

ON A MISSION: GRACE ELLISON'S AN ENGLISHWOMAN IN A TURKISH
HAREM

Precious McKenzie-Stearns

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Chair

Accepted by

Dean, Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, entitled “On A Mission: Grace Ellison’s An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem,” closely analyzes the rhetoric that is used within Ellison’s text. Ellison writes about her adventures in Turkey from a uniquely British perspective. Her discourse addresses such issues as the veil, the harem and women’s rights. Ellison’s socio-political concerns, she claims, are centered on the Turkish women. Often times though, her discourse shifts to address the progress and needs of Englishwomen of the early twentieth century. This intimate study of An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem reveals Ellison’s progressive feminist ideas as well as the fervent nationalistic propaganda that she espouses in order to champion her cause.

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Special thanks go to my husband, who made this path less difficult. Also, special thanks to my parents, brother and sister whose humor and encouragement know no limits.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Colby and Wyatt Stearns, with love.

INTRODUCTION

Only recently has the genre of travel writing come into its own in the literary arena. For many decades it was looked upon as literature only fit for the coffee table, for simple escapist enjoyment. But thanks to scholars, such as David Spurr, Sara Mills, and Inderpal Grewal, travel writing is now considered a vital component of post-colonial studies.

This thesis will discuss one traveler's discourse and its characteristics as well as the emerging theory surrounding the rhetoric of women travel writers. This thesis will be a close literary analysis of Grace Ellison's little known, yet fascinating text, An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem. As a counter discourse to Ellison's work, I will present scholarship regarding the Turkish woman and Muslim custom. By developing a sound understanding of the post-colonial and feminist theory behind travel writing, exploring Turkish society and outlining Ellison's own life in the early twentieth century, this examination will unearth Ellison's imperial message to British society as well as her message for the Turkish 'other.'

DISCUSSION

Women Travel Writers

An often times overlooked literary genre is travel writing. More likely than not, for novices and scholars alike, travel writing is read for pure enjoyment and escape. Readers of travel writing often explore this genre because of a desire to travel to or experience an exotic locale. Quite frequently, books on travel are relegated to the coffee table for a casual browse instead of an in-depth literary analysis. Yet, travel writing is the world's oldest form of story telling. Traveling and the retelling of one's adventures can be traced back to prehistoric pictorial tales involving hunts and exploration on cave walls. Through the centuries, travel writing has spanned many continents and surveyed many people.

Some travel writers were amateurs simply recording their observations and vacation experiences in travelogues. Others were skilled professional writers, explorers, or scientists on a quest for adventure, knowledge, and freedom while further advancing the political cause of their homeland. Marco Polo, Magellan, and Columbus kept detailed notes and journals from their expeditions. Jesuit priests and missionaries on religious quests to educate or convert non-Christians in China and South America also contributed to the field of travel writing. Due to the underlying political or imperial circumstances and reasons for travel, as was certainly the case for Marco Polo and Columbus, I believe that travel writing is inherently an alluring façade for a much more provocative political agenda. Revealing the well-hidden political message within a travel writer's text can be

like navigating through the Dardanelles, treacherous, exotic, enchanting and intricately immersed within the history and identity of many peoples from many lands.

Travel writers, therefore, cannot be separated from their native land, either in identity or political mindset. The mother country always, inevitably influences the discourse within the text. This inseparability grants these texts with an integral socio-political commentary that can give valuable insights into historical texts. Whereas I have mentioned notable male travel writers, there are many overlooked female travel writers that deserve a closer examination, especially within the study of British imperialism and post-colonialism.

Recently the works of male travel writers have received much needed attention. Yet the works written by women travelers are still virtually untouched by literary scholars and historians. In fact, many of the books by women travel writers are currently out of print, available only through rare book dealers, who charge an exorbitant fee. This is a strange phenomenon in an age of the Internet and technology, for these texts cannot even be accessed in cyberspace. There seems to be a general consensus among some scholars and, evidently, publishing houses that insightful travel writings by women are rare. As Sara Mills astutely mentions in her book, Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism:

