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

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## CONCLUSION

# *Feminism, Philanthropy and Patriotism: Ottoman Muslim Female Associational Life and Identity Formation*

The aim of this book has been to contribute to the existing literature on nationalism and women in the late Ottoman Empire through a closer look at the practices and discourses of, particularly, Ottoman Muslim women during the Second Constitutional Period. It aimed at providing a better understanding of the involvement of Ottoman (Muslim) women, both as object and as subject, in the regeneration of nationalism through their activities as individuals and, even more so, in female associational life. By describing and analyzing the feminist, philanthropic/charitable, and patriotic/nationalist activities of Ottoman Muslim women during this period, the study sought to get a better understanding of the identity claims which according to Özkırımlı are part of the particular form of discourse which nationalism is and to show how the processes of community and/or nation building and the creation of state identity/identities in the late Ottoman Empire were gendered.

## Ottoman Women's Organizations

Ottoman Muslim women's organizations and associations figure prominently in all chapters. As in Europe the first (Muslim) women's associations in the Ottoman Empire were voluntary societies of women belonging to the urban elite. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards Ottoman Muslim women in Istanbul, but also in, for example, Thessalonica, started to form associations. These first associations of Ottoman Muslim women were clearly the initiative of women belonging to families close to the entourage of the Sultan, such as the wife of Midhat Pasha and the daughters of Cevdet Pasha. Initially these associations seem to have lacked a formal character and to have

been loosely established for particular, short term aims partly due to the existing restrictions from the Hamidian regime.

Gradually, these women's associations gained a more formal character and turned into women's organizations, while they also went through a process of democratization: the educated wives and daughters of the stratum of modern educated civil servants and military officers, which had been created during the nineteenth century became increasingly involved in the establishment of Ottoman Muslim women's associations and organizations and in their activities. In their efforts these women were often openly supported by their male relatives, as was the case with the Thessalonian *Teali-i Vatan Osmanlı Hanımlar Cemiyeti* founded in 1908. The restrictions created by the existing gender norms forced the male Unionists, in fact, to formalize their initially informal support to this organization.

The Young Turk Revolution proved to be a turning point in Ottoman associational life. As shown in the introduction, Ottoman women and men, Muslim and non-Muslim, felt that this revolution created for them the possibility to become participatory citizens within a new society, rather than subjects of a sultan being experienced as tyrannical by the military and civil servants and other civilians participating in the revolution. This wish for such a participatory citizenship found expression in the many newspapers and periodicals which were founded in the direct aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution as well as in the establishment of associations with a variety of aims.

The outburst of civil activities scared the authorities, who tried to get control over the public, but at the same time actively used the rising spirit of citizenship to mobilize that public. The "Law on Associations" which was issued to this aim in August 1909 forced the associations to formalize their existence and to get registered with the local authorities. Thus while some of the associations which were formed spontaneously in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution were turned into formal organizations, others disappeared.

Central authorities actively cooperated with local authorities in the establishment of new, nation-wide organizations such as the Fleet Organization, the Red Crescent and the National Defense Organization and did not hesitate to use these to raise public consciousness, to install feelings of national pride and to create a sense of community. During the period of war, moreover, these national organizations served to turn the "unguided" participation of women in the war

increasingly into a “guided” participation:<sup>1</sup> the authorities required the activities of women and their organizations to be co-ordinated by these national organizations. Thus, they succeeded in tapping into the resources offered by their female citizens, which were so badly needed for the internal and external economic and military struggles.

The women’s organizations which were established were formally all private, so-called non-governmental, organizations. The “division of labour” within the Ottoman Empire, according to which the non-Muslims were supposedly predominantly involved in commerce and finance, while Muslims were more likely to be involved in the military and bureaucracy, however, blurred the border between private (as in “non-governmental”) and public (as in “governmental”) in the Ottoman case.

This research shows how Ottoman women’s organizations can roughly be grouped into three categories based on their intricate relationship with the authorities. To the first category belonged those organizations which were established independently, without any (obvious) involvement, directly or indirectly, of the authorities. The women involved in these organizations were the wives and daughters of men with a wide variety of functions: from trader to medical doctor to bank employee. An example of such an organization was the *Osmanlı Kadınlar Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi*. Non-Muslim and mixed organizations were most likely to belong to this category. The second category was formed by those organizations whose members were closely affiliated with the military and civil authorities. The women behind these organizations belonged to the Ottoman (Muslim) establishment. Due to the “division of labour” within the Ottoman Empire, the women’s organizations with a majority of Muslim women almost automatically belonged to the second category, since the husbands of the well-to-do women involved in these women’s organizations were very likely to belong to the military or bureaucratic establishment. An example of this kind of organization was the *Asker Ailelerine Yardımcı Hanımlar Cemiyeti*. Although more research is needed it seems that this organization was largely financed by civil and military institutions.

