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Feminism, philanthropy and patriotism : female associational life in the Ottoman empire

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CHAPTER TWO

Ottoman Muslim Women and the International Women's Movement

In the 1912 English translation of the second edition of her book on the “Modern Woman’s Rights Movement,” which was first published in German in 1905, the German feminist Käthe Schirmacher also included a chapter on “The Orient and the Far East” consisting of paragraphs of different length on Turkey and Egypt, Persia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Orient) on the one hand, and India, China and Japan and Korea (the Far East) on the other hand. In the introduction to this chapter, she wrote that in this rather broad geographical area “woman almost without exception [is] a plaything or a beast of burden” and that polygamy and the harem “still exist almost undisturbed.”¹ The latter she almost immediately revoked in her description of the recent developments in Turkey (and Egypt):

Through the influence of the European women educators, an emancipation movement has been started among the younger generation of women in Constantinople. (...) [They] are now opposing oriental marriage and life in the harem.²

She adds, moreover, that the opposition of the younger women is leading to “tragic conflict” adding a footnote referring to the novel *Les Désenchantées*.³ In this novel published in Paris in 1906, the French naval officer Julien Viaud – using his *nom de plume* Pierre Loti – relates the story of three cultured and

¹ Käthe Schirmacher, *The Modern Woman’s Rights Movement: A Historical Survey*, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912 [translation of the second German edition: *Die moderne Frauenbewegung: ein geschichtlicher Überblick*, Berlin: G.B. Teubner, 1909], 245. See also Käthe Schirmacher, *Die moderne Frauenbewegung: ein geschichtlicher Überblick*, Berlin: G.B. Teubner, 1905.

² Schirmacher, *The Modern Woman’s Rights Movement*, 247.

³ The footnote initially, i.e. in the German version of 1905, referred only to an article in *Conseil des Femmes* published in October 1902. The version of 1909 and its translation into English of 1912 refer also to Loti’s *Les Désenchantées* which, after all, only appeared in 1906. Another difference is that in the second edition of her book Schirmacher mentioned that “A federation of women’s clubs [had] just been founded in [Turkey]” (1905, 122; 1912, 245).

educated women belonging to the Ottoman elite, who were disenchanted due to the restrictive rules of their social environment which curbed their freedom. The novel found a wide audience in Europe and was reprinted several times turning the image of the *Désechantée* into a topos of the discourse on Oriental women.⁴

In her book she, however, also referred to the lectures of two “Turkish” women, “Selma Rıza” and “Hâirie Ben-Aïd” at international women’s congresses in 1900 and 1904, respectively. In this chapter, the activities of Ottoman (Muslim) women and, in particular, Selma Rıza on the international platform are explored, showing that the contradiction reflected in Schirmacher’s book is symptomatic for the way women within the international women’s movement tried to deal with the seemingly irreconcilable of the “Orient”: the existing and persisting image of traditional Oriental harem ladies, on the one hand, and the reality of modern(izing) (Ottoman) Muslim women whom they met on the platform of the international woman’s movement, on the other hand.

The Oriental harem had been, as Lewis points out, a topic which sold books. European women travelling or temporarily living in the Ottoman Empire, and the Middle East, who wrote on their visits to the women’s rooms of the Ottoman houses found a ready audience to share their experiences with. Starting with the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the early eighteenth century, harem literature reached its zenith in the 1890s, but continued to remain popular until the foundation of the Republic of Turkey.⁵ Even then the ghost of the leisured harem lady lingered on, if only to compare the new, modern Turkish women favourably with.

The way Ottoman women and their lives in the setting of a harem were described by European female travellers, however, mirrored the preoccupations of the authors and their own changing gender relations rather than an objective reality and shifted accordingly over time.⁶ By the beginning of the twentieth century English publications started to reflect an interest in those Ottoman Muslim women who were increasingly becoming socially active in public. As Schirmacher shows, however, the European and other Western press was not yet

⁴ Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004, 12-14. Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000, 45-55. See also Irene L. Szyliowicz, *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Woman*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988 and Orhan Koloğlu, *Loti’nin Kadınları: Osmanlı Haremının Gizemli Dünyası*, İstanbul: Dünya Yayınları, 1999.

⁵ Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, 12-14.

⁶ Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind*; Billie Melman, *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718 - 1918*, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1992.

ready to immediately let go of the harem “plaything” to have it replaced by the new Ottoman woman.⁷

The texts on Ottoman (and other) women living in harems produced by European and other Western women not only reflected the preoccupations of its authors concerning relations within the own society, but also its relations with “other” societies: the innate ideas of superiority of one’s own society versus the inferiority of another society as displayed in the colonialist discourse.

For the women of the international woman’s movement it was clear, therefore, that the new Ottoman woman had only been able to progress because of the European education she had had. Texts on the advancement of Ottoman Muslim women reverberating with

‘feminist orientalism’ lauded ‘Western’ societies as the pinnacle of progress for women in contrast to backward, repressive ‘Eastern’ ways, (...) women of European origin [being] in the lead, offering a hand to their more oppressed sisters.⁸

In the Ottoman Turkish women’s press which developed in the second half of the nineteenth century a strong belief in Western superiority in science and technique was reflected as well. It regularly featured articles on women in other parts of the world including

[d]iscussions of the foreign [which] could be used to express Muslim propriety, Ottoman loyalties, ingenuity in adapting western forms, wit in satirizing western and westernized behaviors, and through all of these, to forge a patriotic identity for women in their domestication and mastery of the foreign.⁹

⁷ Even as late as 1924 the *New Zealand Truth* published a lengthy article on Turkish men and women who allegedly wanted the old harem, where the “wives waited upon [the Turk] hand and foot and were kept in line by their jealousy of each other,” to come back. “Turks want Harem back,” *New Zealand Truth*, 5 January 1924, 7.

⁸ Leila J. Rupp, “Challenging Imperialism in International Women’s Organizations, 1888 - 1945,” in: Barbara Ryan (ed.) *Identity Politics in the Women’s Movement*, New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001, 245-260, 247.

⁹ Elizabeth Brown Frierson, “Mirrors Out, Mirrors In: Domestication and Rejection of the Foreign in Late-Ottoman Women’s Magazines (1875 - 1908),” in: D. Fairchild Ruggles (ed.), *Women, Patronage, and Self-Representation in Islamic Societies*, Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2000, 177-204, 182.

The tone of these articles could be either positive or negative – or both at the same time – regarding foreigners and their behaviour, stressing similarities or differences. They thus reflected the struggle of Ottoman Muslim women (and Ottoman society at large) in defining changing gendered social spaces within a modernizing Ottoman society just as European women’s descriptions of Oriental harems mirrored their changing gender relations.

The platform where a very explicit struggle took place to change these gender relations actively was the international women’s movement. This platform also formed the stage for a very specific form of interaction between “Oriental” and “Western” women: the contacts between Ottoman Muslim women and the international women’s movement. The explicit inclusion of a part on “Orient and Far East” in Schirmacher’s book on the “Modern Woman’s Rights Movement” indicates an early interest of the international women’s movement in the Middle East which according to modern scholars started only much later. According to Rupp a continuing and lasting interest of the international organizations with Muslim women did not start until the Egyptian Huda Sharawi participated in the congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) in Rome in 1923.¹⁰ This was the first year non-Western feminist organizations could join the IWSA. Sharawi subsequently became an officer of the IWSA in 1926. Weber dates “the beginning of the international women’s movement’s encounter with women in the Middle East,” in which she includes Turkey, somewhat earlier.¹¹ According to her, the world tour Carrie Chapman Catt and Aletta Jacobs made in 1911 and 1912 as representatives of the International Woman’s Suffrage Alliance marked this beginning.

In this chapter, the interactions between Ottoman (Muslim) women and the international women’s movement are described and analyzed. Its aim is to determine when these interactions actually started and to find out how they

¹⁰ Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: the Making of an International Women’s Movement*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997. Although Huda Sharawi had been active in Egypt from 1909 onwards, it seems that the IWSA did not notice her until after the First World War. She had wanted to attend the 1920 meeting of the IWSA in Geneva together with some other Egyptian women from the Women’s Committee of the Egyptian nationalist party (*Wafd*), but their husbands had not allowed them to leave. When the IWSA send her an invitation for the 1923 congress in Rome, she founded the Egyptian Women’s Union (EWU), independently from the *Wafd* party. Together with other women from the EWU she travelled to Rome where they participated in the congress. During this congress the EWU joined the IWSA and in 1926 Sharawi became a member of its board. Badran, *Feminists, Islam and the Nation*, 86-110.

¹¹ Charlotte Weber, “Unveiling Scheherazade: Feminist Orientalism in the International Alliance of Women, 1911 - 1950,” *Feminist Studies*, XXVII, 1, 2001, 125-157, quotation 128.

influenced the Ottoman women’s movement and the formation of an Ottoman female associational life. Not only the large international organizations such as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), the International Council of Women (ICW) and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) are taken into account, but also the large international congresses which were organized by women’s organizations and at which, for example, the speakers referred to by Schirmacher were present.

Creating International Sisterhood

The nineteenth century proved to be a century in which many international organizations of various background – and both governmental and non-governmental – were founded. Not only men actively engaged in creating international networks, women, too, started to get organized internationally. Between 1830 and 1860 early feminists on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean exchanged letters and sought each other’s support. European women also participated in women’s rights conventions in the US. All these international contacts, however, remained rather loose and were not formalized by establishing organizations.¹²

The first international women’s organization with a more formal character was established in 1868 in Genève by Marie Goegg, a Swiss pacifist and feminist. She founded the *Association Internationale des Femmes* after she attended a peace conference of the *League of Peace and Freedom* in 1867 where only men took the floor. The association counted more than 15 branches in Europe and the US, but proved to be short lived: by August 1871 it closed down again.¹³

Although this first attempt at the establishment of an international women’s organization failed, some large international congresses on women’s rights were successfully organized in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. One of the first, less known, international congress for women was organized in France, where under the Republic, French feminism had undergone a revival. This international *Congrès du Droit des Femmes* was convened in 1878 at the occasion of the World Exhibition in Paris. More than two hundred persons from eleven states – half of them men – signed up as official participants. Unofficial

¹² Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement, 1830 - 1860*, Oxford, etc.: Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹³ Reinalda & Verhaaren, *Vrouwenbeweging en Internationale Organisaties*, 13-16.

participants who came in to listen to the speeches added another 400 to the total amount of visitors.¹⁴ After the success of this first occasion at which an international women's congress was combined with a Universal or World Exhibition, international women's conferences or congresses became part and parcel of these exhibitions. Thus women's congresses were organized at the occasion of the exhibitions in Paris (1878, 1889, 1900),¹⁵ Chicago (1893), Copenhagen (1895), Brussels (1897) and The Hague (1898).¹⁶

For the Ottoman Empire these exhibitions formed a platform to display its "civilized profile," and it actively participated in them.¹⁷ That is probably why May Wright Sewall, as chairwoman of the Committee on the World's Congress of Representative Women held in Chicago in 1893, took the initiative to try to invite an Ottoman representative to participate in the Congress at the occasion of the World Exhibition in Chicago in 1893. She obviously contacted the US Minister in Constantinople, D.P. Thompson, and asked him to ask the Ottoman Government to send a representative to the Congress. He answered her that

¹⁴ Reinalda & Verhaaren, *Vrouwenbeweging en Internationale Organisaties*, 18-19. It is not clear, however, how many of these listeners were women.