Firstly, there is the assumption that women travel writers are rare; this is rather surprising, since, as I noted earlier, there have been a great many women travelers, especially during the nineteenth century. Secondly, it is clear from many of these critical accounts that women travel writers should not be

considered ordinary women, but exceptional, and perhaps not always viewed in a positive way. (Mills 32)

To her twentieth-century readers, Grace Ellison was an exceptional woman. Ellison was a female journalist, a suffragette and a world traveler. Yet, in her writing, she strove to portray ordinary Eastern women in ordinary Eastern life. Ellison passionately hoped to become the voice for the modern, free woman. I find nothing ordinary in this lofty pursuit. An exceptionally bold, dauntless woman, a pioneer, would pursue this mission. As Mills mentions, many of Ellison's male contemporaries felt affronted and threatened by the radical women's movement of the early twentieth century. Mills states:

Whilst this redefinition of women's role in history and women's achievements is crucial to feminists, it is also necessary to be aware of how much the model of history used owes to the patriarchal model which excluded women in the first place, that is, that history is composed of exceptional individuals. (33)

Mills is conscious of the fact that social reformists are inherently required to be extraordinary individuals to lead movements of any variety and in turn, these stellar individuals leave their mark upon history. The largely patriarchal framework of history and literature would all too easily exclude the woman as one of those exceptional individuals. But, the female activist or writer does indeed play an integral part in the narrative history of civilization.

If woman as a historical figure is marginalized in Western scholarship, then women travel writers are virtually forgotten. Mills observes:

Writers on women travelers are especially uncritical about the status of these texts. None of the critics analyses the politics of production of women's texts.

There is no real analysis of how these women managed to travel in an age which has been characterized as repressive and where many middle-class women could only move outside the house with a chaperone. (Mills 35)

Considering the oppressive society in which Western women moved, it is astonishing that literary critics have overlooked women like Ellison who seem to break all of the rules by defying stereotypes. Ellison freely moves about without a husband or a male chaperone not only throughout Europe but Turkey and the United States as well. She manages to submerge herself within the homes of foreign families and mingle with foreign dignitaries. Yet, few scholars, with the exception of Reina Lewis, have attempted to analyze Ellison's "politics of production." And, indeed, politics were at play in Ellison's travel narrative.

This thesis will analyze Ellison's "politics of production" as well as the socio-political implications surrounding her rhetoric. An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem not only espouses criticism regarding Turkish customs, Ellison praises, defends and chastises the English identity, society and imperial project. Mills acknowledges that:

Because the critical work on women travel writers has centred on the women authors as individual rebels against the constraints of Victorian society, much of it has simply discussed the women themselves and not their relation to the countries they are describing or the part women travelers played in colonialism. It is very common in analyses of women's travel writing to treat the accounts as simply about individuals, and this is encouraged because of the stress within the texts on markers of femininity, such as concern with personal relations and appearance.

However, the texts are, just as men's texts are, about the colonial situation, although their relation to the dominant discourses differs. (Mills 39)

As I hope to demonstrate, Ellison is concerned with femininity as well as with women's rights and nation building. While Ellison may innocently appear to be advocating for social reform for Turkish women, she is unmistakably challenging the English status quo. To accomplish this, Ellison strategically aligns herself with the "primitive" Turkish woman. Wendy Mercer describes this highly effective strategy:

The 'feminine' subject, on the other hand, will construct her identity through 'same-ness', or through her relationships with the 'other', because she has not experienced the same need for distance from the m/other. She will therefore not have the same need to subjugate; this potential bond with the 'other' is enhanced by the capacity for child-bearing and nurture. Where travel writing by women exists, we would therefore expect to find a different 'feminine' set of values appearing in the text: the boundaries between subject and surroundings would be less clear, 'objective' analysis would give way to involvement, mind to body. There would be a refusal to prioritise and judge or to measure and order; this would constitute an example of what Helene Cixous terms 'écriture feminine'.

(Mercer 148)

While Ellison works exhaustively to build a common bond between herself and the Turkish women, contrary to Mercer's theory, Ellison frequently does judge and measure Turkish women according to her uniquely British standards. Because she is a politically aware woman writer, she is deeply concerned with feminine values and that is clearly

stated within her text. And yet, she manages to marginalize the Turkish women in rhetoric that has far reaching complications.

