women, as physical bodies, social actors, and objects of desire, became proxies for the delineation between a “good” monarchy and a “corrupt” one.

For Montesquieu, the seraglio’s harem was a space in which the categorical distinction between the patriarch and the monarch collapse, much like in an absolute monarchy. In such a state, the seclusion of women is deadly, and so is the seclusion of a monarch. For Mehmed Efendi, French obsession with seeing and being seen indicated complete loss of decorum. Unless it was supplemented by some form of piety, such loss can easily lead to loss of virtue, and undermine the legitimacy of the dynastic monarchy. The formal properties of *sefaretnâme* and epistolary novel further amplify the two sets of values and meanings attached to the same boundary of visibility. Indeed, Mehmed Efendi and Montesquieu are simultaneously navigating and mapping the imagined geography of “East” and “West” through the capacity to see and to be seen.

Claiming to be “Ottoman” or “French” in the early eighteenth century only made sense if one could also invoke their status as subjects of their monarchs, which meant affirming one’s subservience to the sovereignty of the dynastic family as well as acknowledging their own limited or non-existent political authority. The dual logic of encounter, as a modality of political belonging, emanates precisely from this juncture. On the one hand, it requires strong sense of self-interested curiosity in naming and articulating differences between the sociopolitical order to which one is attached and the sociopolitical order that one imagines as “other.” On the other hand, it necessitates the

“other” to be recognizable as both fundamentally different, and incidentally similar. At a time of changing local and global dynamics, such recognition requires creating new frames of reference that demarcate the political, sociocultural, and intimate spheres and that enable cross-cultural comparison.

Fast forwarding to the last two decades of the eighteenth century, the next chapter will examine another modality of political belonging, translation, when speaking to the other became more pronounced as a logic than seeing the other. In this revolutionary moment, the political, social, cultural and affective boundaries we have seen emerge in Montesquieu and Mehmed Efendi’s works were shifting. However, the distinction between Christian Europe and Islamic Middle East still carried weight in making the contact between “self” and “other” politically meaningful. In the eve of the French Revolution, the terms of political belonging came to be defined by a subject’s capacity to speak, to claim authority as a speaker, and to be heard as one. In the next chapter, I will turn to the life and work of Ottoman-Armenian translator Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson to explore the intersection of language, historiography, and ideology through what I call “translation as a modality of political belonging.”

CHAPTER 2. TRANSLATION: POLITICS OF COSMOPOLITAN NATIVENESS

Introduction

“The first of these [new articles added to old imperial capitulations] declares that bishops who are dependents of France, & other Religious who profess the French faith, regardless of their nation and creed, [...] shall exercise their functions freely in parts of our empire where they have been established for a long time.”
*Treaty between Sublime Porte and French Court, 1740*¹

“The eye of politics has not yet penetrated, nor has it even peeked into the springs that drive this great machine [the Ottoman Empire].”
Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson, *Tableau Général de l’Empire Othoman*, tome I, 1788²

In 1740, the year Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson was born in Pera, the pan-Latin neighborhood of Istanbul, the Ottoman Sultan Mahmoud I expanded the imperial treaty that gave French representatives and subjects important political, economic, and social privileges (tr. *imtiyazāt*) when they were within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. The first article added to the existing capitulations with the French court concerned the status of Catholics in the Empire. Until the 1830s, Ottoman authorities did not recognize

¹ “Le premier de ces articles porte, que les Evêques dépendans de la France, & les autres Religieux qui professent la Religion franque, de quelque nation ou espèce qu’ils soient [...] ne seront point troublés dans l’exercice de leurs fonctions, dans les endroits de notre empire où ils sont depuis long-temps.” *Capitulations ou Traités Anciens et Nouveaux, Entre La Cour de France et La Porte Ottomane, Renouvelés & Augmentés l’an de J.C. 1740 & de l’Égire 1153*, translated by Monsieur Deval, Secretary and Interpret of King & his first Dragoman to the Ottoman Court (Paris : Imprimerie Royale, 1770), 21. All translations from French are mine, unless otherwise noted.

² “L’œil de la politique n’a point encore pénétré, ni même aperçu les ressorts qui font mouvoir cette machine immense.” Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson, *Tableau général de l’Empire Othoman: divisé en deux parties, dont l’une comprend la législation mahométane; l’autre l’histoire de l’Empire Othoman* (Paris: Impr. de Monsieur [F. Didot], 1788-1824), vol. I, ii. *TGEO* in the rest of the text. All translations from French are mine, unless otherwise noted.

Catholics as a distinct *millet*,³ which meant that they were either categorized as foreigners or as members of a *millet* that considered their faith to be schismatic. Given that each millet was responsible for its own administration, such lack of recognition meant that Ottoman Catholics were under the administrative authority of religious leaders who considered their faith to be heretical.

In fact, almost a year after Mehmed Efendi's mission to France ended, on September 14, 1722, Ahmed III had issued an imperial edict that forbade all conversions to Catholicism. Charles Frazee notes that "Catholic converts were ordered to return to their traditional faith and Latin missionaries were commanded to confine their attention to 'Franks' living in the Orient."⁴ This edict was brought on by growing French missionary activity in the Ottoman capital and provinces, and the discontent it generated among Greek Orthodox and Armenian millet. Although the edict remained in effect throughout the rest of the eighteenth century, the 1740 Franco-Ottoman capitulations placed Ottoman Catholics under the protection of the French state. Perhaps more importantly, this treaty made the Catholic faith into "the French faith" even though many

³ Although frequently translated as "nation," "millet" (Ott. Tr. *ملت*), the term designated self-administering religious communities in the Ottoman Empire. Prior to the late nineteenth century, the term millet exclusively designated the different religious communities which were authorized by the Sultan to administer civil and communal affairs of their own communities. In this sense, a millet was also one of the building blocks of a complex imperial administration. Historian İlber Ortaylı writes that "individuals lived in the religious section, the *millet*, in which they were born and came under the spiritual, financial, and administrative authority of the community concerned." See İlber Ortaylı, "The Ottoman Millet System and Its Social Dimensions" in İlber Ortaylı, *Ottoman Studies* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2007), 18. The non-recognition of Catholics as a distinct *millet* meant that Armenian Catholics and Greek Catholics were living in a condition of dual subjection. First, they were subjected to the imperial authority of the Sultan, and second, they were subjected to the administrative authority of Armenian Apostolic or Greek Orthodox churches. For further discussions of the so-called *millet* system, see also Benjamin Braude, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982).

⁴ Charles Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, p.155

Catholic Levantine families had been living in the Ottoman Empire for generations. Unlike earlier capitulations, the 1740 treaty included a clause that confirmed its articles for all successors of Mahmoud I. This meant that the association between Catholicism and Frenchness became codified in the Ottoman legal and political imaginary.

The goal of this chapter is to study articulations of political belonging in the shifting landscape of late eighteenth century Franco-Ottoman relations through the lens of the life and work of Ignatius Mouradgea d'Ohsson, the Ottoman-Armenian Catholic *dragoman*⁵ of the Swedish Embassy in Istanbul whose life ended while he was in exile in Paris. D'Ohsson's career as an interpreter and translator was central to his undertaking of the task of writing a comprehensive history of the Ottomans for a Francophone-European audience. In this regard, he was one of the many non-Muslim and non-Turkish Ottoman natives who took on the task to translate the Ottoman Empire to a European audience. While his multivolume *Tableau Général de l'Empire Othoman* (TGEO) was one of the most ambitious textual productions written by such an author, many dragomans and polyglot tradesmen wrote similar treatises.⁶ What makes d'Ohsson's life and work stand out are the ways in which they illustrate the opportunities, dangers, and impossibilities of a transnational existence in a time of global sociopolitical tumult.

Within the span of two decades, d'Ohsson was transformed from an Ottoman Armenian Catholic dragoman who was legally a Swedish subject, to the Swedish ambassador in his city of birth, accused of being a "*bon français*" (a supporter of the

⁵ Official interpreters and translators who were often under the legal protection of the states that they were working for. See Rothman, E. Natalie. "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no.4 (2009):771-800. doi:10.1017/S0010417509990132.

⁶ Some examples include Grigorios Paleologos (1794-1844), Iakovos Pitzipios (1800-1869), Alexandros Rizos Rangavis (or Rangabé) (1809-1892) and Stephanos Xenos (1821-1894).

French Revolution) despite his royalist commitments.⁷ Working with an Ottoman court that was not yet ready to recognize the newly minted French republic, d'Ohsson was unable to convince his connections at the Sublime Porte and his patrons in Stockholm of his loyalties. In this chapter, I interweave d'Ohsson's biography and TGE0 to examine the ways in which history, language and culture become intertwined in transnational imperial subjects' reclamation of their own nativeness. Doing so, my goal is to theorize translation as a modality of political belonging that captures the precarious and ephemeral cosmopolitanism of the late eighteenth century. Unlike encounter, which relies on a dialectic demarcation of the other's foreignness to reclaim identity and familiarity of the self, translation places the familiarity of self and the foreignness of other on a spectrum of understanding. The two ends of this spectrum are untranslatability and universal comprehension. The latter suspends the foreign/native binary, whereas the former transforms it into a dichotomy. Using d'Ohsson's analogy quoted in the epigraph, it is possible to say that while encounter allows subjects to see the "great machine" that is another society, translation enables them to understand its inner workings.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I elaborate what I mean by translation as a modality of political belonging. I then discuss how d'Ohsson configures the "nation" as an object of translation. In the third section, I turn to his construction of a narrative progression of Ottoman history and examine the ways in which historiography and narrativity enable d'Ohsson's justification that the history of the Ottomans needs to be translated into French. To better understand the ways in which politics of exclusion and

⁷ Findley, "Mouradgea d'Ohsson (1740-1807): Liminality and Cosmopolitanism in the Author of the *Tableau Général de l'Empire Othoman*," *The Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 22, no.1 (Spring 1998), 31

translatability are connected in TGEO, the fourth section offers a close reading of his account of the imperial harem. In this section, I argue that gender relations remain untranslatable, harkening back to the way they were configured as indicators of cultural difference in Mehmed Efendi and Montesquieu's works. The last two sections turn first to d'Ohsson's self-presentation as a translator-scholar and then to the reception of his text to elucidate the more explicitly political stakes of translation as a modality of political belonging.

Translation as Modality of Political Belonging: Language, History, and Ephemeral Cosmopolitanism

Translation, in its broadest and most literal sense, requires the removal of something "from one person, place, or condition" and its transfer onto another person, place, or condition.⁸ It requires the existence of an object to be transferred, a subject to conduct this transfer, and a hospitable recipient for the transfer to be successful. As a linguistic practice, translation requires transferring meaning from one language to another, and is often grouped with interpretation, equivocation, and metaphor. In this sense, translation can take on one of two forms: successful assimilation of all foreign elements in a text to comfort the reader, or preservation of the text's foreignness in a way that displaces the reader from the comforts of her native language.⁹ This section outlines the ways in which this bifurcated form of translation can help us to think about the two constitutive elements of translation as a modality of political belonging, which are the

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, v. "translate," accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/204841>

⁹ Claude Auvray-Assayas, Christian Bernier, Barbara Cassin et al., "To Translate," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. ed. Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 2014.

paradox of mutual understanding between self and other, and the fraught commitment to universal ideas.

Unlike encounter, the modality in which the demarcation of self and other is enveloped in a distinct way of seeing and being seen by the foreigner, translation calls into question the linguistic and historical conditions of foreignness. Specifically, at the heart of translation as a modality of political belonging is a belief in the commensurability of self and other, native and foreign, friend and stranger. This belief is not a kind of naïve multiculturalism that suggests that cultural differences will become politically irrelevant if individuals and communities find a shared language through which they can speak to and understand each other. Rather, it is a zealous yet pragmatic cosmopolitanism that strives for cross-cultural exchange and understanding despite the knowledge that some meaning will be lost, some words will remain untranslatable, and the relationship between one's native language will be changed forever.

On the one hand, there is a kind of zeal in the way translation insists on its object, its subject, and its recipients inhabiting a multilingual, and consequently, multicultural world. The root of this insistence is a categorical belief that the relationship between self and other can be one of mutual understanding. Such understanding carries with it the potential to render the very distinction between self and other obsolete or irrelevant. On the other hand, the actual practice of transferring information, ideas, and values from one context to another without losing the essence of meaning requires great attention to even the smallest linguistic and contextual details. Even then, some meaning is always lost. The desired state of mutual understanding could never be a universal one. As such, it is possible to say that while a successful translation renders foreignness temporarily

invisible, an unsuccessful one renders the most familiar aspect of one's identity (native language) foreign. In trying to mediate difference, translators and translations risk transforming difference into alterity. This paradox is one of the constitutive elements of translation as a modality of political belonging.

The second constitutive element of translation as a modality of political belonging requires thinking about translation from the perspective of the translator. In one of the founding texts of translation studies, Walter Benjamin remarks that "while content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds."¹⁰ The premise here is that the original text, whether it is a philosophical treatise, a novel, a poem, a work of art, or human speech, has a natural relationship with the specific language that gives form to it. This is not to say that the first language of a text contains exclusively literal meanings.¹¹ Rather, it is to posit that the first language in which a text is generated structures and forecloses the possibilities of meaning for that text. This first language becomes the text's native language; it restricts the universe of potential meanings as it generates a community of readers, listeners, and interlocutors who can experience the text

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 75.

¹¹ Here, I am drawing on Rousseau's distinction between figurative language and literal meaning in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. While a detailed discussion of this essay is beyond the scope of this chapter, I find Rousseau's juxtaposition of "figurative language," "poetry" and "passions" to be a productive point of reference to think about the way language and linguistic difference work. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (ARTFL Electronic Edition, 2009). Jean Starobinski argues that there is a kind of "unscientific nostalgia" in Rousseau's approach to language captured in this essay and the second discourse. See Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 146. It is precisely the ease with which Rousseau moves between linguistic, historical, and affective registers in *Essay on the Origin of Languages* that I find productive for thinking about translation as a modality of political belonging.

and its first language in the same way. When seen through the lens of translation, then, the “natural” relationship between content and the original language form is an ethical and political relationship.

Translating any text, i.e. transferring it from one language to another, requires reconfiguring this ethical and political relationship. As such, the task of the translator requires ethical and political justification. For Benjamin, this justification lies within the translator’s conviction that language should be experienced as a human universal. The translator “intends language as a whole, taking an individual work in an alien language as a point of departure.”¹² Although the vocabulary, grammatical structures, idioms, etc. change from one specific language to another, the communicative structures of language remain constant. Translating a text exalts it from the particularity of its original tongue to the universality of language. The translator adorns and decorates the meanings contained in the original text in the hopes of achieving “the great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language.”¹³ However, she remains constrained by the particularities of the many tongues with which she works. Regardless of the form the translated text takes, the task of the translator remains ambivalent, fraught with power, and always potentially treacherous. This intense commitment to universal human ideals that is always bound by communitarian particularities is the second constitutive element of translation as modality of political belonging.

¹² Benjamin, “Task of the Translator,” 76. Benjamin’s distinction between “tongues” and “language” mirrors Ferdinand de Saussure’s distinction between “la parole” and “la langue.” See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique Général*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, with Albert Riedlinger, critical ed. Tullio de Mauro. Paris: Payot, 1985.

¹³ Benjamin, “Task of the Translator,” 77.

To think of the conditions of articulation of political belonging in the late eighteenth century as “translation” means that we can conceptualize the relationship between self and other as a dialogic one marked by the paradox of mutual understanding and the fraught commitment to universal ideals. While TGEO speaks to the configuration of “the nation” and specifically “the nation of the Ottomans” as an object of translation, d’Ohsson self-positioning as a translator-scholar and his life as a dragoman illustrate the ephemerality of this zealous yet pragmatically cosmopolitan modality of political belonging. In the following section, I elucidate how d’Ohsson configures the “nation” as an object of translation by situating this configuration within the context of late eighteenth century debates around universal history and linguistic diversity.

Nation as Object of Translation: Language, History, Customs and Morality

In 1784, d’Ohsson left his native Istanbul for Paris. His goal was to work on a treatise concerning Ottoman history. Three years earlier, Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’Origine des Langues*¹⁴ was posthumously published. An extension of *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*,¹⁵ the essay brought together reflections on the emergence of human civilization, the origins of language and linguistic difference, and the impact of linguistic corruption on the political corruption of mankind. A few decades earlier, Denis Diderot had published *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, arguing that the French language was the closest approximation of a universal language (if such a thing could exist, of course).¹⁶ Harold Mah remarks that this argument was widely accepted by eighteenth-

¹⁴ Rousseau, *Essai sur l’origine des langues*

¹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, in Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Volume 3 (Paris : Gallimard, 1966).

¹⁶ Denis Diderot, *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, ed. P.H. Meyer (Genève: Droz, 1965).

century linguistic theorists within and outside of France, and that it hinged on the rationality of French sentence structure.¹⁷ Although the interplay between universal ideals and specific cultural practices was one of the central themes of European Enlightenment, debates on language seemed to be distinctly central for French thinkers.

It is in this context that d’Ohsson began working on TCEO, which opens with a deceptively cursory claim: “Generally, nothing can be more interesting than the knowledge of nations.”¹⁸ Perhaps meant to serve as a preliminary justification for the following multivolume history to follow, this opening statement contains two seemingly simple assertions. First, it asserts that there are “nations,” that is, communities that consist of “a considerable number of people, who live on a specified portion of land enclosed within distinctly marked borders, and who obey the same government.”¹⁹ Second, it asserts that the true knowledge of these nations can be known and understood from the perspective of outsiders. Given that d’Ohsson is writing about the Ottomans in French, it is possible to say that this assertion holds true even when the outsiders are linguistically unfamiliar with the nation.

¹⁷ Harold Mah, *Enlightenment Phantasies: Cultural Identity in France and Germany 1750-194* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 2003, p.48.

¹⁸ TCEO, vol. I, p.i. Throughout the seven volumes, d’Ohsson uses the terms “Ottoman nation” and “Ottoman Empire” interchangeably. This may seem problematic, given that “nation” and “empire” denote two different types of political organization. However, as noted in footnote 3 of this chapter, in the case of eighteenth century Ottoman Empire this difference does not seem to exist, primarily because the equivalent of the term “nation” was part and parcel of Ottoman imperial administration.

¹⁹ [Unknown], “Nation,” *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2016 Edition), Robert Morrissey and Glenn Roe (eds), <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>. While this definition does not seem to be very specific, I think it captures best the way in which d’Ohsson uses the term “nation” with regards to the Ottomans. As noted in the previous footnote, “nation” did not carry its modern connotations within the Ottoman context. Instead, it seems to express a political community in the broadest sense of the term, and as such, it demonstrates all three of the characteristics identified in this definition.

According to d’Ohsson, the state of knowledge with regards to the Ottoman Empire is minimal in Europe of his day. “In this enlightened age, we do not know anything about the Ottoman Empire other than its size, its geographical position: we have never moved beyond the exterior lines of this giant.”²⁰ Knowing a nation is dependent on the learner’s ability to seek information beyond that nation’s geographical location and conditions. While d’Ohsson does not provide a systematic discussion of the concept of nation, it is possible to identify, from his discussion of what is important to know about the Ottoman Empire, two specific elements that every history about a group of individuals living within certain geographical borders should address. He writes:

“On the one hand, [the reader of this work] will find in it the different codes that make up the universal legislation of this Empire, what is great in many of its beliefs, what is sublime in most of its morals, what is impressive in its culture, what is wise in its laws, what is simple and natural in its practices and its mores. On the other hand, the Empire’s history, as it is written by its own chroniclers, will show the men of genius who have shined on the throne, what the nation has produced within different orders and sects, the powerful bases of its administration, and the resources of its government.”²¹

As an object of translation, the nation’s “universal legislation” is what makes it simultaneously unique and similar. The people living within the set boundaries only become a nation when they are bound by an overarching set of laws and principles. These are categorically distinct from the set of rules that organize a nation’s administration and government in that they cannot be altered with the passing of time. It is also distinct from the religious codes and texts of the members of a nation, which regulate the daily practices

²⁰ TGEO, vol. I, p.ii

²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

of believers.²² D’Ohsson seems to suggest that while the “universal legislation” of a nation contains elements of religious and civil legislation, it also goes beyond them. In this regard, the “universal legislation” is a version of what d’Alembert calls the “character of nations.” For d’Alembert, what distinguishes one community of human beings from another is neither the geographic borders that surround it nor the government it obeys. Rather, each of these communities have a distinct “habitual disposition of the soul even though this disposition may not be found in all the members of that nation.”²³ As such, it is communal, not individual. It also carries some immutable truths about the community. It animates the daily administration, governance, and practices of the members of a nation, yet it is not impacted by how these change over time.

Interestingly, the character of a nation makes that nation recognizable to outsiders, although the kind of recognition that this enables is proverbial and often stereotypical. The *Encyclopédie*’s examples include “mean like an Englishman,” “drunk like a German,” and “cunning like a Greek.”²⁴ D’Ohsson’s universal legislation, by contrast, aims to be as loyal to the truth of the nation as possible, regardless of how complex and detailed that might be. Unlike “*le caractère d’une nation*,” its “*législation universelle*” allows outsiders not only

²² See d’Ohsson’s discussion of the religious code, *ibid.*, pp. xii-xix. This discussion is further detailed in the 4th volume of TGEQ, which is coincidentally the only volume of this work that has been translated into Turkish.