¹⁵ In the cities where the World Exhibitions took place, there was, in general, an enormous increase in the number of (international) congresses organized. A special committee belonging to the organization of the exhibition could grant or deny an official status to these congresses. The women's congress in Paris of 1878 was denied such a status, like one congress in 1889, because they were both deemed too radical. Another congress in 1889 was granted an official liaison with the exhibition, like the two congresses held in 1900: the *2e Congrès international des oeuvres et institutions féminines* in June and the *Congrès international de la condition et des droits des femmes* organized in September. Anne Rasmussen, "Les Congrès internationaux liés aux Expositions universelles de Paris (1867 - 1900)," *Cahiers Georges Sorel*, VII, 1, 1989, 23 - 44. (accessed through www.persee.fr).

¹⁶ In Vienna (1873) and Philadelphia (1876) women's pavilions were part of the exhibitions, but no congresses were organized. Maria Grever, "Reconstructing the Fatherland: Comparative Perspectives on Women and 19th Century Exhibitions," in: Maria Grever & Fia Dieteren (eds), *Een Vaderland voor vrouwen. A Fatherland for Women. The 1898 'Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid' in Retrospect*, Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG/VVG, 2001. (accessed through <http://www.gendergeschiedenis.nl/nl/dossiers/grever.html>); Anick Druelle, "Analyse intersectionnelle de la solidarité des intérêts au World Congress of Representative Women (Chicago, 1893)," *Lien social et politiques*, 58, 2007, 15-27 (accessed through <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/017548ar>).

¹⁷ Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs*, Berkeley, etc: University of California Press, 1992; Selim Deringil, *The Well-protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876 - 1909*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998.

[her] communication will be presented to the 'Sublime Porte' asking the appointment of those delegates, (...) with but little hope of success – women have as you are doubtless aware, have (sic!) but few rights guaranteed to them.¹⁸

Although the Ottoman government was present at the World's Columbian Exposition with an "Ottoman Bazaar," and pupils from girls' schools featured prominently in the Ottoman photograph albums sent to the Library of Congress and the British National Library in 1893 and 1894, respectively, no Ottoman (Turkish) women were sent to participate in the Congress of Women. Still, "Turkey" was not wholly absent at this Congress. Two women gave a talk at the "Congress of Women" organized by May Wright Sewall: Cariclee Zacaroff, who informed her audience on the "Turkish Compassionate Fund,"¹⁹ and Mary Page Wright, a former missionary to Asia Minor, who gave another lecture entitled "Woman's Life in Asiatic Turkey" of which a synopsis was published in the report of the Congress.²⁰ Neither of them was displaying the so much wanted civilized profile of the Ottoman Empire, the latter sharing with her audience an allegedly frequently used quote from women in Asiatic Turkey: "Blessed are you American women; you can read, you have souls, but we are only cattle."²¹

¹⁸ D.P. Thompson to May Wright Sewall, 27 March 1893 (accessed through <http://digitallibrary.imcpl.org/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mws&CISOPTR=1451&REC=3>).

¹⁹ Cariclee Zacaroff was, according to a footnote "born in Constantinople, Turkey, of Greek nationality, and educated in England." Mary Kavanaugh Oldham Eagle (ed.), *The Congress of Women: Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, U. S. A., 1893*. Chicago, Ill: Monarch Book Company, 1894, 618 fn. The Turkish Compassionate Fund, which had been founded by a rich English woman, the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, in the winter of 1877-78, was a relief fund for the Muslim victims of the Turko-Russian war, who, driven out of their homes, sought refuge in Istanbul. It provided clothing and food to the needy, but when it after the war almost ran out of money one of the women involved, Mrs. Arthur Hanson, saw new opportunities. The organisation started to distribute materials for fine needle work to women deft with the needle and to sell the products in special shops in Europe and the USA. By the middle of the 1890s the needle work business had developed into a rather large industry providing women and girls in the Ottoman Empire with work and European consumers with much sought after embroidery and lace. Zacaroff was the manager of the New York outlet of the fund. Mainwaring Dunstan, *The Turkish Compassionate Fund*; Baroness Burdett-Coutts, "Woman the Missionary of Industry," in: Baroness Burdett-Coutts (ed.) *Woman's Mission; a Series of Congress Papers on the Philanthropic Work of Women*, New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893, 284-299, 295-299. See also: "An Englishwoman in Constantinople," *Star*, 10 April 1895, 1. "Her Point of View," *New York Times*, 17 December 1893, 18.

²⁰ Mary Page Wright, "Woman's Life in Asiatic Turkey," in: Eagle, *The Congress of Women*, 305.

²¹ Wright, "Woman's Life in Asiatic Turkey," 305.

Two other women gave lectures, more favourable of the Ottoman Empire, at other congresses. An upper-class American divorcée living in Paris, Teresa Viéle, gave a lecture on “Turkey and the religion of Islam” at one of the literary congresses. She sent the (French) brochure with the text of her lecture to “Ahmed Midhat Effendi” and, explaining how she expressed her *sentiments de sympathie* for the *noble peuple Turc* in the brochure, she asked him to forward it to the Sultan as he indeed did.²² The Catalan harpist Esmeralda Cervantes gave a lengthy talk on the education of women in the Ottoman Empire at the International Congress of Education of the World's Columbian Exposition.²³ Although the Ottoman authorities were initially surprised by her claim that she was representing the Ottoman government, it seems that the positive tone of her lecture led them to undertake no further action. She was even invited to give a harp recital at an official banquet of the Ottoman commissioner, İbrahim Hakkı Bey.²⁴ The members of the “Board of Lady Managers” of the Columbian Exposition were so impressed by the “efforts of [his Imperial Majesty Sultan Abdul Hamid II] on behalf of their sisters of the Ottoman Empire” that they decided to send him letters and forty pages of signatures of women bound in leather to show their gratitude.²⁵ As a token of appreciation, both the president of the Board of Lady Managers, Mrs. Bertha Honore (Potter) Palmer as well as the vice president and acting president of the Woman's Branch of the World's Congress Auxiliary, Mrs. Ellen Martin Henrotin, were rewarded with the *Şefkat Nişanı*, an Ottoman medal especially for women.²⁶

²² BOA, Y.MTV, 102/103, 14 Safer 1312 (16 August 1894).

²³ In the *Proceedings of the International Congress of Education of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, July 25-28, 1893, under the charge of the National Educational Association of the United States* (New York: Press of J. J. Little & Co., 1894) her speech is not reproduced, but a translation in Ottoman Turkish was sent to the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul. BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Tahrirat-ı Ecnebiye ve Mabeyn Mütercimliği (hereafter, Y.PRK.TKM) 29/76, 6 Safer 1311 (18 August 1893).

²⁴ “Turkish Commissioners Banquet,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 July 1893, 2.

²⁵ “Affairs in the Polite World” newspaper clipping from an unknown newspaper, dated 24 August 1893, found in BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnaller (hereafter Y.PRK.AZJ), 29/3, 29 Zilhicce 1311 (3 July 1894).

²⁶ BOA, İrade-i Taltifat (hereafter İ.Tal), 40/1311/C-020, 1 Cemaziyelahir 1311 (10 December 1893); BOA, İ.Tal, 86/1313/C-09, 3 Cemaziyelevvel 1313 (21 October 1895). This medal had been created during the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877 - 1878 by Abdülhamid II specifically for women, Ottoman and foreign, who had served to alleviate the needs and problems of Ottoman subjects caused by war, natural disasters or other reasons for suffering. “Devlet-i Aliye-i Osmaniye'nin nişanlarından nisvana mahsus ‘Şefkat Nişan-ı Hümayun,’” in: Avanzade Mehmet Süleyman,

The “voice” of one Ottoman Muslim woman, however, was present at the World’s Columbian Exposition, albeit in writing: Mrs. Marcellus Bowen, the wife of the director of the Bible House in Istanbul, obviously had contacted the Lady Board of Managers telling them about the existence of an Ottoman, Muslim female author, Fatma Aliye. Thereupon, the Board decided to send her an invitation to send some of her work to be exhibited at the Woman’s Library.²⁷ The cataloguer of the Woman’s Library, Edith Clarke, moreover, wrote her a letter inviting her to send more biographical information on herself to “include in our catalogue (...) to make it of permanent value as a bibliography of woman’s work in literature.”²⁸ Fatma Aliye seems to have reacted positively and less than three weeks later Suzan Gale Cooke, Secretary of the Board of Lady Managers, sent a letter to Fatma Aliye thanking her for the books she sent and pointing out that they were “really delighted to have these books to exhibit.”²⁹ Three of the novels by “Fathma Alié” in Ottoman Turkish were indeed exhibited at the Woman’s Library in the Women’s Building.³⁰

May Wright Sewall, the president of the Congress of Woman in Chicago, had also been involved in the foundation of the ICW at Washington, D.C. in 1888 during a convention held in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 which had launched the woman suffrage movement in the United States. Representatives of “associations of women in the trades, professions, and reforms, as well as those advocating political rights” were invited and 49 women of “all the countries of the civilized globe” – *in casu*, England, Ireland, France, Norway, Denmark, Finland, India, Canada, and the United States – attended the founding meeting. Although it aimed at becoming

Nevsal-i Nisvan (Birinci Sene), Dersaadet: Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete Kütüphanesi, 1315 (1897), 41; “Şefkat Nişanı Nizamnamesi,” *Düstur*, I, 4, (1289), 62-63.

²⁷ Amey M. Starkweather to Fatma Aliye, 10 August 1893, İstanbul Atatürk Kitaplığı, Fatma Aliye Hanım Evrakı (hereafter İAK, FAHE), 18/3.

²⁸ Edith E. Clarke to Fatma Aliye, 10 August 1893, İAK, FAHE, 18/1.

²⁹ Suzan Gale Cooke to Fatma Aliye, 28 August 1893, İAK, FAHE, 18/2.

