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Os, N.A.N.M. van

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Author: Os, Nicolina Anna Norberta Maria van

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CHAPTER ONE

Founding (Women's) Organizations in the Ottoman Empire

Ottoman Muslim women belonged to the “new social groups” referred to by Watt,¹ which were brought into public life through the creation of charitable organizations in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Until the Law on Associations (*Cemiyetler Kanunu*) was issued in August 1909 associations could not be founded legally in the Ottoman Empire. The word *cemiyet* (association) only occurred in the context of criminal law, where it referred to “a group of people coming together for an illegal purpose.”²

Despite the lack of a legal framework, associations and organizations for various purposes had been established in the Ottoman Empire from the 1860s onwards. While some of them had to remain underground, others could pursue their activities publicly. This largely depended on their being tolerated by the Sultan and the authorities. Under the rule of Abdülhamid II (1876 - 1909) the relative freedom which had existed under his predecessor was increasingly curbed: the establishment of a literary or charitable organization became liable to the explicit permission of the government by 1890, while they came under strict surveillance by 1900.³ Özbek points out, however, that the increased centralization under Abdülhamid II did not prevent the creation of civic life and a public sphere in the Habermasian sense as other Ottoman historians argued. Rather, he argues, the ruling groups themselves developed “public and civic activities (...) as in the pursuit of organizing popular consent, renewing and reproducing hegemony, and legitimizing themselves.”⁴ Thus, part of the

¹ Watt, *Serving the Nation*, 202-203.

² Mehmet Ö. Alkan, “Sivil toplum kurumlarının hukuksal çerçevesi 1839 - 1945,” in: A.N. Yücekök, İ. Turan & Mehmet Ö. Alkan (derl.) *Tanzimat'tan Günümüze İstanbul'da STK'lar*, İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1998, 45-73, 51. In fact, the two women referred to in the introduction, Gülistan Ismet and Emine Semiye, had been active members of the women's auxiliary organization of such a(n illegal) political organization. For more contexts the word *cemiyet* was used during the *Tanzimat* period, see Mehmet Ö. Alkan, “Osmanlı'da cemiyetler çağı,” *Tarih ve Toplum*, XXXX, 238, 2003, 4-12, 6.

³ Alkan, “Sivil toplum kurumlarının hukuksal çerçevesi.”

⁴ Özbek, “Philanthropic Activity, Ottoman Patriotism, and the Hamidian Regime,” 63.

philanthropic and patriotic activities undertaken during this period was actively supported by Abdülhamid II and his palace entourage or even initiated by them in a conscious effort to create a unified social and political space. Through his patronage of such activities Abdülhamid II sought to portray himself as the caring monarch of all Ottomans, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.⁵ Particularly the educated sectors of both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities were allowed to develop philanthropic initiatives as long as they did not pose the risk of invoking separatism amongst his non-Muslim subjects or of an inclination towards Westernization of his Muslim subjects.⁶

In this chapter, the policies pursued by the Hamidian regime regarding the establishment of organizations and their effect on, particularly, female associational life are described. It researches the opportunities and limitations Ottoman (Muslim) women met during this regime. Furthermore, it shows what changes the Young Turk Revolution of July 1908 entailed with regard to Ottoman associational life in general and Ottoman female associational life in particular. As such it aims at providing the legal and political context in which the women's organizations active during the first decade after the Young Turk Revolution were operating.

Ottoman Women's Organizations before the Young Turk Revolution of 1908

The first female associational activities in the Ottoman Empire seem to have been religiously-based charitable activities by foreign and non-Muslim women. Thus, one of the earliest women's organizations in Istanbul seems to have been the "Constantinople Auxiliary Ladies' Association for Promoting the Christian Education of Jewish Females." This organization which was, between 1855 and 1859, presided over by Catherine Harriët Van Zuylen van Nijvelt, née Nixon, the wife of the Dutch envoy, was founded in 1855 following the establishment of a similar organization in Edinburgh by the followers of the "Free Church of Scotland," an orthodox protestant religious movement, in co-operation with the

⁵ Özbek, "Philanthropic Activity, Ottoman Patriotism, and the Hamidian Regime."

⁶ According to an article in the newspaper *İttihad ve Terakki*, foreigners and even non-Muslims were allowed to establish charitable organizations or e.g. organizations for educational purposes, but "Turks" were not in Selanik. "Osmanlı Kadınları 'Şefkat' Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi," *İttihad ve Terakki*, 4 Teşrinisani 1324 (17 November 1908), 2-3.

American missionaries belonging to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Its aim was, as the name indicated, “to rescue the Jewish Females from their present state of lamentable degradation and unbelief”⁷ by teaching them about the Old and New Testament in the schools founded by the missionaries of the Church of England and Scotland. Several women (and men) belonging to the circles of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions were involved in this association.⁸ Another (Christian-based) international women’s organization which established branches in the Ottoman Empire relatively early in the nineteenth century was the orthodox Catholic *Les Amies des Jeunes Filles* (The Friends of Young Girls).

Groups of women within the local Christian and Jewish communities which were centered around their churches or synagogues, had their own charitable committees which took care of the poor and needy in their own parish. The secularization which took place within the non-Muslim communities in the course of the nineteenth century led to the establishment of secular philanthropic organizations as well. Although these organizations were secular they were in many cases still directed towards people of the own ethno-religious community. One of the earliest of these organizations was the *Peran Philoptochos Adelphotis ton Kyrion* (Philanthropic Organization of Women from Pera), an organization founded by the wives of prominent Greek Ottoman bankers and traders, which was established in 1861 and continues its activities until today. This organization, which originally supported the poor by giving them goods and free health care, was, in 1876, the first organization to open a sewing and embroidery workshop for poor women and girls to provide them with a way to earn a decent living. This workshop, where not only private persons but also the army ordered goods, became in due time a major source of income for the organization.⁹ An other organization with the same name

⁷ *The Third Annual Report of the Constantinople Auxiliary Ladies’ Association for Promotion of the Christian Education of Jewish Females*, Edinburgh: Ballantyne & Company, 1858. National Archives, The Hague, (hereafter, NL-HaNA) Collection 105 V.J.P.A. van Zuylen van Nyevelt, 1655 - 1940, access number 2.21.180, file number 67, document 44, quotation p. 6.