²³ Jean le Rond d’Alembert, “Caractère des nations,” *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2016 Edition), Robert Morrissey and Glenn Roe (eds), <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>. Translation from French is mine. D’Alembert’s explanation of the term also includes an unnamed reference to Montesquieu when he suggests that there is evidence that climate influences a nation’s character.

²⁴ [Unknown], “Nation,” *Encyclopédie*

to recognize the communal contours of a nation. It also enables them to formulate the most accurate ideas (*les plus justes idées*)²⁵ about the soul that animates it.

The second component that d’Ohsson posits as critical for understanding the workings of a nation is its history. This history appears to be in categorical opposition to the nation’s universal legislation. It includes the beliefs, values, and practices of the community, yet it is defined by individual actions and events that cause changes in the nation’s administration and governance. For d’Ohsson, the history of the Ottoman Empire is composed of the following:

“[T]he birth of this empire, its perpetual rise, its establishment in Europe, the speed of its conquests, the power of its weapons, the genius of its Sultans, the portraits of its generals and its ministers, the development of different political systems, the origins of great officials and of great high officials of the State, the steady march of destructive abuses within the different sections of the administration; and all the revolutions that have occurred in different centuries [...]”²⁶

The passage suggests that history has two constitutive components. On the one hand, there are the individual lives that have influenced the existence of the nation. This can be called the biographical component. On the other hand, there are the political, administrative, and military events. This can be called the governmental-administrative component. What is striking is that both components show an emphasis on “movement.” For d’Ohsson, then, the object of translation that he seeks to engage (the Ottoman nation) is one that is simultaneously immutable and in constant movement. The judicious and accurate translation of such an object requires the translator to pay close attention to the historical context in which the object is located.

²⁵ *TGEO*, vol. I, p.xxxi

²⁶ *TGEO*, vol. I, p.xviii

The object that he seeks to translate judiciously and truthfully for a Francophone and European audience transforms d’Ohsson from a translator to a translator-scholar, or more specifically to a translator-historian. As illustrated by the passage above, d’Ohsson the historian conceptualizes the history of nations as a series of events. Although the nation’s universal legislation remains constant, the individuals who govern the nation change, and so do their methods and tools of governance. More broadly, the history of nations is about rising and falling, living and dying, developing and stagnating. Since *TGEO* is not a treatise on the philosophy of history, there aren’t many clues in the text as to the directionality of these movements. However, d’Ohsson tells us that his initial motivation in deciding to translate the nation of the Ottomans was his “reading of national historians, and the comparisons [he] has made with foreign authors who have written so imperfectly about the Ottomans.”²⁷ Even though the Ottoman historiographical imagination remained linguistically and politically diverse, it mostly operated within the cultural-discursive register of Islamic and Turkic history writing until the nineteenth century, and placed the Empire’s achievements at the center of their visions of world history.²⁸ Given his starting point in Turkic and Islamic history, it is possible to see in d’Ohsson’s approach a French translation of the cyclical vision of historical time that is exemplified by Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun, who had a critical influence in shaping Ottoman-Turkish chroniclers’ accounts of the empire’s rise and decline.²⁹ The analogy

²⁷ *TGEO*, vol. I, p.iv-v

²⁸ Hakkı Erdem Çıpa and Emine Fetvacı, eds., *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 2013.

²⁹ Khaldun’s legacy for the fields of history, sociology, philosophy, and Ottoman studies is vast and rich, however a detailed discussion of this legacy would be beyond the scope of this chapter. For a short discussion of Khaldun’s work, see Jennifer London, "Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406)," in *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, edited by Mark Bevir (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc), 2010, p.675-677 doi: 10.4135/9781412958660.n221. For a critical analysis of

between historical time and natural life cycle was one of the characteristic traits of Ibn Khaldun's analysis of communal and social life. It became a prominent feature of Ottoman historical consciousness with Naîmâ's *History*.³⁰

Yet one could also make the case that d'Ohsson's understanding of historical time derives from a distinctly eighteenth century European sensibility for cataloguing and explaining the rise and fall of political communities. In this regard, d'Ohsson's framing of the story of the Ottoman nation is reminiscent of his contemporary Edward Gibbon's framing of the story of the Roman Empire: the gradual destruction of "the solid fabric of Roman greatness."³¹ In the next section, I turn to the question of historiography and narrative to explore the ways in which d'Ohsson's translation of the true history of the Ottomans is embedded in a complex intermingling of narrative, historical representation, and translation.

Translating the Unknown Giant: Historiography and Narrative's Role in Constructing the Nation of the Ottomans

History is not merely a series of events. It is also the telling of these series of events. As such, it contains a multitude of words, and a multitude of strategies that used to make meaning of the events, the words, and the strategies themselves. This literary understanding of history dictates that historical knowledge should be thought of not only as the knowledge

Khaldun's qualification as a "historian" or "sociologist" *avant la lettre*, see Hayden White, "Ibn Khaldun in World Philosophy of History: Review Article," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.2, No.1 (October 1959), p.110-125. For a concise yet detailed survey of the shifts in Ottoman historical thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see Gottfried Hagen, "Afterword: Ottoman Understandings of the World in the Seventeenth Century," in Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden: Brill), 2004, p. 215-236.

³⁰ Mustafa Naîmâ, *Tarih-i Naîma* (Istanbul: Ibrahim Müteferrika), 1734.

³¹ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol.I (London: Strahan and Cadell), 1776, p.iii.

of past events, but also of their discursive formation as well. Defined by Jacques Rancière as “the ways in which we speak about the past, and the ways in which it *speaks, fails to speak, or is prohibited from speaking to us*,”³² historical discourse problematizes the location of the scholar of history not only in relation to his objects of study, but also in relation to the broader sociopolitical discourses in which these objects were embedded, and that he himself is subjected to.

Historical discourse, then, is a modern creation and it is bound by its own set of epistemic and political principles. Hayden White suggests that a text can only become part of the modern historical discourse if (a) the writer of history is not only aware of the chronological sequence of events, but also considers the chronology as a criterion for the nature of the relationship between the events; (b) the object of historical study is real events, and the reality of these events can only be shown by way of evidence; and finally (c) the account of events has a “narrative form.” This means that the account has a beginning and an end, as well as a plot and a “moral of the story.”³³ The main source of conflict in modern historical discourse lies precisely in this discourse’s inability to reconcile the second and third elements. While the former seemingly emphasizes the scientific quality of historical work, the latter demonstrates the need for literariness when writing history, in other words, the inextricable link between literature and historiography.

Rancière pushes such an affinity between literariness and history even further, and suggests that modern historical discourse seeks to erase *literariness out of history*, which is synonymous with the erasure of “politics” from history. While one may disagree with

³² Jacques Rancière, *Names of History*, trans. Hassan Melehy, with a foreword by Hayden White (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1994.

³³ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), 1987, p.4-5

the prophetic declarations that emanate from this perspective, Rancière's rather idiosyncratic definition of politics presents an opportunity to rethink the relationship between events, words, and power precisely because it creates room for forgotten words, words that were left outside of the political order of scholarship (i.e. modern historiography) by virtue of their "non-scientific" quality: often, these are words uttered or written by foreigners, the poor, the illiterate. Regardless of their ideological variance (e.g. revisionist, royal-empiricist, or Marxist), practitioners of modern historical discourse all seek to erase *politics as disruption of order from the past*³⁴ because they all forsake literariness in one way or another, contributing to the hierarchy of knowledge, to the political ordering of words and truth. "It seems that *the truth wins only through a growth in scientific guarantees or in scientific redemption.*"³⁵ The politico-discursive order of modern historiography hinges on the ability of the historian to convert literature into science. For such conversion to succeed, the historian needs to claim an epistemic authority that straddles both realms.

The genre of the *tableau*, overlooked by Rancière and hastily dismissed by White, provides an interesting addition to the complex relationship between narrative form and historical discourse. As the "center of knowledge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries"³⁶ the *tableau* can be defined as a form in which knowledge about the world, including historical knowledge, is organized, produced, and reproduced, according to

³⁴ Here, I have to note that I do not adopt the "politics"- "police" terminology (so eloquently described in Rancière's other works) in the chapter. However, I do think that politics as disruption of order and politics as preservation of order express two distinct logics of power, and that this distinction is key in understanding d'Ohsson's own location as a translator-scholar.

³⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History*, p.98-99

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses* (Paris: Editions Gallimard), 1966. p.89. Translation from French is mine.

principles that are both classical and modern, or that are neither classical nor modern.³⁷ The tableau aims at providing a textual picture of its object at a given time. It is not preoccupied with how things evolve over time, but with the way things *are* and with presenting them with taxonomic accuracy. This is perhaps why White lists the tableau as a non-narrative discursive mode and yet there are examples of “historical tableaux” which are preoccupied with depicting textual pictures of the movements of peoples, societies, or even humanity in general.³⁸ Writing within the generic conventions of the *tableau*, d’Ohsson certainly does not conform to the figure of the modern historian. He is neither a Michelet, nor a Marx. Given the epistemic liminality of the genre, it is also difficult to classify TGEO as an illustration of narrative form. However, the genre’s centrality to eighteenth-century dynamics of knowledge production,³⁹ and d’Ohsson’s own attentiveness to questions of objectivity, authenticity, and accuracy render the TGEO a rich site of study for the interaction of politics, literariness, and history.

D’Ohsson’s initial observation about the lack of knowledge of Ottoman Empire in Europe leads him into a discussion on what the knowledge of this nation should consist of, and perhaps more compellingly on how one can attain such knowledge. As discussed in the previous section, d’Ohsson claims that the character of a nation, i.e. its universal legislation and its history must be known to obtain true knowledge of that nation. In order to acquire this knowledge, one must access the local knowledge of said nation. It is here

³⁷ Foucault claims that this is indicative of the liminal quality of the tableau. For his discussion on the tableau as a transitory form between classical and modern episteme, see *Les Mots et Les Choses*, p.86-89

³⁸ For one of the most famous examples, see Condorcet, J. de Caritat. (1795). *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*. Paris: Agasse; for an English translation see Condorcet, J. de Caritat. (1795). *Outline of an historical view of the progress of the human mind*. London: Printed for J. Johnson.

³⁹ Foucault, 1966

that the problem of “what happened in history” matters for d’Ohsson and for his project of bringing this isolated nation into light for a European audience. Not surprisingly, he frames the problem of attaining knowledge about the nation of the Ottomans by hinting at different levels of inaccessibility. He states:

“It is true that it is difficult to pierce through the thick clouds that surround this nation that is not very communicative. The religious prejudices erect between her and other peoples of Europe a barrier, which is only reinforced by natural, physical, moral, and political causes. In order develop a just opinion about her, it is necessary to travel to the places themselves. I can attest to it: the ministers of foreign powers who have lived in proximity of this court, and those who are still living there, all know the difficulties that one encounters, and even the dangers one exposes himself to when one wishes to dedicate oneself to the studies necessary for a deeper knowledge of this nation and its different relations.”⁴⁰

The first challenge d’Ohsson identifies in terms of the historical knowledge of the Ottoman nation is this three-fold challenge of obtaining local knowledge. Coupled with his main claim that the true knowledge of nations must contain both their mutable and immutable elements, this challenge posits an understanding of the role of the historian that is not simply about the collection of correct information about historical events. Here, d’Ohsson seems to suggest that true historical knowledge is inextricably linked to true cultural knowledge, which can only be acquired if one can master the language, the manners, and all other elements that constitute the universal legislation, or the character, of a nation.

Furthermore, d’Ohsson posits that there is an accurate way of understanding and studying historical events. For instance, he writes:

“[This nation] merits that we acquit it of ignorance and barbarism. If these epithets were accorded to it in Europe, this was no doubt because

⁴⁰ T GEO, vol. I, p.iv

the writers who have transmitted its history to us, abused themselves by their own prejudices, strangers to this people, poorly versed in the knowledge of its practices, have confused public mores with private ones; laws with their abuses; principles with opinions; maxims of the government with passions of its holders; isolated facts, a few displays of authority directed by circumstances, with rules of the general administration.”⁴¹

At first glance, D’Ohsson’s critique of the prevailing European depictions of the Ottoman Empire appears to contradict his assertion that there is an intimate connection between the universal moral laws that establish and maintain a nation and the historical particularities that are endured by it. One can initially dismiss either the initial claim about the constitutive elements of a nation, or the claims about the proper location of the historian of nations. However, a closer reading of the passage above would highlight a compelling nuance in d’Ohsson’s account: history, as the moving aspect of a nation’s existence, can distort the appearance of its immutable aspects, that is, the overarching set of principles and laws that constitute its character. Only those who have mastery over the latter can assess the relation between specific events that constitute history and the principles that constitute the character of a nation; hence it is of crucial importance for the scholar to have at least near-native knowledge of the nation.

Within the context of TGEO, the second challenge posed by historical knowledge is the question of the meaning of history, that is, of the meaning of the historical event in relation to the customs, mores, and laws that constitute the universal character of a nation for its members. It can be argued that it is this quest for the meaning of history that leads d’Ohsson to present his readers a story about the existence of the Ottoman Empire. He suggests that the contemporary struggles of the Empire are a result “not of religion nor of

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii

law” but “of popular prejudices, false opinions and arbitrary regulations dictated by caprice, passion, the interest of the moment, which are against both the spirit of the Quran and the provisions of common law.”⁴² For him, the history of the Ottoman Empire is a story that has its origins in the “chronological order of Islam”⁴³ and its happy ending in the “civil, moral, and political order of European nations.”⁴⁴

D’Ohsson’s brief overview of the meaning of the historical experience of the Ottoman Empire presents an interesting example of what Hayden White calls the “moralizing impulse of narrativity.”⁴⁵ D’Ohsson’s discussion of how to attain the knowledge of the nation of Ottomans illustrates both the narrativity of history and the moralizing impulse that White claims is inextricable from it. His assertion that historical events disfigure the foundations of societies is not an objective observation. It carries with it a moral claim about the nature of historical knowledge: historical events are “told” by the scholar, and they should be told “correctly.” This weaving of historical knowledge and language can only be made by a scholar of history who is also a translator, or vice versa.

One of the most interesting illustrations of the ways in which the truthful and accurate translation of the nation of the Ottomans is juxtaposed with historiographical and narrative concerns is d’Ohsson’s detailed descriptions of the imperial harem. Although d’Ohsson was a native of the imperial capital, he did not have access to the living spaces of the dynastic family.⁴⁶ In the opening chapter, he announces that he owes “the details

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. xxxii-xxxiii

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. xxix. It should be noted that d’Ohsson uses “Islam”, “Islamisme”, “Mahometisme” (Mohammadism) and “Muslumanisme” interchangeably.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxxviii.

⁴⁵ White, 1987, p. 24

⁴⁶ See the previous chapter’s discussion of the imperial harem as a space protected from outsiders to the dynastic family.

concerning the wives of Sultans, the *Cadinnns*, and the Imperial *Harem* to the slave girls of the palace [...] and to Christian women who have helped me gain free access to them.”⁴⁷ His informants were women who were freed from slavery upon marriage to officers of the imperial Court.⁴⁸ D’Ohsson claims that his conversations with these women allowed him “to correct the false and incorrect ideas I have had regarding the wives of Sultans, the ladies and the *Harem* of the *Grand-Seigneur*.”⁴⁹ His discussion of the imperial harem, specifically of the organization of what could be called the “private” living quarters of the Ottoman court, illustrates the impasse of d’Ohsson’s dual commitment to the translatability of the Ottoman nation, and to narrating it truthfully.

Translating the Interior Life of the Ottoman Court: The Imperial Harem

The seventh and final volume of T GEO, subtitled *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*,⁵⁰ was published posthumously in 1824. It is organized as a detailed description of daily life in the Ottoman court, including its “private” living quarters that d’Ohsson identifies as “l’intérieur,” the parts of the court that are secluded from those who are not members of the dynastic family or part of the vast corps of officials who manage the Sultan’s daily life. In this section, I want to briefly consider the challenges

⁴⁷ T GEO, vol I, p. ix. D’Ohsson seems to use “cadinn” as a variant of the Turkish word for woman, “kadın” in a specific way. See the following section for more details about this usage. There is no indication that this word, unlike “harem,” gained any traction in the French-speaking world.

⁴⁸ The conditions of slavery in the Ottoman Empire, particularly the conditions of women slaves, were different from the conditions of slavery in Europe and European colonies. For a more detailed discussion, see Madeleine Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2010.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. ix-x.

⁵⁰ T GEO, vol VII.

that this richly, sometimes tediously, detailed description raises for the translatability of the nation of the Ottomans.

The Francophone reader finds the secluded world of women, eunuchs, and an all-powerful sovereign in d'Ohsson's depictions of the imperial harem, just like she would when reading Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* or other Oriental novels of the eighteenth century. D'Ohsson is careful to preserve the French transliterations of Ottoman-Turkish names (e.g. *cadine* or *cadinn* for "kadın,"⁵¹ *ack-aghale* for "ak ağalar"), and to catalogue the rites, rituals, and procedures that govern the interior spaces of the court. However, the reader does not find the narratives of intrigue, exoticism, or romance that are so central to the workings of the *roman oriental*. There is a kind of dry objectivity in d'Ohsson's descriptions in this volume that aims to break the association between the harem and sexual, romantic, and political intrigue. For instance, in his description of *kara ağalar* (black eunuchs), d'Ohsson discusses the painful and dangerous complete castration that "these Africans" go through to become black eunuchs in the imperial court. He writes that "it is their parents who mutilate them to sell them at a high price. The provincial governors, and especially the governor of Egypt, take it upon themselves to send them as gifts to the sérail."⁵² Neither in this section, nor later in the text do we learn about how black eunuchs came to be objects of trade, and why, unlike their white counterparts (*ak*

⁵¹ D'Ohsson explains that this word is a variation of "hatun," a Turkic honorific reserved for the wife of the ruler, and in rare instances, for a woman ruler. See *Ibid.*, p.64

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.55

ağalar), their prospects of promotion remain limited. In this passage, d’Ohsson abstains from all political judgment, and all the moral trappings of a potential narrative structure.

Similarly, d’Ohsson describes the architecture of the harem in the following way:

“The part of the *sénil* that is inhabited by women is surrounded by a thick wall; the only passage that it offers is closed by two bronze and two iron doors. The black eunuchs wait by these doors day and night, and even their chief cannot cross their limits without the express orders of the Sultan. At center of the Harem is the Sovereign’s pavilion, composed of a sleeping room and a throne room. In the first room, an elevated stage carries his bed, surrounded by a satin curtain embroidered with gold and fine pearls; the rest of the room only contains a sofa covered with gold drapes. In the throne room, the Sultan receives the princesses of blood and the *cadines*; this is also where he celebrates most civil and religious holidays. This room is decorated with gold paneling, extensive sofas, and thrones that radiate with all the gold and stone that surround them.”⁵³

On the one hand, the “gold drapes” and “embroidered satin curtains” suggest a kind of monarchical wealth and opulence that is not foreign to a Francophone audience. It is perhaps through the detailed description of such familiar opulence that d’Ohsson aimed to convey the ordinariness of the imperial harem. On the other hand, the description of the physical space as closely guarded, surrounded by a thick wall, and doors that can only be opened with the explicit orders of the Sultan reinforces the understanding of the harem as a space in which women are enslaved and imprisoned for the sole purpose of Sultan’s entertainment. In the rest of the volume, d’Ohsson provides detailed explanations of the ways in which women can move up in the ranks of the harem, at times approximating what Leslie Pierce calls “the inner as source of power.”⁵⁴ Unlike his remarks on the condition of white eunuchs in which he explicitly states that “the *sénil* is their prison and their grave,” the discussions of the condition of women and black eunuchs never guide

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.70

⁵⁴ Pierce, *The Imperial Harem*, p.10-12.

the reader to think that there might be a potential injustice at work in this organization of private and intimate lives of the Sultan and his family.

One could argue that this lack of political-moral judgment is exactly the purpose of translation but, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, translation reconfigures the relationship between the reader and her native language. It can reconfigure it to comfort the reader, or to unsettle her. D'Ohsson's translation of the imperial harem seems to work towards accomplishing the former by presenting the details of everyday life in Ottoman court through tropes and images that are already familiar to a Francophone audience. In doing so, however, this translation also works against TGEO's overarching goal to familiarize the audience with the inner workings of the Ottoman Empire and to overcome its categorical alterity in the European imaginary. In the next two sections, I pursue the precarious and ephemeral location of d'Ohsson as translator by first turning to his own self-positioning in TGEO, and then by briefly discussing TGEO's reception.

D'Ohsson the Dragoman: Precarious Authority of the Native Outsider

While a detailed biography of d'Ohsson does not exist, historical records⁵⁵ show that he was born in 1740 in Istanbul. As the son of a French Catholic mother and an Ottoman-Armenian Catholic father, d'Ohsson belonged to one of the religious minorities of the Empire. Following his father, he became a translator for the Swedish embassy.⁵⁶ In 1775, he became the confidant of the King of Sweden. In 1784, he left his hometown,

⁵⁵ Beydilli, K. "Ignatius Mouradega d'Ohsson: Ailesi Hakkında Kayıtlar, "Nizam-i Cedid"e dair Lahiyasi ve Osmanlı İmparatorlugundaki Siyasi Hayati," *Tarih Dergisi*, No. 34, 1983-1984, İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, pp. 247-314.

⁵⁶ For a detailed discussion about how the status of official translators and other non-Muslim subjects working in the service of the Ottoman Court changed in eighteenth century, see Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1996.

Istanbul, for Paris and returned to the Empire in 1792, only to go back to Paris in 1799, having been declared *persona non grata* by the *Sublime Porte*. He remained a Swedish subject living in Paris until his death in 1807.