A third category was formed by the women’s auxiliaries of the large national organizations: the Fleet Organization, the Red Crescent and the National

<sup>1</sup> Term borrowed from Marwick, Marwick, Arthur, “Problems and Consequences of Organizing Society for Total War,” in: Nándor F. Dreisziger (ed.), *Mobilization for Total War: the Canadian, American, and British Experience 1914 - 1918, 1940 - 1945*, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981, 3–21, 11.

Defense Organization. While the women's branch of the Red Crescent was founded because the rules and regulations of the International Red Cross organization required establishing such an auxiliary, the initiatives to establish women's branches of the Fleet Organization and the National Defense Organization were taken by women. The women's branches of the Fleet Organization were short-lived, probably because the women involved failed to embed them firmly in the larger organization. The women who initiated the women's branch of the National Defense Organization were more successful. It was turned into an auxiliary with several local branches with well circumscribed supportive tasks and duties.

The spatial radius of action of these women's organizations was limited: they were locally based and do not seem to have worked interlocally. This was even the case for the Women's Committee of the Red Crescent. Although women's branches were established in several towns in the Empire, there existed no direct contact between these branches and the Women's Center in Istanbul: correspondence went largely through the local men's organization to the central men's organization in Istanbul. This confirms the findings of Lewis for Great Britain<sup>2</sup> that the geographical scope of female associational work was largely limited to local, grassroots associations, while national organizations were the prerogative of men.

Lindenmeyr notices how philanthropic organizations and activities in Imperial Russia were more prone to occur in "more modernized" regions with relatively prosperous communities.<sup>3</sup> Although more research is needed, this seems to be the case in the Ottoman Empire as well. The majority of the women's organizations discussed in this book were established and active in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Another, relatively modern and prosperous city with a rich female associational life was Thessalonica, while further research on Izmir will very likely show a similar richness in this field.<sup>4</sup> Female associational life in the provincial towns was, in majority, initiated by

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, "Gender, the family and women's agency in the building of 'welfare states'."

<sup>3</sup> Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice*, 226.

<sup>4</sup> Nicole van Os, "Complimenteren en passagieren: Nederlandse marineofficieren en janmaats in Osmaanse wateren (1896 - 1897)" in: Jan Schmidt (red.), *Nederland in Turkije/Turkije in Nederland: 400 Jaar Vriendschap*, Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012, 202-217. Due to the focus on sources published in Istanbul for this research, the associational life of Thessalonica and Izmir is likely to have been underexposed. Further research into other sources may reveal a richer associational life in these cities than this research warrants. This may also be the case for other cities such as Beirut and Alexandria.

administrators and civil servants sent from the imperial center and their relatives, who thus contributed to the dissemination of new ideas about participatory citizenship amongst women in the provincial centers. Women belonging to the highest circles of Ottoman society including the Imperial dynasty, in cities like Istanbul or Izmir, whose “visibility” hitherto had been limited to their representation in, for example, the (imperial) patronage of religious endowments, actively contributed to the associational culture created. Initially their substantial, and widely published, contributions allowed them to remain physically invisible: they became patrons of (women’s) organizations and donated generously. Later they stepped out of their harems and actively and visibly participated in Ottoman associational life through activities such as attending the meetings of organizations or visiting soldiers in the hospitals. Their public support of, and participation in Ottoman female associational life formed a source of legitimation which carried multiple dimensions.

Firstly, the involvement of women from the highest layers of Ottoman society served to give legitimacy to the state and its apparatus these layers represented, including the Ottoman dynasty. The patronage as well as active participation of women from the Ottoman dynasty in female associational life contributed to the legitimation of the dynasty. As such the involvement of these women can be regarded as the continuation of the policy pursued by Adbülhamid II during the nineteenth century by a dynasty whose powers had been severely restrained after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the grab of power by the Unionists in January 1913. Through the visible activities of women belonging to the dynastic household, a conscious effort was made to continue the role of the Ottoman dynasty as the representative of a multinational, dynastic state to which “emotionally disparate peoples”<sup>5</sup> could and would feel committed.

The active and visible involvement of a relatively high number of prominent Unionists and their female relatives in philanthropic organizations was relevant in a similar way: through these activities they (re)presented the “caring” side of the state. Thus they legitimized the prominent role of the bureaucratic elite within the state apparatus and its actions:<sup>6</sup> the philanthropic activities developed by the Unionists themselves and by their wives and daughters served as “public performances” through which the “ruling elite pursue[d] hegemony.”<sup>7</sup> “High

<sup>5</sup> Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> See also Özbek, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Sosyal Yardım Uygulamaları.”

