SOURCES OF ORIENTALISM: TRACING OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN BRITISH MIND [*]

ŞARKİYATÇILIĞIN KAYNAKLARI: BRITANYALI ZİHNİNDE OSMANLI İMPARATORLUĞUNUN İZİNİ SÜRMEK

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Abstract

Established on three different continents, the Ottoman Empire demonstrated unquestioned political success and constituted the representation of orientalism for the West. Both her geographical position and her cultural identity as an Eastern and a Muslim provided the structure to approach the Ottoman Empire representing the Eastern identity as constructed by the West. Hence, a stereotypical representation of Turks created in order to satisfy the oriental approach of the West. This perspective can be observed in British sources as well. Beyond her exotic qualities for the West, the rival position of the Ottoman Empire against the British Empire provoked further interest in British names. As is common in oriental texts, British sources also reshaped the Turkish identity unconsciously to fit the text's stereotypical perspective. In addition to the fixed image of Turks and the Ottoman Empire that is depicted underlining Westernized qualities, British written sources do not hesitate to reinterpret the constructed image of Turks as a medium for their own ideologies. In this regard, tracing the British sources and their representation establishes a problematic depiction of the Ottoman Empire and the Turks that is dominated by Western ideology. Moreover, it can be further argued that the literary works also both fed upon and contributed to the stereotypical depiction of Turks as an exotic eastern. Travel writing of the time also maintained the perception of Turkish identity representing the constructed understanding of the West regarding the East. Consequently, this study aims at tracing the stereotypical image of Turks as depicted in British sources especially with emphasis of sources dating to the 19th century as the highlight of Orientalism in British Empire. Hence, the misinterpretation of the Ottoman Empire and Turks will be laid out in a chronological order underlining their common perspective.

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Keywords
Orientalism, Ottoman Empire, British Empire, stereotypical image of Turks.

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Öz

Üç kıtaya yayılmış olan Osmanlı İmparatorluğu güçlü bir politik başarıyı ve de Batının gözünde şarkiyatçılığın örneklendirilmesini temsil eder. Hem coğrafi konumu hem de Müslüman ve de Doğulu olan kültürel kimliği Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Batı tarafından algılandığı şekli ile doğu kimliğinin göstergesi olarak algılanmasına neden olmuştur. Bu anlayış İngiliz kaynaklarında da

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gözlemlenebilmektedir. Yansıttığı egzotik durumun yanı sıra Britanya İmparatorluğu'na rakip pozisyonu da Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na olan ilgiyi İngilizler arasında arttırmıştır. Böylelikle Batının şarkiyatçı yaklaşımını tatmin etmek üzere klişe bir Türk imajı yaratılmıştır. Buna ilaveten edebi eserler de bu klişe Türk imajından hem beslenmişler hem de bu imajın sağlamlaştırılmasına katkıda bulunmuşlardır. Zamanının gezi yazıları da yaratılan klişe Türk imajının korunmasını desteklemişlerdir. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma şarkiyatçı bakış açısının hat safhada olduğu 19. Yüzyıla odaklanarak klişe Türk imajının İngiliz kaynaklarında nasıl betimlendiğinin izini sürmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bununla birlikte kronolojik bir sırayla verilecek olan eserler Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ve de Türklerin nasıl ortak bir bakış açısından gerçeklikten farklı olan yorumlandığını ortaya koyacaktır.

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Anahtar Kelimeler
Şarkiyatçılık, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Britanya İmparatorluğu, klişe Türk imajı.

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Introduction

Literature plays a primary role in articulating cultural values; especially the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were reshaped by the historical events of English imperialism. As Gayatri Spivak argues, it is essential to consider both overt and covert aspects of imperialism when reading British literature, a time which can be seen as an important turning point in England's political and social mission of global imperializing of the East. In her article "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Spivak names these "distant cultures" as "the Third World" that are "exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation" (1996: 243). One such distant culture was the Ottoman Empire, which was both a target of and a rival to British imperial policy in the nineteenth century. Political and the social aspects of the Ottoman Empire challenged British writers and representations of it in British literature appear to fit into Edward Said's concept of the Other and the East as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1978: 1). For Said, while Orientalism[1] becomes an academic interest, it maintains a historical and material definition "as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (1978: 3). In the case of representing the Ottoman Empire, however, such indications lead to misinterpretations and semantic problems concerning Turkish national identity and the political and social realities of the Ottoman Empire. While the cultural history of Asia Minor and the political importance of Istanbul—which is often referred to as Constantinople in order to indicate its position in history and deny contemporary Turkish hegemony—distinguishes Turks from the rest of the East. Turkish identity displaces the perceptions that symbolically position Turkey as the West of the East and the East of the West.