D'Ohsson describes himself in the following manner in the *Discours Préliminaire*:

“Born in Constantinople, raised in the same country, and attached all my life to the service of a Court tied intimately to the *Sublime Porte*, I had more than anyone else the means of overcoming these difficulties [of accessing knowledge of the Ottomans], and to fulfill the task that impose on myself today; I shall be happy if such weak talents, cultivated outside of Christian Europe, far away from its light and its help, would guarantee me some success.”⁵⁷

This passage is emblematic of the tensions that characterize d'Ohsson's self-consciousness regarding his authority as a translator-historian while claiming to hold the true knowledge of the Ottoman nation. On the one hand, he asserts his nativeness as what distinguishes him from others who wish to study the history of the Ottoman nation, and as what renders his knowledge of this history truer. On the other hand, he acknowledges his limitations as a historian since he has been cultivated outside of Europe. This self-consciousness provides him the moral authority of a translator of history because it allows d'Ohsson to reconstruct his authorial position as simultaneously non-European and non-Ottoman. As a non-European translator who is intimately familiar with the language and customs of the Ottomans, d'Ohsson can make a convincing case for his native mastery of the language in its natural form and context. As a non-Ottoman historian who is familiar with the intellectual and scientific developments of Europe, he can make the case for his ability to convey the knowledge of Ottoman Empire objectively.

⁵⁷ TGEO, vol. I, p. v.

D'Ohsson was born and raised in the Catholic milieu of Pera and Galata in the imperial capital. To understand the social and political implications of his nativeness, and the way he asserts this nativeness, one needs to consider his socio-political location within the Empire. As described in the introduction to this chapter, d'Ohsson belonged to a religious minority that was not legally recognized by the Ottoman imperial administration. He was a member of a Catholic denomination that was not even recognized within the smaller community of Ottoman Armenians. Carter Findley writes that the Mouradega family were “not Roman Catholics, but uniates, members of an off-shoot of the Armenian Apostolic church that accepted papal authority. Among Armenians, the Catholics reputedly formed a vanguard of cultural revival and westernization.”⁵⁸ This suggests that d'Ohsson's religion did not hinder his participation in the political and intellectual developments of the Empire in the late eighteenth century, at least initially.⁵⁹

Here, it is important to mention that the eighteenth century was a period of transformations “that altered the architecture of the empire.”⁶⁰ Interestingly, the position

⁵⁸ Findley, “Mouradega d'Ohsson,” 22. In Findley's account, it is unclear whether “cultural revival” and “westernization” are synonymous processes. For a compelling discussion of the ideological transformations of the period and the ways in which they reconfigured the relationship between Ottoman Empire and an increasingly “westernizing” world, see Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵⁹ For a comprehensive account of the history of the Armenian Church, and the different socio-political transformations that led to divisions within it, see Malachia Ormanian, *L'Eglise Armenienne: Son Histoire, Sa Doctrine, Son Regime, Sa Discipline, Sa Liturgie, Sa Littérature, Son Present* (Antelias, Lebanon: Imprimerie du Catholicos de Cilicie, 1954). For an interesting study of the ways in which the Ottoman Armenian community contributed to the development of constitutionalism (a movement that started about a decade after d'Ohsson's death) in the Ottoman Empire, and of how these contributions mirrored the relations between lay members of the orthodox Armenian church and its clergy, see Vartan Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1863: A Study of its Historical Development* (Istanbul: Published PhD Dissertation, 1988).

⁶⁰ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 263. For an extensive discussion of these transformations see *ibid.*, 193-263

of minority officials became increasingly precarious during the same period, primarily because “at the hands of [...] conservative religious forces, an increasingly narrow Sunni orthodoxy would be protected and perfected by the increasingly centralized institution of the *ilmiyye* [the religious scholarly elite].”⁶¹ While the Ottoman Empire was becoming increasingly interested in the social and political ways of Europeans, the economic and political tensions within the empire generated increasingly sharp cleavages between Muslims and non-Muslims. These were accompanied by projects of administrative and political reform which triggered a series of conservative revolts and rebellions that demanded the preservation of existing institutions. These developments created a distinctly problematic environment for those who were members of religious minorities while being part of the extended political and administrative organization of the Ottoman Court. As Müge Göçek remarks, their lives were emblematic of “the ambivalent situation of the few Ottoman minority officials, between the conflicting demands of the Ottoman Empire and the West. This subgroup of small but powerful minority officials eventually disintegrated under the strain of these conflicting demands; they either left the empire or lost their jobs.”⁶² D’Ohsson’s “nativeness” appears to be precarious given this socio-political context marked by changing loyalties, and shifting intellectual and cultural values.⁶³

D’Ohsson’s life in France, first while he was working on TGEO and then again when he was exiled from İstanbul in 1799, was also financially and politically precarious.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 225

⁶² Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie*, 95

⁶³ D’Ohsson was eventually declared a *persona non grata* by Ottoman authorities. See Beydilli, “Ignatius Mouradgea D’Ohsson,” 290-293 for the details of this process.

⁶⁴ I draw this information from Beydilli and Findley’s work. While Beydilli’s work relies on Ottoman and French records, Findley’s article makes use of the rich archive of d’Ohsson’s personal correspondence at the Uppsala University library in Sweden.

The move to Paris was costly, even for the son-in-law of a rich Armenian-Catholic financier who had also moved to Paris at around the same time. Writing what became a seven-volume treatise on the Ottoman Empire's laws, history, and organization required help, and d'Ohsson solicited that help from Jacques Mallet du Pan.⁶⁵ Before the revolution, Mallet du Pan was a Genevan Calvinist publicist and a friend of Voltaire's who was living in exile in Paris.⁶⁶ In the aftermath of 1789, he became one of the leading figures of a counter-revolution that was deeply attached to the restoration of monarchy. Mallet du Pan's life ended in exile in England, and his Calvinist yet royalist legacy remains a contentious one.⁶⁷ It is unclear whether Mallet du Pan and d'Ohsson remained in contact with one another after the French Revolution, but d'Ohsson's continuing financial and personal ties to France made him the object of diplomatic and personal rumors that he was "the only non-French diplomat in Istanbul who took the side of the French."⁶⁸ It perhaps didn't help that upon his return from France with the first two volumes of TGEO in tow, d'Ohsson quickly rose through the ranks of the Swedish Embassy, and became ambassador. Although the first two volumes of TGEO were received favorably by the new, reformist sultan Selim III, the rumors about d'Ohsson's loyalty to France soon led him to ask the Swedish King to replace d'Ohsson with a true Swede.⁶⁹ Shortly thereafter, d'Ohsson left for Paris a second time, this time as an exile. In the aftermath of the French Revolution and the

⁶⁵ Findley, "Mouradgea d'Ohsson," 23.

⁶⁶ "Jacques Mallet du Pan," in *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*, <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/f/F15899.php>

⁶⁷ Bernard Mallet, *Mallet du Pan and the French revolution* (London: Longmans, Green, and co., 1902). This seems to be the only detailed biography of Mallet du Pan. It's written by his grandson with the aim of clearing his name and legacy.

⁶⁸ Findley, "Mouradgea d'Ohsson," 29

⁶⁹ Beydilli, "Ignatius Mouradgea D'Ohsson," 292-293 and 313.

upheaval of European monarchies, d'Ohsson's ability to move between cultural and linguistic registers repeatedly worked to his disadvantage.

By underscoring his flexible nativeness in relation to an exalted idea of Europe in the TCEO, d'Ohsson seeks to reclaim these layers of precariousness as sources of epistemological authority. He asserts, from the onset, why he is more capable than others to give a historical picture of the Ottoman Empire: he was born and raised in its capital. This assertion enables him to deflect the assumption that a native Ottoman must be Muslim. Here, it is worth mentioning that Ottoman historiographical tradition consisted almost exclusively of works by authors who were Muslim, and who wrote in Ottoman Turkish, Persian, and Arabic. D'Ohsson's self-positioning as an Ottoman historian who aims to write the history of this "nation" in relation to the Western world was a precursor to the shift towards a more diversified understanding of Ottoman and world history that became increasingly prevalent later in the nineteenth century.⁷⁰

D'Ohsson's assertion of his nativeness, despite the challenging socio-political context of the late eighteenth century, also suggests that he is aware of the issue of competing narratives that exist in Ottoman and European sources alike.⁷¹ In this light, d'Ohsson appears to claim a position of authority not only because he wants to convince those who read his work about the truth or authenticity of his account, but at the same time because the contemporary knowledge of the Ottomans is marked by a multitude of

⁷⁰ See Hakan Karateke, "The Challenge of Periodization: New Pattern in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Historiography," in Çıpa and Fetvacı, eds., *History at the Ottoman Court*, 129-154.

⁷¹ See Hagen, "Afterword" for Ottoman narratives of imperial rise and decline. See Tavernier, *Nouvelle Relation* for what remained the most authoritative European and Francophone source on the Ottoman Empire until the nineteenth century.

narratives which are almost exclusively geared towards a non-native (i.e. European) audience.

Yet d’Ohsson also seems to be aware that a simple assertion of his provenance would not be sufficient to convince his readers of the accuracy of his account, of his truth claims about the Ottoman nation. A second, more complex issue regarding the authorial position of d’Ohsson pertains specifically to the intended audience of this work, and it is reflected in his self-conscious plea that his account should be taken seriously despite the fact that he has “weak talents cultivated outside of Christian Europe.” Throughout the opening chapter of TGEO, d’Ohsson oscillates between praising the universal legislation of the Ottomans and discounting the historical misinterpretations and applications of it. Certainly, it is possible to claim that this oscillation is simply an indication of his ambivalence towards the contemporary developments of the Empire. However, such a claim discounts the narrative that d’Ohsson goes on to construct in the rest of his TGEO. Such oscillation, coupled with his plea to the readers to overlook his poor “scholarly training,” is a narrativizing move that contributes to his authority as a translator.

Translation, Historical Discourse, and Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion

In this final section, I want to take a somewhat anachronistic turn away from TGEO and d’Ohsson’s authorial self-positioning to discuss the reception of d’Ohsson’s work in the Ottoman Empire. There are no historical records in the Basbakanlik Osmanli Arsivi records that refer to d’Ohsson as anything other than a dragoman for the Swedish embassy. TGEO also does not seem to be translated into Ottoman Turkish. The only Turkish translation of TGEO of which I am aware is a partial translation, entitled *Mores and*

Customs in 18th Century Turkey.⁷² This partial translation was published in 1972 as part of the “*Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser*” series. In the words of the sponsoring newspaper’s (*Tercüman*) owner, the goal of the series was to “save the works that have been distilled from our thousand-year history and made us “us,” works that have served as *our culture*’s cornerstones, from dusty bookshelves so that they can reach future generations.”⁷³ Given the nationalist and religio-conservative stance of the newspaper, its owner’s affiliation with the conservative *Adalet Partisi* (Justice Party),⁷⁴ and the other works included in the series,⁷⁵ it is evident that “us” refers to the Turkish-Muslim citizens of the Turkish Republic. Similarly, “our culture” refers to the Turko-Islamic cultural heritage of modern Turkey. Why is a French text written by a non-Muslim native of the Ottoman Empire deemed part of this canon?

The anonymous author of the introduction to the translation describes d’Ohsson as follows:

“The author of this work, d’Ohsson, is of Armenian origin. He entered Swedish subjecthood, and worked in the Swedish Embassy in Istanbul. His first position at the embassy was that of translator. Afterwards, he directly became the *chargé d’affaires*, and was ennobled and knighted by the Swedish King.

Working in the Swedish Embassy in Istanbul for a very long time, d’Ohsson analyzed the Turkish state under Selim III extremely well, and he examined Turkish sources with great attention and detail. Here, it must be noted that the author knows the Turkish language very well.

⁷² d’Ohsson, M. de M., *XVIII. Yüzyıl Türkiyesinde Örf ve Adetler*, trans. Zehran Yüksel, *Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser*, vol.3 (Istanbul: Kervan Kitapçılık, 1972).

⁷³ Kemal Ilıcak, “1001 Temel Eseri İftiharla Sunuyoruz,” in *ibid.*, unmarked page.

⁷⁴ Adalet Partisi was the main center-right party that was part of governing coalitions between 1960 and 1980. For a political-sociological exploration of its ideological genealogy see Tanel Demirel, *Adalet Partisi: İdeoloji ve politika* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004).

⁷⁵ D’Ohsson’s work appears to be the only one written by a non-Turkish and non-Muslim author in the series.

One of the greatest characteristics of d’Ohsson is that unlike many Western authors, he does not have any prejudices against or negative feelings about Turks and Muslims. As a result, he was able to write this great work with utmost objectivity.”⁷⁶

The reason d’Ohsson’s work is included in the canon of “Turkish-Muslim” culture, then, seems to be because he was a foreigner who was capable of true objectivity. Although it is from a different century, this biographical description illustrates the slipperiness of d’Ohsson’s self-identification as simultaneously an “translator-historian” and “native of Constantinople.” D’Ohsson himself was aware that a simple assertion of his provenance would not be sufficient to convince his readership, whether European or Ottoman, of the authenticity of this claims. To “tell the history of Ottomans truthfully,” d’Ohsson oscillated between praising the universal legislation of the Ottomans, discounting historical misinterpretations and applications of it, and structuring his work as progression from religious principles to practices to sociopolitical organization of the Empire. His life and work largely remained unknown, even as it became an inspiration and key resource for the Austrian historian Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall’s foundational *History of the Ottoman Empire*.⁷⁷ The ease with which d’Ohsson navigated the linguistic and cultural boundaries of Ottoman Empire and France was not recognizable either as a type of monarchical-imperial or national-imperial identity attachment. Thus, his role as a translator-historian remained illegible for Ottoman, French, Swedish, Armenian, and Turkish audiences alike.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

⁷⁷ Joseph F. von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des Osmanischen reiches* (Pest: C. A. Hartleben, 1827).

⁷⁸ A few years ago, Turkish human rights activist and publisher Ragıp Zarkolu wrote an editorial piece on his discovery of d’Ohsson in the leftist daily newspaper Evrensel. Despite the fact that Tercüman and Evrensel are on opposite ends of the contemporary Turkish ideological spectrum, Ragıp Zarkolu’s editorial also refers to d’Ohsson as a “Swedish aristocrat of Armenian origin.” Unlike Ilıcak, the editor of Tercüman, however, Zarkolu calls on the Armenian publishing

Conclusion

When d’Ohsson makes the seemingly self-conscious announcement that he hopes his native knowledge will grant him some success even though he was cultivated outside of Europe, he sets the stage for the historical claim he will make for the contemporary superiority of Europe and for the moral claim that this is where the future of the nation of the Ottomans can, and should, reside.

Initially, both claims appear to appeal only to the sensibilities of francophone Europeans. “D’Ohsson was the broker between two cultures that lacked direct access to each other and he clearly meant to give a good account of the Ottoman Empire, even while talking about its harsher realities.”⁷⁹ This approach does not fully explain why he would chose to undermine his own authorial position, especially since loyalty to truth, and to true historical knowledge, appears to be a critical element in his discussion of the knowledge of nations. It also does not explain why he suddenly, towards the end of the opening chapter, turns to a discussion of the role of the sovereign in generating reform within the Empire, claiming, “nothing more than a superior mind, a wise, enlightened, entrepreneurial Sultan, is required to reform the Ottomans.”⁸⁰

D’Ohsson’s assertion of his nativeness, his claims about the content and the meaning of true historical knowledge, his preoccupation with reform within the Ottoman Empire, and his assertion of his own inadequacy together suggest that he is not simply acting as a “cultural broker,” whose sole preoccupation is to introduce an unknown culture to the

community in Turkey to take on the task of creating a critical edition of *TGEO*. See Ragıp Zarkolu, “Osmanlı’nın Tarihini Kim Yazdı?” *Evrensel*, July 25, 2014, <https://www.evrensel.net/yazi/71900/osmanlinin-tarihini-kim-yazdi>.

⁷⁹ Findley, “Mouradgea d’Ohsson,” 31

⁸⁰ *TGEO*, vol I., xxxv

Europeans. It reinforces the broader moral framework in which d’Ohsson seems to conceptualize the TGEO. As a native who recognizes the inadequacy of the current ways of “cultivating talent” within the Ottoman Empire, he renders credible his suggestion that the story of the Ottoman Empire is a story of the move from the corrupting effects of the history of the Empire into the enlightened ways of Europe. Moreover, his seeming self-consciousness allows him to position himself as “native enough,” that is, native in attaining the true knowledge of the Ottoman nation, its history, and its character, and non-native (or almost European) in his methods and in his moral and scholarly impulses.

D’Ohsson’s assertion that historical events disfigure the foundations of societies is not a morally or politically neutral observation. Rather, it is a rhetorical device that he uses to relate the Ottoman Empire to the global transformations of the eighteenth century. Much like Marquis de Condorcet’s *Esquisse d’un Tableau Historique des Progres de l’Esprit Humain* (1794), one of the most famous examples of the genre, the broader narrative d’Ohsson seems to adopt in TGEO emphasizes the role of Europe as cultural and political vanguard without overlooking the possible permanence of cultural differences. As a result, the TGEO reflects a newly emerging global political order marked by European imperialisms. Furthermore, *Discours Preliminaire*’s insistence on proper methods of learning about other nations suggests that d’Ohsson also adopts the linguistic and epistemological categories of what can be called the political and intellectual imaginary of the Enlightenment era, reinforcing the very political order that has cast the Ottoman Empire into the position of a “barbaric and ignorant” “unknown giant.”

However, given the precarity of d’Ohsson’s nativeness, it would be too quick to dismiss his work, and the works of others like him as mere (and imperfect) replications of European

epistemic norms because of their appeals to the civil, moral, and political “superiority” of European nations. Such an interpretation does not do justice to the complexity of writing history during a period of intense socio-political change, and as a result, it causes the reader of TGEO to lose sight of the implications of “out-of-place” words and claims. The words of a figure like d’Ohsson (a figure who claimed to be “native enough”) can only be intelligible when they are read within the cross-cultural historical and literary context in which they were written and against the grain of the established norms of modern historiography and national-historical knowledge.

As a modality of political belonging, translation enables this kind of cross-cultural reading, and the complex, fluctuating, and ambivalent politico-moral commitments embedded in texts that are produced by cosmopolitan figures like d’Ohsson. In the following chapter, I take up the shift from monarchical-imperial structures of governance to national-imperial structures of governance in the mid-nineteenth century through the lens of conversion as modality of belonging. Etymologically related to translation,⁸¹ conversion also configures the question of difference between self and other on a spectrum. Unlike translation, which aspires to universality while preserving cultural specificity, conversion imagines the self as politically and morally superior and seeks to recast the other in that image.

⁸¹ The two words share an emphasis on transformation. See Jane Tylus, “No Untranslatables!” in Cassin et al., *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, 1153-1154.

CHAPTER 3. CONVERSION: LOVE, PIETY, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

Introduction

“Regardless of title or rank, French are equal in the eyes of the law.”
*Charte constitutionnelle du 14 août, 1830*¹

“All individuals who are under the subjection of the Ottoman State are called “Ottoman” regardless of their religion or sect without exception, and the status of Ottoman is created and granted according to conditions decreed by laws.”
*Kanun-i Esasi, 1876*²

“Muslim, Christian, Israelite, you are all subjects of the same emperor, sons of the same father.”
Rıza Paşa, *Address to the leaders of Greek, Armenian, and Jewish communities of Western Anatolia, 1839*³

“The French Republic has for its principles Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Its foundations are Family, Work, Property, and Public Order.”
*Préambule de la Constitution, Article IV, 1848*⁴

“And so the People remain masters of their own fate. Nothing fundamental is done beyond its will.”
Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, *Proclamation du 14 janvier 1852*⁵

¹ “Les Français sont égaux devant la loi, quels que soient d'ailleurs leurs titres et leurs rangs.” *La Charte Constitutionnelle du 14 Août 1830*, <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution/les-constitutions-de-la-france/charte-constitutionnelle-du-14-aout-1830.5104.html>

² “Devleti Osmaniye tabîyetinde bulunan efradın cümlesine herhangi din ve mezhepten olur ise bilâ istisna Osmanlı tabir olunur ve Osmanlı sıfatı kanunen muayyen olan ahvale göre istihsal ve iza'e edilir.” 1876 Kanun-i Esasi, <http://www.anayasa.gen.tr/1876ke.htm>. All translations from Turkish are mine unless otherwise noted.

³ “Musulmans, chrétiens, israélites, vous êtes tous les sujets d'un même empereur, les enfants d'un même père.” Edouard Engelhardt, *La Turquie et Le Tanzimat* (Paris: A. Cotillon et Cie, 1882), vol.1, 69. All translations from French are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁴ “[La République Française] a pour principe la Liberté, l'Égalité et la Fraternité. Elle a pour base la Famille, le Travail, la Propriété, l'Ordre public.” *Constitution de 1848, IIe République*, <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution/les-constitutions-de-la-france/constitution-de-1848-ii-republique.5106.html>

⁵ “Ainsi, le Peuple reste toujours maître de sa destinée. Rien de fondamental ne se fait en dehors de sa volonté.” *Constitution de 1852, Second Empire*, <http://www.conseil->

In the first three quarters of the 19th century, there was a gradual shift in how French and Ottoman states codified their subjects' relationship to their state. In turn, a growing number of these subjects formulated the political stakes of their identities and affective attachments as they started making more frequent claims for political power and agency. The first two epigraphs of this chapter highlight the emphasis on equality of subjects before the law. The third and fourth epigraphs reference the space of the family, and specifically the paternal relations it captures, as a kind of proxy for politics. The last shifts the emphasis from individual subjects to "the people," which becomes the ultimate holder of sovereignty, i.e. "master of its own faith." Focusing on the period between 1830 and 1876, this chapter aims to understand how the transition from monarcho-imperial structures and institutions to national-imperial ones has impacted the conditions of articulation for political belonging. The gradual transformation of "subjects" into "a people" seems to solidify and stratify the identity-based distinctions between self and other in both French and Ottoman contexts. Identifying "conversion" as the primary modality of political belonging during this period enables us to think about the transnationally shared ways in which religion, family, and political community came to overlap in the creation of national-imperial subjects.