<sup>7</sup> Özbek, “Philanthropic Activity, Ottoman Patriotism, and the Hamidian Regime,” 63.

politics” and society at grassroots level conveniently joined forces in organizations such as the *Asker Ailelerine Yardımcı Hanımlar Cemiyeti* or the Ottoman Red Crescent.

Secondly, their involvement served to legitimize the activities of women from the other strata in Ottoman society. The example given by the wives and daughters of prominent members of Ottoman society through their work in philanthropic associations served to legitimize the extension of social space of Ottoman Muslim women in a wider context. The fact that the head of the worldwide Muslim community allowed women from his direct entourage to deploy public activities left little room for others to deny other women the right to do so, at least on religious grounds.

Another factor contributing to the legitimization of female activities beyond the direct scope of the family were the decorations which were awarded to women such as the *Şefkat Nişanı*. Although these decorations do not seem to have been awarded in public award ceremonies, as was the case in Germany,<sup>8</sup> (women’s) periodicals and newspapers reported regularly on women’s receiving these medals and other public tokens of appreciation. Besides giving legitimacy to the activities of women, they also served to build a sense of community between the dynasty, the state and its female subjects.

## Feminism: Stretching But Not Changing the Gender Order

One of the subquestions posed in this research was how women’s organizations changed or affected the gender order. And, implicitly, whether they can be called feminist or not. Moreover, what did these changes mean for the identity of the (Muslim) community? The activities of the women within the larger, male dominated organizations and the women’s organizations, were, like their geographical scope, gender based. The local, auxiliary women’s branches of the male dominated national organizations, such as the Red Crescent, the National Defense Organization or the Fleet Organization were assigned well circumscribed tasks and duties, which in general formed an extension of the

<sup>8</sup> Quataert, *Staging Philanthropy*, 3.



familial tasks of women such as education, nursing wounded soldiers and sewing. The women of these auxiliaries as well as their colleagues in the more independent organizations were, however, able to gradually redefine the seemingly well-defined parameters of the existing gender order: rather than doing this by upsetting them, they did so by stretching them.

Initially women's organizations offered the possibility to be active for the public good without physically stepping out of the private realms through donations of money and goods. Later women started to step out of their private homes to gather in the homes of other women or accommodations provided by their organizations to contribute to the common effort. Through these places, which were open to women only, women's organizations offered women the possibility to act in a realm beyond the privacy of their homes and families. They created the possibility not to enter the realm of men, but to enlarge theirs. Slowly but firmly this realm was further extended. The female realm was no longer the home where women educated children, nursed the sick and elderly, and managed a household. The female realm became the larger community where they educated other women, nursed wounded soldiers, fed the poor and destitute and contributed to the financial stability of their country by managing women's organizations and all-female workshops and by becoming producers, investors or patriotic consumers. By conceptualizing this newly "lived" or "experienced" community as an extension of family and neighbourhood, Ottoman Muslim women were allowed to enter this domain. Ottoman Muslim women of the upper and upper-middle class thus increasingly dedicated a substantial part of their time and effort to nonwage civic activities turning (parts of) the public domain of men of the middle and upper classes in what Fraser<sup>9</sup> calls a counter-public, female domain.

Within this counter-public domain the organizations offered the wives and daughters of the government officials and military belonging to the middle and upper-middle class an additional vocation besides (private) teaching and writing. They sat on the boards of their organizations, donated money and goods which were often produced by themselves, organized fundraising activities, while they also worked in hospitals and set up and managed workshops and schools to improve the fate of girls and women of the less fortunate strata in (urban) society. Thus they became the much-desired active civil participants so badly needed instead of women relishing their idleness.

<sup>9</sup> Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."

While Ottoman Muslim women belonging to the middle and upper-middle classes thus forewent their allegedly leisured lives to become active as volunteers for the sake of the nation, other Ottoman Muslim women became active for different reasons. While more research is needed, the data in this work seem to point at an increased participation of Ottoman Muslim women belonging to the lower socio-economic strata in the labour pools created during the Second Constitutional Period. The almost continuous state of war and the process of nationalization of the Ottoman economy formed the main reasons for this development. While in the first case gender was of particular relevance, ethno-religious background was of more relevance in the second case. As in other countries during, for example, the First World War, both push and pull factors were responsible for the increased participation of women in the labour force. The (war) industry needed fresh labour pools both to replace the men drafted and to increase the production to replace the normally imported goods whose lines of transportation had been severed. At the same time women themselves needed a job to replace the income lost by the draft of their breadwinners. Educated Ottoman Muslim women of the lower-middle and middle class, too, profited from these developments: they found their way into the service sector. While the lack of employable men opened the road to paid jobs for Ottoman Muslim women because they were *women*, their ethno-religious background was particularly relevant in the process of nationalization of the Ottoman economy, which increasingly proved to be one of muslimization. As *Muslims*, Ottoman Muslim women replaced the non-Muslim women who were ousted in the context of this process.