³⁰ *List of books sent by home and foreign committees to the Library of the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893* [compiled for the United States World's Columbian Commission Board of Lady Managers under the direction of Edith E. Clarke], 92 (available at <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/clarke/library/library.html>). See also The Editor, “The Library,” in: Maud Howe Elliot, *Art and Handicraft at the Woman's Building of the World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893*, Paris & New York: Bousod, Valadon & Co., 1893, 109-113 (accessed through <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/2574526>).

an organization in which “all women’s organisations from all countries.”³¹ would participate through national councils, this showed to be impossible due to the great diversity in background and ideas of the women’s organizations represented at the meeting. While it was originally envisaged as a central bureau to collect, exchange and disseminate information on suffrage work internationally, the presence of rather conservative female members meant that the enfranchisement of women was not put on the agenda.³²

Disappointed because of the disappearance of the demand of enfranchisement some of the founding members of the ICW founded a “temporary” International Woman Suffrage Committee at the annual convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in Washington, D.C., in February 1902. At a congress in Berlin in 1904 this temporary organization was transformed into the IWSA.³³

With the outbreak of the First World War it became difficult for the women involved in these organizations to continue their activities. The war made it practically almost impossible for the women from belligerent and neutral countries to convene. Moreover, internationalism and patriotism proved difficult to unite. The views of women on the war and its flipside, pacifism, diverged largely.³⁴ The ICW became totally dysfunctional for six years, the IWSA succeeded at its conscious effort to keep the lines of communication with its members open partly through the continued publication of its journal *Jus Suffragii* under the editorship of Mary Sheepshanks.³⁵ It was unable, however, to organize the congress in Berlin it had scheduled for June 1915. An alternative was offered by the Dutch feminist Aletta Jacobs, an ardent pacifist, who invited the members of the Alliance to the Netherlands, a neutral country. Although her initial invitation was turned down, eventually she succeeded in convening a

³¹ Mineke Bosch & Annemarie Kloosterman (eds), *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1902 - 1942*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990, 1.

³² Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years And More: Reminiscences 1815 - 1897*, New York: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898, 412-421. (accessed through <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/stanton/years/years.html>); Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 15-21.

³³ At the ninth meeting in Rome in May 1923 it changed its name into the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, the name under which it held its 12th Congress in Istanbul in 1935. In 1946 it became simply the International Alliance of Women under which name it still exists.

³⁴ Christine Bolt, *Sisterhood Questioned? Race, Class and Internationalism in the American and British Women’s Movements, c. 1880s - 1970s*, London & New York: Routledge, 2004, 28-50.

³⁵ Sybil Oldfield, “Mary Sheepshanks Edits an Internationalist Suffrage Monthly in Wartime: *Jus Suffragii* 1914-19,” *Women’s History Review*, XII, 1, 2003, 119-134.

meeting of more than eleven hundred women from both neutral and belligerent countries in The Hague in April-May 1915. At this meeting the International Women’s Committee for Permanent Peace was formed, which in 1919 was turned into the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).³⁶ Although the Ottoman Turkish newspaper *Hadisat* reported briefly on the meeting of the WILPF in May 1919 in Zürich,³⁷ it would be 1924 before the first Turkish woman, Efzayış Yusuf (later, Efzayış Suat) attended a meeting of this organization in Washington.³⁸

While the WILPF was established at such a late date that it falls beyond the scope of this chapter, the other two main international women’s organizations, the ICW and IWSA, are certainly of relevance.

Ottoman Women, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance and the International Council of Women

Ottoman Women and the IWSA

Although the Ottoman Empire certainly did not have a suffrage movement until the 1920s, nor any associations of female professionals, it was, surprisingly enough, represented at the founding meeting of the International Woman Suffrage Committee in Washington in 1902. The person representing, what was called “Turkey,” was not an Ottoman woman, though, but Miss Florence Fensham,³⁹ a Christian missionary and Dean of the American College for Girls

³⁶ Bosch & Kloosterman (eds), *Politics and Friendship*, 135-143; Reinalda & Verhaaren, *Vrouwenbeweging en Internationale Organisaties*, 43-47.

³⁷ “Kadınlar arasında: bizim kadınlarımıza ittifak!” *Hadisat*, 17 Mayıs 1335/1919, 3.

³⁸ “Peace Delegates of 21 Countries Meet at Capital,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 April 1924, 1-2; “First Turkish Girl Journalist Arrives,” *Washington Post*, 22 April 1924, 3; “Amerika’da yüzümüzü güldüren hadise,” *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Temmuz /July 1924, 4; “Kadınlık Cereyanı,” *Asar-ı Nisvan*, 5, 2 Nisan/April 1341/1925, 7.

³⁹ Florence Amanda Fensham was the first woman to gain a bachelor degree in divinity from the Chicago Theological Seminary in 1902. Barbara Brown Zigmund, “Women’s Ministries within the United Church of Christ,” in: Catherine Wessinger (ed.) *Religious Institutions and Women’s Leadership: New Roles inside the Mainstream*, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1996, 58-78. See also “Unusual Honor to a Woman,” *New York Times*, 10 May 1902.

at Constantinople, who happened to be on furlough.⁴⁰ At this meeting she gave a report on “Women in Turkey.”⁴¹ Not devoid of Orientalist ideas, she stated that “Turkey”

is more akin to our Europe of the Middle Ages [for which a] change in its development can be brought about only as a new force is introduced (...) most of all by the network of American institutions for the education of her peoples, which, by action and reaction, are transforming Eastern thought and life into the broader liberty of our Western world.⁴²

Due to these “new forces” many changes had taken place in the previous century, she told her audience, giving examples. While Christian women were “unquestionably” advancing ahead of their Muslim sisters, she was optimistic about them as well, though, summing up “the condition of women in Turkey” as follows:

1. Mussulman law gives woman rights denied her by many nations of the Western world.
2. If these acknowledged rights have failed to develop in her an independence and self-realization like those of Western women, the remedy lies in the thorough training of her mental powers.
3. The women of Turkey are realizing their inherent power and the limitations put upon it by tradition, and there is a growing intelligence and desire for learning among them.
4. Given the ability, the desire, and the means, and it is but a matter of time, and not long, for the frozen bonds of custom to give way and the women of Turkey to take their place with others of the various countries of the world in proving the power of an emancipated womanhood.⁴³

⁴⁰ Mary Gray Peck, *Carrie Chapman Catt: a Biography*, New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1944, 453.

⁴¹ Ida Husted Harper (ed.), *The History of Woman Suffrage [Volume V: 1900 - 1920]*, n.p.: National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1922, 42. During her furlough, she gave several lectures on “Oriental women.” See e.g. “Miss Fensham to Speak,” *The Hartford Courant*, 3 April 1902, 8; “Women of the East,” *The Hartford Courant*, 5 April 1902, 5; “Lecture on Oriental Women,” *New York Times*, 3 May 1902, 16.

⁴² [Florence Fensham], “Turkey” in: *Report First International Woman Suffrage Conference Held at Washington, U.S.A. February 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 1902 in Connection with and by Invitation of the National American Woman Suffrage Association*, New York: International Woman Suffrage Headquarters, n.d. [1902], 118-123, 118-119.

⁴³ [Florence Fensham], “Turkey,” 123.

The contradiction between the relatively women-friendly Muslim laws and the limiting force of tradition and custom, and the possible rescue of these women tied in false traditions and customs through proper, Western (and Christian) education also formed the central themes of the speeches of two Ottoman Muslim women speaking on their fellow countrywomen, Hayriye Ben-Ayad and Selma Rıza, which Schirmacher referred to and which will be discussed in more detail below.

The contacts between the IWSA and “Ottoman” women seem to have remained limited to this one occasion up until 1920. When the Dutch feminist, Aletta Jacobs and the president of the IWSA, Carrie Chapman Catt, travelled all over the world in 1911 and 1912, they visited the Middle East and Egypt in November and December 1911, but not Anatolia nor the European parts of the Ottoman Empire, which from the end of September of 1911 until October 1912 was at war with Italy over Libya.⁴⁴

The first meeting after the First World War of the IWSA, which was held in June 1920 in Geneva, was attended by two Turkish sisters belonging to the Kıbrıslı family, Aziz⁴⁵ and Refika.⁴⁶ One of them gave a talk and wrote a part for the *International Woman Suffrage News*.⁴⁷ Both in the report as well as in the periodical, she carried the qualification of “Government Delegate.”⁴⁸ This was

⁴⁴ Their goal during this tour was two-fold: they wanted “to collect information and report back on the varying conditions of women around the globe” and, trying to include non-Western women into their movement, they wanted to spread the ideal of female enfranchisement. To this goal they actively assisted in efforts to found national suffrage councils in several of the countries they visited. Weber, “Unveiling Scheherazade,” 132; Bosch & Kloosterman (eds), *Politics and Friendship*, 94-99.

⁴⁵ Aziz (and not Azize as one would expect) was the wife of Ali Ferruh Bey, an Ottoman diplomat and the Ottoman Ambassador to the USA (1879 - 1901) and the first one to accompany her husband, when he returned to his post after a leave of absence. “Interest in Mme. Ferrouh,” *New York Times*, 13 February 1900.

⁴⁶ Personal email of Selim Bilgişin (4 January 2010). Nezihe Muhittin, Turkish feminist and founder of the first Turkish suffragist women’s organization in 1923, wrote about these two sisters: “These young and virtuous Turkish women (...) talk about the most serious and social problems, they criticize the politics of the day and tell their observations on our future life in a quite authoritative language.” Nezihe Muhittin, *Türk kadını*, Istanbul: Numune Matbaası, 1931, 18.

⁴⁷ According to Nezihe Muhittin, this must have been Aziz. In the report and the periodical of the IWSA, however, her name was mistakenly spelled as T. Keibrizli. T. Keibrizli, “Turkey: Report Presented to the Congress by the Government Delegate,” *The International Woman Suffrage News*, July 1920, 164; Nezihe Muhittin 18fn.

⁴⁸ International Woman’s Suffrage Alliance, *Report of Eighth Congress*, Geneva, Switzerland, June 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 1920, Manchester: Percy Brothers [n.d.], 14.

once more confirmed in a letter from the “Editor & Headquarters Secretary” of the IWSA, Elizabeth Abbott, who sent it to – probably – a government representative enclosing the resolutions of the Congress. She wrote that “twenty Governments (among them your own) appointed official representatives” which had resulted in 38 countries being represented at the Congress. Since the resolutions “carr[ied] the opinion of representative women of practically every civilised nation,” she asked the addressee to take them seriously and to submit them to the “careful attention” of the government, which, she hoped, would consider them when taking decisions related to women. She expressed the desire to be put on a mailing list to receive the texts of any government bill related to women and offered to send the government *The International Woman Suffrage News (Jus Suffragi)*.⁴⁹

Which “government” is referred to here? This must be the puppet government in Istanbul which was under British and French occupation at that time. It is likely that the two women were sent there by this puppet government and/or the occupying forces or, at least, not without them knowing about. On 18 March 1920 the Council of State, Department of Dersaadet (Istanbul) had sent a note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stating that an invitation had been sent to the *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti* in English. Although both the letter and its translation are lacking, this is likely to have been an invitation from the IWSA for the congress in Geneva. The Istanbul government may accordingly have asked the Kıbrıslı sisters, or at least one of them, to represent it.⁵⁰

After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey contacts between the IWSA and women in Turkey were continued on a more regular basis. In March 1923 the IWSA sent an invitation to the newly established government in Ankara and asked for a delegate to be sent to the Congress to be held in Rome in May.⁵¹ It seems that the IWSA got the idea that the Turkish author Halide Edib and Latife *Hanım*, the wife of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk would participate.⁵²

⁴⁹ The letter in typescript which is in the archival file does not have the name or address of a particular recipient on it. It is addressed to a further anonymous “Dear Sir.” It might well be the ambassador of the Ottoman Empire to Great-Britain, but this is not clear. BOA, Hariciye Nezareti, Siyasi Kısım (hereafter, HR.SYS), 2464-20, 6-6-1920. [This date is clearly wrong. The letter of the IWSA was dated July 20, 1920, the translations were from September of that year.]