⁸ *Appeal in Favour of Forming an Auxiliary Ladies’ Association in Constantinople for Promoting the Christian Education of Jewish Females in Connection with the Jewish Mission of the Free Church of Scotland*, Istanbul: M. De Castro, 1855; *The Third Annual Report of the Constantinople Auxiliary Ladies’ Association for Promotion of the Christian Education of Jewish Females*, Edinburgh: Ballantyne & Company, 1858. Both in NL-HaNA, Zuylen van Nyevelt, van, 2.21.180, file no. 67, docs 16 and 44, resp.

⁹ Sula Bozis, *İstanbul Rumlar*, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011, 81-88. The author uses the name *Peralı Yardımsever Bayanlar Derneği* in her book. This is the (modern)

Philoptochos Adelphotis ton Kyrion Thessalonikis (Thessalonian Philanthropic Organization of Women) was founded in Thessalonica in 1879.¹⁰

The first Armenian women's organizations were devoted to the promotion of female education. In 1864 Nazlı Vahan, mother of one of the first Armenian female authors, Srpuhi Dussap founded the *Aghkadakhnam Dignants Ingerutyun* (Charitable Women's Organization).¹¹ Other Armenian women founded, in 1879, two of the largest Ottoman women's organizations in the nineteenth century, which both had a secular character and aimed at educating young Armenian girls by opening schools: the *Tibrotsaser Dignants Ingerutyun* (Schoolloving Women's Organization) and the *Azkanever Hayuhyats Ingerutyun* (Patriotic Armenian Women's Organization). The former is still active in Paris, where it moved to in 1927. The latter was closed down in the 1890s by Abdülhamid II and re-established in 1908.¹² Another early Ottoman women's organization was a, further unknown, philanthropic society of Christian women which was founded before 1887.¹³ Also women of the foreign communities living in Istanbul had their own associations.

Turkish translation of its original Greek name. The organization is referred to as the "oldest charitable organization in the city of Pera" being more than 50 years old in an article in *Osmanischer Lloyd* of December 1916. It is not clear whether this organization is the same as the *Beyoğlu Rum Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i Nisvaniye* (Philanthropic Society of Greek Women in Beyoğlu) referred to in the Ottoman newspaper *Mürüvvet*. "Tee des 'Philoptochos' im Pera-Palast," *Osmanischer Lloyd*, 9. Dezember 1916, 3; "Der Philoptochos-Tee," *Osmanischer Lloyd*, 1. Februar 1917, 3; "İstanbul: Beyoğlu Rum Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i Nisvaniyesi..." *Mürüvvet*, 17 Mart 1304 (29 March 1888), 1; See also Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, 45. The Greek name of the organization can be found at <http://neww.huygens.knaw.nl/works/show/10547> (accessed 21 September 2012).

¹⁰ See <https://www.facebook.com/nicoleanm.vanos> for a photograph of members of this organization supposedly taken in 1907.

¹¹ Victoria Rowe, "Armenian Writers and Women's Rights Discourse in Turn-of-the-Century Constantinople," *Aspasia*, II, 2008, 44-69, 48.

¹² Ewald Stier, "Das Armenische Schulwesen" in: Paul Rohrbach (Schriftst.), *Armenien: Beiträge zur armenischen Landes- und Volkskunde*, Stuttgart: Engelhorn, 1919, 82-88, 84; Rowe, "Armenian Writers and Women's Rights Discourse in Turn-of-the-Century Constantinople;" Victoria Rowe, "Sorunun temel çözümü eğitimdedir: Sibil," in: Lerna Ekmekçioğlu & Melissa Bilal (derl.), *Bir Adalet Feryadı; Osmanlı'dan Türkiye'ye Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar, 1862 - 1933*, İstanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2006, 117-147, 121-128; 313-314; 373; 399. Zehra Toska mentions some other Armenian women's organizations which were active before 1908. Zehra Toska, "Beynelmilel Men'-i Tese'ül Cemiyeti: İslâm Şubesi ve Saadet Mektepleri," *Tarih ve Toplum*, XXXIX, 231, 2003, 25-31.

¹³ BOA, Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzat Evrakı (hereafter Y.MTV), 26/25, 22 Receb 1304 (16 April 1887) referred to in Özbek, "Philanthropic Activity, Ottoman Patriotism, and the Hamidian Regime."

Charity and philanthropy formed the major drives behind the establishment of the first women’s organizations in the Ottoman Empire. For Muslim women (and men) charity formed an inherent and institutionalized part of their religious duties through *zakat* and *sadaka*. *Zakat*, to give alms, is one of the five pillars of Islam: it is regarded as an obligation to God for every individual, male and female alike. While *zakat* is obligatory, *sadaka* can be regarded as voluntary charity. Voluntary charity can have many forms, often remains invisible and is ended when the giver dies. Religious endowments, *vakıfs*, however, constitute a form of voluntary charity which is highly visible and allows the patron to continue his or her charity even after his or her death. Religious endowments allowed Ottoman Muslim women to develop visible charitable activities without actually becoming visible themselves.¹⁴ Through *vakıfs* Ottoman Muslim women (and men) could, amongst other things,¹⁵ provide the needy with what were regarded according to Islam the basic necessities for existence: food, drinks and clothing. A religious endowment, however, could only be established by an individual based on his or her own properties and not by a group of individuals or association.¹⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the financial independence of the *vakıfs* had been curbed. The Treasury of the Religious Endowments (*Evkaf Hazinesi*) was absorbed into the Central Treasury (*Maliye Hazinesi*) of the Ottoman Empire in the context of the *Tanzimat* reforms which meant that the *vakıfs* had no longer control over their incomes: the central authorities allocated only what they considered necessary to sustain the endowment and kept the remainder.¹⁷ As a result, the role of the religious endowments as providers of charity was eradicated to a large extent.