The increased civil participation and public presence of Ottoman Muslim women was, however, continuously contested and negotiated. It caused anxiety amongst the authorities who feared that the (perceived) transgression of existing norms and values might cause social unrest as was the case during the counterrevolution of April 1909 when Ottoman Muslim women who had become socially active and had started to appear on the streets without veils after the Young Turk revolution of July 1908, provoked a fierce response from the counterrevolutionary conservatives and were explicitly targeted by them. Especially at times of conflict with non-Muslims, reactionary forces eagerly pointed their fingers at those women who supposedly behaved improperly and, thus, like infidels (meaning non-Muslim women). Their improper behaviour, therefore, was interpreted as a lack of loyalty to the own community of Muslims. At such times, the importance of gender as a signifier of identity was at play: the Ottoman Muslim community feeling threatened by inside and outside forces

needed women to behave properly in the process of (re)enforcing the borders of the own community. The public behaviour of Ottoman Muslim women – symbolized by their street attires – therefore formed a constant point of concern for the authorities in the context of the Islamist “option of identity.”<sup>10</sup>

This was also true for the other public activities of women or the mere threat of them: the anticipation of a possible transgression of the existing “national” (*milli*) norms and values could even lead to discussions at the highest levels of the state apparatus, such as the Council of State. This was the case with the establishment of the *Teali-i Vatan Osmanlı Hanımlar Cemiyeti*, which as an outcome of the discussions was forced to include a commission of men to run its external affairs and with the *Hanımlara Mahsus Eşya Pazarı Osmanlı Anonim Şirketi*, which was only allowed to have female stake holders after a long discussion and as long as they would not trespass the existing rules regarding seclusion during the stakeholders’ meetings.

While the increased civil participation and public presence of Ottoman Muslim women was a major point of concern for the authorities, the press played an important role in the more public negotiations on women’s position in society. Of course, women themselves incessantly pointed at the importance of their activities for society in the women’s periodicals of the period, but the activities of women and their organizations were also widely published in the general newspapers and periodicals of the time under headings pointing out the praiseworthy patriotism of the women. Not seldom these articles carried references to a golden era long gone when women supposedly took up similar roles. In fact, two separate golden eras were used, depending on the “option of identity” appropriated by the respective author: the pre-Islamic era of the central Asian Turkish tribes as well as the era of an uncorrupted, pristine Islam. According to these claims Turkish or Muslim women living in those days were publicly active and fighting side by side with their men. Ottoman Muslim women of the Second Constitutional Period who deployed public activities were, therefore, not transgressing traditional values of the Turkish or Muslim community but rather reviving and reclaiming those long forgotten, true communal values.

Others opting for the Islamic option of identity, were critical of the increased civil participation and public presence of Ottoman Muslim women. They argued that the Ottomans formed part of Muslim civilization and that Ottoman

<sup>10</sup> Barkey, “On the Road Out of Empire,” 290.

Muslims, therefore, should adhere to the rules of Islam. According to them the perceived infringement of men's domain by women upset the God-given order and, thus, constituted a threat to the community, whose communality by that time was largely determined by its religion and which at times was involved in conflicts with other communities, whose identity was perceived to be largely determined by their religion as well.

Others, however, legitimized women's organizational activities through arguments firmly grounded in the belief in positivism and ideas of social Darwinism prevalent at the time: society could only develop and progress if women could and would fulfil their duties as citizens. Through the use of such rhetoric, which overtly recognized the sociopolitical utility of women for the wider community and the state, the active participation of women in civil society and their public presence were justified and legitimized.

The Ottoman Muslim women involved in associational life and the Ottoman Muslim women and men writing in the newspapers and (women's) periodicals of the time who belonged to the educated upper-middle and middle class, thus, were very much aware of the "constraints placed upon women because of their gender."<sup>11</sup> As such their activities to identify and become aware of these constraints fit the definition of "feminism" given by Badran and quoted earlier in the introduction:

[Feminism] includes the awareness of constraints placed upon women because of their gender and attempts to remove these constraints and to evolve a more equitable gender system involving new roles for women and new relations between women and men.<sup>12</sup>

It is, however, not possible to state that Ottoman Muslim women unequivocally "attempt[ed] to remove these constraints." The analysis shows that Ottoman Muslim women of the upper and upper-middle class did not really remove these constraints, but rather stretched them, carving out an enlarged space for themselves. Rather than "evolv[ing] a more equitable gender system involving new roles for women"<sup>13</sup> these Ottoman Muslim women redefined their roles in such a way that they were extended while they remained firmly grounded within the well-defined parameters of the existing gender order of their (Muslim) community. The new roles aspired by and assigned to women, moreover, were

<sup>11</sup> Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 19-20.