Focusing on Hovsep Vartanian's *Akabi Hikâyesi* [Akabi's Story] (1851),⁶ this chapter argues that conversion imagines the self as politically and morally superior and seeks to recast the other in that image. It also has a deep-seated mistrust of the other's

constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution/les-constitutions-de-la-france/constitution-de-1852-second-empire.5107.html

⁶ Vartan Paşa, *Akabi Hikâyesi: İlk Türkçe Roman (1851)*, ed. by Andreas Tietze (Istanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 1991). All translations from transliterated Turkish are mine.

capacity to transform correctly. The novel's plot of tragic romance rooted in the religious differences of the main protagonists captures the affective, socio-cultural, and political challenges of this mix of politico-moral hierarchy and mistrust of individual transformation. As it depicts the life-worlds⁷ of two distinct ethno-religious communities, the novel suggest that romantic love encourages a kind of individuality that is often in opposition with a strong sense of community, whether it be religious or political. As such, romantic love is always potentially threatening to a communal existence. This threatening potential of romantic love contrasts with the imperatives of conversion as a modality of belonging, which require a zealous belief in the righteousness of one's own community and an ongoing desire to bring outsiders into that community.

In what follows, I first elucidate the meaning of conversion as modality of political belonging by examining the literal and metaphorical meanings of the term. Then, I offer a historical discussion of the local, transnational, and global contexts in which conversion became a primary modality of political belonging. In this section, I look specifically at the proliferation of French-Catholic missionary activity in the Ottoman provinces to articulate competing practices and visions of conversion. I then offer a brief discussion of the turn to a fictional genre, the novel. I highlight the ways in which political community building and reading practices came to be intertwined. It is also in this section that I offer a gloss of Chateaubriand's *Atala*,⁸ one of the most frequently read

⁷ Here, I'm drawing on the concept of *Lebenswelt* that Habermas outlines in Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol 2, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

⁸ François-René Chateaubriand, *Atala* (Paris: Gabriel Roux, 18??). The edition I am working with seems to be the third edition but there is no year specified anywhere in the book. The preface dates the first edition as 1800. See *Ibid.*, p.3 and p.9. All references are to this edition, and all translations from French are mine.

texts in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. This text has a central place in *Akabi Hikâyesi*, and I argue that it is a precursor to the kinds of familial, religious, and romantic impasses that overlap in Vartan Paşa's novel. Finally, I turn to the text of *Akabi Hikâyesi* itself and discuss the ways in which it narrates the threateningly individualistic potential of romantic love. I conclude with a few remarks on the limits on conversion as a modality of political belonging.

Conversion as Modality of Political Belonging

Much like encounter, histories and practices of conversion have been studied in great detail;⁹ but the term itself is often used as self-evident. While the specific norms and practices that constitute conversion are highly dependent on the perspective of those who experience it,¹⁰ in its broadest sense the term captures a process of transformation that is ostensibly and simultaneously about the convert's individual spirituality, and her attachments to community.

“To the faithful within monotheistic religious traditions, conversion was seen positively as testimony to the truth of the religion as well as guarantor of salvation. Pejoratively, conversion often meant sacrificing personal or social identity, a rejection of local lifeways and customs, through the "turning to" another religious tradition that may have been associated with a dominant political, social, or religious power.”¹¹

On the one hand, conversion captures a process of *going back* to a community in its purest, most just form (if such a form ever existed), and of ensuing individual repentance and atonement. On the other hand, it captures a deliberate (if not always

⁹ I engage some of this literature in the next section of this chapter.

¹⁰ The process of conversion expresses one set of norms and practices for the religious believer and another for the secular researcher. For an overview of these different perspectives see Lewis R. Rambo, and Charles E. Farhadian, "Conversion," In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., edited by Lindsay Jones, 1969-1974. Vol. 3 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), *Gale Virtual Reference Library* (accessed September 15, 2016).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1969

voluntary) and radical transformation of one's lifeworld that is often viewed skeptically by both the members of the community that one has left behind, and of the community of "true" believers one has joined.

I use "conversion" as a modality of political belonging to describe what I see as the primary logic of intelligibility of political belonging in the Ottoman and French empires between 1830 and 1876. Experienced and understood through the lens of the converter (and not the potential convert), this logic is premised on an ardent belief that membership in a political community, whether it be a nation, an empire, or both, is the ultimate righteous state of communal existence. This premise is reminiscent of encounter as a modality of political belonging in that it requires the demarcation of the boundaries between communal "self" and its "other." In encounter, the relationship between self and other is temporary and self-serving. Unlike encounter which points to a moment of contact (however brief) during which the two sides see each other and recognize their differences, conversion points to an ongoing exchange between these two sides.

In this regard, conversion as a modality of political belonging more closely correlates with translation, which places self and other on a spectrum of difference, and envisions a moment transformation that will enable them to address one other, overcoming the trappings of linguistic and cultural difference. In both translation and conversion, the relationship between self and other is continuous and referential to a universal ideal of human understanding. What distinguishes conversion from translation is the location of the ideals that guide the moment of transformation. Unlike translation, which uneasily but respectfully alternates between the universal ideal of human understanding and the specifics of language and history, conversion is anchored in the

belief that the location of the self is the universal ideal. The “spectrum” of conversion, then, is a highly hierarchical one in which only the location of the self could be just and righteous.

This hierarchical spectrum dictates that individuals need to radically change their beliefs, everyday spaces and practices, and primary circles of communitarian interaction to become part of the religio-political community in its purest form. Since disagreement as to what constitutes the purest, most just form of these communities abound, the practices of repentance and atonement that the erring subject-citizen needs to undertake remain nebulous. Perhaps not surprisingly, conversion as a modality of political belonging also entails an inherent skepticism of the (potential) convert’s ability to see the necessity of such radical change and to follow the newly acquired beliefs, spaces, practice, and community in the way that she is supposed to. Although the process of conversion places the convert in a liminal state (at least temporarily), it affirms how steadfast the converter is in her beliefs about the righteousness of the ways of her own community. Conceived through the perspective of the converter, conversion as a modality of political belonging indicate a lack of tolerance for liminality and impropriety.

Regardless of the different poles between which people circulated and literally converted (East-West, Muslim-Christian, Orthodox-Catholic, etc.), conversion came to capture the modality of political belonging in two distinct ways. First, it has solidified the value of absolute obedience by crafting obedience to familial and religious authorities as a precondition of obedience to political authority. Second, and relatedly, it has enabled the development of a unique form of secular politico-juridical framework in which different ethno-confessional orders could coexist by channeling languages of religious

belief and practice into the linguistic field of politics. In the next section, I turn to the local, transnational, and global transformations from the late 1830s to 1870s, to contextualize the history of Franco-Ottoman interactions in this period and to highlight the ways in which literal practices of conversion overlapped with the more metaphorical dimensions of conversion as socio-political and cultural transformation.

Historical Background: Franco-Ottoman Practices of Conversion in the Ottoman Provinces

Ottoman historians see the period of between 1839 and 1876, otherwise known as *Tanzimat* (reordering and regulation), as the first systematized culmination of Istanbul's efforts to modernize the Ottoman state. Widespread military and administrative reform had started almost half a century earlier, during the reign of Selim III (1789-1808).¹² The imperial edict that started the *Tanzimat* period (*Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayûnu*) was declared in 1839, and it recognized the basic rights of sultan's every subject, such as equality before the law for all. A second edict fortifying the provisions of the 1839 edict was issued in 1856 (*Islahat Fermanı*). This period between the edict of 1839 and the promulgation of the first Ottoman constitution in 1876 was heavily influenced by European, and specifically by French political and intellectual developments.¹³

While France's influence on Ottoman governing elites' modernization efforts is often cast as easily recognizable, the frequent yet superficial references to this influence

¹² The first document that recognized the (limited) political authority of an entity other than the sultan was the Charter of Alliance (*Sened-i Ittifak*) of 1808. This charter created an advisory assembly composed of urban and rural notables.

¹³ For a brief, yet compelling discussion of the European influences during the period, see Zafer Toprak, "From Plurality to Unity: Codification and Jurisprudence in the Late Ottoman Empire," in *Ways to Modernity in Greece and Turkey: Encounters with Europe, 1850-1950*, edited by Anna Frangoudaki, and Çağlar Keyder (London: I.B. Tauris), 2007, 26-39. For a detailed political history of the period see Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 21-70.

often leads us to neglect the fluctuations of the French state in the mid-nineteenth century. Over the course of the short lived Second Republic (1848-1852), the Bonapartist revival of the Second Empire (1852-1870), and the early years of the Third Republic (1870-1876), the governing elites of France tried a number of different politico-institutional arrangements to mediate the political, social, economic, and cultural changes of this period.¹⁴ Each one of these arrangements had markedly different ideological referents, and they evoked very different visions of the state's relationship with its citizens, as well as with its colonies. More importantly, these visions did not always correspond to the visions that the citizens had regarding their own governance. For instance, during the Second Empire, as the state was trying to centralize its powers in metropolitan France, the localities were developing their own distinct political, social, and economic commitments. As Sudhir Hazareesingh aptly notes, "the abiding image of the Second Empire toward the end of its reign [was] that of a regime that pulled in many different directions. [...] A government that prided itself on its depoliticized vision of local communal life had witnessed the development of widespread political competition at the local level through universal suffrage."¹⁵ Given the multiplicity of ideological and political commitments of governing elites and of citizens, it is difficult to see how the Ottoman elites could have been influenced by a single, "French" way of governing.

It is perhaps more productive to think about France's influence on the Ottoman political reforms (and reformers) of the mid-nineteenth century as a reflection of changing global power dynamics. Although both countries struggled to centralize state

¹⁴ For a detailed social history of this period, see Christophe Charle, *Histoire sociale de la France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 60-137.

¹⁵ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 94.

power, and to maintain authority over populations that had not been fully unified under a hegemonic national identity, France was succeeding in conquering new territories and in maintaining its authority over them. The Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, was losing its existing territories either after wars with other European powers such as France, or after local independence movements that received support from European powers.

During this period, then, the Ottoman state was “engaged in a struggle for survival in a world where it no longer made the rules.”¹⁶ To survive, it needed to learn the new rules of imperial governance, which entailed sending increasing numbers of ambassadors, bureaucrats, and students to explore the most recent political, military and scientific developments in the West. France was a privileged destination during these exploratory travels, and French quickly became one of the languages of correspondence among Ottoman officials and elites.¹⁷ The activities of French-Catholic missionary congregations, especially the Lazaristes who established schools throughout the Ottoman Empire starting in the eighteenth century, had made French a widely accessible, non-native language of the Empire.

¹⁶ Selim Deringil, ““They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery”: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (April 1, 2003), 311.

¹⁷ France’s privileged position in these changing global power dynamics suggests that the relationship between the two countries in the mid-nineteenth century was already an unequal one that mapped onto the field of language. For example, the Ottoman Empire’s self-designation as an “empire” (tr. *imparatorluk*) was a late eighteenth/early nineteenth century occurrence that was reflective of the Empire’s efforts to create a shared vocabulary with France, and other European countries. Over the course of the nineteenth century, French became one of the official languages of the Empire, used frequently and sometimes exclusively by the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which was created in 1835). My research in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul suggests that the shift from Ottoman to French as the language of correspondence between officials of the ministry happened between 1856 and 1876. For a brief conceptual history of imperial rule in the Ottoman empire, see Einar Wigen, “Ottoman Concepts of Empire,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8, no. 1 (2013): 44–66, doi:10.3167/choc.2013.080103.

While conversions from Judaism or Christianity to Islam had always been commonplace, and in some cases entirely necessary for physical, social, or political survival in the Ottoman Empire's seven centuries long existence, the reverse was forbidden by law, and by imperial edicts.¹⁸ More critically, with the start of *Tanzimat* reforms in 1839, the Ottoman center had become invested in clearly identifying and regulating the different religious communities within the empire. On the one hand, these reforms aimed at guaranteeing the safety, integrity, and property of all subjects of the empire, regardless of their religion. On the other hand, such reforms required a much more tightly organized and centralized state apparatus that could enforce these guarantees. These reforms thus led to an increase in Ottoman state's efforts to identify and to stabilize the various ethno-confessional communities to which its subjects belonged. In a political order that was dependent upon the self-administration of religious "nations" (*millet*), such efforts meant that the rights of an Ottoman subject depended on the religious community to which they belonged more than ever.¹⁹ Thus, as the education provided by the missionaries became socially, economically, and culturally desirable for many Ottoman subjects (including those who were Muslim), their religious mission was becoming increasingly suspect.

¹⁸ For detailed histories of conversion practices in the Ottoman Empire, see Marc Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford University Press, 2010); Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 1 edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). I will discuss conversions to Islam later in this section.

¹⁹ See Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2000). Also see James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

It is in this context, in 1849, that three missionary nuns belonging to the order of St. Joseph de l'Apparition traveled from Rome to Jerusalem. They initially settled in the religiously diverse city without any problems. In a letter to L'Abbé Bourgade, the *chargé des missions* in the region, and chaplain of the St. Louis Chapel in Carthage, the most experienced of the three missionaries, Sœur Emilie Julien, wrote:

“You must know, my Father, that Jerusalem is under the captivity of Constantinople, and that we need to act with a particular kind of circumspection when it comes to all religious matters. [...] Yet I am pleased to see the effects of our arrival. The Turks come and see us; we go to their homes as well, and when we do so, we are greeted with celebrations. Everyone holds us in high esteem, and one day we will be able to do immense good.”²⁰

This short passage captures the difficulties as well as the ethos of doing Christian missionary work in the Ottoman Empire. Regardless of their different denominations,²¹ these missionaries could not work overtly for the conversion of Muslim subjects of the Empire. Instead, they focused on converting Orthodox Christian and Jewish subjects while creating educational institutions in which Muslim girls and boys could also enroll. Muslim bureaucrats and local notables started enrolling their children in these missionary schools so that they could learn French, English, or German and so that they could become versed in Western curricula. Since the political and cultural capital gained by

²⁰ 7 juillet 1849. Printed in Congrégation des Soeurs de Saint-Joseph de l'Apparition, *La Bienheureuse Emilie de Vialar: souvenirs et documents* (Oratorus Saint Léon, 1901).

²¹ While Catholic missionaries were the first ones to arrive in the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, Protestant congregations became an equally powerful presence starting in the 1800s, especially in the Eastern provinces of the Empire. This was largely due to increasing American Protestant missions to the area. See Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). Mormon missionaries also had an influential presence after their arrival in 1880s. See Seçil Karal Akgün, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Mormon Misyonerler* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2014).

mastery of French was important for these bureaucrats and notables, French Catholic missionary schools quickly gained a privileged status among many Ottoman Muslims.

Paradoxically, Catholic congregations in France were struggling to coexist alongside a state apparatus that was increasingly becoming hostile to religious institutions and practices during the second half of the nineteenth century. In the aftermath of 1848, the Orleans monarchy had made way to the Second Republic. The financial, social, and political support Catholic congregations gained from the French state during the restoration and the monarchy were diminished. Many aristocrats and notables, who were avid donors and ardent supporters of Catholic congregations, withdrew from the public eye. Women's congregations were specifically struck by this change in political regime. Charges were brought against nuns for corrupting young girls, and convincing them to flee their homes and join convents.²² By contrast, in the context of French colonial and imperial expansion, Catholicism was seen as an integral component of French identity, and its propagation in the newly acquired colonies as well as potential colonial outposts was framed as national duty.²³ The congregations that were deemed to support the cause of this newly forming *nation missionnaire* were awarded with direct financial support overseas. Hence, it was not just the "captivity to Constantinople" that made circumspection necessary for Catholic congregations and that turned education into a focal point of missionary work. These conditions were reinforced by missionary

²² Local and national newspaper clippings in AN, F/19/6246. In the three cases I came across, the charges were either dropped, or the nuns were acquitted. This anti-clerical moment mobilized the imagery of early 18th century suspicion and ridicule of women religious.

²³ See Clancy-Smith and Gouda, *Domesticating Empire*. Also see Elizabeth Foster, *Faith in Empire: Religion, Politics, and Colonial Rule in French Senegal, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

congregations' financial, logistical, and diplomatic reliance on their respective metropolises.²⁴

Not more than a year after Sœur Emilie Julien's letter, an overview of the state of the missions of l'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi (OPF), the primary French Catholic Missionary organization, was published in the organization's end of year booklet, *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* (APF). It suggested that "the need for education [...] has been awakened among all oriental nations. One had to place oneself at the head of this movement, or risk seeing the youth go astray; one had to instill the Gospel in the emerging generation for this generation to spontaneously carry its fruits when it comes of age. [...] Everywhere, their [Lazaristes'] success has surpassed their hopes, and it even gave education a general impetus."²⁵

Written by anonymous editors located in Lyon, this depiction highlights the connection between education and religious literacy. Even though it shows some apprehension of the difficulties involved in missionary work in Ottoman territories, it also suggests that the local population is more than hospitable to missionaries. While the tone of the statement is in contrast with the personal tone of Sœur Emilie Julien's letter, it shows a similar kind of confidence in the viability of education as an instrument of propagation for the Catholic faith and the French language, which had become inextricably entangled in the context of missionary work. Immediately after this hopeful opening, the authors of this overview move to a discussion of the education of women.

²⁴ American Protestant missionaries were somewhat of an exception to this, as their financial and logistical support was often coming from wealthy individual benefactors. The French-Catholic missionaries were very distraught by this, as they were unable to compete with the resources American missionaries offered. Specifically, American-Protestant missionary schools offered local children free classes and free supplies, which became a point of contention.

²⁵ APF, *Tome* 22, 9.

They suggest that this was a more arduous and risky task, and that not every congregation was able to succeed in convincing the local populations of the need to educate women in schools operated by missionaries. They write:

However, what appeared to be hopeless and fantastical was the education of people of sex because this kind of publicity repulsed the habits and the mores of the East. To give it an initial try, even within the French populations of the empire,²⁶ one had to brave the traditional repulsions, and there wasn't a complete success that could justify the hastiness of the enterprise. Providence reserved this success for the industrious zeal of Sœurs de la Charité; and today public schools for young people are seen not only as progress but also as a social need. Turkish women, who have observed this new tendency, secretly prefer in their hearts the fate of Christian women to their own fate, and, naturally, the law of Jesus Christ to the Law of Muhammad."²⁷

Here, the link between education, traditional gender roles embedded in Islamic jurisprudence, and conversion is somewhat obscure. What is more overt, and interesting, is the claim that the missionaries were able to know the “secret preferences” of Turkish women. Given the authors’ distance from everyday missionary practice, it is difficult to take this claim as a factual statement, or even an informed observation. This phrase evokes an imagery of the “Muslim Eastern woman” (while attaching an ethnic identity to it) who is forced to suppress her thoughts, preferences, and desires, and who is waiting to be freed from the yoke of Islamic law and traditions. Much has been written on this imagery, and the ways in which it masked, or facilitated French and European colonial expansion in the nineteenth century.²⁸ What makes this instance interesting is the way it enables the quick switch from conviction in the local population’s ability to see education

²⁶ Here, the reference seems to encompass Ottoman Catholics who developed close ties with France in the previous century. See previous chapter for a discussion of the legal status of Ottoman Catholics.

²⁷ APF, *Tome 22*, 10.

²⁸ See, for instance, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* and Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*.

as a universal need, to determination in its inability to move past traditional habits and mores *on its own*.

This belief in individuals' and communities' capacity to sense the righteous beliefs, laws, and practices coupled with simultaneous skepticism about their ability to move towards such beliefs, laws, and practices on their own is constitutive of Ottoman-Islamic notions of conversion as well. Converts were "ennobled" or "honored" by "the glory of Islam." What distinguishes the Ottoman-Islamic understanding of conversion is its connection to the juridical status of Ottoman subjects. Despite the relative administrative autonomy granted to non-Muslim religious communities, the Ottoman state's relationship with its non-Muslim subjects (*dhimmis*) remained distinctly marked by an Islamic-imperial vision of conquest.²⁹ In the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries when the Ottoman Empire was expanding, conversions of *dhimmis* to Islam was used as an instrument of imperial expansion. While "perceptions of conversion and the ways of narrating the act of entrance into Islam changed over time,"³⁰ the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of the Empire remained one of the key social, cultural, and political divisions of Ottoman state and society.³¹

Indeed, in the late Ottoman context, conversions to Islam continued to create legal, political, and sociocultural benefits for the converts in ways that conversions out of Islam did not.³² *Tanzimat* reforms attempted to remedy the disenfranchisement of non-

²⁹ See Braude, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*.

³⁰ Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 165.