⁵⁰ Through the note dated 18 March 1920 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was informed that the letter was sent on for translation. BOA, Şura-yı Devlet Dersaadet 30/373, 2843-12, 2 Zilkade 1338 (19 July 1920).

⁵¹ Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivleri (Priministerial Republican Archives), 4101/30.10.0.0/229.541.1, 10 May 1923.

⁵² “Women’s Column: Near and Far,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 May 1923, 4.

However, neither of them went and the Congress was held without any Turkish representative. Only after the foundation of the explicitly suffragist *Türk Kadın Birliği* in 1923, whose establishment was also reported in *Jus Suffragii*,⁵³ a more regular contact was established culminating in the organization of the 12th Congress of the IWSA in Istanbul in April 1935.⁵⁴

For the Ottoman women of the first two decades of the twentieth century, who were not yet demanding female enfranchisement,⁵⁵ however, the IWSA proved to be too radical. The ICW, which in general was regarded as more conservative, seems to have been more attractive to them. The ICW, in turn, also seems to have shown more interest in “Turkey” than the IWSA, which identified feminism almost exclusively with suffragism. At least, it undertook some conscious actions to promote the establishment of national councils in the Ottoman Empire twice.

Ottoman Women and the ICW

Although no Ottoman women were present at the foundation of the ICW, at the international women’s congress in Berlin which was held between 13 and 18 June 1904 following the general meeting of the ICW, an Ottoman Muslim woman, Hayriye Ben-Ayad,⁵⁶ joined the delegates. She attended the meetings in Berlin where a paper of hers on women in the Ottoman Empire was read by

⁵³ Arthur Field, “Women in Present-Day Turkey,” *Jus Suffragii*, XVIII, 1, 1923, 8-9.

⁵⁴ On this congress see Weber, “Unveiling Scheherazade,”; Zafer Toprak, “1935 İstanbul uluslararası ‘Feminizm Kongresi’ ve barış,” *Düşün*, Mart 1986, 24-29; Zafer Toprak, “Türkiye’de siyaset ve kadın: Kadınlar Halk Fırkası’ndan ‘Arsiulusal Kadınlar Birliği’ kongresine (1923 - 1935),” *Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2, 1994, 5-12; Kathryn Libal, “Staging Turkish Women’s Emancipation: Istanbul, 1935,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, IV, 1, 2008, 31-52; İnci Özkan-Kerstecioglu, “Die Konstruktion der ‘neuen’ türkischen Frau und der Internationale Frauenkongress (1935),” in: Barbara Pusch (ed.), *Die neue muslimische Frau*, Istanbul: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2001, 17-30.

⁵⁵ Although Ottoman Muslim women demanded to be allowed to be present as audience at the opening of the first parliament in December 1908, I would not interpret this as being an indication for their wanting the right to vote. “Kadınların bir Teşebbüsü,” *Servet-i Fünun*, 16 Aralık (December) 1908, reproduced in *II. Meşrutiyet’in İlk Yılı*, 182.

⁵⁶ According to her book, she was the daughter of Tunuslu Mahmud Pasha. Hâirié Ben-Ayad, *Die Türkische Frau; ihr soziales Leben und der Harem*, Wien: K.K. Universitäts-Buchhandlung Georg Szelinski, 1904 (Börte Sagaster was kind enough to give me a photocopy of this book). The book was according to an advertisement in *Het Nieuws van den Dag/Kleine Courant* (17 March 1905, 4) also published in Dutch, probably in 1905 as Hâirié Ben-Aïad, *De Turksche vrouw en de Harem*, Amsterdam: W.B. Moransard.

someone else.⁵⁷ The participation of “Turkey” had been announced months earlier in a London newspaper, which indicates that she either contacted the ICW herself or that she had drawn the attention of the ICW and had been invited due to her appearances in public in Europe.⁵⁸ She had been living in Europe escaping the suppression of the Ottoman regime for some years together with her husband, who was of Swedish descent, but had worked for the Ottoman regime.⁵⁹ In Europe, she had been giving lectures on the poor conditions women in the Ottoman Empire had to live under and especially the white slave trade.⁶⁰ A few months before her paper was read at the congress in Berlin, she had published a book on “Turkish women.”⁶¹ This book, which was published in Vienna, was presented as being a lecture to an audience. It might well be the lecture she gave to an audience in this city which, according to the author of an article in the *Washington Post*, was severely censured by the Austrian authorities because they feared her words would upset the ruler of a neighbouring empire. Although the author in the *Washington Post* claimed that the text he reproduced in his article were the words cut out by the Viennese Police Authorities before Hayriye Ben-Ayad could give her lecture, the extracts reproduced in his article prove to be the exact translation from parts of her book.⁶²

⁵⁷ *Die Woche*, Berlin, VI, 24, 17 Juni 1904. An unknown reporter described her as follows in a New Zealand newspaper: “Her dress was European, and quite simple, usually consisting of a black skirt and black silk blouse; an air of distinction was given, however, by a white lace veil, which she wore over her hair, and a black satin mantilla reaching to her elbows.” “A Turkish Woman Reformer,” *Grey River Argus*, 9 September 1904, 4.

⁵⁸ This London newspaper of 27 February 1904 was referred to as *London Ethics*. “The Population Problem,” *Poverty Bay Herald*, 15 April 1904, 4.

⁵⁹ “Woman’s World,” *Star*, 22 August 1903, 3. Her husband, Gustaf Noring, was born in Malmö in 1861. Interested in the Orient he travelled to the Ottoman Empire where he started to work for the Foreign Office. While he was Consul-General for the Ottoman Empire in Rotterdam he was accused of involvement with the Young Turkish movement and removed from his post. He continued living in exile in Europe agitating against Abdülhamid II. He passed away as Ali Nuri Dilmeç in İstanbul in 1937. Özer Soysal, “XIX. yüzyıl sonlarında ‘Türk Ulusal Kütüphanesi’ni kurma girişimi,” *Türk Kütüphaneciliği*, 1, 1, 1987, 9-16. (accessed through <http://tk.kutuphaneci.org.tr/index.php/tk/article/view/1050/2099>).

⁶⁰ “Voor dames,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 5 April 1904, 10; Curtis Brown, “Lifts Veil of Harem,” *The Washington Post*, 15 May 1904, B7; “A Turkish Woman Reformer,” *Grey River Argus*, 9 September 1904, 4.

⁶¹ Ben-Ayad, *Die Türkische Frau*, 1904.

⁶² Brown, “Lifts Veil of Harem.”

A Swiss born female novelist belonging to the Vienna high society, Goswina von Berlepsch, wrote the introduction to this book.⁶³ In her introduction she stressed that Ben-Ayad was not describing “colorful, entertaining pictures from the social environment of her class,”⁶⁴ but “a country, where the white slave trade was still fully flourishing.”⁶⁵ Both topics were clearly based upon the orientalist view of Europeans of the harem as a place where white slaves turned into odalisques in oriental costumes were engaged in pleasing the man of the house. Although Ben-Ayad tried to correct the orientalist image of the Ottoman woman as a harem lady, she meanwhile acknowledged the pitiful state of Ottoman women and their lack of rights. This, however, was in her view not caused by Islam, but by the “government” which “forces Moslem women (...) to pine away in a severe ignorance.”⁶⁶ She was hopeful, though; pointing out the still low, but increasing number of women obtaining (European) education and speaking out for themselves, she made an appeal upon their “Occidental sisters” not to just be curious, but to actively support their efforts.⁶⁷

A similar analysis was given by another Ottoman Muslim woman living abroad, who also moved within the circles of the ICW. Selma Rıza, the youngest sister of the leader of the Young Turks, Ahmed Rıza, in the same way criticized the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II for denying Ottoman Muslim women the rights given to them by Islam.

Selma Rıza had fled from Istanbul to Paris in 1900,⁶⁸ where she had joined her brother who had been living there in exile. She studied at the Sorbonne University and wrote articles on women in, amongst others, the periodicals published by her brother.⁶⁹ In the year she arrived in Paris she gave lectures in both women’s congresses organized at the occasion and under the auspices of

⁶³ She was also a member of a women’s association founded in November 1903 in Vienna, which obviously invited the “Turkish princess Hairié ben Aiad” for a “five o’clock tea” in 1903 or 1904. *Erster Jahresbericht des ‘Neuen Frauenklub’. 1903 - 1904*, Vienna: Im Selbstverlag des Klubs, 1904, 5.

⁶⁴ On the Western imaging of women in the Middle East see Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860 - 1950*, London: Quartet Books, 1988.

⁶⁵ Goswina von Berlepsch, “Vorwort,” in: Ben-Ayad, *Die Türkische Frau*, 3-4, quotation 3.

⁶⁶ Ben-Ayad, *Die Türkische Frau*, 8-9.

⁶⁷ Ben-Ayad, *Die Türkische Frau*, 60-64.

⁶⁸ For a letter of hers on her voyage to Paris, see Abdullah Uçman, “Selma Rıza’nın mektupları,” *Tarih ve Toplum*, XXXX, 235, 2003, 39-43.