<sup>13</sup> Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 19-20.

legitimized with arguments referring to the benefit for the family or the larger community rather than to the individual needs of women. The parameters of the existing gender order meant, for example, that Ottoman Muslim women were, in principle, not allowed to intermingle with men. While mixed charity balls were one of the fundraising activities for the organizations of non-Muslim Ottomans, the fund-raising activities of organizations with a majority of Ottoman Muslim female members were organized in such a way that men and women could attend them separately. Where male-female contacts were inevitable, for example when nursing the sick, they were symbolically converted into *namahrem*, familial relations.

Even the activities directed at educating and employing poor Muslim women and girls were framed within the existing gender order. The girls and women were educated and employed in all-female workshops or, when they had children to take care of, through a putting out system. A crucial term used in the texts legitimizing the employment of these poor girls and women was “honor” (*iffet*). When the women’s organizations educated and employed needy women, they did so, not to offer these women a chance to self-development, but to secure the honor of the community by providing them with an honorable way to earn money, rather than having to take recourse to begging or even worse. Thus, these activities, rather than constituting a major break with the existing gender norms, which potentially would create a peril for a community and its identity, served to thoroughly guard and preserve this identity. As such Ottoman Muslim feminism was more akin to the conservative, familial feminism of American missionary circles and the International Council of Women than to the more radical feminism of, for example, the suffrage movement and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.

### From *Vakıf* to Association, from *Zakat* and *Sadaka* to *İane*: the Secularization of Philanthropy

In the last chapter of her book on charity in Islamic societies, Singer, discusses the “mixed economy of charity.”<sup>14</sup> With “mixed” she refers to the fact that social and welfare services were provided by several actors, individuals as well as collectivities. She points out that, although charity had always involved multiple

<sup>14</sup> Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies*, 176-216, quotations 177.

agents, the actual mix of actors involved in charity, and their proportional share in it, has been subject to change continuously. The chapters in this book clearly prove her point: they show how indeed multiple actors were involved in charity and philanthropy.

They also show how new, more secular forms of charity developed: while the religiously inspired *zakat* (alms) and *sadaka* (voluntary alms) retained an important place in late Ottoman society, a growing role was assigned to a new form of secular giving: *iane* (donation). Moreover, the role of religious endowments, *vakıfs*, as intermediary in the redistribution of wealth was diminished in favor of secular associations and organizations.

*Zakat* and *sadaka* were gifts from a Muslim to a Muslim. They could be handed directly by one individual to another, but over history *zakat* was erratically used as a way to redistribute wealth: at several points in history, it was collected as a kind of tax and then used to finance, for example, the activities of religious endowments. Religious endowments, *vakıfs*, which could be founded by individuals only, played an important role in the redistribution of wealth through charitable activities. For the Ottoman authorities, however, the central collection of *zakat* to pass it on to those in need of support, would mean that a large proportion of the population would be excluded from this. During the nineteenth century, therefore, another means to extract resources from the public was increasingly used: *iane*. Since *iane* was a secular form of giving, appeals could be made to all Ottoman citizens independently of their ethno-religious background. These appeals thus were made not based on religious grounds, but by referring to the patriotic feelings of those who were asked to contribute. The contributions were used for a wide variety of “projects”: from large scale infrastructural projects such as the *Hijaz* railroad to the ships and planes for the Ottoman navy and air force, respectively, to the alleviation of the plight of soldiers. The donations could consist of money as well as of goods such as, for example the “patriotic gifts” (*vatan hediyesi*) for the soldiers.

While *sadaka* and *zakat* were, in principle, gifts directly given from one individual to another,<sup>15</sup> this was different for *iane*. They were not given by individuals to individuals directly, but indirectly, through an intermediary: *iane* was collected by and distributed through the new associations and organizations which were founded from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, including women’s organizations. These women’s organizations as well as the

<sup>15</sup> Although *vakıfs*, at times, served as intermediary to distribute *zakat* to those entitled to it.

women's branches of larger organizations proved pivotal to including the "other half" of the population in the search for resources. The strong networks these organizations and branches developed helped to turn these campaigns into a success: the collection of *iane*, moreover, formed one of the important sources of financing women's organizations and their activities as well.