³¹ As historian Madeline Zilfi remarks, this distinction was one of the main "resonant imaginaries" that "reflected a general, yet far-from-universal truth." Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, p.20

³² See, for instance, the case of "career converts" discussed in Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, Chap. 4. While I do not share Deringil's assessment that "Islam subsumes faith and citizenship,"

Muslim subjects but they held on to the distinctions that made the world intelligible to the Ottomans. While the letter of the law now dictated that any act of becoming Muslim should be voluntary, the privileged legal status that was gained from such acts makes it difficult to claim that such acts could ever be entirely autonomous and voluntary. Perhaps due to this imbalance of powers, much of the scholarship that focuses on conversions in the late Ottoman Empire highlights the ways in which individuals converted as a political strategy or the ways in which minority communities were forced to hide their “true” identities.

In debates about state-society relations and state power in the *Tanzimat* era, questions of sentiment quickly get subsumed into a discussion of realpolitik, global power relations, or imperial strategy.³³ This is not particularly informative if we seek to understand the “national-imperial” identities, allegiances, and sensibilities that were flourishing in the discursive landscape of the Ottoman Empire alongside the growing influence of, and competition with, France. In the decades leading up to the adoption of the Ottoman constitution, new, ostensibly “western” genres of texts, ranging from charters limiting the absolute authority of the Sultan to novels, were repeatedly refashioned for Ottoman sensibilities. While such generic adaptation was not new,³⁴ the

and that consequently, the Ottoman state has subsumed Islamic faith and citizenship, this chapter sheds light on various cases in which conversions from Christianity to Islam served strategic purposes during and after Tanzimat reforms. For a discussion of the various Christian and Western influences on Ottoman interpretations of Islamic principles see Larry Poston, *Islamic Da‘wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1992).

³³ Marc Baer’s *Honored by the Glory of Islam* is perhaps the only exception to this, but it focuses on a much earlier period of Ottoman history, and his argument doesn’t quite capture the intricacies of Tanzimat era religious politics and politics of piety.

³⁴ Hatice Aynur et. al., *Metnin Halleri: Osmanlı’da telif, tercüme, ve şerh* (İstanbul: Klasik, 2014).

speed with which such adaptations flourished was unparalleled.³⁵ This suggests that in this period, “being an Ottoman” was less a juridical-political status than a perpetually shifting state of becoming that was guided by a quest for political belonging.³⁶ In the next section, I turn to the literary-historical aspects of this moment to further illustrate the stakes of conversion as modality of political belonging.

Reading and Conversion: Constitutions, Novels, and Chateaubriand’s Atala

There are two genres of texts that are historically and conceptually linked to the emergence of the “imagined political community” that is the nation:³⁷ constitutions and novels.³⁸ While the former can be a productive site for understanding the institutional arrangements that regulate the relationship between state and society³⁹ as well as the juridical principles that animate the interaction between religion and politics, the latter is a richer site for understanding the affective dimensions of religious and political belonging.⁴⁰ Unlike the constitution, the novel is formally, functionally, and substantively

³⁵ Johann Strauss, “Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th centuries)?” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 6, no. 1 (2003): 39-76, doi: 10.1080/14752620306881.

³⁶ I am borrowing Hans-Lukas Kieser’s terminology. See Hans-Lukas Kieser, *A Quest for Belonging: Anatolia Beyond Empire and Nation (19th-21st centuries)* (İstanbul: The Isis Press, 2007).

³⁷ Here, I’m drawing on Benedict Anderson’s definition of “nation” as a political community that is imagined as inherently “limited and sovereign.” See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

³⁸ Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Dorothy J. Hale, ed., *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Franco Moretti, *The Novel. Vol. 1, History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Mary Helen McMurrin, *The Spread of Novels: Translation and Prose Fiction in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³⁹ See for example Pascal Firges et al., eds., *Well-Connected Domains: Toward and Entangled Ottoman History*, Leiden: Brill, 2014 and Kelly Grotke and Marcus Prutsch, eds., *Constitutionalism, Legitimacy, and Power: Nineteenth Century Experiences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴⁰ It is important to emphasize that I see these two genres not as mutually exclusive, but mutually reinforcing textual forms.

paradoxical. On the one hand, reading a novel is the quintessential form of individualistic and solitary consumption that is closely linked to capitalist modes of production. On the other hand, the stories that are told in and through each novel can offer “the individual a more conscious and selective pattern of social life to replace the more diffuse, and as it were involuntary, social cohesions.”⁴¹ Functionally and formally, the novel encourages a kind of introspective individuality that is compatible with mass consumption. Substantively, however, it offers an imaginative landscape that is simultaneously individual and communal.

In the three and a half decades that led to the adoption of the first Ottoman constitution, the Ottoman reading public grew substantially. Translated novels (often -but not exclusively- translated from French) quickly gained popularity among Ottoman readers from all ethnic and religious communities.⁴² Given the low rates of industrialization, the limited scope of what can be called an Ottoman bourgeoisie, and the state-centric spread of literacy, it is difficult to suggest that the novel’s popularity in the Ottoman Empire was one of the consequences of the Empire’s integration into global markets. For Jale Parla, the popularity of the genre was made possible by the paternalist reformism of *Tanzimat* reformers. This popularity was reflective of a conservative Islamic epistemology that sought to adapt to a world that came to be dominated by European ways of living and being without losing too much of its religious and cultural

⁴¹ Michael McKeon, *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 435. For a detailed exploration of the paradoxical ways in which public, private, and intimate spaces are constructed in novels, and the reflection of these constructions onto subjectivity, see *Ibid.*, parts 8 and 9, 435-586.

⁴² Strauss, “Who Read What,” 51-52.

“essence.”⁴³ The appeal of this new literary genre seems to transgress not just geographic borders but ethno-confessional ones as well. In fact, the earliest local example of the genre, *Akabi Hikâyesi*, was written in vernacular Turkish in Armenian script by an Ottoman-Armenian bureaucrat, Hovsep Vartanian.⁴⁴

Given the trans-ethnic and trans-religious popularity of the genre in the Ottoman Empire, it is difficult to think of the genre’s adoption as an illustration of the eclectic yet Islamic modernization efforts of Ottoman-Muslim elites. Here, I want to consider an alternative explanation for the growing popularity of the genre during the *Tanzimat* era by turning to the staging of the encounter between Akabi and Hagop, the two protagonists of *Akabi Hikâyesi*. The story is set in Istanbul in 1846-1847. Akabi, a young woman from an Armenian Apostolic family, and Hagop, a young man from an Armenian Catholic family, fall in love the first time they see each other. When Akabi gets up to greet Hagop, Chateaubriand’s *Atala* falls out of her fur coat. Hagop asks:

“- Efendim,⁴⁵ could you tell me what is this book you have with you?

-Atala.

-It is a book that I have enjoyed very much, and such a sad story.

-Indeed, I am still reading it but I am very happy that I have started it.

-Surely, you must have felt compassion for Chactas’ state in your heart?

Akabi’s cheeks blushed when she heard this question, and she could only muster “yes, it is beautifully written.” They understood their

⁴³ Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1990).

⁴⁴ See Andreas Tietze’s introduction in *Akabi Hikâyesi*, x.

⁴⁵ “My master.” It is used as a gender-neutral form of polite address, much like “monsieur” or “madame” in French. Hagop addresses Akabi here.

mutual fluency in French⁴⁶ and started a long conversation on French literature.”⁴⁷

French romantic author Chateaubriand’s *Atala* is a novella that tells the tragic love story of Chactas and Atala, two Native Americans who meet by chance. Chactas becomes prisoner of a rival tribe. He is saved by Atala, a Native American young woman whose “smile was heavenly.”⁴⁸ Although Chactas is under duress as a prisoner of war, he remarks on her beauty, and Atala responds by asking “Are you Christian?”⁴⁹ Chactas is taken aback, but his response is striking. “I told her that I never betrayed my hut.”⁵⁰ As they try to run away from Chactas’ tormentors, they get caught in a terrible thunderstorm in the middle of the woods. They are saved by a missionary priest who offers to marry them by converting Chactas into Christianity. However, Atala’s mother had told Atala that she had promised God that her daughter would remain a virgin if she were born healthy. Atala decides to poison herself to avoid betraying her mother and her religion, even though she is in love with Chactas. Right before she dies, she learns that such promises are not absolute in Christianity. Chactas, “maddened by heartache” promises Atala to “one day adopt the Christian faith.”⁵¹ The story is told in the form of a dialogue between René “the European”⁵² who is in an “unhappy exile, without even the slightest

⁴⁶ Since *Atala* wasn’t translated into Armenian until 1858 and into Ottoman Turkish until 1872, Akabi must be carrying a copy of the French original. Etienne Charrière carefully tracks the translations of novels and novellas like *Atala*. He writes that the first translation into Armenian appeared in the periodical *Masis* in 1858. See Etienne Charrière, “*We Must Ourselves Write About Ourselves:*” *The Trans-Communal Rise of the Novel in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Unpublished Dissertation (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2016).

⁴⁷ *Akabi Hikâyesi*, 58.

⁴⁸ *Atala*, 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 26

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 26

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 83.

reminder of the bones of his fathers,”⁵³ and Chactas, “son of Outalissi the Natchez,”⁵⁴ who the Great Spirit “wanted to civilize (I don’t know for what purpose).”⁵⁵

In this novella, the reader finds recurring motifs of sadness and suffering. The causes of such sadness and suffering alternate between the imperfect conversion of Atala, the rootlessness of René, and the tragic (self)-betrayal of Chactas, who “like all men, had bought virtue through misfortune.”⁵⁶ Chateaubriand’s reflection on the human condition, its fragility and tragedy regularly refers the reader back to the compassion of (Catholic) Christianity. The moral of the story is to emphasize not only human beings universal and primordial need for religious belief and religious community, but the superiority of its Catholic-Christian variant in assuaging the suffering of mankind.

As a genre, the novel is capable of narrating stories of individual suffering while reproducing a strong sense of religio-political community, allowed Ottoman authors to imagine a lifeworld that anchored them as members of a multilingual and multiethnic empire in transition. The popularity of the genre was connected to its ability to center around a communal self. In the next section, I offer a close reading of *Akabi Hikâyesi* to examine the ways in which Vartan Paşa’s version of the “communal self” interweaves religious, familial, and political authority.

Inconvertible Romance: Piety, Community, and The Disruptive Force of Love and Desire

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

Akabi Hikâyesi, like *Atala*, reimagines the dangers of straying from one's own family, religious community, and socioeconomic class⁵⁷ through the plot of tragic love. In the ideological order of *Tanzimat* era, it was not possible to imagine loving outside one's religious community *and* without obedience to one's own family. To be more precise, in the late Ottoman context, the household became a locus of religious, familial, and civil-political authority. While the imperial household had been such a locus since the early eighteenth century,⁵⁸ non-dynastic households were not considered to be in the same political-cultural realm as the imperial palace. As the Ottoman state became increasingly preoccupied with creating an overarching category of "Ottomanness" for its subjects, the location of religious, civil, and political authority became more dissipated. The impossibility of imagining cross-confessional, cross-ethnic, or cross-religious love emanated from this dissipation.

The tragic impossibility of cross-confessional, cross-ethnic, cross-religious romance starts with the transformation of the non-dynastic Ottoman household. Throughout the novel, priests from the Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Catholic churches move in and out of the households of the two patriarchs, Bagdasar and Viçen. For instance, when the Catholic priest, M. Fasıdyan, questions Viçen's hasty decision to disown his son Hagop for loving "an Armenian girl," their exchange revolves around Hagop's obedience to his father. Viçen repeatedly claims that his son is no longer under

⁵⁷ It should be noted that the term "class" is somewhat anachronistically used here. It is meant to capture the differences in financial and cultural capital, and not necessarily different positions in the capitalist mode of production. For a compelling discussion of the emergence of capitalist production in the Ottoman Empire, see Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London: Verso, 1987).

⁵⁸ This was discussed primarily in chapter 1, and then again briefly in chapter 2, with d'Ohsson's discussion of the interior spaces of the Ottoman court.

his sovereignty (tr. *hükümden çıkmış*) and M. Fasıdyan pressures him to forgive this one transgression. “We must call on him and advise him with kindness.”⁵⁹ While the priest insists on caution, kindness, and ruse, the father insists on punishment because he sees his son’s transgression as an act of absolute disobedience. If one were to change the names in the dialogue and block out the narrative that precedes it, this exchange can easily be read as a reflection on the two common ways of reinforcing political authority (cunning and coercion). Interestingly, however, the dialogue takes place in a ‘private’ living room, between an urban merchant and his priest, and it is about how to stop his son from marrying outside his faith and community.

Cross-confessional romance also highlights individual political predispositions that are not compatible with the hierarchical communal selves that are being imagined in the *Tanzimat* era. As Akabi and Hagop’s relationship develops, they realize that they both share a disdain of aristocracy and value education. Their love is as much an intellectual and political attraction as it is a romantic one.⁶⁰ Right before Hagop’s family discovers their son’s relationship with Akabi, Akabi herself declares that “only a tyrant would separate two people who love each other; sadly tyranny is never missing from the face of this earth.”⁶¹ Hagop’s response once again points to a tragedy: “Akabi, no man or human power can separate us from now on since the emotions of our souls that have brought together our hearts were given to us by the rightful one; they are not *matters of human*

⁵⁹ *Akabi Hikâyesi*, 89-90.

⁶⁰ See Murat Cankara, “Reading *Akabi*, (Re-)Writing History: On the Questions of Currency and Interpretation of Armeno-Turkish Fiction,” in *Cultural Encounters in the Turkish Speaking Communities of the Late Ottoman Empire*, edited by Evangelia Balta, 53-75 (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2014) for a more detailed discussion of the overtly political dimensions of Hagop and Akabi’s love.

⁶¹ *Akabi Hikâyesi*, 76

judgment or human will.”⁶² The way romantic love is formulated by the two lovers directly confronts and negates parental as well as ecclesiastic authority. It establishes a direct connection between individual souls and God. Romantic love transforms piety from a communal experience into a dyadic one, defying the communal logic of conversion.

When families and family priests learn about Akabi and Hagop’s relationship, they channel all their will to put an end to it. They confiscate letters Akabi sends Hagop while Hagop worries that Akabi might have fallen out of love with him. It is at this juncture that the intergenerational aspects of the story are introduced, adding first a layer of intrigue, then a layer of tragedy to the plot. The older, sickly neighbor who had become a confidante and a friend to Akabi reveals to her that she is her mother, Anna. Anna had fallen in love with Bogos, a Catholic Armenian, who was a friend of her father’s despite the differences in their age and sect. Bogos proposes to elope by sending a letter to Anna with a mutual friend. They meet in the middle of the night and head over to Monsieur de Longville’s house. Monsieur de Longville offers them housing and protection. Shortly thereafter, the Armenian patriarch orders the expulsion of all Catholic Armenians from Istanbul. Accused of being a French spy, Bogos flees to London two months before Akabi is born. Akabi’s uncle, Anna’s brother Bagdasar, the man who has raised Akabi, is complicit in Bogos’ exile and Anna’s ensuing misery and exclusion from the Apostolic community.⁶³

⁶² *Ibid.*, 77

⁶³ There are echoes of d’Ohsson’s life story in Bogos’ story. It seems that being forced to live in exile after being accused of being a French spy was not just a sad biographical detail. It was also a tragic trope that marked the dangers of straying too far away from one’s own community, or of becoming too close to a community of (European) foreigners.

Bagdasar's character and specifically his cruelty towards Anna and Akabi capture both the disruptive potential of romantic love and its tragic impossibility. Defying one's religious community in the name of romantic love does not simply break the bonds of one religious community for another's. It breaks all communal bonds, including familial ones between brother and sister, and father and daughter. As such, it strips away the bonds that intimately and socially connect individuals to one another. When Akabi defies Bagdasar's orders to write Hagop a letter denying her love for him, Bagdasar declares forcefully: "Then, I will drag your dead mother's body out of her grave and throw it to the dogs!"⁶⁴ Reminiscent of Creon in *Antigone*, Bagdasar is willing to take away his own sister's burial rites to protect the boundaries of his religious community and to show Akabi that she needs to obey authority.

Unlike *Antigone*, Akabi deceives Bagdasar into thinking she has obeyed him, but she pays the price of such deception with her own life. One of her final sentences captures the inconvertibility of romantic love: "Ah Hagop Agha, would our relatives ever want the happiness of anyone who does not share their opinions and interpretations?" Hagop dies twenty-one days after Akabi, and he dies of sorrow. What creates and preserves communities is a shared set of conventions and rules of interpretation. Romantic love causes individuals to become introspective, to value their own emotions over such rules and conventions. As such, it categorically can't be channeled into the logic of conversion, lovers cannot belong anywhere, and those who cannot belong cannot survive.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 142

Although its precursor *Atala* reads like a romanticized defense of Catholic Christianity as a religio-political project, *Akabi Hikâyesi*'s lessons about the Armenian Apostolic and the Armenian Catholic visions of religio-political life remains much more ambivalent. This ambivalence relates to the limits of thinking about political belonging through the lens of conversion, namely the way it focuses on an imagined self when the very construction of that self remains intimately connected to an imagined other.

Conclusion: Imperial Survival and the Limits of Conversion as Modality of Political Belonging

Akabi Hikâyesi is written and circulated at a time when the Ottoman state is trying to learn how to survive in a changing global order. This is also a time in which the structures of monarchical-imperial rule and the ideals that hold them in place no longer work. Hence, Ottoman elites and the growing reading public are in search of a new identity, one that can accommodate the dissipation of imperial power. It is here that the logic of conversion becomes apparent. As a modality of political belonging conversion values a communal sense of self, which it regards as the most exalted form of existence.

Along this valuation, there is also skepticism of the corrupting effects of the communal others that remain outside the scope of conversion. In *Akabi Hikâyesi*, these are presented as emerging Ottoman urban consumption and leisure habits that directly mirror those of Europeans. Vartan Paşa's depictions of affluent Armenian homes include thinly veiled critiques of the new habit of decorating these domestic spaces with paintings of scenes from European artistic and philosophic cannon. For him, this habit arose out of a need to demonstrate a socio-cultural superiority that is entirely unearned. The books are never read, the paintings are never examined closely. They act as foreign decorative

objects that serve to demonstrate a family's wealth and status through a superficial affinity with European culture.

Somewhat ironically expressed within the confines of a transnational genre that emerged in Britain and France,⁶⁵ these critiques suggest that whatever its ethno-religious shades may be, the new Ottoman subjectivity that was emerging during Tanzimat also entailed reimagining the “West” as simultaneously and paradoxically the location of “advanced science and knowledge”⁶⁶ and “frivolous consumption.” Behind this paradox is an acute awareness of changing global power dynamics. Conversion as a modality of political belonging does not capture the cultural dimensions of these dynamics. As the Ottoman Empire increasingly became embroiled in battles of survival, Ottomans of various ethno-religious backgrounds started contesting the value of European cultural imports precisely because it was materially impossible and ethically undesirable for the new Ottoman subjects to wholeheartedly adopt the frivolous consumption and leisure embodied by European cultures.

In the next and final chapter, I turn to the Ottoman women's periodical *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* to examine the ways in which its authors and editors, who were mostly although not exclusively Ottoman-Muslim women, sought to clarify the stakes of their demands for women's education and for the betterment of women's condition in the Empire by reclaiming and redefining a distinctly Islamic Ottoman identity in relation to their French and European counterparts. This reclamation and redefinition of identity is best captured, I argue, by a distinct understanding of the term “resistance” as the articles I

⁶⁵ Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever, *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶⁶ *Akabi Hikâyesi*, 7

look at reject both European visions of progress and prosperity and Ottoman-Islamic traditions regarding women's place in society.

CHAPTER 4. RESISTANCE: “RECREATING THE DOOR TO WOMEN’S FUTURE”

Introduction: Religion, Progress, and Women’s Happiness in *Ladies’ Own Gazette*

“Women, unlike men, are deprived from becoming employed, of enhancing their circles of exchange according to their talents, their intellect, and their scholarly education given the current state of civilization.”¹ This statement is found in an article on the education of girls and women, written by the editors of *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (Ladies’ Own Gazette, hereafter LOG), one of the most successful Ottoman women’s magazines of the late nineteenth century.² It highlights the constraints imposed on women by late nineteenth-century sociopolitical arrangements. On its surface, the statement reflects a liberal-feminist sensibility, as much as it suggests that education is a basic right that is unjustly denied to women. Yet the statement does not seem to suggest that education is a basic right because it allows individuals to develop an autonomous self. Rather, the appeal for women’s right to education is couched in an understanding of education and employment as primary instruments of socialization, of expanding one’s sites of social and political interaction.

¹ “Kadınlar istidat ve zekâları nisbetinde ve tahsîl-i ilm ve kemalleri derecesinde aynen erkekler gibi memuriyetlere nail olmaktan, tacir ise tevsi’-i dâire-i ticaret eylemekten–tertîb-i hâzır-ı medeniyetçe–mahrumdurlar.” in *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 23, (6 Teşrinisani 1311/1 Cemâîyehîr 1313 [November 18, 1895]): 1-2. All quotations from LOG are from the issues found in Millî Kütüphane Süreli Yayınlar Koleksiyonu (Turkish National Library Serials Collection), files 1956 SC 23/1966 SC 90/ 1967 SC 102. All translations from Ottoman Turkish are mine, unless otherwise noted.

² LOG’s first issue was first published August 31, 1895 and it remained in print until 1906.