⁶⁹ Taha Toros, “İlk Türk kadın gazeteci Selma Rıza,” in: idem, *O Güzel İnsanlar*, İstanbul: Aksoy Yayıncılık, 2000, 15-20.

the World Exhibition. In June she gave her first lecture on the “Legal Condition of Turkish Women” at the *2e Congrès international des Oeuvres et Institutions féminines*.⁷⁰ Her brother was also present at this congress,⁷¹ as was Maria Pognon, who was the president of the second women’s congress in September, the *Congrès de la Condition et les Droits des Femmes*, and the president of *La Ligue Française pour le Droit des Femmes*. Selma Rıza’s brother had been an active member of this organization for several years and had attended its meetings regularly.⁷²

Obviously, her brother had introduced Selma Rıza shortly after her arrival to Maria Pognon. The latter was happily surprised by the fluency of Selma’s French, but was quick to point out that, despite her eloquence she was still different, recalling nine years later that:

she walked in short paces and as slowly as a baby two years old. I asked her if she was ill or indisposed she said ‘No, but I have never walked, and cannot go any quicker.’ She learned by degrees and when she came to visit me in the country she could take a long walk with us all.⁷³

In her lecture at the June Congress, Selma Rıza presented a rather “Islamist” point of view regarding women. She stated that there were two sides to the situation of “Turkish” women at that moment: they had to abide by the rules of Islamic law, but also those of a “despotic authority of an arbitrary regime.” She then continued to explain that with the birth of Islam Arab women had been granted rights they did not have before. Interpreted correctly, the rights granted were often more generous than those of women in modern Europe. When the Turkic peoples, whose women also were involved in social and political life, became Muslim, women were able to actively contribute to the grandeur of the nascent Ottoman Empire. After the conquest of Constantinople, however, they were increasingly forced to retire from the social and political scene due to the

⁷⁰ [Selma Rıza], “Condition légale des femmes turques par Rıza,” in: *2e Congrès international des Oeuvres et Institutions féminines tenu au Palais des Congrès de l’Exposition Universelle de 1900 sous la Présidence d’honneur de Léon Bourgeois et sous la présidence de Mademoiselle Sarah Monod*, Paris: Charles Blot, 1902, 393-397.

⁷¹ *2e Congrès international des Oeuvres et Institutions féminines*, 552.

⁷² Maria Pognon, “The Turkish Women,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April 1909, 5. Pognon and Ahmed Rıza also both attended the Universal Congress of Peace that year where they participated in the same committee on “propaganda”: IXe Congrès universel de la Paix. *Bulletin officiel du IXe Congrès universel de la Paix, tenu à Paris du 30 septembre au 5 octobre, 1900*, Berne: Imprimerie Büchler & Co., 1901, 38. (accessed through www.archive.org).

⁷³ Pognon, “The Turkish Women.”

increasing contacts with the Persians and the remnants of old Byzantine mores, such as the *gynaikeion*, Selma Rıza argued. As a result women were denied proper education, one of the obligations of Islam, and they could no longer learn nor defend their rights. She applauded the former Sultan Abdülmeçid and his *Tanzimat* reforms which had allowed “Turkish” women to make a start with their liberation. Not surprisingly, she was more critical of Abdülhamid II, whose regime, she pointed out, tried to convince the public that the emancipation of women was “a violation of the religion.”⁷⁴ Therefore she concluded her lecture with a call upon those present at the congress

to support the Turkish women in the revendication of [their] rights, not because they arise from Islam, but because they are based on justice and because they are conform the traditions, the mores of the country, since they have been respected for a long time and have always been part of the essential laws of the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁵

It is unclear whether she was sincere in the way she presented true Islam here as being the way to the modernization of women, or whether she used a strategy also supposedly followed by the Young Turks “of infusing modernization and westernization into [the Ottoman Empire by presenting] them to the Muslim masses as Islamic concepts.”⁷⁶

Whether sincere or a strategy, her lecture is a typical example of the justification of women’s rights with reference to an uncorrupted “golden age,” or, in fact, two golden ages, a Turkish and an Islamic, in which women’s rights were better guarded thus reconciling the “alien modern” with the “own traditional.” With her lecture, thus, she succeeded in satisfying two separate audiences at the same time: the Western women actively involved in the struggle for more women’s rights she was actually addressing and the more conservative forces who were very likely reading along over their shoulders. The misrepresentations of “Oriental women” by Western women were corrected, while also more conservative forces amongst her potential audience were pacified. Although the Ottoman women’s periodical *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (Gazette for Ladies) duly reported briefly on the congress, – as it had also done on the women’s congress in Brussels in 1897 – there was no reference at all to

⁷⁴ [Selma Rıza], “Condition légale des femmes turques par Rıza,” 397.

⁷⁵ [Selma Rıza], “Condition légale des femmes turques par Rıza,” 397.

⁷⁶ Şükrü M. Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, 201.

Selma Rıza. This may have been due to Abdulhamidian censorship, but more likely the French newspapers which formed the source for this short report did not mention her either.⁷⁷

Selma Rıza's activities in Paris probably got her into touch with members of the ICW, while also the lecture of Hayriye Ben-Ayad in Berlin must have drawn the interest of the Lady Aberdeen, president of the ICW. She asked Baroness Gripenberg, who also attended the Congress in Paris in 1900 and seems to have given her lecture on Finnish women immediately after Selma Rıza at the Congress in June,⁷⁸ to visit Greece and Turkey in 1906. Her purpose was to "do some organising work (...) on behalf of the Council."⁷⁹ In Istanbul (where "there is no telephone and no local post, and the postal conditions are quite on an Eastern standard"),⁸⁰ she met with Mary Mills Patrick, the principal of the American College for Girls. The latter had arranged for her to give a lecture at the College in Üsküdar which was attended by "only ladies, because of the Turkish ladies present."⁸¹ After the lecture a large committee was elected from women from various nationalities and ethnic groups including Greek, Armenian and "Turkish" ladies, which was presided over by Mrs. Bowen – the same Mrs. Bowen who had drawn the attention of the Lady Board of Managers of the Chicago Fair to Fatma Aliye's work – while Mary Mills Patrick became its secretary. This committee was supposed to set up a Council. This council would, as Gripenberg formulated, "[Not] yet be a Council of Turkish Women," though, but rather a "National Council for women in Turkey" [emphasis added],⁸² because, she thought, the first was not yet possible for two reasons. Firstly, she wrote, "no organizations of Turkish subjects are allowed by the Government."⁸³ With "Turkish subjects" she probably referred to Muslim men and women only, because when listing the attendants of the lecture, she is careful to refer to Greek, Armenian and "Turkish" ladies, respectively. As mentioned in Chapter One, it was not entirely true that Turkish subjects were not allowed to establish

⁷⁷ "Nisvan kongresi," *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, 124, 7 Ağustos 1313 (20 August 1897), 7; "Nisvan kongresi," *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, 76-278, 31 Ağustos 1316 (13 August 1900), 5.

⁷⁸ Alexandra De Gripenberg, "L'Association des Femmes Finlandaises," in: *2e Congrès international des Oeuvres et Institutions féminines*, 403-406.

⁷⁹ Alexandra Gripenberg, "Special Reports of New Organising Work: From Baroness Gripenberg, in Greece and Turkey," in: Ogilvie Gordon (ed.), *International Council of Women: Report for 1905 - 1906*, Aberdeen: International Council of Women, 1906, 134-137, quotation 134.

⁸⁰ Gripenberg, "Special Reports of New Organising Work," 135.

⁸¹ Gripenberg, "Special Reports of New Organising Work," 136.

⁸² Gripenberg, "Special Reports of New Organising Work," 136.

⁸³ Gripenberg, "Special Reports of New Organising Work," 136.

organizations. Both Muslims and non-Muslims had been founding organizations for various purposes for quite some years at that time. It would last, however, until 1909, before the Law on Associations was issued and the legal framework for the foundation of associations was established, as mentioned before. The second reason she gave was that “those women, when they marry Turkish men, must submit to having their homes quite Turkish and obey the Turkish rules for women.”⁸⁴ She does, however, not describe what she means by “having their homes quite Turkish” or “obey[ing] the Turkish rules for women.”⁸⁵

By remaining vague in her report she left the audience and readers room to fill in the blanks for themselves. Thus she allowed her audience to sustain the existing (orientalist) ideas instead of giving them the opportunity to revise them based on a more thorough investigation of social reality.

Moreover, it is not clear who she thought should be part of a National Council of Turkish Women. Was she including Armenian and Greek women as well?⁸⁶ Or were they, because they were Christians, in her view belonging to

the European colonies [which] would join in starting a Council, and get individual Turkish women – those who have passed the American College for Girls and other Western institutions – to join some of the associations in the Council.⁸⁷

So only those “Turkish” women, whoever she meant, who had stood the acid test of the Western *mission civilisatrice* by successfully passing through Western education were regarded capable of participation in an organization operating on the – Westocentric – international platform.

Two years later the situation in the Ottoman Empire had drastically changed. Only a few weeks after the revolution of 23 July 1908, in September 1908, Selma Rıza returned to Istanbul together with her brother,⁸⁸ who became the president of the new Ottoman Parliament in December 1908. Obviously, the changes which were brought along by the Young Turk Revolution also led to renewed, and different, contacts between the ICW and Ottoman Muslim women, this

⁸⁴ Gripenberg, “Special Reports of New Organising Work,” 136.

⁸⁵ Gripenberg, “Special Reports of New Organising Work,” 136.

⁸⁶ A similar question had been raised in the ICW in 1899 when a woman from Austria reported that it would be impossible to have a National Council in Austria due to the large variety of ethnic and religious groups in that country. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 113.

⁸⁷ Gripenberg, “Special Reports of New Organising Work,” 136.

⁸⁸ “Renseignements Mondains,” *Le Figaro*, 9 September 1908, 2.

time represented by Selma Rıza. Very likely it was Mrs. Bowen, the wife of the director of the American Bible House in Istanbul and president of the committee founded on instigation of Mrs. Gripenberg, who took the initiative to (re)introduce Selma Rıza to the ICW. The unknown Dutch owner of a copy of the Agenda for a meeting of the ICW at Toronto, Canada in June 1909 found at Aletta, the Institute for Women's History in Amsterdam, jotted down the name of "Selma Hanim" with pencil, adding that there were "three letters about Turkey," and a line saying that "most importantly she says they can breathe freely now" [underlining in original]. Directly under the "most importantly" line, the name of Mrs. Marcellus Bowen was written.⁸⁹ Obviously, (some of) the letters came from Mrs. Bowen and contained information on the developments in "Turkey" that the formation of a Council was imminent.⁹⁰ As mentioned, she herself had been actively involved in the efforts to establish such a council and she must have been well aware of the post-July 1908 associational activities of Ottoman women. It seems that she herself, like other women from American missionary circles, was involved with one of them: the *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti*.

The *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti*

In her text on "Turkey," Käthe Schirmacher, also referred to the foundation of a *Fortschrittverein der Frauen* (in the 1912 English translation of the 1909 German original referred to as "the Women's Progress Society").⁹¹ The Society, she wrote, "[comprised] women of all nationalities but [concerned] itself only with

⁸⁹ The Countess of Aberdeen, *Agenda for the Quinquennial Sessions of the International Council of Women to be held at Toronto, Canada, June, 1909*, Aberdeen: The Rosemount Press, 1909 [copy at the library of Aletta, Institute for Women's History, Amsterdam (WER 72 1909)].

⁹⁰ The Countess of Aberdeen, *International Council of Women: Report of Transactions of The Fourth Quinquennial Meeting held at Toronto, Canada, June, 1909*, London: Constable & Co., 1910, 101. As mentioned above, Schirmacher indeed reported that "A federation of women's clubs [had] just been founded in [Turkey]" in her second edition of 1909 (in German, and translation of 1912 in English). Schirmacher, *The Modern Woman's Rights Movement*, 245.