From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, as Özbek thus argues, the financing of poor relief was gradually centralized and the Ottoman state, through its central or provincial authorities, started to provide forms of social security payments on a regular base to indigent subjects who in the eyes of the

¹⁴ Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies*. Thys-Şenocak, *Ottoman Women Builders*.

¹⁵ Through *vakıfs* a wide range of public activities and institutions could be financed such as schools (*medrese*), hospitals and maternity wards, or *hans*.

¹⁶ Randy Deguilhem, “Gender Blindness and Societal Influence in Late Ottoman Damascus: Women as the Creators and Managers of Endowments,” *Hawwa*, I, 3, 2003, 329-350. Suraiya Faroqhi pointed out, however, that although “corporate ownership” did not exist in Islamic law, Ottoman guilds were able to establish so-called *esnaf vakıfları*. “Silk cloth, halva and yoghurt: manufacturing and selling all kinds of goods in 18th century Istanbul” lecture by Suraiya Faroqhi, Leiden University, June 10, 2010.

¹⁷ Hüseyin Hatemi, “Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e vakıf,” in: *Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985, Vol. 6, 1658-1678.

authorities rightfully asked for financial support.¹⁸ The decreased role of *vakıfs* as providers of charity not only increased the role of the state in poor relief, however, it also brought along new forms of private charity. Combined with an ongoing secularization also of the Muslim community, the forced withdrawal of religious endowments from the field of charity and philanthropy opened the way for Muslims to other, more secular forms of charity and philanthropy through, for example, charitable and philanthropic organizations.

The first (proto-)associations of Ottoman Muslim women were founded in 1876. They can be characterized as patriotic and philanthropic and were founded within a very specific, belligerent context: the declaration of war by Serbia on 1 July 1876 and the subsequent war with Russia.¹⁹ According to Karal the declaration of war by Serbia in 1876 for the first time evoked a large scale reaction from the public in Istanbul and other cities. Volunteer units were established and some of the more prosperous Ottomans even financed complete battalions. Also the Christians in Istanbul actively participated in these activities.²⁰ Both the fundraising rallies in the women's periodical *Ayine* and the establishment of the first patriotic, philanthropic female associations by Ottoman Muslim and other women in Istanbul and Thessalonica in the first month after the declaration of war by Serbia in 1876 fit within this picture.

This first call upon women was probably not a coincidence but carefully orchestrated by the Ottoman authorities. The conscription law which had been introduced in 1848 had undergone a thorough revision in 1871. The introduction of the new conscription law had led to a larger number of soldiers being called into arms.²¹ The further modernization of the Ottoman army (and navy) had cost enormous sums of money and the finances of the Ottoman Empire were in dire straits. The bureaucratic reforms which resulted in a fast increase of the number of bureaucrats and the financial crisis which held the world in its grip as of 1874 added further to the financial difficulties of the Empire. A few months

¹⁸ As opposed to “undeserving” poor, vagrants or *serseriler*. Nadir Özbek, “‘Beggars’ and ‘Vagrants’ in State Policy and Public Discourse During the Late Ottoman Empire: 1876 - 1914,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, XXXV, 5, 2009, 783-801.

¹⁹ An earlier call upon Ottoman women to unite and collect money for the benefit of wounded soldiers with a reference to their European sisters seems to have remained rather unsuccessful probably since the Ottomans were at that moment not involved in any war. “Mecruhine iane,” *Hakayık ül-Vakayi*, 23 Cemaziyelahir 1287 (19 September 1870), 2 as quoted in Alkan, “Osmanlı’da cemiyetler çağı.”

²⁰ Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi: VIII. Cilt, Birinci Meşrutiyet ve İstibdat Devirleri 1876 - 1907*, Ankara: Türk Tarihi Kurumu Basımevi, 1983, 16-17.

²¹ See Chapter Nine.

after the insurrection in Bosnia and Herzegovina broke out in July 1875 and Ottoman soldiers were sent there to quash it, an anonymous author made a direct appeal to Ottoman (Muslim) women in the Thessalonian women’s periodical *Ayine*:

Our soldiers are struggling in Bosnia and Herzegovina sacrificing their lives to defend us and our homeland against the enemies. Although our soldiers thanks to the kindness of our Sultan have the disposal of more than sufficient drinks, food and clothing and do not need anything else, it occurred to us that we also should send a present in the name of the fatherland (*vatan*) from here to feel good and to show that we love our soldiers as our beloved ones, because we saw in the newspapers that in Istanbul some are collecting and donating “woollen jackets” (*hırka*), others “flannel undershirts” (*fanila*) and “short bodied coats” (*nimten*), that is, “heavy outershirts” (*mintan*) and we felt it would be appropriate if we would, within the limits of our possibilities, also do such a thing.²²

The wording chosen in this appeal seems to stress the rather secular character of the donations. The readers were asked to “send a present in the name of the fatherland” to soldiers who did not need anything. As such the donations were explicitly dissociated from the Islamic context of *zakat* and *sadaka*. At the same time, however, they were implicitly associated with this context through the reference to basics such as food, drinks and clothing which faithful Muslims were expected to donate to those in need of them.²³

In the three subsequent weeks lists with the names of the generous donors and the number of their “patriotic gifts” (*vatan hediyesi*)²⁴ consisting of socks and wadded jackets, were published.²⁵ The existence of a print culture clearly was instrumental in evoking and directing the reaction of the public when Serbia declared war on the Ottoman Empire, a few months later. It was one of the means through which the authorities tried to draw women into the war effort pointing at their civil duty. The content of the publications, however, had changed. While the first appeals in November carried a rather optimistic tone,

²² “Hanımlara hayıra davet,” *Ayine*, 3, 16 Teşrinisani 1291 (28 November 1875), 3.