Established on three different continents, the Ottoman Empire demonstrated unquestioned political success and provided a critical model for the British Empire. Although the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries are years of decline for the Ottoman Empire, its previous history was highly influential for the British government that not only had been shaken by the French and the American Revolutions, but which also had entered into a new phase in worldwide politics and economics through its colonization of the East. Considering the economic and political situation of the era, the Ottoman Empire can be categorized as the Other that needs the supervision of a "more civilized" Western power, while also standing as a mentor of and an exemplar for the newly emerging British Empire. In addition to this, the weakening power of the Ottoman Empire over Eastern Europe and on the geography that we refer to today as the Middle East has made her a target. Britain, as well as her rival Western countries, aspired to the lands of the Ottoman Empire.

The historical facts of both empires, combined with the distorted perspectives of the West, reveal themselves in British literature. While the Orient was frequently invoked in the literature of the time, British writers brought their own interpretations of the East, creating an identity puzzle for the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, the increasing number of the travelers and

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[1]   While Orientalism can be considered as the main conceptual framework of this study, a detailed analysis will not be presented due to the methodology applied. The main aim of this study is to discuss exemplary British works that are interested in Ottoman identity; for further discussion on Orientalism, see Edward Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* along with related secondary sources.

travel writings and the popularity of the journal and travel writing genres presented to a fascinated reading public a spectacular, exotic panorama of a splendid Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, fiction deliberately promoted both Turks and the Ottoman Empire as violent and lustful opponents of the civilized and respectable West. Unlike any other so-called Eastern cultures and regions, the Ottoman Empire puzzled British writers with its multi-national and multi-cultural form, causing considerable confusion about how to identify Turks, Ottomans or Arabs. Edward Said provides us with some insight into the persistence of the written sources on Turks and the Ottoman Empire: "In the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a topos, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these" (1978: 177). As a result, British writers took refuge in stereotyping a general Eastern identity, so their response to the changing world of the era did not extend beyond cultural imperialism.

In literature, as in history, the main factor that sets the East apart from the West is religion. Islam is seen as the bonding element for the Eastern identities, both personal and political. The effect of this stereotype on Western minds is that it can disable them from differentiating Eastern identities, and lead to prejudiced and inaccurate conclusions. In this sense, it is vital to take notice of the many different groups of people that constitute Eastern identities. While most research generalizes the East, or just distinguishes geographically between the Middle East and Asia, it is necessary to underline the historical identity of the Ottoman Empire as standing partly within the West's concept of Orientalism, and partly outside of it. In this regard, this study aims to make a sketch of a brief survey of works written on Ottoman Empire and Ottoman identity by British writers and/or travelers up to the nineteenth century. Rather than a detailed analysis of these works, the study will follow the order of the selected main works and names, and their common perspective on their overlapped understanding of Ottoman, Turkish and Eastern identities in a chronological order. This survey will mainly focus on the misrepresentation of the Ottoman Empire and Turks that can be observed in the mentioned works with the intention of inspiration for detailed analysis in further studies.

Ottoman Empire in Written Sources

The Republic of Turkey, established in 1923 after World War One and the War of Independence, is a modern country that has carried over the Ottoman Empire's legacy both as a burden and a blessing. Turkey preserves her place as a geographical and a cultural bridge between the West and the East. For Westerners, it still represents an Eastern image that is mixture of fact, fantasy, and fear. Moreover, modern Turkey tends to be perceived as a substitute for Eastern and Islamic stereotypes due to its location, ethnic composition, and the Ottoman legacy. Regardless of the Ottoman's long standing political and economic success and influence over three continents, the West chooses to view the Ottoman Empire under a constructed image as a representation of the East and Islam. Taking the question of religion on center, the West has tended to conceptualize the Ottoman Empire as its counterpart representing the oriental. Palmira Brummett defines the Ottomans as "the black hole of history" (2007: 18) quoting one of her students. This construct provides an appropriate metaphor for an empire whose political, geographical and national space are ambiguous. The image of "the black hole" takes on deeper overtones as we go through the representation of the Ottoman Empire in European literature. Literature presents an anamorphic picture of Turks and the Ottoman Empire that shifts with the political and economic influences of a given time.