Ellison's narrative is wrought with socio-political commentary that engages in discourses of power and equality. Simply by creating a text that explores the life of the "other," Ellison is reaffirming her power over the Turkish woman. Ellison has the power of the written word; her position is pointedly clear. She holds dominance over the "other." And hence, we are presented with very little counter discourse from the "other." Mills reaffirms Ellison's position of authorial authority; after all, "Texts are relations of power" (73). Ellison may or may not have been cognizant of the underlying power relationships at work within her text; she did, no doubt have a strategic plan for the propagation and dissemination of her all-important socio-political platform.

Ellison knew that in order to catch the attention of a publisher and of society, she must travel to and write about an exotic port of call. Mills asserts that:

Travellers normally only write (and are published) under the following circumstances: firstly, if they travel to well-established places (in this case, the writer has to produce something which is novel, witty or erudite to compensate for the fact that they are writing about the well-known); secondly, if they write about travel to non-places (the Gobi Desert, Tibet, that is, places which have not been written about before); or thirdly, if they describe traveling by a difficult means of transport. The very fact of being female is considered to be one of the elements which make travel difficult enough to write about. (Mills 84)

Fortunately for Grace Ellison, she accomplished two out of three of these publishing objectives. She chose to travel and write about a "non-place," a Turkish harem, where

relatively few twentieth century Englishwomen had traveled. Grace Ellison wrote “articles about harem life for the British newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, which were later compiled in the book, An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem” (Ternar 17). Through her careful choice of words for the title of the book, An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem, Ellison blatantly utilizes her gender, and the implied female gender within the harem, to further emphasize the provocative journey into the secret world of the Turkish interior. How could any red-blooded Brit fail to be aroused by such a title? As Mills reaffirms, “Many of the letters which form travel books were scrupulously written with a view to publication” (Mills 85). Indeed, Ellison is a skilled writer who knew that in order to ensure publication either in book or newspaper format, she had to be provocative and exotic. The term “harem” evokes connotations of a highly sexualized and promiscuous environment. Sara Mills also acknowledges the inevitable quest for the exotic that is unique to travel writing and investigative journalism. She states:

Travel writing is an ‘implicit quest for anomaly,’ as if the travel writer were searching for something strange to describe. And yet, he feels that this is only because in describing the anomaly the writer is affirming the societal norms of England. (Mills 86)

Ellison’s choice of a Turkish harem indeed guaranteed a strange subject for her British audience. She does describe the societal norms of Britain as compared to those of Turkey, yet she also criticizes these societal norms. In this respect, her narrative is as much of a travel journal as it is a political forum. As a female political activist, Ellison strove to be taken seriously, including photographs and commentary from political leaders in reformist meetings within her text. Yeshim Ternar believes:

Grace Ellison, who dared to travel alone to the Orient at the turn of the century to practice what would now be called investigative journalism, felt compelled to substantiate her work by doing what journalists normally do: citing from known public figures and providing photographs of people and places. She was especially concerned about her credibility, however, since she was virtually alone in a field defined and dominated by men. (Ternar 18)

This undying concern with credibility strengthened Ellison's argument for her cause. Her photographs, recorded conversations and meticulous details seemed likely to convince her audience of the authority and authenticity of her work. This authority and authenticity was earned; Ellison was well prepared to enter the male dominated world of journalism and publishing.

Grace Ellison was educated in France at the Couvent des Annonciades, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Ecole Normale Superieure, Sevres and the University of Halle. She worked as a nurse in World War I in France. And, "It was she who would go to the USA in 1919 to solicit help from young American women to fill the gap left in French hospitals by the nuns who left their country to go to places like Turkey" (Ternar 98). Returning to Mills' theory, Ellison was, quite fortunately, not an "ordinary" woman; she was a concerned, highly trained, "exceptional" individual with two strenuous missions: to forge a path for herself in the male dominated world of writing, as well as advocating for social reforms for women. The phrase "exceptional" women writers will be reclaimed as one of positive power and fortitude that, perhaps, twentieth century men were simply not ready for.