²³ See Singer for more information on what was deemed basic by Islam. Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies*, 69-72.

²⁴ The expression means a gift *by* the fatherland, not *to* the fatherland, which would have been *vatana hediye*: women thus donated on behalf of the fatherland.

²⁵ “Hanımlar tarafından bu hafta yazdırılan hediye,” *Ayine*, 4, 23 Teşrinisani 1291 (5 December 1875), 3-4; “Selanik redif taburu için...,” *Ayine*, 5, 30 Teşrinisani 1291 (12 December 1875), 3-4; “Askerlerimize hediye-i vatane olarak verilmekte olan...,” *Ayine*, 6, 7 Kanunuevvel 1291 (19 December 1875), 4.

the effects of the war had become visible to the public and the articles now referred to the many casualties and wounded caused by the war. A rather long article in praise of both the soldiers who had fallen on the battle field fighting for faith and fatherland and the mothers of these martyrs (*şehit anneleri*) was published in *Ayine* two weeks after the declaration of war on 1 July 1876.²⁶

The influx of wounded soldiers had affected the people in Istanbul, too. A few days after Serbia had declared war the French daily *Stamboul* called upon women to join forces and collect money and goods for war victims with a reference to “the miracles of devotion which we have been able to admire in the other capitals of Europe.”²⁷ A few days later the same newspaper announced the formation of “a committee for help for the wounded under the presidency of the wife of His Highness Mithat Pasha [...] in Istanbul.”²⁸ It was not the only committee to be formed with that aim. Mrs. Millingen, who had also been involved in the Ladies’ Association of Mrs. Van Zuylen van Nijeveld, founded an international women’s committee,²⁹ Bulgarian women formed another one,³⁰ and a group of Armenian women also joined forces to “assist” the wounded.³¹ On 12 July, the day of the call of *Stamboul*, the Ottoman Turkish newspaper *Vakit* (Time) published an article praising Armenian *familyalar* (here used to refer to the female members of those families only) in Erenköy, because they had founded an organization to produce surgical materials and night- and underwear for the ill and wounded.³² A day later, the same newspaper called upon the Ottoman Muslim women not to fall behind “our Christian compatriots,” (*hristiyan vatandaşlarımız*) and to establish an organization with five or ten women. From amidst them a secretary should be chosen to keep the

²⁶ “Kadınlarda bir söz vardır ki...,” *Ayine*, 30, 4 Temmuz 1291, 4. The dates given on the periodical are 4 Temmuz 1291 and 24 Cemaziyelahir 1293. Based on the dates of the previous and later issues and knowing that the periodical was published on Sundays, it is clear that both dates are wrong and should read 4 Temmuz 1292 and 23 Cemaziyelahir 1293, respectively (16 July 1876). The following issues are all dated (Rumi) 1291 where they should read 1292.

²⁷ “Secours aux blessés; appel aux dames,” *Stamboul*, 12 Juillet 1876, 1.

²⁸ “Secours aux blessés,” *Stamboul*, 21 Juillet 1876, 1.

²⁹ “Il vient de se former ...,” *Stamboul*, 13 Juillet 1876, 1. The Mrs Millingen referred to here, was probably the wife of one of the professors at Robert College, a prestigious college for boys in Istanbul founded by Americans.

³⁰ “Société de Bienfaisance des Dames Bulgares de Constantinople,” *Stamboul*, 4 Septembre 1876, 2.

³¹ “Le Vakit publie ...,” *Stamboul*, 11 Juillet 1876, 1; “Secours aux blessés – Comité des dames Arméniennes,” *Stamboul*, 5 Septembre 1876, 1.

³² “Dünkü nüshamızda,” *Vakit*, 30 Haziran 1292 (12 July 1876), 3.

records. The money collected from donations by the women of the organization had to be handed to a central committee which was located at Paşakapı. The newspaper was willing to contribute, too: it offered to publish the names of the generous donors based on the records kept.³³ The next day the formation of a “committee formed amongst women” (*beynünnisa teşekkül eden komite*) was indeed announced.³⁴

On 13 August, an anonymous author writing in *Ayine* urged the women of Thessalonica to follow the example of the women of the various ethno-religious communities (*millet*) in Istanbul and to get organized to collect cloth for bandages (*sargılık bez*) and lint (*tiftik*) for the wounded soldiers.³⁵ In the adjacent column on the same page the establishment of a committee under the presidency of the wife of the governor of Thessalonica was announced.³⁶ She herself donated five bales of cloth for bandages and five *kıyye*³⁷ of lint, while the wives and daughters of other prominent local authorities also contributed goods, albeit in lower amounts. In the following four issues similar lists were published indicating that not only women belonging to the highest social circles of the local community, but also the wives and daughters of civil servants lower in rank contributed to the war effort.³⁸ Inspired by the activities developed by other women, the wife of Kabuli Pasha, one of the members of the first Ottoman “Senate” (*Meclis-i Ayan*), Zafer hanım, wrote and published a novel with the meaningful title *Aşk-ı Vatan* (Love of the Fatherland). The sales’ revenues from what appears to be the first Ottoman Turkish novel by a female author were intended to be spent on the soldiers wounded in the war.³⁹ Thus, the press was actively used to create a patriotic public which explicitly included women.

³³ “Hanımlar gayret,” *Vakit*, 1 Temmuz 1292 (13 July 1876), 1-2.

³⁴ “Muharebede mecruh olan...,” *Vakit*, 2 Temmuz 1292 (14 July 1876), 3.