Beside the Crusades in the Middle Ages and the Muslim occupation of Spain that lasted until 1492, the Ottoman Empire has been the major point of contact between Europe and the Orient. The Ottoman Empire's tolerance towards cultural and religious differences and its established system of governance enabled Europeans to explore the Orient through the Empire. While Europe's trade with the Ottomans has been the major point of interaction, travel writings have been the main sources for Europeans to conceptualize the Orient on a personal basis. Western sources vary bringing different problems with them until travelers gradually depict a more realistic portrayal of the Ottoman Empire. Yet the Ottoman Empire or Turks never seem to be represented as a heterogeneous form. The tradition of writing on the Empire, regardless of the time period and genre, carries a problematic and stereotypical discourse.

British readers got their first impressions of Eastern identities through secondary sources. Since the Crusades, language has stood as the main obstacle to understanding and characterizing the Ottoman Empire. Berna Moran calls attention to the fact that prior to the fifteenth century, monographs were written in Latin, so he opens up his bibliography on the texts written in England about Turks with G. Caoursin in 1482. Abdur Raheem Kidwai, on the other hand, names Chanson de Gestle as "an important source for studying the image of the Orient" (1964: 4). He also cites the names of English writers from the thirteenth and fourteenth century that dealt with oriental and Islamic subjects in their works. Yet, Kidwai underlines the *Arabian Nights* as the source of Western admiration for the oriental. Though controversial because of its fanciful romanticism, the stories in the *Arabian Nights* have enabled the West to construct an Eastern –therefore Ottoman – identity that is erotic and mystical. Regardless of the other literary sources that introduce the Ottoman Empire from a historical perspective, the *Arabian Nights* remains as the main source for fictitious representation of the East. Marie Meester also touches upon the imaginative representation of the East, acknowledging the importance of the *Arabian Nights*: "This literature, [a certain kind of oriental or pseudo-oriental prose-tale], was occasioned by the introduction of the *Arabian Nights* between 1704 and 1712, and by a growing general interest in the countries of the Orient" (1915: 2). Meester names William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) as "the last important novel" which ends the period of imaginative Eastern literature. With the nineteenth century, Orientalism "develop[s] in a more scientific line" (1915: 2) as Meester claims. Vesna Goldsworthy sets forth a parallel approach just by looking at the travel writings that cover the Balkans: "The nineteenth century also broadened the range of reasons that brought British travel writers to the Balkans. The focus of interest in individual works now lay in areas as diverse as commerce, mining, natural history, archaeology, military and church affairs. Their authors ranged from diplomats, soldiers, businessmen, priests and war correspondents" (1915: 23). This scientific line involves an approach that evaluates the East not to understand, but to develop knowledge on a possible colonial discourse.

Leaving the deflected effect of the *Arabian Nights* and the translated works in English aside, Moran classifies the sources written about Turks by British authors from 1482 up until the eighteenth century in five categories. The first category includes the booklets and newspaper articles published in England that cover foreign affairs. The second type comprises works written on the history, society and political structure of Turks. In this category, Moran points out Richard Knolles as the most important Turkish historian of the eighteenth century in England. Sıla Şenlen defines Knolles's *Generall Historie of the Turkes* as, "the first British chronicle written on the military and political aspects of the Ottoman Empire in the medium of English …