⁹¹ Schirmacher wrote that the organization had been founded by those women who during and in the direct aftermath of the Young Turk revolution "expressed themselves orally and in writing in favor of the liberal ideas; [who] spoke in public and held public meetings; [who] attempted to appear in public without veils, and to attend the theater in order to see a patriotic play." It seems, however, that she confused the *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti* with the organization she also referred to, the "Young Turkish Women's League" (in German *jungtürkische Frauenbund*) which probably was the women's branch of the CUP (*İttihad ve Terakki Kadınlar Şubesi*). Schirmacher, *Die moderne Frauenbewegung*, 1909, 136; idem, *The Modern Woman's Rights Movement*, 248-249.

philanthropy and education.”⁹² The organization she referred to was very likely the *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti*. This organization had been founded in Istanbul “eight months after the Constitution,”⁹³ probably in March 1909,⁹⁴ by four women amongst whom Halide Edib, a graduate of the American College for Girls, a school founded by the (American) Women’s Board of Missions. In this Board graduates from Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, a school where women’s study clubs had been actively stimulated, took an important place.⁹⁵ Other women closely affiliated with the Board participated in the organization. Thus, Mrs. Bowen herself became an active member of the organization, as did the director of the College, Mary Mills Patrick and Mrs. Etta Marden, one of the women in charge of the Mission House in Gedik Pasha where Halide Edib also taught and where the first conferences for women organized by the *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti* were given.⁹⁶ The four initial members of the organization⁹⁷ in the first place aimed at their “personal and intellectual development” and gathered regularly in the house of one of them.

Halide Edib and her friends probably had the American reading and study clubs in mind when they founded the *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti*. The name of this organization is the literal translation of the name for the umbrella organization for women’s study clubs in the United States, “Association for the Advancement of Women,” which was founded in 1873.⁹⁸

The official aim of the organization was, according to the first article of its statutes, “to serve the elevation of the level of knowledge of our women, under the condition that our national characteristics and habits will be preserved

⁹² Schirmacher, *Die moderne Frauenbewegung*, 1909, 136; idem, *The Modern Woman’s Rights Movement*, 249.

⁹³ “Halide Hanımefendinin hitabesi,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 134, 8 Mart 1330 (21 March 1914), 4-5.

⁹⁴ According to a police report on associations in Istanbul of 1922 the organization, which at that time was no longer active, was founded on 26 Mart 1326 (8 April 1910). The difference in date may be caused due to a mix up of calendars or due to a discrepancy between the actual and official date of foundation. BOA, DH.EUM.5.ŞB, 37/90, 30 Zilhicce 1337 (26 September 1919).

⁹⁵ Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Voices; Women’s Study Clubs, 1860 - 1910*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1987; Frank A. Stone, “Mt. Holyoke’s impact on the land of Mt. Ararat,” *The Muslim World*, LXVI, 1, 1976, 44-57.

⁹⁶ “Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti,” *Halka Doğru*, 48, 6 Mart 1329 [sic! This should be 1330] (19 March 1914), 383; S.H., “Hayat-ı nisvan,” *Safahat*, 1, 6 Mart 1330 (19 March 1914), 16; “Halide Hanımefendinin hitabesi,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 134, 8 Mart 1330 (21 March 1914), 4-5.

⁹⁷ It is not clear who they are. One of them must have been Halide Edib. Would the other three have been the American women?

⁹⁸ Martin, *The Sound of Our Voices*.

without being harmed.”⁹⁹ According to these statutes, the organization regarded the education of women on the topics of pedagogy, housekeeping, history, literature, music and drawing and, eventually, foreign languages, as one of its most important duties (art. 5).¹⁰⁰ It would not engage in politics, since, as article 6 of the statutes read, politics formed part of women’s needs nor duties.¹⁰¹ The statutes furthermore stated that the organization was independent, but willing to cooperate with other organizations (art. 2), and that it welcomed members without any distinction of ethnicity, religion or nationality (*bilatefrik-i cins ve mezhep ve tabiyet*) (art. 10).¹⁰²

The organization recognized two sorts of members: “regular members” (*aza-yı asliye*) and “honorary members” (*aza-yı fahriye*). The regular members had to fulfil three requirements: they had to attend all the meetings, which were held every two weeks; they had to be able to read and write Turkish; and they had to know English or to take lessons in it (art. 12).¹⁰³ Honorary members were exempted from these three requirements, were free to participate in the meetings, but were not allowed to vote. They were not obliged to participate in the activities of the organization and could attend the English classes only against payment of a monthly fee (art. 13).¹⁰⁴ The regular members paid an entrance fee of 40 *kuruş* and a monthly fee of 20 *kuruş*; honorary members paid 108 *kuruş* and 10 *kuruş*, respectively (art. 33).¹⁰⁵

In the first year the number of members did not exceed sixteen. They read contemporary publications and discussed literature and history during their meetings. Besides English lessons, French classes were organized.¹⁰⁶ In its statutes the reasons were given for choosing English as the main language to concentrate on: firstly, to have access to science and knowledge “which we always will need from Europe;” secondly, since there existed a “Turkish women’s lovers” (*Türk Kadınları Muhibbi*) organization in England; and, thirdly, because

⁹⁹ *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, n.p. [Istanbul]: n.p., n.d. [1909?], 3. Also quoted in “Bizde hareket-i nisvan,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 140, 25 Nisan 1330 (8 May 1914), 4-7, quotation 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, 5.

¹⁰¹ *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, 5.

¹⁰² *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, 3-4; 7.

¹⁰³ *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁵ *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, 16.

¹⁰⁶ “Halide Hanımefendinin hitabesi,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 134, 8 Mart 1330 (21 March 1914), 4-5, quotations 5; Halide Edib [Adivar], *Memoirs of Halidé Edib*, New York & London: The Century Co., n.d., 334-335.

the “English” were supposedly socially and morally further developed than other nations.¹⁰⁷

While the organization initially aimed at self-education, its later activities were partly directed at the education of other women and girls rather than its own members. According to its statutes it wanted to do so by translating and publishing books.¹⁰⁸ It organized scholarly (*ilmi*) conferences on various topics and set up courses for girls.¹⁰⁹ In the late spring 1913, it opened two course centers: one where women by paying a small fee could get primary education twice a week, and one where women could learn classical Turkish embroidery for free.¹¹⁰ After one of the big fires in Istanbul the club organized a benefit activity and slowly its activities shifted towards becoming more charitable as will be shown in the chapters to come.¹¹¹

Although Halide Edib five years after the foundation of the organization at a speech during a dinner at the Tokatliyan Hotel in the honor of the oldest daughter and wife of the American Ambassador Morgenthau remarked that “today (...) this Turkish women’s club has its first official and social meeting with its Western sisters,” this first meeting seems to have had no follow-up.¹¹² At least, the name of the organization does not occur in any of the sources of the ICW, the most likely gateway for this organization to the world of international female associational life. Nor do the sources warrant the existence of a meta-organization like a National Women’s Council, despite the fact that Mrs. Bowen seems to have thought that the foundation of a Council of women’s

¹⁰⁷ *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, 4-5. “Bizde hareket-i nisvan,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 140, 25 Nisan 1330 (8 May 1914), 4-7.

¹⁰⁸ *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi*, 6, “Bizde hareket-i nisvan,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 140, 25 Nisan 1330 (8 May 1914), 4-7. See also Mary Mills Patrick, “Among the Educated Women of Turkey,” in: Annie van Sommer & Samuel M. Zwemer (eds), *Daylight in the Harem: A New Era for Moslem Women*, New York, etc.: Fleming H. Revell Company, [1911], 71-90, 83.

¹⁰⁹ E.g. “Hanımlara büyük bir gün: Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti’nin taht-ı himayesinde,” *Tanin*, 19 Haziran 1328 (2 July 1912), 6; “Teali-i Nisvan’ın 4üncü konferansı,” *Tanin*, 22 Nisan 1328 (5 May 1912), 4. The lecture had to be postponed, though. “Teali-i Nisvan’ın 4üncü konferansı,” *Tanin*, 27 Nisan 1328 (10 May 1912), 4.

¹¹⁰ “Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti’nde kadın dersleri,” *Mektep Müzesi*, I, 3, 1 Haziran 1329 (14 June 1913), 79. See also “Havadis-i dünya: Osmanlı kadınlığı durmuyor, çalışıyor,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 100-11, 28 Eylül 1329 (11 October 1913), 15.

¹¹¹ “Halide Hanımefendinin hitabesi,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 134, 8 Mart 1330 (21 March 1914), 4-5.

¹¹² “Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti,” *Halka Doğru*, 48, 6 Mart 1329 [sic! This should be 1330] (19 March 1914), 383 “Halide Hanımefendinin hitabesi,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 134, 8 Mart 1330 (21 March 1914), 4-5. See also S.H., “Hayat-ı Nisvan,” *Safahat*, 1, 6 Mart 1330 (19 March 1914), 16.

organizations was imminent when she wrote to the ICW as early as 1909 and Schirmacher actually stated that such a Council had been founded.¹¹³ Despite the lack of international aspirations and a national Council to represent them at the international platform, the ICW continued its efforts to draw the Ottoman women into its realm.

Selma Rıza and the ICW

Although the women's associations founded in the Ottoman Empire seem to have lacked international aspirations, the 1909 conference in Toronto did not go completely unnoticed in the Ottoman Empire. *Yeni Gazete* (New Journal) reported that at this international women's congress the decision had been taken to work on establishing local councils in the Ottoman Empire, Egypt and Russia.¹¹⁴ The person who in the eyes of the ICW could best be charged with the foundation of such a local council in the Ottoman Empire formed no surprise: Alice Salomon, seconded by Evelyn Gough proposed to invite "Selma Hanum Rıza, sister of Ahmed Rıza, (...) to become Honorary Vice-President for Turkey."¹¹⁵

Selma Rıza was an obvious choice for the women involved in the ICW. Due to her lectures at the congresses and her contacts with the French women's organizations, she had become a familiar person within international feminist circles. Moreover, she had been involved in associational activities in Istanbul after her return in 1908: she seems to have been an active member of the women's branch of the CUP.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Aberdeen, *International Council of Women*, 1910, 101. Schirmacher reported that "A federation of women's clubs [had] just been founded in [Turkey]" in her second edition of 1909 (in German, and translation of 1912 in English). Schirmacher, *The Modern Woman's Rights Movement*, 245.

¹¹⁴ "Beynelmilel Kadınlar Kongresi ve hüküm usulu," *Yeni Gazete*, 24 Haziran (June) 1909, 2. The year before national women's councils had been established in Bulgaria and Greece. The Countess of Aberdeen, *Our Lady of the Sunshine and her International Visitors: A Series of Impressions Written by Representatives of the Various Delegations Attending the Quinquennial Meeting of the International Council of Women in Canada, June 1909*, Toronto: the Copp Clark Company, 1910, 103. (accessed through <http://www.archive.org>).