³⁵ “Asakir-i Osmaniye mecruhini için...” *Ayine*, 33, 1 Ağustos 1291 (=1292!) (13 August 1876), 1. The issue of 23 July 1876 (Serbia declared war on 1 July) where a repeated call might have been published is not available.

³⁶ “(Pazartesi çıkarılan ilave)” *Ayine*, 33, 1 Ağustos 1291 (=1292!) (13 August 1876), 1.

³⁷ A measurement of weight, which varied according to time and place, but was approximately 1300 grams.

³⁸ “Asakir-i Osmaniye mecruhini için...” *Ayine*, 33, 1 Ağustos 1291 (=1292!) (13 August 1876), 1-2; “Asakir-i şahane için bu kere...” *Ayine*, 34, 8 Ağustos 1291 (=1292!) (20 August 1876), 4; “33 (sic!) numarolu nüshamızda münderic ianeden mabad” *Ayine*, 35, 15 Ağustos 1291 (=1292!) (27 August 1876), 4; “35 numarolu nüshamızda münderic ianeden mabad” *Ayine*, 36, 29 Ağustos 1291 (=1292!) (11 September 1876), 4.

³⁹ Zafer hanım, Kabuli Paşa Haremi, *Aşk-ı vatan*, İstanbul: Kavafyan Tab’ hanesi, 1294; Zafer hanım, *Aşk-ı vatan* [giriş, çevrimyazı, sadeleştirme: Zehra Toska], İstanbul: Oğlak Yayınları, 1994.

The influx of refugees from the areas lost to the Ottomans, too, led Ottoman women to engage in organized philanthropy. At Edirne a “Turkish lady” was a member of the executive committee in charge of the Camara Hospital and attended its meetings.⁴⁰ Other Ottoman women, notably the Egyptian princess Nazlı and the wives of Server and Hilmi Pashas,⁴¹ became members of the “Ladies’ Committee” affiliated with the “Turkish Compassionate Fund,” an organization founded by the British Baroness Burdett-Coutts in August 1877 to help the devastated refugees from the war areas and supervised by the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Layard, whose wife also actively participated in the committee.⁴² The wars of 1876 - 1877, thus, seem to have formed the catalyser for the development of not only the first secular charitable activities of Ottoman Muslim women, but also of their first associations.

The Greek-Ottoman war of 1897 lasted too short to initiate any women’s committees during that war. Immediately after the “30 days war,” while the negotiations for peace still continued, however, a large, countrywide campaign was started to raise funds for the war orphans and the wounded soldiers and their families. As Özbek noted the “empire-wide campaign attracted participation from a broad spectrum of Ottomans (...) [and] was thus of the kind to foster feelings of unity between the people and the state and of belonging to an imagined imperial community.”⁴³ This imperial community explicitly included women: a *Muhadderat-ı Osmaniye İane Komisyonu* (Donation Committee of Ottoman Ladies) was formed under the presidency of the daughter of the Grand Vezir.⁴⁴ For several weeks, lists with the names of generous donors, male and female, were published in *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*.⁴⁵ The authors of the periodical explicitly called upon their readers to

⁴⁰ H. Mainwaring Dunstan, *The Turkish Compassionate Fund: an Account of its Origin, Working, and Results*, London: Remington and Co, 1883, 159.

⁴¹ It is not clear whether they were Muslim or not.

⁴² Mainwaring Dunstan, *The Turkish Compassionate Fund*, 189. See also the entries in Lady Layard’s journal for the dates 27 and 28 November 1877 and 22 and 27 April 1878 (consulted through <http://fleetwood.baylor.edu/layard/search/search.php>, 1-2-2012)

⁴³ Özbek, “Philanthropic Activity, Ottoman Patriotism, and the Hamidian Regime, 1876 - 1909,” 71-72.

⁴⁴ Şadiye, “Şeref-i nisvan-ı islam ve muhadderat-ı osmaniye iane komisyonu,” *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, 124, 7 Ağustos 1313 (19 August 1897), 2-3.

⁴⁵ Including a Jewish women’s organization from Selanik named *Bienfaisance*. “Tebligat-ı resmiye,” *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, 125, 14 Ağustos 1313 (26 August 1897), 1-2. For more lists, see e.g. “Tebligat-ı resmiye,” *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, 120, 10 Temmuz 1313 (22 July 1897), 1-

contribute money or goods with an appeal to the innate quality of compassion which women supposedly possessed. The goods collected were exhibited and sold at a fair, which was located at a temporary pavilion, especially built for the purpose, at the imperial premises at Yıldız. On Thursdays, the fair, which in Ottoman Turkish officially was called “Exhibition of Donations” (*İane Sergisi*) opened its doors for women only.⁴⁶ This exhibition was the first of its kind in the Ottoman Empire, but would not be the last. In the first two decades of the twentieth century such exhibitions would become one of the many activities to raise funds to various aims. Women’s organizations in particular embraced this form of fund raising: at these “Compassion Fairs” (*Şefkat Pazarı*) they were able to expose the products made by their members and the donations they received and turn them into liquidities by selling them or by organizing a lottery at which the goods could be won as prizes.

Almost all of the associational activities of the Ottoman Muslim women in the period before 1908 seem to have served explicitly patriotic and philanthropic aims. The ‘proto-organizations’ were obviously prompted by the newspaper reports on the poor conditions of the soldiers on the battle field, their families and of the refugees fleeing into the larger towns. They were founded for one specific purpose, and probably were not very long-lived. Moreover, their presidents seem to have been, in general, the female relatives of high (local) bureaucrats: the wife of Midhat Pasha, the wife of the governor of Thessalonica, the daughter of the Grand Vezir.⁴⁷ Whether or not they were the actual initiators or driving force behind these fundraising rallies remains (yet) unclear, but it was certainly impossible to publish these references to them without the explicit approval of their husband and father. Ottoman Muslim women of such high standing were supposed to refrain from exposure to the public eye.⁴⁸ “Their” call, therefore, was the first conscious effort orchestrated by Ottoman authorities at the highest level to create a community of women through the voluntary

2; “Tebliğat-ı resmîye,” *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, 121, 17 Temmuz 1313 (29 July 1897), 1-2 and subsequent issues.