indicating that knowledge about the 'terror of the World' was becoming essential not only for the sophisticated reader who could read Latin, but also for the general reading public" (2005: 383). Knolles's work has a historical and literary importance as a text written in detail for Christians on the history of not just the East, but of Turks. Besides the customs in society, Knolles researches his way into the origins of Turks differentiating his work by defining Turks as a nation rather than an Eastern stereotype. As Şenlen notes, the first section of the chronicle "provides information about the origin of the Ottoman starting from the 'first kingdome of the Turkes erected in Persia by Tangrolipix Chiefetaine of the Selzuccian Familie'" (2005: 384). By tracing the Ottoman Empire's roots to the Seljuks, Knolles examines the empire within its historical context. His emphasis on history and his careful examination of each sultan demonstrate Knolles's quest to discover the motivation and success behind the unexpected conquest of Constantinople by Turks. Şenlen follows up with seven different editions of the work indicating its popularity at the time. Yet Knolles's chronicles fall short by largely collecting second-hand information based on previously written texts, most of which are in translation, and constantly urging Christians to unite against the Ottoman Turks.

Moran continues his bibliography with works written on Islam and travel writings as the other two categories. He notes that while travel writings have become a popular genre after the seventeenth century, the sixteenth century didn't accommodate many of them. Moran cites Nicholas de Nicolay's *The Navigations, Peregrinations and Voyages*, which dates 1585, as an important one. In the last category, Moran examines the plays that are either on Turks or inspired by Turkish history. He gives the year 1580 as the starting point for playwrights to employ Turks as the subject. Moran interprets the interests in Turkish history during the Elizabethan era in relation to society's demand for bloody and terrifying scenes for which intense relationships among the members of the Ottoman monarchy provided favorable popular material. Suleiman the Magnificent and his relation with Hürrem Sultan – known in the West as Roxelana – and her power over the Sultan can be pointed out as a favorite Eastern theme for the stage. With the Restoration period, English playwrights combined Turkish history and characters with duty and honor in order to satisfy the expectations of the audience. During the eighteenth century, the Turkish theme in theatre, which is generally referred as turquerie, transformed into a fashion more than an inspiration from Ottoman history. Eve R. Meyer in her article "*Turquerie* and Eighteenth-Century Music" illustrates the fashion that invaded leisure culture: "For an evening's entertainment, one might attend the theater to see the latest play or opera based on a Turkish theme or go to a masked ball wearing an elaborate Turkish costume. At home, one might relax in a Turkish robe while smoking Turkish tobacco, eating Turkish candy and reading an ever-popular Turkish tale" (1974: 474). More than the economic and political effect of the Ottoman Empire, this fashion reflects the popularity of Eastern romances that portray an unrealistic but magical and exotic East. Meyer notes that "The world of magic, fantasy, and splendor, and the marvelous adventures described in the narratives [Arabian Nights, Turkish Tales and Persian Tales] provided natural material for the popular stage and satisfied the public's demand for novel and spectacular stage effects" (1974: 476).

Turkish characters and history on stage served as a mediator to satisfy the English audience. Diminishing the historical realities and identities of the Ottoman Empire, they staged their own desires under the etiquette of turquerie. Even though the plots of the plays are derived from history, they cannot be reclaimed from the imaginary constructions of the West. We can, once again, give an example from the plays that penetrate the relation between Suleiman the Magnificent and Roxelana. Depicting Roxelana as one of the most powerful

women of the harem was staged through Western interpretation. Roger Boyle's *Mustapha* (1668) is one of the plays that portray cunning and ambitious Roxelana who can dare to assassinate her stepson for the sake of her political power. Meyer touches upon the problem of unrealistic portrayal:" The characters in most exotic operas of the time – despite their Oriental names – tended to speak and act exactly like European courtiers … they usually ignored ethnic references and precise details of the Eastern locale" (1974: 476). Meyer underlines the constructed images of a desired Eastern character that British audiences wanted to see. As Meyer discusses, and Moran cites in his bibliography, up until English travelers were exposed to Turkish customs in major states of the Ottoman Empire, the English audience had been entertained through turquerie. Interestingly, the years that turquerie ruled England's stages correspond to the time frame when the Ottoman Empire lost most of her European provinces. As Europe's interest in the Middle East and the Ottoman Empire increases, the obsession with the exotic other presents itself on the stage. From a political perspective, this can be interpreted as a theatrical reflection of the Ottoman Empire's political and economical decline. Such obsession can also be perceived as the replication of the imaginative representations of the East influenced by the *Arabian Nights*. Stereotyping the sultans by emphasizing either their lust or ambition left the English audience ignorant of a series of reforms made throughout the century in order to modernize the Ottoman Empire for the sake of her relations with Europe.