Moreover, earlier in the same article, the editors call their readers to “disregard European nations and look at the Ottoman social organization which is based upon *our* national customs and religious principles.”³ This is one of the many articles in which editors and contributors of LOG explicitly contrast Francophone-European and Ottoman-Islamic ways of social organization to make claims about improving Muslim women’s condition in the Ottoman Empire. In this chapter, I identify and develop resistance as a modality of political belonging to capture the seemingly counterintuitive turn to religion found in LOG. I also suggest that this modality of political belonging follows the communal logic of conversion by enabling a subject position that is simultaneously part of the emerging national-imperial community and critical of it.

Specifically, I argue that read within the context of the late 19th century Ottoman political debates and transnational exchanges about women’s education, the gazette’s contributors and editors’ call for women’s progress within Islam conjures a simultaneously spiritual and political understanding of religion and religiosity. In dialogue with contemporary scholarship on women’s piety and agency, I show how Ottoman-Muslim women’s rediscovery and reevaluation of their own religion was articulated as a fundamental necessity for crafting a new kind of public space, one in which women’s collective well-being and happiness is valued as much as men’s. While this may seem like a merely strategic, or instrumental, use of religion, what distinguishes this turn to Islam is its simultaneous commitment to following religious precepts and to unearthing their true potential for women’s inclusion in the life of the political

³ *Ibid*, 2. Emphasis mine. The adjective “national” (tr. *milliye*) in the late Ottoman context refers primarily to religious communities. I discuss the evolution of the meaning of this concept in the previous chapters.

community. The writers and editors of LOG illustrate the subject position of a “non-pious believer,” a subject position that muddles the distinction between conceptions of freedom from oppression and religious obedience. The “non-pious believer” illustrates the persistent instabilities and profoundly personal and political imperatives that are captured by resistance as modality of political belonging.

The chapter proceeds as follows: first, I outline the interpretive lens of resistance as a modality of political belonging. Then, in dialogue with contemporary feminist theorists, I situate the chapter’s contributions for rethinking the so-called “Muslim woman” question. To elucidate LOG’s writers’ and editors’ claims about the relationship between religion, progress, and women’s happiness, I reconstruct the journal’s local historical context and what can be called the transnational context of the late nineteenth century Ottoman-Muslim women’s writing. In the fifth section, I turn to articles from the gazette and discuss the general reading of Islam proposed by the editors and contributors. Finally, I focus on a series of articles on the issue of women’s public schooling to argue that in LOG, the traditional demands of Ottoman society from Muslim women (namely, becoming a wife and a mother) are merged with demands for women’s public education. I end with a few concluding remarks on how these discussions speak to larger questions about political belonging in the increasingly nationalizing and homogenizing world of late nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire.

Resistance as Modality of Political Belonging: Politics of Difference and Poetics of Critique

As a political-philosophical term, resistance is most commonly associated with disobedience and rejection of norms, values, or practices that are deemed to be unjust or unfree. It is associated with a simultaneously negative (critical) and positive (generative)

political agency. The agency embodied by the resisting subject is negative in its rejection of existing power structures, political institutions, juridical principles and cultural values. Such agency is positive, or generative of new worlds, through the utopian vision(s) of a society without power inequalities that often coexist alongside it. Even though such visions are rarely universal,⁴ the understanding of politics embedded within them is a politics of liberation and justice.

This definition of resistance is not one that can allow us to grasp the complexities of the claims for women's happiness that are found in LOG.⁵ Understanding resistance as a modality of political belonging requires capturing the politics of difference that are constitutive for national-imperial communities' sense of identity. Like encounter and conversion, resistance relies on a strict demarcation between self and other. Just like conversion, it considers the relationship between the two to be ongoing, and it allows members of a political community to consider their own community as politically and morally superior. Furthermore, resistance as a modality of political belonging also dictates that the members of a political community strive for further inclusion, justice, and happiness for all its members. While conversion allows us to see how a strictly and exclusively hierarchical relationship between self and other maps onto the political

⁴ In a recent edited volume, Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay seek to reclaim the critically generative potential of resistance without reproducing its dangerously utopian and universalizing corollary, resilience, by emphasizing the various embodied vulnerabilities of leftist movements around the world. See Judith Butler et. al., eds., *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁵ As I'll discuss below, the centrality of "freedom from oppression" to such definitions of resistance make it categorically impossible to recognize practices of piety and religious obedience as agentic. For two recent discussions of the problem of piety in feminist theoretical accounts of agency see Sirma Bilge, "Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance: An Intersectional Approach to the Agency of Veiled Muslim Women," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no.1 (2010): 9-28, doi: 10.1080/07256860903477662 and Jakeet Singh, "Religious Agency and the Limits of Intersectionality," *Hypatia* 30, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 657-674.

community itself, resistance allows us to see how members of the political community seek to challenge the hierarchical and exclusionary practices of their own community. As a modality of political belonging, then, resistance captures the coexistence of strong identity attachments with a homogenous (or at least homogenizing) political community and a political-ethical sense of critique as community members' duty. In the next section, I unpack the political implications of such coexistence.

Rethinking “The (Turkish/Muslim) Woman Question” in the Late 19th Century from a Transnational-Historical Perspective

According to Saba Mahmood, “freedom is normative to feminism: critical scrutiny is applied to those who want to limit women’s freedom rather than those who want to extend it.”⁶ This state of affairs seems commonsensical, yet the normative primacy accorded to freedom (however it may be defined) within feminist theory today limits feminist scholarship’s ability to fully acknowledge the breadth of women’s experiences in different cultural and historical contexts. It also hinders feminist theory’s capacity to respond to the challenges of such an acknowledgement of difference. For instance, Chandra Mohanty emphasizes the need to create “genealogies that not only specify and illuminate historical and cultural differences but also envision and enact common political and intellectual projects across these differences”⁷ to craft a truly multicultural feminism. In this context, these common political and intellectual projects are based upon “common interests”⁸ that converge on the need to resist conditions of

⁶ Saba Mahmood “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 207.

⁷ Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, 125.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

unfreedom and oppression in the individual and social, economic, cultural realms across local, national and global boundaries.

Scholars like Saba Mahmood and Phyllis Mack seek to show the extent of this normative primacy accorded to freedom in feminist theory and to challenge the affinity between meaningful action and free action. In order to expand the feminist definitions of agency, they turn to the experiences of devout, religious women.⁹ Accordingly, they define the enactments of piety and religious obedience as a normatively distinct and novel site of women's capacity for meaningful action. While doing so, however, they either neglect or overlook the distinctly social and political aspects of these sites, by focusing on the ways in which piety entails an inward turn to one's own self-crafting as an obedient, religious subject. But such a focus is not particularly helpful in understanding LOG's contributors' and editors' claims for women's progress: these women take on questions that are inseparably political and religious, public and private. They argue that being a good Muslim woman in the private sphere requires being a good Muslim woman in the public sphere. As such, they resist the notion that a life confined to the private sphere is, in and of itself, sufficient for the new Ottoman-Muslim woman subject.

In what follows, I discuss this argument about "being a good Ottoman-Muslim woman subject" within a historical framework. I argue that LOG's editors and writers were convinced that Ottoman-Muslim women's progress and happiness could be found only within the confines of their own religion. Unlike the pious subjects Mahmood and

⁹ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) and Phyllis Mack, "Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29, no. 1 (2003): 149-177.

Mack are interested in, piety mattered to LOG's contributors because it can be both spiritual and political, individual and collective. More importantly, these writings suggest that it is their fellow Muslim women's literacy, education, companionable marriages, and ultimately, happiness that are the objects of religious contemplation. Within a global and local political context that was increasingly marked by the loss of Ottoman imperial power, these non-pious believers' approach to religion also engendered an imperial political orientation. Accordingly, Ottoman interpretations of Islam constituted a unifying and mobilizing factor for Muslim women within and beyond the contemporaneous geographic borders of the Empire.

LOG in its Local Context: Late-Ottoman Society (c.1876-1908)

The late nineteenth century was a significant period in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Most of the contemporary historical scholarship recognizes that the "longest century of the empire,"¹⁰ particularly its latter half, was a period of drastic social, political, and intellectual transformations.¹¹ For the purposes of this chapter, two specific developments appear to be particularly noteworthy: the first constitutional period and the development of a popular press during the period of absolutism that followed.

The "First Constitutional Period" refers to the short-lived parliamentary experience between the promulgation of the constitution in December 1876, and the

¹⁰ The qualification of the nineteenth century as the longest century of the Ottoman Empire belongs to historian İlber Ortaylı. See İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005).

¹¹ See for instance Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); Şükrü Hanoğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Elisabeth Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2005).

dissolution of the parliament in February 1878 by Sultan Abdulhamid II. As Erik Jan Zürcher remarks, “the parliament almost totally failed in its legislative functions, partly because the constitution allowed the sultan and his ministers to govern by decree, but it was an effective forum for criticism of the government’s conduct of affairs.”¹² The efficacy of the parliament as a forum of political criticism was not welcome by Abdulhamid II, who was more interested in controlling opposition to the sultanate and creating a centralized state. The constitution was never revoked; in fact, it remained technically in effect until 1921. However, it was suspended twice, first between 1878 and 1908, and then between 1918 and 1920.¹³ Although the return to a constitutional monarchy lingered as a political alternative, what followed the first constitutional period was the thirty-year reign of Abdulhamid II, named by those who were in opposition as the period of *istibdat*, or despotism¹⁴ It is in this atmosphere of increased centralization (accompanied by political censorship) on the one hand, and increasing opposition to the regime (accompanied by covert demands to reestablish the parliament) on the other, that LOG’s editors, writers, and readers came into political consciousness.

¹² Erik Jan Zürcher., *Turkey*, 76.

¹³ Within the confines of this dissertation, I will not address the causes and the effects of this second suspension, nor the issues raised by an emerging nation-state, that is, the Turkish Republic, inheriting an imperial constitution. For a detailed discussion of post-1908 developments see Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey*, 93-175

¹⁴ The main movement of opposition to Abdulhamid was called the “Young Turks.” It is the members of this movement that eventually had the constitutional monarchy restored in 1908. The most active members within the movement were members of the Committee of Union and Progress, which held considerable executive and legislative power between 1908-1918. The founding elites of the Republic were involved in the affairs of the CUP in some way or another. The movement’s ideology is widely recognized as the first systematic expression of Turkish nationalism. For further discussion of this movement, its organization and its ideology see M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a critical analysis of the Young Turk legacy, see Fatma Müge Göçek, “What is the meaning of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution? A Critical Historical Assessment in 2008,” *İstanbul Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* .38 (March 2008): 179-214

It is true that Abdulhamid II's reign limited what can be identified as the burgeoning Ottoman "public sphere"¹⁵ in many ways, especially with regards to public debates about governance in general, and about the Sultan's policies more specifically. However, the Hamidian era contributed to the development of this sphere in other ways, mainly through the expansion of popular press and of a reading public. Abdulhamid II's efforts to centralize the imperial administration resulted in the development of telegraph and railway networks throughout the Empire. They also resulted in an increase in the number of elementary and secondary schools (aimed at raising bureaucrats for the regime), as well as in the number of students who attended them.¹⁶ Technical developments in transportation systems allowed for printed materials to move through the empire more easily while educational reforms led to the quantitative growth and qualitative diversity of the reading public. Elizabeth Frierson aptly observes that the late nineteenth century witnessed an "increasing activity of non-elite authors, including hundreds of contributors who were known only by first names and sometimes educational accomplishments."¹⁷ Although the censorship intensified after 1888, the resulting decline in the number of new publications per year was not necessarily indicative of a similar

¹⁵ Here, I use the term "public sphere" relatively loosely, to designate the site of public discussion and debate. While my understanding of this term is informed by Habermas' analysis of the bourgeois public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, I refrain from adopting his framework in its entirety, mainly because I find the primacy he gives to "critical rationality" to be problematic for understanding the development of public sphere, especially in the late Ottoman context. See Jürgen Habermas., *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991): 51-56.

¹⁶ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, 77-78*, and Elizabeth Frierson "Women in late Ottoman Intellectual History," in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga (London and New York, NY: Routledge), 2010: 135-161.

¹⁷ Frierson, "Women in Late Ottoman Intellectual History," 142

decline in readership of the popular press.¹⁸ On the one hand, the periodicals of the period can be read as “vivid guides to meeting points between state and society, where Hamidian publishers, editors, writers, readers, and censors struggled over the founding debates of Islamic modernity.”¹⁹ On the other hand, the Ottoman reading public of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a multilingual one, often reading Ottoman-Turkish periodicals alongside publications in Greek, Bulgarian, Armenian or Arabic, as well as French, English, and German.²⁰ As such, the “founding debates of Islamic modernity” were occurring within a multilingual and transnational context.²¹

It is puzzling that the existing social and cultural histories of women’s writing often overlook this multilingual and transnational context. For example, Elizabeth Frierson finds that Ottoman women authors of the late nineteenth century have “‘a certain ambiguity’ to their arguments, forwarding claims of women’s abilities, but restricting

¹⁸ Zürcher writes: “Between 1876 and 1888, nine to ten new periodicals appeared in Istanbul each year. When strict censorship was introduced in 1888, this number dropped to one year on average. The censors now prohibited any discussion of political matters, especially anything related to liberalism, nationalism or constitutionalism. [...] The major newspapers of Istanbul had circulation figures between 12,000 and 15,000, reaching 30,000 at peak times. In reality, the readership was much greater. This was due to the spread in the 1870s of the phenomenon of the *kiraathane*, a coffee house that stocked all the major periodicals for its clients to peruse while smoking a water pipe or drinking coffee.” Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey*, 78.

¹⁹ Elizabeth B. Frierson, “Mirrors Out, Mirrors In: Domestication and Rejection of the Foreign in Late-Ottoman Women’s Magazines (1875-1908),” in Ruggles, F., *Women, Patronage, and Self-Representation in Islamic Societies*, ed. D. Fairchild Ruggles (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 179. For a short, but all-encompassing historical survey of women’s social and cultural history from the late eighteenth until the early twentieth century, see Suraiya Faroqhi, “Women in the Ottoman World: Mid-18th to Early 20th Century,” *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, general ed. Suad Joseph (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 153-163.

²⁰ The languages in which people read in the 19th and early 20th century Ottoman Empire varied based on the religious communities they belonged to. For a survey of the multilingual reading practices in the Ottoman Empire, see Johann Strauss, “Who read what in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th centuries),” in *Arabic Middle Eastern Literatures* 6, no.1 (2003): 39-76.

²¹ I discuss this strange cosmopolitanism of the late Ottoman public sphere in the previous chapter.

their deployment of skills.”²² Indeed, Frierson’s argument that the ideas of modernity and of Islam, with all their “ambiguities” and contradictions, were simply reflected through these urban, middle-class, Muslim women appears to be valid at first glance. In the first issue of LOG, the editors identify the gazette’s duty as two-fold: “serving the expansion of our ladies’ general knowledge and the development of their skills by holding a mirror to and by publishing the works of women journalists, authors and poets whose existence is the pride of our empire” and “publishing articles that are in accordance with the sacred orders of Islam and Ottoman national customs.”²³ This juxtaposition suggests that the gazette’s editors approached the development of women’s literary and intellectual capacities within existing socio-cultural structures, which impose restrictions on women’s ability to practice such capacities. For Frierson, the ambiguities that such juxtaposition entailed are indicative of an emerging Turkish-Muslim national imaginary.²⁴

Similarly, Nükhet Sirman reads the writings of one of LOG’s primary contributors, Fatma Aliye Hanım,²⁵ as a contribution to the emergent Turkish national imaginary in the late Ottoman period.²⁶ Indeed, LOG was published for, in the words of its editors, “those of *our* ladies who received an education either in school, or through their own efforts and patience, and who would like to expand their knowledge within the company of their family.”²⁷ While the second person possessive pronoun in the first

²² Elisabeth B. Frierson, “Women in late Ottoman Intellectual History,” 150.

²³ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 1 (August 31, 1895), 3.

²⁴ Elisabeth B. Frierson, “Women in late Ottoman Intellectual History,” 151

²⁵ Fatma Aliye Hanım’s writings are discussed in more detail in the third section.

²⁶ N. Sirman, “Constituting the Modern Family as the Social in the Transition from Empire to Nation-State,” in *Ways to Modernity in Greece and Turkey: Encounters with Europe, 1850-1950*, ed. Anna Frangoudaki and Çağlar Keyder (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 187.

²⁷ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 1 (August 31, 1895), 2. Emphasis mine.

sentence seems to refer to a shared understanding of Ottomanness (presumably including women of all religions and sects who are subjects of the Ottoman sultan), the recurrence of Islamic values and Ottoman traditions in the same statement of duty clearly demarcates the primary intended audience of the gazette as Muslim women of the empire.

There are certainly elements of “national attachment” in LOG’s editors and writers calls for improving women’s condition that are reflective of growing efforts to imagine what will become “the Turkish nation.” However, reading the gazette exclusively through the lens of a then-emerging “national imaginary” ignores not only the unique cosmopolitan context of the Hamidian period, but also the transnational connections that informed and shaped LOG’s editors’ and writers’ views on self-realization as Muslim women (and not as Turkish-Muslim women).²⁸ Doing so also leads to neglecting the deeply religious characteristics of political belonging in late Ottoman society. Before moving on to the text itself, I will briefly discuss these connections.

LOG in its Transnational Context: Understanding the “Current State of Civilization”

LOG’s pages contain frequent references to events happening in Europe, as well as to European and American socio-cultural conventions. Often, the pages of the gazette feature “latest fashion trends from Europe” alongside articles discussing the condition of women in the Ottoman Empire, the development of different genres in Ottoman literature, and short (and didactic) stories about family life. Occasionally, the editors

²⁸ It should be noted that LOG occasionally published articles from non-Muslim Ottoman women, such as “Mademoiselle Talya from Kadıköy.” These articles seem to focus almost exclusively on mothering practices and children’s education. Unlike the anonymous editorials, and articles that were written by Fatma Aliye Hanım, Emine Semiye, and other Muslim women authors, these articles contain almost no references to religious values or customary practices.

would translate articles from European, and specifically French, periodicals.²⁹ More importantly, comparisons between “our” conditions, mores, and practices and those of the “Europeans” appear frequently, even though the meanings of “us” (Ottoman-Muslim subjects of the empire) and “them” (Europeans) vary depending on the topic at hand.

The crux of these comparisons is framed as an issue of compatibility (or lack thereof) between European mores and customs and Islamic values. For instance, in an article on fashion and the use of corsets, author Emine Semiye writes: “If there is something to be done [about the preponderance of European fashion trends in the empire], that would be to accept the reasonable parts of fashion, and to follow the thriftiness of European women and teach our young girls how to sew, instead of following European women’s fashion sense and producing various kinds of clothes every year.”³⁰ The quote illustrates the simultaneous familiarity with and resistance to European culture as it is presented in the pages of LOG. While LOG’s writers and editors were aware of the increasing cultural influence of Europe, and specifically France, they were skeptical of many of its manifestations in the Ottoman territories such as increased consumption of luxury goods among middle-class families.

Beyond the familiar yet foreign specter of Europe, the editors and writers of LOG read and reflected on French debates on women’s public education. In an article called

²⁹ The earliest example of such a translation that I could find was of Julia Daudet’s “La Femme Française,” published in *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no.33, 11 Kanunuevvel 1311/6 Receb 1313 December 23, 1895), pp.4-5. The piece is introduced by LOG’s editors with the following passage: “One of Europe’s many periodicals has started publishing articles on the women of various nations of Europe. Since it is suited for our duty, we are publishing the article written by Madame Alphonse Daudet, the wife of famous French author Alphonse Daudet with minimal changes.” The only French version of the article I was able to find is published as “La Femme Française” in Madame Alphonse Daudet, *Journée des Femmes: Aliénas* (Paris : Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1898).

³⁰ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 59, (10 Zilkâde 1313/11 Nisan 1312 [May 7, 1896]): 1-2.

“Kızların Tâlim ve Terbiyesi Meselesi” (The Question of Girls’ Instruction and Education),³¹ the editors first summarize then refute the key arguments made by Vicomtesse d’Adhémar in “Nouvelle Education de la Femme dans les Classes Cultivés” (New Education of Woman Among the Cultivated Classes).³² According to d’Adhémar, the education of women (especially among the upper classes) should take place in the privacy of their homes, under the supervision of *institutrices*. These women instructors, in turn, are to be educated at the quasi-religious Institut des Dames de Préceptorat Chrétien (Women’s Institute of Christian Preceptorship). When they are not teaching girls and young women in their homes, d’Adhémar notes, they must live together as a tight-knit, women’s only community.³³ The editors of LOG argue that the strict gender segregation proposed by d’Adhémar could not be a general solution for the education of all girls and women. They write:

Just as many experts have tried to show, this time, it is a European author³⁴ who extensively comments on why it is ill advised to organize schools so that we provide girls with the exact same education and instruction as the boys. Even if we accept this claim as truth in and of itself, we still need to find a solution to it. If the proposed solution is to not send girls to schools and instruct them in the privacy of their own homes, with private tutors, this cannot be a general solution. Adopting it will cause a girl to remain ignorant. In that case, it would be better and preferable for her to go to a [co-educational] school, even if we were to consider all its potential troubles.³⁵

³¹ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 52, (13 Ramazan 1313/15 Şubat 1311 [February 27, 1896]): 1-2

³² Marie-Blanche-Angeline d’Adhémar, *Nouvelle Education de la Femme dans les Classes Cultivés* (Paris: Librairie Académique Didier, Perrin et Cie, 1896).

³³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

³⁴ The word in Ottoman Turkish is “muharrirre,” which specifically designates a female author.

³⁵ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 52, (13 Ramazan 1313/15 Şubat 1311 [February 27, 1896]): 2.