⁴⁶ Necmettin Alkan, “1897 Yunan Harbi’de şehit olanların yakınları ve gaziler için düzenlenen iâne sergisi,” *Güney Doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 13, 2008, 13-42.

⁴⁷ See also, e.g. “Saye-i mealivaye-i hasret-i Padişahı’da...,” *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (second series), 7, 17 Nisan 1319 (30 April 1903), 150. According to this short message a committee of women presided over by the wife of the *Kaymakam* (district governor) collected donations and other gifts from women for a newly opened hospital financed by the Sultan in a place called *صومه*.

⁴⁸ In a sense they remained indeed invisible: their names were not mentioned, but they were referred to as “the wives of” or “the daughter of.”

mobilization of female civilians as one of the civilian counterparts of the community of mobilized and conscripted male military: through the mediation of these women, the state hoped to be able to extract at least a part of the so badly needed resources from the female half of the population.⁴⁹

One organization founded by predominantly Ottoman Muslim women in February 1906 seems to have been different and a precursor of the changes about to occur. Its initiator was a woman and it had a different, more feminist purpose: the *May-Beyaz Kulübü* (Blue-White Club) was established by a group of “young ladies” (*küçük hanımlar*) in Thessalonica who had just graduated from a school whose name was not mentioned but which was most likely the *Feyziye Mektebi*. The initiator of the organization was a teacher from this school, Pakize Seni, the wife of the poet Abdülgani Seni. Its aim was to “let Ottoman women adequately share in the literary, scientific and social improvements.”⁵⁰ After the Young Turk revolution it changed its name in *Kırmızı-Beyaz Kulübü* (Red-White Club), red and white being the colors of the CUP. Members of the CUP and their wives were also the main initiators of many of the women’s organizations founded after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.⁵¹

Forming Women’s Organizations after 1908

The number of Muslim women’s (proto-)organizations remained limited until 1908. The revolution in July of that year created a spirit of freedom among the urban administrative and intellectual elite, male and female, and resulted in an

⁴⁹ The other “communities” of civilian counterparts may well have been the groups Karal referred to: prosperous Ottomans, Christians and inhabitants from Istanbul. All of them were or could be exempted from being drafted into the regular army. Appeals on those exempted from conscription – notably women, the inhabitants of Istanbul, the affluent who paid off their service and Christians – through fundraising rallies included them into the war effort of a state searching for a secular definition of communality.

⁵⁰ “Kırmızı-Beyaz Kulübü; üçüncü sene-i devriye,” *Kadın*, 18, 9 Şubat 1324 (22 February 1909), 8-10.

⁵¹ The alumnae of another girls’ school at Thessalonica, the girls’ section of the *Yadigar-i Terakki*, also founded a charitable women’s organization as early as March 1907, the *Heyet-i Hayriye-i Nisvayiye* (Women’s Charitable Committee). Nothing is known about this organization except that its president was the widow of a prominent tradesman from the town, Emine Telci Osman Efendi. “Générosité d’une dame musulmane,” *Revue du Monde Musulman*, I, 5, Mars 1907, 55-56. Later Emine would become involved in the *Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i Nisvaniye* (Women’s Charitable Organization) founded in September 1908 (see Chapter Three).

outburst of civil activities, which had been forbidden or suppressed under the old regime, including initiatives to publish newspapers and periodicals and to establish associations. As Hester Donaldson Jenkins, a history teacher at the American College for Girls at Istanbul, recalled a few years later: “[o]ne of the first results of the revolution’ (...) ‘was that the women organized societies to sew for the soldiers.’”⁵² She added:

‘The very first thing Ottoman women asked for after the Revolution were women’s clubs. They had only vague and misty ideas about what such clubs were, and discussed various plans. One plan was that the women should assemble and have men deliver lectures before them. Another was that women who were competent should translate good literature for children into Turkish. These sewing societies were a third idea.’⁵³

The wife of the medical doctor and microbiologist Rıfat Hüsametdin Pasha, added the wish for the establishment of more charitable organizations and, addressing one of the first large women’s meetings in Istanbul after the Young Turk Revolution in the second week of August 1908, said that:⁵⁴

‘[t]he light which has risen over our country is to enlighten everyone, without distinction of sex. We women also have to receive its beams, for we too have the right to demand our freedom. We wish to help at the renaissance of our race; we wish to bring charitable institutions into being, homes for the poor and their children.’⁵⁵

The development and existence of women’s charitable organizations were seen as a sign of, a condition for, and a means to civilization and progress. A(yn) S., for example, argued that,

[i]n the civilized countries, for example, pensionados, women of the prosperous and noble class, the religious classes, and reputable traders are those deeply engaged in philanthropic work. Thank God, we do not have a few, but even a lot of persons belonging to these classes.⁵⁶

⁵² “The Turkish Woman,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1910, 5.

⁵³ “The Turkish Woman,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1910, 5.

⁵⁴ See also Chapter Twelve.

⁵⁵ “The Last of the Harem,” *Evening Post*, 31 October 1908, 11.