Leaving aside the registers and letters of merchants, the correspondences of ambassadors, and governmental documents, which are of more of historical importance than literary, travel writings constitute a significant source for Europeans to get to know the real Ottoman Empire. Parallel to Britain's imperialistic politics, the Romantic period showed increasing interest in examining the Orient. Visitors to the Ottoman Empire finally began to take the responsibility of not just witnessing the imaginary East they had been told of, but examining the empire's structure and learning from its power. After Europe named the Ottoman Empire as "the sick man," the rivalry among European countries extended into controlling the Ottoman Empire as well as colonizing its provinces. Kidwai also points out emerging differences in the Romantic period's treatment of the Orient "which was promoted and enhanced by certain historical developments and, more importantly, by a general tendency of the age to look at things in a wider, broader context" (1995: 9). Meester also holds the nineteenth century separate from the eighteenth century tradition, discussing the general oriental influences in the English Literature:

> The type that predominated in the eighteenth century, "the oriental tale", seems to have been given up entirely. … The authors of the nineteenth century have endeavoured, and mostly very successfully, to give an imitation, as faithful as possible, of the style and language peculiar to the Orient, they have studied the eastern literatures and have reproduced them faithfully. The background of their work is not phantastic or imaginative but true to nature. This is all the consequence of the greater extent of travelling all over the world … (1915: 76)

Therefore, England reclaimed interest in the Eastern region as a political maneuver against continental Europe. The restless situation among the nations of Eastern Europe caused England to focus geo-political interest in the Middle East, and to experience the Orient. Europeans provoked the Ottoman's Balkan provinces by playing on nationality and ethnic factionalism. Reflecting the ideologies and rivalries of the French Revolution, European countries created a restless situation in the area. This not only prevented Russians from reaching the Mediterranean, but also distracted the Ottoman Empire, so that Britain and France gained more

control of the Middle East. Structured by the era's politics, travelers refocused their interest in the Middle East. Moreover, this familiarized the traveler with the *Arabian Nights'* fantasy world.

The language barrier English readers had faced throughout the Middle Ages reappeared as travelers tended to experience the Orient on the lands of the Ottoman Empire. Due to its multinational system, different languages were used in daily life. While less-educated lower class people adopted rough Turkish in their daily life, Ottoman Turkish was the Empire's administrative language. We can define Ottoman Turkish as a variety of the Turkish language that has been developed under the effects of Persian and Arabic. Usage of a variant of Arabic script also makes it distinct not only for Europeans, but also to the rural members of the society. Consequently, travelers in Constantinople had difficulty comprehending the system of the Ottoman Empire even if they got an exceptional admission into the court. Ezel Kural Shaw reflects these obstacles through the example of Charles Perry, "an English doctor who visited the Ottoman lands in the first half of the eighteenth century" (1972: 13). Shaw states that "[Perry's] information concerning Ottoman institutions and society is of limited value. Like most travelers of the time, he simply was too isolated from the mainstream of Ottoman affairs to observe or understand more than externals at best. Much of this was a product of … their ignorance of the local language" (1972: 17). In this case, they reflect their observations blended with their personal interpretation that once again led them into forming stereotypes, as Shaw continues to underline: "It was rare for the foreign traveler to learn Ottoman Turkish and understand Ottoman ways well enough for him to overcome these built-in barriers and move beyond the stereotypes to something more real and understanding …" (1972: 17). As in the case of Charles Perry, this even diminishes the reliability of travel writings.