The Veil

The most predominate social ill that Grace Ellison attempts to rectify in her book, An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem, is that of the veil in Middle Eastern society. This piece of cloth is, for Ellison, the single greatest dividing and oppressing factor in the Turkish society. After all, Ellison is a modern, educated, Western twentieth century woman. She resents this appearance of restrictions that the veil represents to her British eyes. Yet, Ellison's discourse surrounding the veil varies from page to page. There are passages where she blatantly condemns the practice of veiling. At other times, Ellison's contempt for the veil is subdued; she treats it as a metaphor for feminine weakness and submission. Her rhetoric often, as David Spurr describes, eroticizes the veil. In An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem, Ellison is returning to Turkey after a five-year absence. As an example, of her reunion at the hotel with her Turkish friend Fatima, whom Ellison has not seen in the past five years, she writes:

Then came a faint repetition of the first knock, and a few minutes after followed yet another and another tap. At last I rose and opened the door to see who was there. A moment's pause, then a little black-robed, thickly veiled figure threw herself in my arms and without saying a word, without even raising her veil, just clung and clung to me. (Ellison 6)

I find this image of the "little black-robed, thickly veiled figure" quite problematic. Ellison is simultaneously associating the veiled figure as small, weak and dependent as well as lacking an identity. She does not grant this figure a face or name. This obviously Eastern woman just clings tightly to the staunch, emancipated Englishwoman, as a child

would to a mother. Ellison certainly seems to be suggesting that these veiled Eastern women need the guidance and enlightenment that the English can provide.

To further strengthen this argument, Ellison describes the social changes that have come to Turkey since her first visit in 1908. She comments upon a walk in the park with her friend:

But not only in the bazaar do we walk; we have walked in the magnificent newly laid-out park, where women are allowed for the first time to walk, in a park where there are men. The men, I must say, have not yet grown accustomed to this new and extraordinary state of things, and vie with the Levantine “mashers” in their desire to see the features under the veil. It is not a very comfortable experience for the Turkish women, but it is the darkness before the dawn. The dawn is coming slowly; but it will come if the Turkish woman really wishes it, and works always with that aim before her- the uplifting of her sex. (Ellison 32)

Once again Ellison is simply amazed at the “extraordinary state of things.” She is quite impressed that a Middle Eastern society could make any progress in the arena of human rights. Ellison acknowledges the difficulties that are inherent with any large-scale social reform. Yet, she seems to doubt that the Turkish women will really follow through with further social reform. After all, she states that the Turkish woman must truly wish it. In this passage the Turkish woman is again a childlike creature in the civilized world. The Turkish woman is still living in the darkness before the dawn. Who shall bring the light to these women?

I believe that Ellison sees this to be her mission; she is the bearer of freedom and enlightenment to the Turkish infidel. The use of darkness and light is significant and

very persuasive in colonial discourse. The veil and the metaphorical darkness are used to signify primitiveness. The British colonizers bestowed the light of civilization upon those “creatures.” This is often described as “the white man’s burden.” Hence, Ellison is recreating this colonial notion of “the white man’s burden.” This becomes her personal mission. To accomplish this objective, she must experience the veil, the literal darkness, firsthand and report about its effect on herself and society. She muses:

Personally I find the veil no protection. In my hat I thread my way in and out of the cosmopolitan throng at Pera. No one speaks to me, no one notices me, and yet my mirror shows that I am no more ugly than the majority of my sex. But when I have walked in the park, a veiled woman, what a different experience. Even the cold Englishman has summed up courage and enough Turkish to pay compliments to our “silhouettes.” We have not heeded them, walking as real Turkish women, with stooped backs and bent heads and a rather swinging gait, but these two silent figures only served to excite their curiosity, and no doubt they wondered at my thick veil.... (Ellison 69-70)

Ellison seems to be excited by the curiosity that is aroused within the Englishmen by veiled women. For her, it is a sort of exotic flirtation, a sex game for the British men and women. Ellison enjoys the attentions of Englishmen because they are English. If she were a Turkish woman, I cannot believe that she would be flattered by this curiosity from foreign men. Even as she marvels at the arousal created by the veil, she cannot grant that the Turkish women have any tangible sense of sex appeal because of their “stooped backs and bent heads and a rather swinging gait.” So while the Englishmen may find the veil enticing, they could not possibly find what causes the swinging gait, the Turkish female

body, as attractive as that of an Englishwoman. I believe this passage reveals a bit of female jealousy that Ellison cannot escape when describing the exotic fantasy of Eastern life, a fantasy from which it is difficult for Ellison to separate herself.