⁵⁶ A(yn) S(in), “Cemiyet-i hayriyeler ve bunlarda en mühim unsur-u amil,” *İslam Dünyası*, 15, 18 Eylül 1329 (1 October 1913), 231-232, quotation 232. See also “Osmanlı Kadınları ‘Şefkat’ Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi” *İttihad ve Terakki*, 4 Teşrinisani 1324 (17 November 1908), 2-3;

He added, moreover, that “those who should have the largest role in founding and managing these philanthropic societies which are based on feelings of compassion and mercy are women!”⁵⁷

Halide Edib, complaining on the lack of charitable “Turkish” women’s organizations and praising female associational life in the United States, was convinced that women who were given something useful to do such as working for an organization, would leave their bad habits and become useful for society.⁵⁸ Fatimatüzzehra, writing in *Kadınlar Dünyası*, wrote

If we want to progress like [great peoples, like communities which we regard to be civilized] we too need organizations which will engage themselves with schools, we are in need of such organizations to alleviate the needs of the poor.⁵⁹

Women’s supposedly innate quality of compassion and thus their being fit to develop charitable activities, as mentioned above, was one of the arguments which was reiterated several times.⁶⁰ But, more importantly, women started to grab an understanding of the power they could yield by organizing themselves: they realized that once they were fulfilling their civil duties during these troublesome times, even if they did so in a counter-public sphere separated from the male public, they could and would make themselves indispensable in creating a new identity for the community or collectivity which was being formed.

Regulating Associational Life

A large number of genuinely private voluntary associations including women’s organizations were indeed established in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution as will be clear from the chapters to follow. The authorities did not

⁵⁷ A(yn) S(in), “Cemiyet-i hayriyeler ve bunlarda en mühim unsur-u amil,” *İslam Dünyası*, 15, 18 Eylül 1329 (1 October 1913), 231-232, quotation 232.

⁵⁸ Halide Edib, “Yirminci asırda kadınlar,” *Mekteb Müzesi*, I, 3, 1 Haziran 1329 (14 June 1913), 66-69.

⁵⁹ Fatimatüzzehra, “Maksadımız teali ise neden çalışmayalım,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 51, 24 Mayıs 1329 (6 June 1913), 2. See also *Kadınlar Dünyası*, “İştirak-i mesai,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 63, 5 Haziran 1329 (18 June 1913); Meliha Canan, “Kadın ve cemiyetler,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 68, 10 Haziran 1329 (23 June 1913), 3.

⁶⁰ See e.g. A(yn) S(in), “Cemiyet-i hayriyeler ve bunlarda en mühim unsur-u amil,” *İslam Dünyası*, 16, 2 Teşrinievvel 1329 (15 October 1913), 246-247.

always know what to do with such organizations and their demands. On 18 December 1908, for example, the Governor of Thessalonica, Daniş, sent a telegraph to the Ministry of Interior asking whether the *Osmanlı Kadınları Şefkat Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi*, an organization founded “by the wives of the members of the *İttihad ve Terakki*, of the staff and officers of the Third Army and of the notables of the city,” should be allowed to use a building owned by the Sultan for its activities. The Ministry of Interior answered that it was not opportune to execute a transaction related to the building the organization had asked for due to the absence of a regulation on associations.⁶¹

The outburst of civil activities in the towns and cities of the Empire obviously made the authorities feel uncomfortable. The lack of a proper legal framework regarding associations and, for example, the collection of gifts for charitable aims, moreover, caused much confusion and opened new windows for swindlers.⁶² The central authorities seem to have recognized that they were losing control and therefore felt the need to regain it by creating a legal framework through which these initiatives, such as the publishing of newspapers or the establishment of associations could be channeled. A committee studied the laws and regulations of other countries and accordingly prepared some bills.⁶³ In February 1909 the *Matbuat Nizamnamesi* (Regulation on Publications) was sent to the presidency of the Parliament. This attempt at curbing the freedom of press was heavily protested.⁶⁴ The promulgation of this regulation seems to have been delayed, but by July 1909 the *Matbuat Kanunu* (Law on Publications) and the *Matbaalar Kanunu* (Press Law) were issued.⁶⁵ In August 1909, furthermore, the “Law on Associations,” (*Cemiyetler Kanunu*) was issued,

⁶¹ BOA, Dahiliye Nezareti, Mektubi Kalemi (hereafter, DH.MKT), 2698/45, 7 Zilhicce 1326 (31 December 1908).

⁶² See, e.g. Yavuz Selim Karakışla, “‘Osmanlı Hilâl-i Ahmer Terakkiperver Cemiyet-i Nisvâniyesi’: dolandırıcıların ‘sahte’ Osmanlı kadın örgütü.” *Tarih ve Toplum* XXXVII, 220, 2002, 11-16; Nicole A. N. M. van Os, “Osmanlı Hilâl-i Ahmer ve Terakkiperver Cemiyet-i Nisvâniyesi ve Hilal-i Ahmer ve Fukuraperver Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i Nisvâniyesi: dolandırıcıların ‘sahte’ Osmanlı kadın örgütü-2,” *Tarih ve Toplum* XXXVIII, 226, 2002, 22-27.

⁶³ BOA, DH.MKT, 2796/73, 27 Rebiülevvel 1327 (18 April 1909).

⁶⁴ See “Sultanahmet’te Matbuat Nizamnamesi’ni protesto mitingi,” and İsmail Sabih, “Yeni Matbuat Nizamnamesi,” *Servet-i Fünûn*, 10 Şubat 1909, both reproduced in *II. Meşrutiyet’in ilk yılı: 23 Temmuz 1908 – 23 Temmuz 1909*, İstanbul: Aygaz ve Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2009, 250 and 254, respectively. For further information on regulations and laws related to publishing see also, Kabacalı, Alpay, “Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet döneminde sansür,” in: *Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985, III, 607-616.