In spite of the language barriers and the travelers' unwillingness to comprehend Turkish culture, travel writings are a significant step for portraying the real Ottoman Empire. Yet, they can be even more crucial to Turkish historians for accessing political or historical information that was not officially recorded, but transmitted orally. Shaw lists sources of such information as "… reports from European wives who went to Turkish baths, or found their way into the Harem, the women's section of Palace, or the like…" (1972: 19). Much useful information of this sort is not otherwise available. In addition to unofficial information the travelers picked up, their observation can be studied by Turkish historians as source-material containing unique depictions of the buildings or monuments that may have been modified, or no longer exist. Shaw points out the viability of travel accounts: "The traveler could and did observe many things by walking the streets of Istanbul, but the quest for the unfamiliar often resulted in concentration on palaces and other symbols of grandeur" (1972: 19). Quoting their observations instead of concentrating exclusively on official sources can be supplementary to narrating the Ottoman history.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is the most significant travel writer; she deserves special mention among many other travelers not simply for being a female, but also for representing the women's world of the East. Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* has challenged the hegemony of the male writers as well as "the received representations of Turkish society furnished by the seventeenth century travel writers" (Lowe 1991: 31). Her entrance to harem, the source of the sensual, exotic and sensational fantasies harbored by the West, enables her to witness the Eastern women's liberty, rights and day-to-day experiences. Lisa Lowe identifies the unique position of Montagu among the Eastern women and Western travel writers:

> Montagu's position with regard to English travel writing is paradoxical, or multivalent,

in a manner that the earlier travelers' accounts are not. On the one hand, some of her descriptions – written as they are from her position as wife of a British ambassador – resonate with traditional occidental imaginings of the Orient as exotic, ornate, and mysterious, imaginary qualities fundamental to eighteenth-century Anglo-Turkish relations. At the same time, unlike the male travel writers before her, she employs comparisons that generally liken the conditions, character, and opportunities of European women to those of Turkish women. (1991: 31-32)

As Lowe stresses out, Montagu, in fact, acknowledges the tradition of stereotyping Turks. To some extent she is also subject to Western discourse. This indicates Montagu's position as a Westerner before her female identity. On the other hand, she made good use of her opportunity to experience the long-imagined fantasy world of the harem. Nevertheless, through her unique position, Montagu has brought a new perspective to the stereotype of an Eastern woman. Moreover, she also introduced feminism into the subject of Orientalism through her essays. The women in harem she met were no longer just a subject of a Western fantasy; they were inspiration for English women to fight for the same personal and legal rights. Instead of unveiling the image of the Eastern women, Montagu used her observations and experiences as a tool to examine British politics and social relations. Although we acknowledge her feminist perspective today, she could not alter the fantasized image of the harem. Parallel to the importance and effect of Knolles, Montagu, in spite of her literary success, failed in her mission to change the Ottoman Empire's image in the eyes of British readers.

George Gordon Byron, famously known for his portrait in Albanian dress, is a compelling name in the discussion of representation of Turks and the Ottoman Empire in British literature. His personal interest in the field and the area, as well as his written works, places him apart from his contemporaries. He is a traveler in the Ottoman Empire and an author of fictional Eastern stories. Byron's travels not only inspired his literary characters and narration, but also were sincerely reflected in his letters and notes, all of which provide rich materials to examine his perception of the East. Byron's fictional and non-fictional works represent the controversy that has existed about understanding and representing the Ottoman Empire. In spite of his experiences, in his fiction he tends to mystify and reframe the East in order to justify the expectations of the West. J. P. Donovan highlights this through Byron's treatment of Constantinople in his fiction and his letters: "Byron's literary transactions with the city of Constantinople set an intriguing problem on the relations between poetry and the experience of travel" (1993: 14). While, for the West, there isn't any definitive distinction among the geography, nationality, culture, and religion of the East, Byron's approaches to these concepts consciously differentiated them from each other.

Biographers of Byron cite Knolles's study on Turkish history as the initial source where Byron encountered Turks and the Ottoman Empire. Byron's readings on the Orient, including the *Arabian Nights* and *Vathek*, constitute the fundamentals of his *Turkish Tales*, portraying his general overview of the East. His readings transformed him into an eager traveler to Constantinople. Yet his eagerness resulted in disappointment, as Filiz Turhan indicates from Byron's letters: "In the letters from his first tour he often expresses a self-consciousness of his role as a tourist and he continually defers the act of full narration to his traveling companion, John Cam Hobhouse…" (2003: 121-122). Although he merely tried to avoid sounding like an ordinary European tourist in Constantinople, his observation enabled him to assign more vital and realistic identity to the city in his fiction. As in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron treats