Ellison seems to be aware of the time required to perform social reform. She condemns the practice of veiling; she wants to bring the dawn to the Turkish women, yet she cannot resist the exotic. She is intrigued by the provocative, sexually charged reactions that she receives when donning the veil. Sarah Mills explains:

‘Going native’ is a phrase which describes the way in which certain European travelers and residents abroad adopted the dress and customs of the people of the colonized country, and potentially aligned themselves with that culture. The phrase is interesting because, conventionally, it has strong negative connotations integrating and identifying oneself with a colonized community is seen to be ‘letting the side down’. (Mills 98)

Ellison must try the veil on; she goes “native” for a time. Even the discourse surrounding this game of dress up is highly politicized. She is in no way “letting her side” down. Ellison writes:

But the slavery of ages cannot be cast aside in a few months, and the ladies continue to wear their thick black canvas veils over their faces. Through this veil the beautiful coloured landscape becomes a black-and-white sketch. On hot days it is unbearable; one has a tendency to squint because of looking through the holes in order to see, and it makes one’s eyes ache if one suddenly throws it back and comes into the full glare of the sunshine. (Ellison 60-61)

She reinforces the notion that the veiled Turkish women have been oppressed for ages. Ellison implies that these women suffer excruciatingly in the veil but they are unable to simply toss it aside. If the women toss the veil aside too quickly, the light, which signifies modern civilization, is overwhelming. She seems to be advocating for slow, methodical social reform since this oppression has such a long history.

And yet, to further her argument for lifting the veil, she remarks on the vistas that she believes the women cannot see clearly. It is as if she is saying, “Look, women, at all that you’ve been missing!” Or look, at least, at what you’ve not been seeing clearly. If the Turkish women cannot see, or in turn, think clearly because of the veil, then it *must* be cast off. The veil seems to be the key to Ellison’s social reform. Once the veil is removed, then the Turkish women would see the world as it truly is. According to Ellison, the Turkish women would realize the injustices of their society and then charge on with reform.

Ellison, the political journalist, skillfully draws comparisons between the Englishwoman and the Turkish through clothing. Grace Ellison writes, “To ask a Turkish woman to go out without her veil is almost like asking an Englishwoman to go out without her blouse. Living in a Turkish household one sees this slavery has become almost part of a woman’s existence” (76). It is quite a lot of fun to deconstruct this provocative statement. Ellison acknowledges the importance and necessity of the veil for the Turkish woman. She compares it to the blouse. This is quite funny. Her statement implies that while the proper Turkish woman would never be seen without her veil, she *might* be seen without her blouse! This implication is further bolstered by the plethora of erotic Eastern women represented in photographs and postcards in Sarah Graham-

Brown's Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860-1950 and in the historical portraits shown in Reina Lewis' Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation. Likewise, the Englishwoman would *never* be seen without her blouse. It is interesting to wonder why she didn't choose to compare the veil to the hat or bonnet. Perhaps she realized that the comparison would be much too tame for her English readers hoping for an erotic Turkish story. The use of the words "blouse" and "veil" would instantly arouse the interest of her male readers. While the veil is a form of slavery for the Turkish women, Ellison never draws that parallel to the blouse. The veil should be cast off but not the blouse; the blouse is not a form of slavery, merely a stylized garment of femininity.

Nonetheless, Ellison does, somewhat, realize the social and religious significance of the veil. At times, she does also grant the Turkish women some autonomy. She theorizes about the Turkish woman and the veil: "But feminist though she is, she strongly opposes any attempt to modify the veil, not because the veil has to her a religious meaning, but to her it is one of the traditions of her race, and therefore sacred" (Ellison 110). This passage is quite a paradox compared to the previous ones. Ellison acknowledges the importance of the Turkish women's accomplishments as well as the uniqueness and value of the Turkish race. For once, the Turkish culture is not marginalized. What Ellison attributes to the traditions of religion and race, Sarah Graham-Brown, in her book Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860-1950, understands the veil to be a marker of social status. Graham-Brown maintains:

The upper- and middle-class women in this movement were very much aware of the dangers which attached to unveiling. In personal terms they risked harassment and even violence if they appeared unveiled in the streets. In a wider sense it would also be regarded as a sign of lowered social status, leaving them open to the attentions of predatory males who regarded 'free' women as sexual prey. (Graham-Brown 139)

While I cannot be sure if the majority of Turkish women desired to unveil or not, it seems that there are opposing viewpoints to explain why they didn't. Ellison believes that the intimate connection between the veil and religion hindered the unveiling process.