⁶⁵ “Matbuat kanunu,” *Düstur*, II, 1, 11 Receb 1327 / 16 Temmuz 1325 (29 July 1909), 395-404; “Matbaalar kanunu,” *Düstur*, II, 1, 11 Receb 1327 / 16 Temmuz 1325 (29 July 1909), 404-406.

followed by a “Regulation (*talimat*) concerning the Collection of Gifts” in September of that year. The latter regulation was replaced with another “Regulation (*nizamname*) of Collection of Gifts” in December 1915.⁶⁶

Although the Law on Associations of August 1909 aimed at canalizing civil activities, it also made it possible for the first time to formally establish civil organizations. No longer was permission needed prior to the establishment, but immediately thereafter the authorities had to be informed through a written statement (*beyanname*) on the name of the organization, its purpose, the place of its board, and the names, qualifications and addresses of the members of its board. Two copies of the organization’s statutes (*nizamname*) had to be handed over to the authorities together with the statement which had to carry the official stamp of the organization.⁶⁷ The Law on Associations thus proved to be rather liberal. The Martial Law which the CUP called after the conservative counterrevolution of April 1909, however, offered the authorities ample room to curb the relative freedom granted to establish organizations.

While women’s organizations had existed prior to the 1909 Law on Associations, the issuing of the law and the subsequent need to document and register their establishment confronted the authorities with the formal existence of women’s organizations and raised questions as to the permissibility of women’s organizing. Thus, when in February 1910 the *Teali-i Vatan Osmanlı Hanımlar Cemiyeti*, which had been founded in November 1909, submitted its *beyanname*, the authorities in Thessalonica were not sure whether a women’s organization fell under the new Law on Associations. They sent a letter to the Ministry of Interior asking for information. The Ministry asked the Council of State for its opinion. Although the Council of State made clear that there were no provisions in the law which prohibited women from establishing organizations, its members obviously felt uncomfortable with the possible transgression of existing gender borders by these women. Therefore, it demanded an additional article to its *nizamname* to provide for “a commission of confidants to manage the external relations and activities of the

⁶⁶ “Cemiyetler kanunu,” *Düstur*, II, 1, 29 Receb 1327 / 3 Ağustos 1325 (16 August 1909), 604-608; “Cem-i ianat usulü hakkında talimat,” *Düstur*, II, 1, 21 Şaban 1327 / 25 Ağustos 1325 (7 September 1909), 728-731; “Cem-i ianat nizamnamesi,” *Düstur*, II, 8, 28 Muharrem 1334 / 23 Teşrinisani 1331 (6 December 1915), 190-197.

⁶⁷ “Cemiyetler kanunu,” *Düstur*, II, 1, 29 Receb 1327 / 3 Ağustos 1325 (16 August 1909), 604-608.

organization.”⁶⁸ The authorities in Thessalonica were informed about the decision and the organization duly added the required article in which it stated that the “Fifth Club of the Thessalonian Committee of Union and Progress” and in other places the local Committees of Union and Progress were to take up this duty.⁶⁹ Thus the organization was able to continue its activities as it proudly announced in its periodical, *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*.⁷⁰

The *Teali-i Vatan Osmanlı Hanımlar Cemiyeti* as indicated by its name was a patriotic organization and one of its aims was to assist in reestablishing the naval greatness of the Ottoman Empire and its conquering might in battle. Therefore it decided to spend fifty percent of its income on the acquisition of a warship to be called *Nevzat-ı Vatan* (Child of the Fatherland). Thirty-five percent was meant for the construction of maternity wards and for the opening of workshops and factories where impoverished girls could learn a job to provide for themselves but also to contribute to the economy of the fatherland. The remaining fifteen per cent was to be handed to the Red Crescent for assistance in disaster areas.⁷¹

The combination of patriotism, philanthropy and feminism was not unique to this organization. As will be shown in the chapters to follow, patriotism combined with feminism and charity/philanthropy were the driving forces behind the activities of most of the women and women’s organizations.

Conclusion

Until the Young Turk revolution of July 1908 women’s organizations in the Ottoman Empire seem to have remained quite limited in number, their geographic span, their goals and their longevity. While women from the non-Muslim communities succeeded in establishing some philanthropic organizations which became firmly embedded in Ottoman society in the last quarter of the

⁶⁸ BOA, Şura-yı Devlet Selânik (hereafter ŞD Selânik), 2068/4 (6), 10 Mart 1326 (23 March 1910); BOA, DH.MUI, 76–1/70, 6 Rebiülahir 1328 (18 March 1910).

⁶⁹ Toprak, “İttihad Terakki ve Teali-i Vatan Osmanlı Hanımlar Cemiyeti.”

⁷⁰ “Teali-i Vatan Osmanlı Hanımlar Cemiyeti hakkında hükümet-i seniye’nin tasdik-i resmisi,” *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, XVI, 10, 20 Mayıs 1326 (2 June 1910), 6 (I am indebted to Zafer Toprak for providing me with a photocopy of this periodical).

⁷¹ “*Yeni Asır*’dan: gaye-i milliye ve hanımlarımızın içtimai,” *Tanin*, 8 Kanunuevvel 1325 (21 December 1909), 3; “Teali-i Vatan Osmanlı Hanımlar Cemiyeti,” *Tanin*, 7 Şubat 1325 (20 February 1910), 2.

nineteenth century, Ottoman Muslim women seem to have been less successful during this period. Although new research might reveal the existence of more female associational activities before the Young Turk Revolution of July 1908, the sources available at this moment seem to indicate that this revolution proved to be a watershed in this respect. During the period between the Young Turk revolution and the end of the First World War, female associational life was vivid and diverse: the number of women's organizations in the Ottoman Empire not only increased, their scope also expanded as this work shows.

In the remainder of this part, firstly Ottoman Muslim female associational life is analyzed within the wider context of international feminism. Its interactions with the international feminist movement(s) and the influence the latter had on the formation of an Ottoman Muslim female associational life are described and discussed.

In Chapters Three and Four, some particular women's organizations are described in detail: when and where were they founded and with what aim? Who were the founders and who formed their membership? How did they raise the funds for their activities? What were these activities and how did they change due to the changing circumstances during the period of their existence? All these questions are, of course, posed, against the background of the main questions of this book.