Just like religiously inspired alms giving, secular charity and philanthropy served to create bonds between the one that gives and the one that receives. Through the charitable and philanthropic activities of women's organizations, therefore, such bonds were also created. Besides the vertical bonds (between who gives and who receives), however, women's organizations also served to create horizontal bonds (between the members of the organization), welding women of different socio-economic strata into one community: women belonging to the highest socio-economic circles became the patrons of the organizations through which the beneficent women of the socio-economic (sub-)elite helped their beneficiaries belonging to the lowest strata. As Lindenmeyr<sup>16</sup> notices for the case of Imperial Russia, these philanthropic and charitable associations constructed hierarchies within these communities by accentuating the socio-economic differences between the beneficent patrons and their beneficiaries, between the haves and have-nots. Associational life was (and is) about sisterhood, but at the same time also about inequality and maternalism. Middle and upper-class women were the benefactors of the poor women and as such formed a small vocal group of well-off women who gave expression to their ideas about citizenship by assisting a large, and largely silent group of unorganized, less affluent, women.

While women's organizations created horizontal and vertical communities of women, gender was in many cases not the only determinant for a possible affiliation. Other factors, such as nationality and ethno-religious affiliation could form additional requirements. These requirements could be of relevance for both the members of the organization as well as their beneficiaries in the case of charitable and philanthropic organizations.

It is at this point that the distinction between charity and philanthropy becomes relevant, between relieving acute needs (charity) and the support of particular groups to improve the fate of the community and diminish the need for charity in the future (philanthropy). The analysis of the surviving statutes and other available sources shows no proof of formal distinctions on ethno-

<sup>16</sup> Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice*, 224-226.

religious grounds between the beneficiaries these women's organizations were aiming at with their charitable activities. It is therefore difficult to establish whether these organizations consciously preferred one ethno-religious group above another within the above-mentioned target groups. Firstly, in almost all cases official reports are lacking and when they do exist, they do not give ethno-religious details on the beneficiaries. An exemption is the *Asker Ailelerine Yardımcı Hanımlar Cemiyeti*: from one of their reports we know they catered to the needs of both Muslim and non-Muslim families. Moreover, many of these organizations did not have any direct contact with their beneficiaries, but worked through intermediary organizations such as the Red Crescent or the National Defense Organization. In most cases they were even gender blind. The distinction was rather based on other criteria related to particular acute needs: some organizations wanted to improve the situation of the soldiers in the field, others opted to take care of wounded and sick soldiers, a third group of organizations concerned itself with the destitute families of soldiers in arms and/or other urban poor.

The organizations which were (also) involved in philanthropic activities, however, directed their activities at more specific groups. While charity and acute poor relief seem to have been gender neutral, Ottoman women and their organizations directed their philanthropic activities in most cases to persons of the same sex. They created, for example, opportunities for impoverished girls and women to earn an "honest" living to prevent that they would become "fallen women/public women." They did so by developing a kind of putting out system through which women could work at home or by creating all-female workplaces. Not only gender was of relevance in this context, though; the (perceived) identity of the receiver, her nationality or ethno-religious affiliation, formed an important criterion as well.

Through the conscious decisions on exclusion or inclusion, on who is "in" and who is "out," on who will receive benefits and who will not, these organizations not only determined the borders of the small communities they formed themselves. They also formed constitutive elements for community formation beyond the limits of the organization through their definition of who belonged to "us" or who belonged to "them."



## Patriotism in an Ottoman context: Community, Multi-tier Identity and Citizenship

What was the role of women in the creation of community and citizenship? How did women and their associations participate in and contribute to communal identity formation and express their citizenship? This study has shown that the voluntary activities of the women and their organizations and the publications of these activities in the newspapers and women's periodicals were instrumental in the creation of a sense of community between women with different backgrounds. Through these activities and the publication of articles related to these activities as well as on other topics women established horizontal and vertical bonds with other women. Women from similar socio-economic backgrounds who had never met physically before learned about each other's ideas and efforts and established horizontal bonds.

Women belonging to the same networks through ties of blood or marriage or through the work of their husbands and fathers started to gather in a more formal setting within the organizations they founded. In a society which was at war almost continuously for ten years, the "community" of women created through the voluntary mobilization of female civilians from these socio-economic circles formed the counterpart of the "community" of mobilized and conscripted male military which included the husbands, fathers and sons of the very same women. If, therefore, warfare and (universal) male conscription can be regarded as formative elements in the creation of an imagined community such as, for example, the nation-state, then women's voluntary action related to war efforts is another substantial formative element that cannot be neglected. Women acknowledged that they, like men, had their duties in times of war, but also recognized that their duties were different. The creation of a home front where women as volunteers took care of the wounded soldiers, the veterans and their families, formed the inevitable counterpart of the war front where their conscripted men were fighting.