As the excerpt suggests, women's education in schools is of primary importance to the editors of LOG. More importantly, the "generality" (*umumî*) of d'Adhémar's proposal for France is countered by a claim for a solution that can benefit every segment of Ottoman society. While the authors of the article are not necessarily comfortable with the idea and practice of co-educational schools, they are aware of the economic inequalities found across Ottoman society. They do not accept d'Adhémar's assumption that only those women who belong to "elite classes" should receive education. They claim that relying on private instructors would not be a viable option because such a reliance would put most girls in Ottoman society at risk of not receiving any education. For LOG's editors, any form of schooling outside the home would be preferable to private instruction in the home. Not surprisingly, in earlier and later articles, LOG's editors and writers also discuss the question of reforming public schools for girls. In this sense, their arguments appear to borrow the vocabulary of late nineteenth century French and European feminists regarding women's writing and education, without making claims for gender equality.³⁶

Here Hubertine Auclert's republican feminism provides a useful point of comparison. In a speech she gave to the Socialist Workers' Congress of Marseille in 1876, Auclert, founder of the suffragist newspaper *La Citoyenne*, said: "Never have we

³⁶ For more detailed discussions of these movements, see Sylvia Paletschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: a European perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth Century France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000); Allison Finch, *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Susan Rubinow Gorsky, *Femininity to Feminism: Women and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992); Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

tried to submit a number of children of both sexes to the same method of education, to the same conditions of existence.”³⁷ Providing children of both sexes the same schooling environments, Auclert insists, would prove that there is no “natural” reason not to recognize women as full citizens of Third Republic France. As Joan Scott remarks, “Auclert’s public actions covered a wide range of possibilities, most of them tailored to meet republican standards of citizenship.”³⁸ Yet *La Citoyenne* also included advertisements such as this one: “*La Citoyenne* recommends the excellent boarding school of Mme Tessier, where young girls receive, in addition to a strong instruction, a charming family education.”³⁹ While Auclert and her republican newspaper were committed to political equality among men and women, the language of sexual difference did not disappear from their vocabulary; indeed, as Scott argues, the language of sexual difference facilitated their republican feminism.⁴⁰ Similarly, the language of Islamic religious belief enabled LOG’s editors and writers self-fashioning as new imperial subjects who were committed to the improvement of women’s condition in an increasingly authoritarian constitutional monarchy.

In the remaining two sections I turn to consider how the claims for women’s progress articulated in LOG were couched in appeals to Islam, a religion that was, by

³⁷ Hubertine Auclert, *Egalité Sociale et Politique de la Femme et de l’Homme: Discours Prononcé au Congrès Ouvrier Socialiste de Marseille* (Marseille: Imprimerie Commerciale A. Thomas et Cie, 1879), 3. Translation mine. Also quoted in Joan Scott, “The Rights of ‘the Social’: Hubertine Auclert and the Politics of the Third Republic,” in *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 100.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁹ *La Citoyenne*, no. 167, Paris, January 15, 1891. Translations from French and emphasis are mine.

⁴⁰ See Scott, “The Rights of ‘the Social,’” 117-124. Auclert’s and *La Citoyenne*’s approach to women’s condition outside of metropolitan France seems to accentuate her paradoxical commitment to equality and (sexual and racial) difference.

many if not most Europeans at the time, considered to be at odds with women's emancipation.⁴¹ I argue that this renders the subject position of LOG's editors, contributors, and readers, difficult to categorize in feminist-theoretical terms.

Religion without "Piety": The Agentic Potential of Religious Texts

In one of the most quoted articles published in LOG, Fatma Aliye Hanım warns against the dangers of becoming like the "bas-bleus", the European women intellectuals and women's rights activists whose male compatriots belittle them with the use of the term bluestocking.⁴² She then writes:

Now this is the kind of unfortunate example that we should learn from, and work on not making ourselves like them [the *bas-bleus*]. We should work on this until history cannot look for the bas-bleus in us, the bas-bleus that it can wrap around its finger, whether it be justified or not, whether it is well intentioned or not.

Yes! We should not become the successors of the bas-bleus! We should be the successors of our famous forefathers and foremothers who are the descendants of the earliest followers of Islam. [...]

God willing, our men will add *the respect for women's writing* to their recent *demands for women's education and instruction*. That way, they can show friends and foes how much the honest religion of Islam values the honor of women as much as the efforts to protect the majestic value of Islam, including those of its women authors, and

⁴¹ While denunciations of Islam as a religion that oppresses women is particularly pervasive even today, here, I am specifically referring to 19th century denunciations of Islam as a religion that silences and victimizes women. The roots of these denunciations can be found in missionary writings of mid-to-late nineteenth century, which I discuss in the previous chapter. In the late nineteenth century, French feminists like Hubertine Auclert had also started writing about the ways in which Islamic precepts caused women's oppression. These critiques often focused on the perceived prevalence of polygamy, particularly in Algeria. As Carolyn Eichner remarks, Auclert's critiques of Islam in Algeria were in tandem with her critiques of clericalism in metropolitan France. For a compelling discussion of Auclert's writings on the role of Islam in the oppression of women in the French colonies and the "Orient," see Carolyn Eichner, "La Citoyenne in the World: Hubertine Auclert and Feminist Imperialism," *French Historical Studies* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2009):63-84.

⁴² The title of this essay, published in the second issue of LOG is "Bablölerden İbret Alalım." Aliye uses the Ottoman-Turkish transliteration instead of a translation.

convince those who have similar intellectual inclinations of the possibility of women's progress *even* within Islam.⁴³

As the passage illustrates, Islam is understood as the only “proper framework” in which Ottoman-Muslim women's progress can come into being. This reading of Islam is not simply an expression of Fatma Aliye's authorial will, but also of LOG's understanding of its own mission. In the first half of the quoted passage, Fatma Aliye appeals to her women readers directly, and seeks to create a sense of community that seemingly excludes men. The “we” in “we shall not become the successors of the *bas-bleus*” is the “we” identified in the first issue of LOG, that is, literate Muslim women of the empire. There is the specter of history, likened to a powerful and cruel acquaintance who can “wrap them around its finger,” who can repeatedly talk about them without their knowledge or consent.⁴⁴ The threatening presence of this specter can only dissolve if LOG's readers take ownership of who they “really” are; if they remember and reclaim the legacy of their Muslim forefathers and foremothers.

In the second half of this passage, Fatma Aliye subtly shifts her address to include the Muslim men who may be reading LOG, and seeks to show that the positions staked out by the contributors and the editors of LOG are in accordance with the Islamic tradition that values women and women's writing. While the women need to recognize the value of their Islamic values and traditions for their own happiness, sociability, and posterity, the men need to recognize the value of women and the importance of women's writing in Islam in order to “show the rest of the world” the goodness, benevolence, and

⁴³ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no.2, pp. 2-3, 24 Ağustos 1311/15 Rebiülevvel 1313 (September 5, 1895). Emphases mine.

⁴⁴ The phrase in Turkish is “parmağına dolayacak.”

transparency of their shared religion. It is in men's purview to communicate beyond the boundaries of the politico-religious community. This passage illustrates a common way in which LOG's editors and contributors use gendered expectations to create a public space in which women have a rightful, albeit constrained, place.

A similar strategy is found in "Nisvan-ı Islam" (*The Women of Islam*), a book by Fatma Aliye, which was published in 1892, three years before she wrote the LOG article quoted above.⁴⁵ The book depicts three different encounters with three European women travelers who come to visit at her house, wanting to catch a glimpse of the Ottoman/Turkish way of life. A combination of fiction, autobiography, and didactic essays, the book draws heavily on Islamic texts to argue that as a religion, Islam grants women more rights than other monotheistic religion. Aliye argues that current issues in Ottoman society regarding the actualization of those rights are the results of ethnic and geographic customs. For instance, she ties polygamy to Arab customs that have their roots in the nomadic and rural ways of living.⁴⁶ The argument is accompanied by an

⁴⁵ Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı Islam* [The Women of Islam] (Istanbul: Tercüman-ı Hakikat Matbaası, 1894 [1892]). This book was later translated to French under the name "*Les Femmes Musulmannes*." I have used the transliterated version, Fatma Aliye, *Nisvân-ı Islam* [The Women of Islam], in *Fatma Aliye Hanım: Yaşamı-Sanatı-Yapıtları ve Nisvân-ı Islam (Fatma Aliye Hanım: Her Life-Her Art-Her Works and The Women of Islam)*, ed. M. Kızıltan (Istanbul: Mutlu Yayıncılık), 63-148.

⁴⁶ There is some defensiveness in Fatma Aliye's arguments in "The Women of Islam." Mostly the text appears to be a defense of "Ottoman" ways of living. However, there are two instances in which she contrasts the rules of Islam to current Ottoman customary practices, and identifies the latter as a hindrance for women's progress. The first is the issue of polygamy. She argues that it is not by order of God that Muslim men were allowed to be polygamous. Since Islam recognizes divorce as a legitimate practice, men who chose to marry multiple times without divorcing (as they do in Ottoman provinces) were not acting according to religion, but according to custom (*ibid.*, 88-94). The second is the issue of men and women not "socializing" together. She argues that Islam allows them to socialize when the women is dressed appropriately. This "appropriate" dress does not need to cover one's face, a simple head covering would do. However, she claims that this was subverted by subsequent "customs" and it is clear that she does not approve of this separation of men and women's living spaces (*ibid.*, 95-96).

emphasis on the need to reread Islamic texts, including but not limited to the Qur'an, as a source for the removal of the exclusions and oppressions imposed on women by customary practices and for women's progress more generally.

After the publication of the "Bas-Bleus" article, Fatma Aliye published several short biographies of famous Muslim women known for their artistry or for their writing. Considered in this light, her turn to Islam and Islamic intellectuals in the LOG passage quoted above is indicative of a religious belonging different from that of the pious subject. She does not suggest total obedience to the religious texts. She regards these as an intellectual heritage that needs to be "reread." She further argues that using this heritage is more appropriate for the amelioration of (Muslim) women's condition in Ottoman society than are European ideas of equality.

The turn to Islamic texts—primary sources like the Qur'an, but also secondary sources such as chronicles and biographies of Muslim men and women—and to Islamic values as the source for "women's progress" was also present in other articles published in LOG. One of the more interesting examples is an editorial response to a letter received from a young woman living in Tbilisi, who attended a Russian school for girls (a school for Muslim girls did not exist at the time). The letter is a dramatic thank you note to the editors, depicting how glad the writer was to find well-read Muslim women publishing such an honorable magazine. As a response, the editors of LOG crafted a kind of a fundraiser, urging their readers to contribute to building schools for Muslim girls in Baku and Tbilisi. The editors justify this call for donations by claiming that "nations which improve women's condition will be honored with prosperity and happiness."⁴⁷ What is striking

⁴⁷ "zira kadınları terakki eden akvâm cidden mazhar-ı feyz ü saadet olurlar." *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 64, 3.

here is that this call for improving women's condition is directed towards territories that are outside of the empire, towards a country where the majority of the population was non-Muslim. The women who were contributing to LOG believed that they were acting in accordance with Islamic values and that their demands for women's progress should be applicable to Muslim women who were not legally subjects of the Ottoman sultan.⁴⁸ In this sense, the community of women who will not be mistreated by the threatening specter of posterity is a distinctly imperial one. Fatma Aliye calls upon this community with the assumption that late nineteenth-century Ottoman interpretations of Islam are the foundations of a global Muslim community. Indeed, this is one of the instances in which there is a clear overlap between the pan-Islamist ideology of the Hamidian era⁴⁹ and the emancipatory agenda for women articulated by LOG's editors.

Judging by the relative success of the magazine, its mostly Ottoman-Muslim, urban, and middle class readers did not disagree with the main claim that women's literacy is prized in Islamic tradition, and that this claim was sufficient to make a compelling case for women's public education and instruction. In the context of LOG, religious texts and values became the source of "emancipation" from the geographic and ethnic customs that impaired the education, the literacy, and the public visibility of Muslim women living within and outside the borders of the empire. This "emancipation," however, meant conforming to a set of beliefs and practices that were embedded in

⁴⁸ This raises the question of how LOG's editors and contributors conceived the condition of the non-Muslim women of the empire. I have not encountered any explicit discussion of the non-Muslim Ottoman women in the Collection's articles. I believe that further archival research is necessary to make sense of this seeming lack.

⁴⁹ For an interesting analysis of this ideology see A. Khalid, "Pan-Islamism in practice: the rhetoric of Muslim unity and its uses," in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2005): 203-226.

relations of sexual hierarchy.⁵⁰ As such, the forms of self-creation and self-realization advanced (and adopted) by LOG's contributors and editors conform neither to the idea that one must think women's agency in terms of autonomy from relations of gendered social domination nor to the understanding that religion can only generate agentic subjects by way of practices of obedience.

As depicted in LOG, Ottoman-Muslim women's self-creation and self-realization can only be fully and properly accomplished if these women turn to Islamic sources that were not, at least until that moment, read by Ottoman women themselves. It indicates the necessity of cultivating their literary capacities required for a more critical reading of the relationship between Islamic principles and established social practices of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in relation to women's condition. The specificity of this notion of a "critical religiosity" becomes clearer if we consider the arguments regarding women's (girls') education in LOG.

Ottoman (Muslim) Girls' Education: Rethinking Public Education for Women

Prior to the nineteenth century, the Ottoman education system had a dual structure. As Şerif Mardin remarks, "[t]he *medrese*, the religious "seminary," trained Muslim Ottoman subjects as judges, jurisconsults, professors, and, for a while, keepers of state records. A rival institution, the Palace School, functioned on a different model; here, religious studies were less in evidence and the arts of war and government were taught more intensely."⁵¹ These two "educational streams," as Mardin calls them, were not

⁵⁰ For an interesting discussion of the different approaches to issues of sex and gender within Islamic law, see Haifaa Khalafallah, "Muslim Women: Public Authority, Scriptures and 'Islamic Law'," in *Beyond the Exotic: Women's Histories in Islamic Societies*, ed. Amira El Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 37-49.

⁵¹ Şerif Mardin, "The Just and The Unjust," *Daedalus* 120, no. 3 (Summer 1991):, 116.

aimed at the education of ordinary Ottoman men and women but rather at would-be statesmen. The education of ordinary Muslim men and women living in the empire was limited to elementary Qur'anic schools, both in the capital and the provinces. These schools were coeducational; there was no regulation that separated boys and girls. Their primary aim was to have children memorize the Qur'an. Public education reform became increasingly widespread in the Ottoman Empire with the start of the 19th century, and these reforms led to the slow but steady disappearance of coeducational schools over the course of the century.⁵²

Focused on creating an education system similar to those established in Europe (and, more specifically, in France), Ottoman education reformers also created secondary schools that were aimed at training doctors, engineers, diplomats, and soldiers. Women did not have access to these schools. While non-Muslim women of the Empire could attend schools run by their religious communities⁵³ or by missionaries, Muslim women did not have access to the first and limited access to the second.⁵⁴ Indeed, it was not until

⁵² Selçuk Akşin Somel, "Sources on the Education of Ottoman Women in the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive for the Period of Reforms in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Beyond the Exotic: Women's Histories in Islamic Societies*, ed. Amira El Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 298. For further information about the educational reforms in late Ottoman society see Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001), İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Eğitim ve Bilgi Üretim Sisteminin Oluşumu ve Dönüşümü* [The Emergence and Transformation of The System of Education and Knowledge Production in the Ottoman Empire] (Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu Yayinlari, 1993).

⁵³ Legally recognized religious communities (tr. *millet*) included the Greek-Orthodox, Armenian-Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish communities. I explain the millet system in more detail in the introduction of the dissertation, and discuss the changes it has gone through in the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries in the second and third chapters.

⁵⁴ Somel, "Sources on the Education of Ottoman Women," 297.

the latter half of the nineteenth century that public secondary and vocational schools for women were established.

As underscored in LOG's "Statement of Duty," one of the gazette's main preoccupations was women's education. Although they were also interested in the education that takes place within the household—i.e. education pertaining to running a household, raising children, etc.—the main question of girls' education and instruction ("*tâlim ve terbiye-i benât*") concerned public schooling. In five articles published consecutively,⁵⁵ the editors of LOG look at a variety of perspectives on girls' and women's education, as well as different institutional practices established in Europe and in the United States. At first glance, their discussion appears to have a universal character, inasmuch as they present the issue in very general terms: "The question of girls' education and instruction existed since the earliest stage of civilization and raised a lot of debates and judgments but, to be judicious and truthful, this question still remains to be settled."⁵⁶ If one looks at their first article on the issue, one might even think their goal is to provide a very broad, historical survey of how women's education was understood in different societies, ranging from ancient Greece to nineteenth-century Europe and the US. They claim that although educated women could have been found in every civilization, the notion that "women must *publicly* receive instruction in all matters of arts and sciences"⁵⁷ was not a commonly shared truth.

⁵⁵ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 20-24. The articles were published between November 7 and November 21, 1895. The first four articles appear on the cover page of the gazette.

⁵⁶ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 20 (November 7, 1895): 1.

⁵⁷ "[...] ancak bütün dünya itibariyle kadınların umumen tahsîl-i ulûm ve fûnûn etmesi teslim edilmemişti. Bugün ise bu fikir bütün akvâm-ı medeniyyenin teslim-kerdesidir." *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis mine.

Toward the end of the first article, LOG's editors claim that women's education is primarily about the happiness of the family. They frame the question in the context of Europe and the United States: "Is it good from the perspective of the happiness of the family that women receive such scholarly education and that they get involved in tasks that are reserved for men? This is the real issue."⁵⁸ The editors follow up this statement with an emphasis on the need to tailor curricula to preserve "the happiness of the family." Formulated as such, the concern with education does not seem related to the self-realization of individual women. Rather, it highlights that it is the balance between men and women's roles within the family that matters. This balance, based on a gendered division of labor (i.e. men work outside the home and women work inside it), is necessary to maintain a healthy and happy family life. If the concern here is the wellbeing of the family, then women receiving a scholarly education, and becoming learned in matters of science and literature, only matter if it benefits the family as a whole.

To better understand the complexity of formulating the issue in these terms, one needs to look at the entirety of the passage quoted in the introduction of this paper. The editors write:

According to the laws of our religion and the customs of our nation, it is possible for a poor girl to marry a young man from a genteel and noble family. It is also possible for a poor young man to marry a girl from an influential family. Thankfully, neither our religious clerics nor our national ethics deem such a union unsightly. Yet searching for balance and harmony in a marriage is not against the orders of our customs. [...] There are multiple ranks within society, and the issue of balance is important in marriages. Women, unlike men, are deprived from becoming employed, of enhancing their circles of exchange according to their talents, their intellect, and their scholarly education given the current state of civilization. Under such conditions, their

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

education and instruction must be aimed at the ranks that they will obtain when they become married.⁵⁹

Here it becomes clearer why the question of women's education is formulated within the framework of the family. Since "the current state of civilization," i.e. the laws of Islam and the customs of the Empire, does not permit women to be employed like men, to develop social and economic relations like men do, it is necessary to think of ways to educate women so that they do not have unhappy marriages. "If a man does not like his occupation, he may change it, but marriage is the door of life for a woman. Once she passes through it, her future will appear before her."⁶⁰ According to the editors of LOG, marriage is the inevitable occupation every Ottoman Muslim woman will have. In order to live fulfilling and happy lives in the face of such inevitability, women must receive an education that will allow them to be on equal intellectual footing with their husbands, to develop meaningful relationships with them (and with their children). This education should include practical training for household chores (such as sewing), but it should also emphasize the cultivation of women's scholarly capacities.⁶¹

Conceptualizing women's education as preparation for the duties of wives and mothers can be read as a symptom of oppressive social and cultural relationships. However, the case for women's public education as it is proposed by LOG presents a more complex picture. Since marriage is "inevitable" for Muslim women in late Ottoman

⁵⁹ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 23, (6 Teşrinisani 1311/1 Cemâiyeahir 1313 [November 18, 1895]): 2.

⁶⁰ *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 24, (November 21, 1895): 3.

⁶¹ For a brief discussion of the importance of the intellectual equality between husbands and wives, see *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no. 22, 1. It must be noted that this scholarly cultivation is relationally defined. Both men and women receive an education in accordance with their social status. While for men, this status is determined by their family heritage and their profession, for women this status is defined by the potential marriage (and thus, by the status of her potential husband) her family envisions for her. See *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, no.23, (6 Teşrinisani 1311/1 Cemâiyeahir 1313 [November 18, 1895]): 1.

society, women must find ways to be happy within their relationships with their spouses, their children, and their families.⁶² In order for them to find such ways, it is imperative that they receive a public education. Here, once again, LOG offers a narrative of women's agency that is neither fully emancipatory nor fully pious. On the one hand, women are thought of as wives and mothers and located within what can be called a strictly gendered social system. On the other hand, their identification as wives and mothers is what grants them the capacity to receive an education. The capacity to be "happy" and "fulfilled," as wives and mothers, is directly tied to increased levels of literacy.