¹¹⁵ Aberdeen, *International Council of Women*, 1910, 101.

¹¹⁶ The British journalist Grace Ellison referred to a "woman's club founded by Selma Hanoum, sister of Ahmed Rıza Bey." The French journalist Marcelle Tinayre, who was closely befriended with Ahmed and Selma Rıza, wrote about an organization referred to as "Cercle

Thus, both the proposition and the invitation were accepted and in a book containing the impressions of some of the participants in the 1909 meeting of the ICW in Toronto she was referred to as Honorary Vice-President.¹¹⁷ She would stay Honorary Vice-President until at least 1923.

As Honorary Vice-President she wrote a report on Turkey for the annual report of 1909 - 1910 of the ICW, followed by more reports in the subsequent years. Her first report was basically a large part of a letter she sent in June 1910 to Alice Salomon, the German secretary of the ICW. In this letter, she wrote to be sorry not to be able to write a full report referring to an earlier letter of hers, in which she seems to have explained “the difficult situation of her female compatriots, who have the desire to work towards progress and civilization.”¹¹⁸ We do not have this earlier letter, but the remainder of the letter of June 1910 was published almost completely in the ICW report of 1910. It reflected her disappointment with the developments in the Ottoman Empire. She explained that she “had to confess that the time has not yet come for Turkish women to demand freely and publicly the integral application of the laws already existing.”¹¹⁹ She was also hopeful, though, writing that “[a]ll those who have the opportunity to see from nearby the obstacles already surmounted and the road already covered in two years in Turkey, carry hope for a better future”¹²⁰ and referred to the establishment of groups and organizations aiming at the education of girls and the “propaganda of new ideas.”¹²¹

In an interview with E.S. Stevens which was published in 1911, but probably took place earlier, Selma Rıza told her proudly of her Honorary Vice-Presidency. She related how she had been the target of the reactionary revolutionaries of

Féminin de Stamboul.” Selma Rıza herself, on the other hand, in an interview with another journalist, recounted how “[w]hen the Constitution was proclaimed, a Ladies' Society of Union and Progress was formed with the purpose of aiding the party of reform, and also of establishing their own claim to more liberty.” All three texts tell how the building of the organization was destroyed and looted during the reactionary counterrevolution of April 1909. Grace Ellison, *An English Woman in a Turkish Harem*, London: Methuan & Co, 1915, 81; Marcelle Tinayre, *Notes d'une voyageuse en Turquie*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, [t.y.], 19-20; E.S. Stevens, “The Womenkind of Young Turkey,” *Contemporary Review*, 99, 1911, 533-544, 540.

¹¹⁷ Aberdeen, *Our Lady of the Sunshine and her International Visitors*, 99.

¹¹⁸ Selma Rıza to Alice Salomon, 13 June 1910, Staatsbibliothek (Berlin) / Handschriften-abteilung, Slg. Darmstaedter 2k 1900: Rıza, Selma Hanna [sic!].

¹¹⁹ Selma Rıza, “Turquie,” in: Alice Salomon (ed.) *International Council of Women: First Annual Report of the Fifth Quinquennial Period, 1909 - 1910*, n.p.: n.p., n.d. [1910], 149-150, quotation 149.

¹²⁰ Selma Rıza, “Turquie,” [1910], 150.

¹²¹ Selma Rıza, “Turquie,” [1910], 150.

April 1909 and was accused of introducing hats to Muslim girls, but assured her interviewer that “as soon as the political situation is sufficiently assured to allow us to act, we shall start a branch [of the ICW] here.”¹²²

The report of 1910 - 1911 still referred to Selma Rıza as one of the Honorary Vice-Presidents of the ICW, but this time the country report on Turkey is not hers. Instead, the president of the ICW, the Countess of Aberdeen, had charged Sophie Sanford with the task of visiting some existing National Councils and to undertake “propaganda work” to “endeavor to establish National Councils in other countries [i.e. where National Councils were not yet existing].”¹²³ Her tour, on which she wrote in the 1910 - 1911 report of the ICW, included France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Servia, Roumania, Hungary, and Austria. She arrived in Istanbul on 7 March 1911, where she met in person with Selma Rıza, “a charming personality.”¹²⁴ Her short report mentioned the formation of “[c]lubs for literary work, (...) [where] the seed is being liberally sown and time must be given for its up-springing.” She also referred to two Greek Ottoman women as being “active and successful leaders.”¹²⁵

The 1911 - 1912 report of the ICW carried again a short letter of Selma Rıza. And again it reflected a mixture of disappointment and hope. “There is very little change in the position of women in Turkey, but there exists a movement which promises much good for the future,” she wrote. She referred to the *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti* and to the *Comité des Dames du Croissant Rouge* which had been founded. The fact that in the latter organization, whose general-secretary (*başkatibe*) she became,¹²⁶ about fifty Greek, Armenian and Jewish women were co-operating with their Muslim “compatriots,” had raised her hopes that this

¹²² Stevens, “The Womankind of Young Turkey,” 540.

¹²³ International Council of Women, *Report on the Quinquennial Meetings, Rome 1914*, Karlsruhe: G. Braunsche Hofbuchdruckerei und Verlag, [1914], 68. (accessed through <http://www.archive.org>).

¹²⁴ Sophie Sanford, “Mrs. Sanford’s Report Regarding her Visits to National Councils and her Propaganda Work,” in: Alice Salomon (ed.) *International Council of Women: Second Annual Report of the Fifth Quinquennial Period, 1910 - 1911*, n.p.: n.p., n.d. [1911], 175-179, quotation 176.

¹²⁵ Sanford, “Mrs. Sanford’s Report,” quotations 177.

¹²⁶ The Red Crescent Ladies’ Committee was founded on 20 March 1912 with the active involvement of Selma Rıza. Initially, the Committee indeed seems to have been committed to *Osmanlıçılık*, the form of “nationalism” which sought to unite all the subjects of the Ottoman sultan without making any distinction regarding race, ethnicity or religion. Muzaffer Tepekaya & Leyla Kaplan, “Hilal-i Ahmer Hanımlar Merkezi’nin kuruluşu ve faaliyetleri (1877 - 1923),” *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 10, 2003, 147-202. (accessed through <http://www.kizilaykutuphane.org/UserFiles/File/tezler/Hanımlar%20merkezi.pdf>)

organization “would lay the foundation for the further co-operation and unification of the women of all *races* in Turkey.”¹²⁷

In the report of 1912 - 1913 a letter from Turkey was lacking. According to a footnote, Selma Rıza had not been able to write it due to her wartime activities and “personal bereavement.”¹²⁸ She had been on the organizing committee of an international congress in Paris held in June 1913, though.¹²⁹

In February 1914, a German female journalist who was a member of the *Osmanlı Müdafaa-i Hukuk-u Nisvan Cemiyeti* living in Istanbul, Odette Feldman, wrote an article on the ICW in the Ottoman Turkish women’s periodical *Kadınlar Dünyası* explaining how only national councils could be members of the ICW if they subscribed to its aims and announcing the conference it would have in Rome in May of that year.¹³⁰ She also referred to Selma Rıza and explicitly called upon the Ottoman Muslim women who were members of various Ottoman Muslim women’s organizations to unite into one national council. A few weeks later, *Tanin* also announced the “International Women’s Congress” (of the ICW in Rome) and reported on the opening speech of the Italian Minister of Science.¹³¹ The owner of *İkdam* wrote from Switzerland, where he happened to be at that moment, that he was regretting that there were no “Turkish” women participating in this congress to report on the bad treatment of Muslim women during the Balkan Wars.¹³² Nimet Cemil, another member of the *Osmanlı Müdafaa-i Hukuk-u Nisvan Cemiyeti* wrote in a reaction that Turkish women had no right to be there because they were not yet sufficiently emancipated.¹³³

¹²⁷ Selma Hanum Rıza, “Turquie,” in: Alice Salomon (ed.) *International Council of Women: Third Annual Report of the Fifth Quinquennial Period, 1911 - 1912*, n.p.: n.p., n.d. [1912].

¹²⁸ Alice Salomon (ed.), *International Council of Women: Fourth Annual Report of the Fifth Quinquennial Period, 1912 - 1913*, n.p.: ICW, n.d. [1913], 104fn. Selma Rıza’s mother had died that year, probably of breast cancer. Personal communication with Burak Çetintaş, İstanbul, 8 February 2010.

¹²⁹ *Avril De Sainte-Croix, Dixième Congrès International des Femmes: Oeuvres et Institutions Féminines; Drois des Femmes. Inauguré par M. Klotz, Ministre de l’Intérieur, Le 2 Juin 1913, au Grand Amphithéâtre de la Sorbonne*, Paris: V. Giard et E. Brière, 1914, 8.

¹³⁰ It had been announced earlier in the French annex of the periodical: “Chronique féministe,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 124, 28 Décembre 1913/10 Janvier 1914, 4.

¹³¹ “Beynelmilel kadın kongresi,” *Tanin*, 20 Nisan 1914, 3; “Beynelmilel kadınlar kongresi,” *Tanin*, 23 Nisan 1914, 2.

¹³² “Kadınlar,” *İkdam*, 17 Mayıs 1914, 1.

¹³³ Nimet Cemil, “Roma’da kadınlar kongresi,” *Kadınlar Dünyası*, 143, 16 Mayıs 1330 (29 May 1914), 4.

Turkey indeed was not in person represented at this meeting,¹³⁴ but Selma Rıza had sent an extensive, written report which was read at the congress. In this report she actually reproached the ICW for not speaking up in favour of the Ottoman Empire when it was at war in 1912 and 1913:

I wanted to draw (...) the attention of the Committee of Arbitration and Peace [sic!] by sending its noble president a complaint which is nothing more than a protest against the inertia of the Societies which are engaged in these two questions – I say inertia, because they have left the innocents, women and children, to die under the blows of bayonets, without shouting out to the aggressors to stop, without showing even any indignation.¹³⁵

She asked the members of the ICW present at the Congress to support “their sisters of the Orient” in gaining “calmness” and “order” without the “unjust attacks of civilized countries” to enable them to make further progress.¹³⁶ Her disappointment with the inertia of the ICW contrasts with her optimistic and positive words on the advancement of women in the Ottoman Empire. Fully aware of the opportunities war offered women in Istanbul, she mentioned the establishment and activities of several women’s organizations, writing that the women

have unfolded all the energy, accumulated since long years, to come to the aid of their compatriots and to take their place in the public and social life. (...) Their attitude has been so dignified and measured at this start that even the most severe and retrograde spirits cannot find anything to reproach them; they have, on the contrary, almost been forced to recognize the importance of the feminine role in society.¹³⁷

During the war years, the ICW was hardly functional, and the next report, covering the period 1914 - 1920, only appeared in 1920. In this report there is no mentioning of any correspondence with the *Asri Kadın Cemiyeti* (Modern Women’s Organization) which accordingly to an article in a Turkish newspaper had decided to send a memorandum to Lady Aberdeen in April 1919 in name of

¹³⁴ *Preliminary List of Delegates and Foreign Visitors Attending the Quinquennial Meeting in Rome, May 5th - 14th, 1914*, Rome: ICW, 1914, 24 says for Turkey, “Will not be represented.”