Secular philanthropy was closely connected to patriotism from its very origins as we have seen. Rowe points out that the pairing of women and patriotism by (male) authors had both restrictive and liberating consequences for Armenian women: restrictive because women's roles were inevitably tied up to the nation and liberating because women played an important role in the

creation of a national identity through activities they had not been able to deploy before.<sup>17</sup>

Nationality and – although this may seem to be at odds with the process of secularization referred to above – ethno-religious affiliation both were factors relevant for the membership of the organizations. So, for example, foreign women living in the Ottoman Empire established organizations based on their nationality.<sup>18</sup> Since the late Ottoman Empire lacked a hegemonic national identity, as discussed in the introductory chapter, women “of the Ottoman nationality” (*Osmanlı tebaasından*, lit. “from the Ottoman subjects”) were presented with two options: affiliation based on *tabiiyet* (“nationality”) or based on *milliyet* (“ethno-religious affiliation”). The women’s branch of the Ottoman Red Crescent formed, originally, a typical example of the former. Other examples were the *Hizmet-i Nisvan Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi* and the *Osmanlı Kadınlar Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi*. Most organizations, however, seem to have been established along ethno-religious lines: there were Greek, Armenian, Jewish, and Muslim women’s organizations. Also smaller communities such as, for example, the Keldani had their own organizations.

Even those organizations which claimed to be or expressed the intention to be “Ottoman,” were in most cases dominated by women from one particular ethno-religious community such as, for example, the *Osmanlı Müdafaa-i Hukuk-u Nisvan Cemiyeti* or the *Nisvan-ı Osmaniye İmdad Cemiyeti* of Fatma Aliye. Both organizations stated in their aims that they hoped for the participation of Ottoman women without any distinction of race or religion (*cins ve mezhep*), but in practice their membership mostly consisted of Muslim women. The *Osmanlı Kadınları ‘Şefkat’ Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi* in a similar vein announced that it was open “only [to] ‘Ottoman’ women without making any distinction regarding race (*kavmiyet*) and religion (*mezhep*)” but also here the discursive unity was not visible in its constituency.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the *Osmanlı (ve) Türk Hanımları Esirgeme Derneği* and the *Türk Kadınları Bıçkı Yurdu*, were openly Turkist. The first organization was founded by women from a strongly Turkist environment and referred several times to “Turkish” women in its

<sup>17</sup> Victoria Rowe, “Armenian Writers and Women’s Rights Discourse in Turn-of-the-Century Constantinople,” *Aspasia*, II, 2008, 44-69, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, they may have also been organized along lines of, for example, religion (e.g. catholic and protestant organizations).

<sup>19</sup> “Osmanlı Kadınları ‘Şefkat’ Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi,” *Kadın*, 1, 13 Teşrinievvel 1324 (27 October 1908), 13-15.

publications. When one of the members of this organization founded the latter organization, she also aimed at a membership of “Turkish” women as she stated in the introduction to her statutes. None of the Ottoman women’s organizations explicitly refers to a preference for a Muslim membership, not even the *Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslamiyesi* which was probably the only women’s organization (if you can qualify it as such) calling itself “Islamic.”

If, for Ottoman women, ethno-religious affiliation was a self-evident and therefore important factor for the membership of women’s organizations, the question can be raised what this means in terms of citizenship. Towards whom or what did these women feel they had to fulfil a duty, towards the community consisting of persons with the same ethno-religious affiliation or to the larger community of Ottomans? What or who did they feel should benefit or not benefit from their activities? It is important to distinguish between the official aims as written down in the statutes and the everyday practice reflected in the official annual reports of the organizations and additional sources.

The beneficiaries of the philanthropic activities of these organizations were, as mentioned, not only chosen based on their gender; in many cases their ethno-religious background was of relevance as well. The distinctions made by the organizations quite overtly reflected the double-tier citizenship which led women to work within the context of two “communities” simultaneously: the larger community of the Ottomans and the smaller ethno-religious community they belonged to. The two “Turkist” organizations mentioned above, the *Osmanlı (ve) Türk Kadınları Esirgeme Derneği* and the *Türk Kadınları Bıçkı Yurdu* were examples of organizations in whose aims this double-tier citizenship manifested itself most explicitly. While they aimed at the development of the “national economy” or the economic life of “our fatherland,” their activities were directed at “Turkish” women. The aim of the *Esirgeme Derneği*, for example, was to teach these *Turkish* women about “female industries” to develop *Ottoman* economic life. What, in their eyes, made someone “Turkish” was, however, not specified. For the *Türk Kadınları Bıçkı Yurdu* this was different: in its statutes it stated that it wanted “to raise *Muslim* women dressmakers in *our fatherland* and thus endeavor to progress and develop its economic life.”<sup>20</sup> An interesting case was formed by the *Mamulat-ı Dahiliye İstihlakı Kadınlar Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi* which later became the *İstihlak-i Milli Kadınlar Cemiyeti*: while the organization initially addressed *Ottoman* women and promoted the purchase of locally