LOG's editors' insistence on the importance of women's public instruction illustrates how the traditional demands of Ottoman society from Muslim women are merged with demands for women's education. LOG's editors are aware of the limitations that Ottoman social organization imposes on Ottoman Muslim women. Instead of thinking women's capacity for action, for meaning-making, and living fulfilling lives in opposition to these limitations, they think of these capacities within and through such limitations. Thus, their case for women's education, and, as a result, for women's progress is not "ambiguous" as Elizabeth Frierson suggests, or "proto-modern" as Deniz

⁶² In the late nineteenth century, locating a woman within a network of familial relations seems to be important in Western and non-Islamic contexts as well. For example, on August 10, 1893, Fatma Aliye Hanım received a short letter from Edith E. Clarke, the cataloguer of the Women's Library at World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The letter was inviting her to send a copy of her works to the Women's Library, and asking her to share "some slight details in regard to yourself, such as the date and place of birth, institutions or teachers by whom educated, degrees obtained, if any, official position, if any, full maiden name, if married, name and position of husband, if desired, and any other noteworthy or distinctive details of your life or work, from which we may make a choice for our catalogue." Subsequent documents show that Fatma Aliye Hanım chose to share her father's name and profession (civil servant), along with two of her short novels with the Women's Library. See Atatürk Kitaplığı, Fatma Aliye Hanım Evrakı, File 18/1 for Edith Clarke's letter, and File 18/3 for the permit that includes the biographical information on the author.

Kandiyoti claims. Rather, the contributors and editors of LOG imagined Ottoman Muslim women's progress as grounded in a notion of happiness that is simultaneously intimate and collective.

Conclusion

The current prevailing feminist interpretations of LOG and other women's magazines of the Hamidian period suggest that these publications are indicative of a transitory phase in Ottoman/Turkish feminism. Not quite Ottoman, not quite Western, not quite conservative, not quite liberal, they are seen as the embodiment of nationalist feminism *avant la lettre*. These interpretations also assume a linear historical development that links the sociocultural developments of the Hamidian era directly to the second constitutional period, and the second constitutional period to the Turkish Republic. They also neglect the transnational connections many of these women discussed regularly in the pages of LOG. Exploring the presentation of women's condition and women's capacities for meaningful action through LOG not only challenges the prevailing conceptions of feminist agency, but also a linear approach to the study of Ottoman women's movements.

The understanding of women's (specifically Ottoman-Muslim women's) capacity for meaningful action that is presented in LOG is, I contend, more difficult to grasp than that of pious women living in non-modern or non-Western societies, because religion, tradition, and nineteenth-century European feminisms are all woven into the ways in which they understand their own location as urban, middle class, and Muslim. Indeed, it is difficult to identify a single, relatively coherent set of values and beliefs that run through all the articles in LOG. Yet there are certain patterns, as in the case of upholding

Islam and Islamic texts against various regional and ethnic customs, or of defending public education as a necessity for women's progress and happiness without challenging the gendered division of labor in Ottoman society. More importantly, the writers and editors of the gazette conceptualized religious literacy as a primary impetus to women's progress in the late Ottoman context. They sought inclusion in their religious community by simultaneously reaffirming their attachments to, and critiquing the exclusionary practices of, it.

CONCLUSION

“Let us therefore leave the Turks and the Chinese in peace, and focus on the positive image for which this danger [of despotism] is the bugbear.”

Louis Althusser, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx*¹

Throughout this dissertation, I made the case that if we want to understand the complexities of political belonging prior to and during the global consolidation of the nation-state, we cannot “leave the Turks and the Chinese in peace,” just as we cannot leave the French and the British in peace. In national contexts, political belonging presents itself as an affective sensibility that is intertwined with attachments to a specific territory, language, religion (often alongside claims to secularity), and a set of cultural customs. However, cross-cultural and cross-imperial interactions and exchanges in the modern period suggest that such territorial, linguistic, cultural, and religious singularity has a long transnational history. This dissertation aims to sketch the political-theoretical implications of this history without crafting a (naïvely nostalgic) vision of a multicultural, even cosmopolitan, modern world in which claims of political membership and identity attachment circulated across borders without any hindrance. Similarly, while it offers historically contextualized close reading of primary texts, the purpose of this dissertation is not to build an alternative intellectual history of nations and nationalisms from the perspective of those who were, in one way or another, on their margins. Rather, it reconstructs transnational entanglements between France and the Ottoman Empire in the

¹ Louis Althusser, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx* (London: Verso), 2007, p.82.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a political-theoretical perspective to better understand how political belonging works as a sensibility and to rethink how the “East/West” distinction helped articulate the stakes of this sensibility for imperial subjects and subject-citizens.

The rich archive of interactions and exchanges between France and the Ottoman Empire is one of the most fruitful sites through which we can think about how political belonging works sometimes alongside, sometimes against the grain of its adjacent concepts, identity, citizenship, and political membership. There are several reasons for this unusual pairing of a primarily Christian empire with a primarily Islamic one. First, the history of diplomatic relations between the two countries date back to the sixteenth century. These relations enabled a lasting economic and cultural alliance; they even generated temporary political alliances against other Christian states and empires.² Second, despite ongoing diplomatic and trade relations throughout the nineteenth century, the two countries remained imperial rivals, explicitly warring over territories such as Algeria and Egypt in the nineteenth century.³ Finally, as the Ottoman Empire suffered territorial losses, France increasingly became a critical interlocutor for Ottoman reformists who sought to find military, administrative, and cultural remedies to alleviate these losses.⁴ Throughout this tumultuous and tangled history, the meanings attached to

² Casa, *Le Palais de France*. For a detailed discussion of trade relations between France and the Ottoman Empire, see Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

³ Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Darendeli İzzet Hasan Efendi. *Ziyânâme: Sadrazam Yusuf Ziya Paşa'nın Napolyon'a Karşı Mısır Seferi 1798-1802*. Edited by İlkin Erkutun (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2009).

⁴ M. Alper Yalçınkaya, *Learned Patriots: Debating Science, State, And Society in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Tuncay Zorlu,

being Ottoman or French shifted alongside the meanings attached to being “Oriental” or “Occidental,” “Eastern” or “Western.” Instead of treating these categories as fixed markers of identity and difference that help us map an imaginary geography, I have argued that we need to pay closer attention to the cross-cultural textual patterns that enabled these categories to express attachment to specific collectivities, and to generate visions of idealized local, imperial, transnational and global political communities.

Throughout this dissertation, I have referred to these patterns as “modalities of political belonging,” and suggested that we should think of them as linguistic and discursive fields in which the epistemic and ethical possibilities of belonging were articulated. These modalities help identify the historically distinct configurations of the relationship between self and other. Each of the four modalities highlight a relational logic between self and other as the central logic of political belonging. Encounter hinges on sight: to claim membership in a political community, one must be able to imagine a collective other and to recognize it as different from the collective self. Translation depends on understanding: to claim membership in a political community, one must be able to imagine conditions of universal understanding between collective self and other while holding on to particularities that distinguish the former from the latter. Conversion entails zeal and change: to be part of a political community, one needs to believe in its righteousness and to be willing to work to bring its others into the community. Finally, resistance conveys consolidation and critique: to be part of a political community, one needs to clearly demarcate it as different from its other(s), and hold on to its distinguishing features while critiquing their potential injustices from within.

Innovation and Empire in Turkey: Sultan Selim III and the Modernisation of the Ottoman Navy (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

All four modalities contain distinct ways of naming, affirming, or contesting the many moves of political power from one context to another. It is gender as a category of analysis that helps me identify and trace these moves of political power. Although their importance is less salient in translation, ideas and ideals of masculinity, femininity, romantic love and sexuality course through each of the four modalities in different ways. In some texts, these ideas and ideals configure the boundaries of public, private, and intimate spheres and delineate the location of subjects who can claim to belong in the community. In others, they guide our attention to the ways in which women's bodies, words, and experiences have become markers of difference. Ultimately, they intersect and interact with belonging as an affective sensibility to articulate visions of imperial political communities.

This dissertation proceeds chronologically and argues that encounter, translation, conversion, and resistance emerge sequentially. Each of these modalities is rooted in the historical and literary context of a distinct moment of interaction and exchange between the Ottoman Empire and France. However, they are not meant to be understood as empirical yardsticks that help us think about the periodization of the transition from imperial to national political communities. Rather, encounter, translation, conversion, and resistance are interpretive categories that allow us to think about the political-theoretical implications of their respective historical and literary contexts. Their sequence captures the narrowing discursive and linguistic fields of possibility for imagining political belonging as the nation-state increasingly becomes the predominant political form. This sequence also enables a juxtaposition of this process with the global creation and policing of modern boundaries between "East" and "West," "Orient" and "Occident," "Islam" and

“Christianity.” In a sense, then, the chronological and interpretive order of these modalities enable us to see the historical, linguistic, and conceptual parallels between nationalism and Orientalism. In what follows, I will offer two brief concluding considerations that aim to reflect on these parallels, and to outline a few potential contemporary implications of the interpretive framework developed in the dissertation.

Parallel Histories and Interpretive Impasses: Nationalism and Orientalism

Edward Said argues that “anyone employing Orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities, and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered to have acquired, or more simply be, reality.”⁵ Strangely, Orientalism as a critical interpretive framework mirrors this “radical realist” framework⁶ by creating a narrative of an imperializing and colonizing Christian West that catalogues, maps, and obsessively documents an imagined Islamicate East since the fourteenth century. Knowledge of Europe’s (and much later, America’s) “Other” has always been intertwined with a political impulse to conquer and rule, regardless of the forms such impulse may take. This is an historically informed yet theoretically ahistorical claim because it fixes Europe as “Christian West” and the Middle East as “Islamicate East” to demonstrate how colonial logic is entrenched in the former. It further designates the relationship between these two poles as categorically hierarchical (with the latter being the subordinate). To critique the colonizing and imperializing “imaginative geography” of Orientalism, Said reinforces its bifurcations as a radical reality.⁷

⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, p.72

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.72

⁷ This runs against the grain of the role of the critic and the purpose of criticism that Said himself outlines in his other work (see Said, *The Word, The Text, and The Critic*). For a nuanced

The existence of the Ottoman Empire demonstrates the interpretive difficulties embedded in this radically bifurcated landscape. It is part of the Islamicate East, but large portions of its territories were never colonized by European powers. More importantly, it has actively worked to maintain its imperial rule over territories that European powers sought to colonize. In this sense, it was the site of a rival imperial imaginary. Somehow, in Said's narrative, the Ottoman Empire and the Ottomans become designators that are interchangeable with "Turks," "Arabs," and "Muslims" even though the Empire was multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual.

Although the Ottoman Empire was a Turkic-Islamic empire, it always had non-Muslim and non-Turkic subjects who sought to make claims as subjects, and later, as subject-citizens. Its rapprochement with Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced a fascinating and rich archive of textual enactments of such claims-making. While some of these textual enactments were in Turkish written in Arabic script (such as Mehmed Efendi's *FS* or the issues of *LOG*), others were in French (such as d'Ohsson's *TGEO*). Others were written in vernacular Turkish in Armenian script (such as *Akabi Hikâyesi*). This multilingual and multiethnic landscape initially can make it difficult to think about textual enactments of political belonging since they each had different linguistic, cultural, and discursive referents. However, the coexistence of these differences carries with it the potential of rethinking the primacy of Orientalism as an interpretive framework.

discussion of the kinds of literary criticism and cross-border theorizing enabled by Said's work, see Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

Taking their bearings from the radically bifurcated landscape of Orientalism, a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship is engaging the relationship between Europe and the Ottoman Empire as “Europe” and its other, “the Turk.”⁸ Such a dichotomization certainly is grounded in the ways in which many early modern and modern texts deploy the figure of the “Turk” as violent, frightening, exotic, animalistic, or barbarian. However, the equivalence of “Turk” with “Ottoman” is a dangerous one to take for granted (even for strictly interpretive purposes) not only because it reinforces an ahistorical and static understanding of an East/West divide, but also because it creates a teleology of national identity. In this sense, the interpretive framework of Orientalism and Turkish-nationalist narratives of an idealized Ottoman past mirror one another.

The creation of a distinctly Turkish national identity was a long and arduous process of reimagining the Ottoman past. If I were to compose this sentence when I first started working on this dissertation in 2011, it would have emphasized the republican break with the Ottoman past, which exalted Ottoman history before 1700s, and disparaged its early modern and modern legacy as corrupt and “backward.” Indeed, one of the constitutive paradoxes of Turkish republican nationalism was its simultaneous belief in the importance of political and economic modernization and its rejection of a vague European/Western identity as imperialistic.⁹ Within this framework, the culprits for Ottoman decline were the Ottoman dynastic rulers who remained attached to Islamic

⁸ For two interesting examples, see Božidar Jezerenik, ed., *Imagining 'the Turk,'* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010; Jerry Toner, *Homer's Turk: How Classics Shaped Ideas of the East,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

⁹ For a brief yet compelling discussion of the constitutive paradoxes of republican-nationalist ideology see Nur Betül Çelik, “Kemalizm: Hegemonik bir Söylem,” in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasal Düşünce Cilt 2: Kemalizm,* eds. Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekinil (Istanbul: İletisim Yayınları, 2006), 75-91.

principles of governance that are incompatible with modernization, and the ethno-linguistic and religious minorities of the Ottoman Empire who were “stooges” of European imperialism. The non-Turkish and non-Muslim subjects of the Empire who claimed to belong were almost entirely erased in this version of Turkish national identity. Since 2011, the Ottoman past is again being reconfigured, now in a distinctly nationalist-Islamist way that unilaterally praises its Turkic-Islamic elements while continuing to erase its non-Turkish or non-Muslim members.¹⁰ Within this reconfiguration, skepticism towards Europe gets reinforced while Islamic attachments to the Ottoman dynasty receive high praise. Historical and philosophical transnational entanglements highlighted throughout the dissertation challenge these nationalist accounts of the Ottoman past as torn between two incompatible and rivaling influences. They suggest that “European” and “Islamic” ways of imagining communities were not always mutually exclusive.

Relatedly, I want to briefly turn to the centrality of France as an interlocutor for Ottomans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, what the texts examined in this dissertation had in common was a preoccupation with France and all things French. The Ottomans recognized “Frenkçe,” the language of Franks, as the quintessential European language. In turn, France became the universal referent for European civilization and culture – with its good and evil. The centrality of France and all things French ended up being a deceptively simple referent, as the content of it repeatedly

¹⁰ For an interesting appraisal of the legacies of exclusion and violence against non-Muslim members of Ottoman and Turkish societies see Ayşe Parla and Ceren Özgül, “Property, Dispossession, and Citizenship in Turkey; or, The History of the Gezi Uprising Starts in the Surp Hagop Armenian Cemetery,” *Public Culture* 28, no.3 (2016): 617-653. doi: 10.1215/08992363-3511574

changed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There is an insistence in the literature on Ottoman political thought that the centrality of France suggests that the Ottomans were trying to understand and emulate something that can loosely be called the “French Enlightenment.”¹¹ By contrast, when we trace the actual textual references of Ottoman authors of all denominations, we find ourselves in the world of Catholic nuns, royalist pamphleteers, romantic novelists, and counterrevolutionary aristocrats. As Ottoman diplomats, intellectuals and reformists sought to make sense of what it meant to be an Ottoman by turning to French texts and writers who explicitly dealt with questions of cultural difference and distinction. Ironically, romantic and counterrevolutionary visions of cultural difference seem to circulate more easily across borders than rationalist and republican visions of cosmopolitan coexistence.

Modalities of Political Belonging in the 21st Century

The implications of thinking about political belonging from a transnational perspective can be underscored by returning briefly to the discussion of the *New York Times* series on refugee sponsorship in Canada that I examined in the introduction. In the series, journalists Kantor and Einhorn tell us that “Abdullah and Eman found their marriage on new ground, the fundamental compact between them shifting,”¹² ostensibly because Eman was working outside the home, and Abdullah was struggling to find paid employment. The journalists’ representation appeals to the reader’s assumption that the fundamental compact between Abdullah and Eman concerns about a strict gendered

¹¹ Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*; Taner Timur, *Osmanlı Kimliği*, (Ankara: Imge Kitabevi, 2010).

¹² Kantor and Einhorn, “Wonder and Worry, as a Syrian Child Transforms,” *New York Times*, December 17, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/17/world/americas/syrian-refugees-canada.html>

division of labor in and outside the household; in so doing their depiction reinforces assumptions and prejudices regarding the meaning of being a devout Muslim, a Syrian refugee, a displaced Easterner in the West. If we recall that Christian and Islamic imperial politics both contributed to the demarcation of the space of the household as simultaneously a site of political authority and the kernel of a deeply personalized and politicized Islamic identity that is defined against a Christian-European one, such assumptions and prejudices start cracking. Through those cracks, one can see glimpses of an alternative narrative in which, already displaced from his physical home in Syria, Abdullah's sense of self became increasingly rooted in a division of labor with which he was familiar, one that sustained the household as the site of paternal (and patriarchal) authority. Coupled with traumas of war and displacement that led to the loss of this physical home, the shift in this familiar division of labor could engender a kind of humiliated masculinity.

One must be careful not to overemphasize the distinctly "Islamic" or "Eastern" character of such a humiliated masculinity. Knowing how past and present transnational entanglements between so-called East and West shaped notions of political belonging and identity would cause Kantor and Einhorn's readers to pause before drawing any overarching conclusions about the immutability of ideas such as the household as the kernel of Islamic identity. Throughout the article, Abdullah's strained relationship with Eman is presented as symptomatic of the former's feelings of powerlessness and humiliation but it remains unclear what is distinctly Islamic, Syrian, or Eastern about such feelings. For instance, Kantor and Einhorn regularly use tropes related to "adoption" to describe Abdullah and Eman's relationship to their sponsors. It is never mentioned that

such a relationship may be more infantilizing than hospitable, or that needing adoption as an adult who has his own children may be contributing to Abdullah's feelings of powerlessness. The readers are never invited to contemplate how they might feel if they were to find themselves forcibly displaced from their homes, in a country where they could not speak the language, and legally mandated to be under the care of complete strangers for a year.¹³

While Kantor and Einhorn focus on Abdullah's despair and powerlessness, they narrate tales of emancipation and human flourishing when it comes to his wife and daughters. Although one of the most striking photographs accompanying the text is of Eman putting a headscarf on her daughter while preparing her for Islamic school, we are told that Eman was "far more at home in Canada" than her husband was. Unlike in the "particularly conservative village in Syria" where they are from and where she was "one of the few women in her circle to be employed outside the home after having children,"¹⁴ in Canada Eman experienced the world outside her household. She enjoyed attending dance performances; she was helping lead a therapy group for Syrian women and was trying to figure out a way to get a nursing license. A critical reader would pause to question whether stereotypical narratives about Muslim men and wounded masculinity¹⁵

¹³ Although one could make the case that private sponsorship creates personal and affective bonds of trust more easily than government sponsorship, the literature on refugee resettlement suggests that such benefits might be overemphasized. See, for instance, Doreen Marie Indra, "The Spirit of the Gift and the Politics of Resettlement: The Canadian Private Sponsorship of South East Asians," in *The International Refugee Crisis: British and Canadian Responses*, edited by Vaughan Robinson, London: Macmillan Press, 1993, 229-254.

¹⁴ Kantor and Einhorn, "Wonder and Worry, as a Syrian Child Transforms," *New York Times*, December 17, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/17/world/americas/syrian-refugees-canada.html>

¹⁵ Roxanne Euben, "Humiliation and the Political Mobilization of Masculinity," *Political Theory* 43, no.4 (2015): 500-532, DOI: 10.1177/0090591715591284. As Euben carefully articulates, there are many ethical and political complexities in thinking about humiliation and masculinity in the context of twenty-first century relations between East and West. Although humiliation and

and Muslim women and cloistered femininity are necessary to convey the personally, politically, and culturally fraught experiences of refugees and private sponsors who help with their resettlement.

Perhaps more compellingly, a reader who is familiar with resistance as a modality of political belonging and the long history of transnational entanglements that have fostered it would not only find transnational connections in Kantor and Einhorn's narrative. She would also hear the trans-historical echoes of a non-pious believer's subjectivity in Eman's voice. Like LOG's writers who framed their concerns about women's happiness in relational terms, Eman suggests that "when we work, we are helping society around us, not ourselves alone."¹⁶ She appreciates knowing that new opportunities are there for her but she continues to struggle with the deeply personal and political dilemmas of being a refugee, a Syrian and Muslim woman in Canada. Although she describes her experience of being in Canada as one that has "opened new doors for [her] that [she] didn't even know existed,"¹⁷ her ongoing valuation of Islamic religious practices and cultural knowledge enables her to navigate through these doors as well as the everyday challenges of living and parenting in a foreign country. Unlike Kantor and Einhorn's narrative which draws the reader's focus on one women's "emancipation"

emasculatation are commonly paired in contemporary radical Islamist narratives of injustices and suffering imposed on Muslims by a very loose category of "Westerners," Euben suggests that such pairing is neither inherently Islamic, nor uniquely used by radical Islamist thinkers. In fact, "humiliation in the twenty-first century has become an affective Esperanto that registers in multiple contexts as an exhortation to action specifically designed to perform and recuperate a "dominant" masculine agency." (p.506) The repeated, cross-cultural association of humiliation with emasculation enables conservative theorists and activists around the world to solidify the boundaries between self and other, and to mobilize collective identities against others who are perceived as enemies.

¹⁶ Kantor and Einhorn, "Wonder and Worry," *NYTimes*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

from conditions of socio-cultural oppression, we could argue that Eman's sense of self, happiness, and well-being remains firmly grounded in her social "circles of exchange," of which religion is a critical component.

Thinking about political belonging through modalities enables an awareness of the local, national, transnational, and global contexts that shape people's identities and lived experiences. It also facilitates questioning the seemingly useful capaciousness of categories of geopolitical attachment such as "Eastern" and "Western." In a sense, this task is reminiscent of the impossible task of the translator who seeks to preserve difference and convey its meaning without transforming it into alterity.

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