¹³⁵ Selma Rıza, “Turquie,” in: International Council of Women, *Report on the Quinquennial Meetings, Rome 1914*, Karlsruhe: G. Braunsche Hofbuchdruckerei und Verlag, n.d. [1914], 391-394, quotation 392-394. (Accessed through <http://www.archive.org>).

¹³⁶ Selma Rıza, “Turquie,” [1914], quotation 394.

¹³⁷ Selma Rıza, “Turquie,” [1914], 392-394.

the “Turkish women’s organizations.”¹³⁸ The report only contained a short letter of Selma Rıza in which she wrote that she regretted not to be able to participate in the congress of the ICW in Stockholm due to the “tragic situation in which [her] poor country was,” asking for sympathy of the *congressistes* for their “sisters of the Orient.”¹³⁹ In this letter she also referred to an extensive report to the President of the ICW, but this report obviously never arrived at its destination and was therefore not published.¹⁴⁰

In the two combined annual reports for the periods 1920 - 1922 and 1922 - 1924, respectively, there were no longer reports on Turkey, but Selma Rıza was still referred to as one of the Honorary Vice-Presidents representing “countries where Councils are not yet formed.”¹⁴¹ After 1924, Turkey and her name disappeared altogether from the ICW reports.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, Rupp and Weber dated the start of lasting contacts between the international women’s movement and women in the Middle East at the early 1920s. Both scholars, however, focused on the relatively radical IWSA during their research, while they ignored the activities of the ICW regarding women in the Middle East. This organization which is generally regarded the most conservative of the three main international women’s organizations, ICW, IWSA and WILPF, was actually the first to establish lasting contacts with women

¹³⁸ “Hanımlarımızın faaliyeti: Asri Kadın Cemiyeti’nin muhtırası,” *Hadisat*, 22 Nisan 1919, 1. Since members of the *Asri Kadın Cemiyeti* a few weeks after sending this memorandum actively got involved in protest meetings against the occupation of Izmir by the Greeks, it is very likely that the memorandum contained a call upon the women of the ICW to support the Turkish women in their objecting to the humiliating results of the Armistice of Moudros and the occupation of large parts of Anatolia by foreign forces.

¹³⁹ Selma Rıza, “Turquie: Lettre de Selma Rıza,” in: the Marchoness of Aberdeen & Temair (ed.), *International Council of Women: Sixth Quinquennial Period*, Kristiana: n.p, 1920, 362.

¹⁴⁰ It makes one curious about what was in the report and why or how it disappeared. Could it be that she was critical of the occupying forces and that the British did not allow for her letter with the report to be sent?

¹⁴¹ Anna Backer (ed.), *International Council of Women: Combined First and Second Annual Report of the Seventh Quinquennial Period, 1920 - 1922*, n.p.: ICW, n.d. [1922]; Anna Backer (ed.), *International Council of Women: Combined Third and Fourth Annual Report of the Seventh Quinquennial Period, 1922 - 1924*, n.p.: ICW, n.d. [1924].

in the region. It made its first conscious efforts to assist in the establishment of a national council in “Turkey” as early as 1906.

Through their focus on the IWSA, both scholars, however, disregarded the substantially earlier contacts of Ottoman Muslim feminists with international feminist circles. Although these contacts seem to have remained limited from both sides during the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, they are certainly not ignorable as they paved the way for a more regular and intensive relationship from the second decade of the twentieth century onwards. This chapter shows how the ICW not only was much earlier in establishing a solid relationship with Ottoman women, but also that it was able to maintain its contacts with “Turkey” beyond the First World War, when its work came to a halt to be resumed only in 1920.

From the organizations within the international women’s movement, the ICW seems to have been the only organization open to such contacts. This fits the goals of the ICW which wanted to have as many members as possible and to be open to national councils including all sorts of women’s organizations and associations.¹⁴² Not carrying the demand for suffrage as a criterion for membership, it was more inclusionary than the IWSA which, as the name indicates, was only open to National Woman Suffrage Societies. These national organizations could be consisting of a variety of organizations as long as they were working towards the enfranchisement of women.¹⁴³ The fact that the ICW – unlike the IWSA – did not limit itself to suffrage organizations allowed it to show a genuine interest in and to engage in contacts with women in those countries where suffrage was not (yet) an issue, like the Ottoman Empire. Women from the ICW who co-operated with women belonging to the missionary community in Istanbul seem to have played a role which should not be ignored in the development of female associational life in the late Ottoman Empire.

From the Ottoman side Selma Rıza seems to have been the only spokeswoman representing Ottoman women for a longer period and on a regular basis on the platform of international feminism. Her first lecture in Paris in 1900 was probably instrumental in this respect. Speaking French fluently and being well-educated she was able to speak the language of the women and men in her audience. They were confronted not with an exotic harem lady, but with a modern Ottoman Turkish woman, who, although being different, was quite able to address a large audience. Her first appearance for such an audience proved to be a stepping stone for the

¹⁴² Schirmacher, *The Modern Woman’s Rights Movement*, xi.

¹⁴³ Bosch & Kloosterman (eds), *Politics and Friendship*, 9.

development of more extensive and lasting contacts with women in the international women’s movement and, more particularly, the ICW.

Whether or not due to the contacts with Selma Rıza, a definite shift in the attitude of the ICW towards “Turkish” women can be detected between 1906 and 1910. While the 1906 report on the Ottoman Empire of Baroness Gripenberg still breathed the sense of superiority also visible at the earlier lectures on women in the Ottoman Empire, the short report of Sophie Sanford on her tour of 1910 carried a completely different tone.

At the same time, the texts of Selma Rıza changed in content, as well. As such they reflect the developments in the late Ottoman Empire of the period. Her first lecture in Paris in 1900 and her first report to the ICW in 1910 pointed at her struggle to reconcile modernization with the local mores and values: she justified giving women more rights by pointing at the corruption of existing values grounded in Islam. In her later reports she no longer justified women’s obtaining rights with a reference to Islam. While she was rather negative about the developments in the Ottoman Empire related to women’s rights in her early reports, her later reports show her confidence in Ottoman Muslim women’s ability to take their place in social and public life. Also her attitude towards her Western sisters-in-arms changed. While she asked them for support for their “Oriental sisters” in regaining their rights in her first speech, she reproached them for having kept silent during the Balkan Wars at the conference in Rome in 1914. In her later reports, she no longer asked for support, but stressed the developments from within the Ottoman women’s world, writing how the members of Ottoman women’s clubs and societies joined forces to educate and support other Ottoman women. Furthermore, while the early texts of Selma Rıza and others up to 1912 also refer to non-Muslim women, and Selma Rıza even explicitly expressed the hope that the participation of Greek, Armenian and Jewish women together with Muslim women in the Ottoman Red Crescent Ladies’ Committee would lead to the unification of “women of all races in Turkey,” in her later texts she does not refer to non-Muslim women anymore at all. The women’s organizations she referred to in her report for the 1914 conference, for example, were known to be rather nationalist. By that time even the Red Crescent which she had praised earlier for its multi-communal character had turned into a more Turkish nationalist organization for which religion,

Islam, was inadvertently connected with being Turkish.¹⁴⁴ Ironically, the wars and, along with them, rising patriotism and nationalism, led to an increase in the number of women’s organizations and increased activities of Ottoman Muslim women in social and public life. Since nationalism and internationalism proved to be difficult to unite, the growth in activism of Ottoman women did not lead to an increase in the international contacts of Ottoman Muslim women. Nor to the establishment of a national, umbrella organization, which could have become an auxiliary of the ICW.

For reasons quite similar to those listed by Çelik in her work on the architecture of Islam at nineteenth-century world’s exhibitions, we can say that studying the early contacts between the international women’s movement and Ottoman (Muslim) women is of relevance for several reasons. Firstly, it reveals that the international platform which supposedly looked for cross-cultural sisterhood, in fact, displayed the underlying power relations, and that the “Orient” was not a homogeneous, but more complex entity. Secondly, the available texts reveal that Ottoman Muslim women, like many others in Muslim (and other) societies, were struggling to find a way to combine modernization, which was perceived to be an alien, and Western, phenomenon, with the maintaining of local norms and values. Thirdly, it shows that European and American women were not the only actors on the playground of the early international women’s movement, and allows us to draw a more complex picture of it. Fourthly, to quote Çelik more literally, “examining the exchanges between [(Ottoman) Muslim women] and the [the international women’s movement dominated by European and American women] acknowledges the existence of communication, discussion, and mutual recognition among these unequal partners, helping to refute the ‘silent’ and ‘frozen’ status given to [Muslim women] in Western [feminist] discourse.”¹⁴⁵

Including the texts of Ottoman Muslim women and, more particularly, Selma Rıza, in the study of the early international women’s movement, indeed helps us to get a more complete picture of the intricate interactions of the movement with women from (this particular part of) “the Orient” and a better understanding of the complex process of changing and evolving ideas around

¹⁴⁴ Hüsni Ada, “The First Ottoman Civil Society Organization in the Service of the Ottoman State: the Case of the Ottoman Red Crescent (*Osmanlı Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti*),” [Unpublished MA-Thesis, İstanbul: Sabancı University, 2004]. (<http://digital.sabanciuniv.edu/tezler/tezler/ssbf/master/adahusnu/ana.pdf>)

¹⁴⁵ Çelik, *Displaying the Orient*, 3.

the “Oriental woman” within that movement and, more specifically the ICW. Of course, the texts used for this chapter are all published texts which may have been “polished” for the sake of the public eye. It would be interesting to be able to view more personal letters from the women involved in these interactions. It is known that Selma Rıza corresponded with her relatives, when she was living in Paris. In the two Paris letters published so far, however, she did not refer to her contacts with women from the international women’s movement. More letters of hers are known to exist; however, they are not (yet) available for research.¹⁴⁶ Did she also correspond on a more personal title with women from the ICW or other women’s organizations? And what did these women write about “Turkey” after they met with Selma Rıza and the other women or read their texts? As Bosch and Kloosterman show such more personal exchanges might reveal more veritable forms of two-way communication, discussion and (lack of) mutual recognition than the more or less official texts as used above.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Uçman, “Selma Rıza’nın Mektupları.”

¹⁴⁷ Bosch & Kloosterman (eds), *Politics and Friendship*, 9.