<sup>20</sup> *Türk Kadınları Bıçkı Yurdu Nizamnamesi ve Ders Programı*, 5.

produced goods (*mamulat-i dahiliye*) meaning goods produced within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, in its later publications it addressed, more particularly, Muslim women and wanted to stimulate the “national consumption” (*istihlak-i milli*) which, by that time, had become the consumption of goods produced and sold by Muslim entrepreneurs. In their workshops and through a putting out system, therefore, they sought to educate and employ particularly Muslim women. The statutes of the *Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslamiyesi*, moreover, referred to a Muslim membership, nor target group, despite its name: its official aim was “to find work for women,” without any further qualification. In the advertisements in the newspapers such qualifications were also lacking. The annual reports do not specify the ethno-religious affiliation of the beneficiaries either. From other sources it is, however, clear that the women they wanted to find work for were actually Turkish and Muslim.

While the women employed and educated by, and through the mediation of, the women’s organizations were compelled to find paid work or work for food and shelter by acute material need,<sup>21</sup> the Ottoman Muslim members of the organizations felt that the work they did as volunteers belonged to their duties as participatory citizens. The citizenship of these women was, however, not based on a straightforward adherence to the single unit of the fatherland, but carried multiple dimensions. The women felt obliged to fulfil their duty *vis à vis* their *vatan* (fatherland or *patrie*) as well as the *millet* they belonged to. This did not necessarily create a conflict: the *millet* was after all part of the *vatan*. Through activities to the benefit of the *millet* the *vatan* thus automatically benefitted as well.

The mix of feminism, philanthropy/charity, and patriotism/nationalism was not unique to the late Ottoman Empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Amongst “social,” “bourgeois” or “familial” feminists of the period, the advancement of women was inevitably connected to the uplifting of the larger community and *vice versa*. Through their philanthropic activities they not only

<sup>21</sup> Ute Daniel reported how lower class women were accused of not being good patriots if they complained. Despite the roaring story on German women and how they contributed to the war effort by working in industry told by some Ottoman officers who had visited Germany, there is little reason to believe they did this out of patriotism as they wanted their audience to think. Most women who worked in the war industries did this out of bare necessity, both in Germany and in the Ottoman Empire. “Harb ve kadınlar,” *Tanin*, 8 Haziran 1332 (21 June 1916), 3.

served the individual members of their community but also the community as a whole. The community involved varied according to place and time, however.

During the last decades of its existence, the Ottoman Empire, for example, did not form a self-evident community. The Empire was in great turmoil: internal and external conflicts created unrest and caused rifts between the various communities living under Ottoman rule. The search for a “hegemonic national identity” to unite the many ethno-religious and national communities living in the Empire and to legitimize its very existence proved to be difficult if not impossible: neither Ottomanism, nor Islamism, nor even Turkism could serve as such an identity.

When the Unionists came to power, they could not but put forward a political identity which formed an intricate mix of Ottomanism, Islamism, and Turkism as Zürcher and Barkey point out. The lack of a hegemonic national identity, moreover, led the Unionist authorities to execute policies that were not always consistent with the political identity they put forward.<sup>22</sup>

While the lack of a hegemonic national identity, thus, created confusion for the Empire’s authorities, this was also the case for the “ordinary people.” This study shows that “ordinary people” in the Ottoman Empire and, particularly, women, in the same way carried multi-tier identities and that women through their associations contributed actively to the creation of these multi-tier identities. The Ottoman Muslim women discussed in the previous chapters were not just Ottomans, Muslims *or* Turks, but they were Ottomans, Muslims *and* Turks and depending on the situation any of these identities could carry a different meaning and any of them could prevail. A complicating factor was that the essence of Turkishness was not clearly defined: it varied from a rather racist understanding whose adherents would refer to their “race” (*ırk*) when referring to their community to a more “cultural” concept in which religion (Islam) and/or language (Turkish) were deemed crucial.

With their organizations and activities Ottoman Muslim women not only reflected the multi-tier identities prevailing in late Ottoman society, but actively took part in shaping, shifting and reshuffling them. As such knowledge of the activities of Ottoman (Muslim) women in the many feminist, philanthropic and patriotic organizations which existed during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire is indispensable for a better understanding of the development of nationalism(s) in the late Ottoman era, nationalisms of which (as with any nationalism) identity claims form an intrinsic part.

<sup>22</sup> Barkey, “On the Road Out of Empire,” 264-296; Zürcher, “The Young Turk Mindset,”; idem, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics 1908-38.”