Constantinople as an individual, and appoints an identity and importance that comes from its historical heritage. Massimiliano Demata defines Byron's perception and impression of Constantinople as following: "In Byron's correspondence from Constantinople, the Turks are missing because he was interested in other aspects of the city … Constantinople struck Byron more than … any 'work of Nature and Art'" (2004: 444) Byron's perspective as a traveler, together with his political and historical opinion on Constantinople, portrays the city as connected to contemporary issues rather than as a stereotype. For Byron, as opposed to an average tourist, traveling to Constantinople didn't constitute getting to know the Ottoman culture. He developed an admiration towards the city not as an integral part of Turkish life, but as a magnificent site which is a common ground for cultures and religions.

Byron doesn't incorporate his personal experience with the Ottoman Empire in his depiction of the East, apart from the characterization of Constantinople. *The Giaour*, which is considered an Oriental romance, is an example of Byron's mystified depiction of the East. In his *Turkish Tales,* including *The Giaour,* Byron displays the Turkish harem as a fantasy of Western desire. Such fantasy and constructed Turkish identity appear in *Don Juan* too. In *Don Juan*, Byron devotes three cantos to Juan's experience of the East. The "East" Byron chooses to depict is the Imperial Harem. Juan's actual experience of the city is limited to the harem after being purchased at a slave market. Since that world was, of course, impossible for him to observe, Byron depicts the harem's environment as a reflection of Western desires, and in the process he loses his connection with the reality of his experience. Instead, Byron depicts the brutality of this so-called barbaric East with a battle scene. Consequently, the city's portrait contradicts the identity of Turks that Byron has attempted to establish. His complicit eroticization of Eastern experience feminizes the East, and separates it from the West by underlining its (imagined) barbaric and uncivilized aspects. Beyond an erotic fantasy, the harem Byron depicts both in *Don Juan* and *Turkish Tales* reflects the anxieties of the West over the political power the East. The disobedient harem women of Byron symbolize the West's suppression of such power.

Byron's depiction of the East in his works leads modern Turkish readers to the same kind of disappointment he experienced in his visit to Constantinople. As a Philhellene, he projects Western hegemony over Turks and the Ottoman Empire. Once again, we are left with typical Westernized stereotypes, in spite of his research on the area. Yet, his fictional works distinctively provide an Oriental subject that can be interpreted as criticism of Western doctrines. Such criticism particularly emerges in *The Giaour.* Discussing "Romantic Orientalism" in *The Giaour*, Eric Meyer theorizes Byron's criticism on Western doctrines: "What we see when we look at the other, then, is our own disfigured image as it is revealed in the blind spots of our cultural field of vision, its incoherencies, its contradictions, and its two facedness in (mis)perceiving its veiled imperial desire" (1991: 693). With this perspective, even Greece becomes a target of Western doctrine. As the West imposes its idealism on Greeks, the Greek identity also turns into the Other. This prompts Stathis Gourgouris to define Greece as "a nation forever situated in the interstices of *East* and *West* and ideologically constructed by the colonialist Europe without having been, strictly speaking, colonized" (1996: 6).

Eventually, Byron isn't only "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" as Lady Caroline describes him, but his works are also "mad, bad, and dangerous" to read. On one hand, his nationalism and his support of Greek Independence label him as an enemy of Turks. Supporting this perspective, his poetry "entailed a more or less conscious effort to contribute to the Western cultural and political hegemonic project over the Orient" (Demata 2004: 439). On the other hand, he shows an appreciation for the hybrid culture of the Ottoman Empire. As

Demata traces in Byron's letters, he in fact has a respect towards Islam and Eastern culture, and shows concern about the realism of his depictions. All these controversies have attracted academics through the years to study the Eastern representation in Byron's work. In terms of my research, it is substantive that Byron and his fiction and non-fiction works embody the controversial understanding and constructed image of Turks and the Ottoman Empire.

Written accounts constituted the only source on the East for the vast majority of the European population. They not only relied on the written accounts for knowledge of the distant lands, but these accounts were a source of entertainment for the public. Through more popular genres, such as oriental romances, the average British reader gained access to the world of the Orient. The immense research that had been compiled in history books was first adapted to the stage. The spectacular world of the Orient has attracted more interest. Travel accounts and fiction inspired by earlier Oriental tales have attracted an even greater number of readers.

All the literary sources that have been cited by different researches leave us without a concrete conclusion on the representation of Turks. Instead, they prove the variation of perspectives throughout the centuries. These literary sources lay out an interest that has been shaped by the political history of Europe and the Orient. Regardless of the variety of sources on the subject, these sources repeat themselves, depicting a sort of a constructed image. Edward Said, as one of the most competent scholars on Orientalism, lays out the construction of such Eastern image as follows:

> Every work on the Orient … tries to characterize the place, of course, but what is of greater interest is the extent to which the work's internal structure is in some measure synonymous with a comprehensive *interpretation* of the Orient. Most of the time, not surprisingly, this interpretation is a form of Romantic restructuring of the Orient. Every interpretation, every structure created for the Orient, then, is a reinterpretation, a rebuilding of it. (1978: 158)

Consequently we, as modern readers and researchers, are left with an ambiguity towards the literary texts that employ Turkish characters which are reinterpretation of their misguided Eastern knowledge. Moreover, trapped within the localized signification of the language, there isn't definitive meaning for Turks, the East, or the Other. Instead, we end up examining another interpretive possibility with an indefinite relation to other concepts.

The eagerness to explore the Ottoman Empire and Turks and the framing of the Ottoman Empire and Turks to serve their political aims, should force us to analyze the importance of the misrepresentation of Turks from a different perspective. Stathis Gourgouris provides the basis for this alternative analysis. Through the example of Greece, Gourgouris presents a sociological study of a nation's existence:

> The national fantasy and, by implication, the entire discursive body that orchestrates and performs its articulation, its discipline, exists precisely in order to mask the fact that the nation 'does not exist.' For though the Nation as a social-imaginary signification most certainly exists, each particular nation, as a geopolitical structure, exists only insofar as its corresponding national fantasy is still at work. The moment this fantasy ceases to operate or is replaced by another, a nation, even geopolitically, collapses. (1996: 37-38)

Gourgouris's concept of the nation as a fantasy can also be applied to the problematic depiction of Turks and the Ottoman Empire in British literature. Written sources on Turks

maintain the national fantasy for Britain through Turkish identity. Her national existence seems to depend on her ability to write national fantasies for others. The existence of Turkish identity as a national fantasy opposes and competes with fantasies of other nations, and this other is Britain in this context.

Conclusion

In the light of this discussion, we can conclude that depicting Turks as stereotypes and as substitutes for a stock Eastern characterization leads us to the same controversy on the slippery signifier of Turkish identity. While it is obvious that they place Turks against the West as its binary opposite, they also fail to define this identity as anything other than Other. Eventually "Turk" is a word that does not have definite meaning, but refers only to an unstable identity. The significance of the word and the identity it represents depend on the context of its use, the purposes it serves. Defined solely by its opposition to the West and Western qualities, the Turkish identity invoked by most authors remains with us even today. On the other hand, in spite of being fictional works, Turkish identity and image in the literary texts do not differ much from that found in non-fiction writings of the time. Apart from mystical representation of the Oriental tales, we expect the travelers to alter the image of Turks based on their experiences. Due to practical reasons, as pointed out, they failed to draw the image that Easterners might have hoped to see. Eventually, their failure is the failure of the fictional works. Considering these limitations, neither Montagu, Byron, Shelley or Cowley, nor any other 19th century British name, differentiates misrepresentation of Turks and the Ottoman Empire. Both fictional and non-fictional works of these– and many more – writers duplicate the same image for probably the same reasons, which are summed up by the term Orientalism.

In conclusion, British writers not only invoke a constructed image of Turks to define their Western qualities, but also to articulate their own fantasy of becoming a nation. This has created a stereotypical representation of Turks that is aimed to be reflected in brief survey of British sources. The chronological study of the chosen works' common perspective on their overlapped understanding of Ottoman, Turkish and Eastern identities points out a recurring approach which should eventually inspire scholars to further such analysis on the understanding of Turkish identity by British names.

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