Graham-Brown acknowledges the dangers that unveiled women would encounter on the streets because, at that point in history, unveiled women on the streets were prostitutes. If a lady went about without her veil in public, men would have reason to believe that she was sexually available. A survey of Middle Eastern men revealed "that when a rural youth visits a town he assumes that any woman walking down the street is sexually available" (Mernissi 143). The veil, in turn, is a form of protection for unwanted advances. The veil offers invisibility and protection for the woman who walks down the street because she becomes invisible and not sexually available. As shocking and oppressive as this sounds for women of the twenty-first century, we must remember that it was not too long ago that European and American women were thought lady-like only if they wore long skirts, hats, gloves, and high collars and were chaperoned when they traveled about town. Western women must not forget that we have not been wearing blue jeans and bikinis for very long. These garments may not be signifiers of "liberation" anyway.

Regardless of the origins of the veil, writers, historians and literary scholars have theorized about the power of the veil. Ellison understands the veil to be a form of oppression rather than power. Lady Montagu, a British woman who traveled extensively in the East, feels that “the Turkish woman is the freest in the world because she can hide behind her veil and move about as she wishes, including anonymous rendezvous with her lover” (Morris xxi). There is power and freedom from accountability through anonymity. A veiled woman can travel anywhere, for any reason, upon any political or personal mission and never be discovered because of the concealment provided through the veil. Men are instantly recognized by their facial characteristics but it is women who may move about in secrecy. I wonder how many political coup d’etats have been accomplished with the assistance of veiled women?

Ellison still finds the veil restrictive and quite unnecessary in the “modern” world. She pays little attention to the benefits that a veil could grant in a volatile political arena in the Middle East. Where she may fail to understand some of the Turkish citizens’ needs, Ellison’s rhetoric certainly does not let the British “side” down. She presents multiple sides in favor of Great Britain, such as the progress of the women’s suffrage movement and the education of British women. Through her praise of England and her comparisons of Turkish and English culture, the most significant being that of the veil, Ellison is opening Turkey up for further English exploration. David Spurr, in The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration, describes rhetoric like Ellison’s as a form of “eroticisation.” Spurr finds:

These scenes of veiling and repetition create a specifically erotic context for certain fundamental qualities of colonial discourse: the removal of the veil serves as a visual metaphor for ideas of opening and discovery everywhere implicit in the discourse (175)

Given Spurr's theory, it can be understood that Ellison was campaigning for the acquisition and ensuing exploitation that would occur if Turkey joined the Allied Forces in World War I. This "opening" of Turkey would be much like the imperial "opening" of Africa or India. The British government could gain a position in Turkey and mold this "primitive" nation into one that would be suitable for British acquisition or alliance, which would be a strategic move during World War I.

Ellison, through her journalism, is opening up Turkey, readying it for further British exploration or alliance, perhaps as an ally in the coming World War. Spurr critiques writing like Ellison's created for mass audiences. Spurr realizes:

The principles of unveiling and repetition come into play perhaps most distinctly in the forms of colonial discourse produced for popular audiences. In newspaper stories, travel posters, advertisements, and the like, these structuring principles do not lie buried under the prevailing ground of a literary aesthetic or a philosophical argument; rather, they push through the surface of discourse, exposing the raw energy of a colonizing desire. (Spurr 175)

Ellison's desire for journalistic accuracy does not mask her socio-political agenda for Turkey and England. Her raw feminine energy emanates forth from every glorious page. Her rhetoric can be, at times, just and at others, somewhat marginalizational. As a British woman, she cannot escape the pride and prejudices that are an integral part of her

identity. Her treatment of the Eastern woman will always be skewed because of her limited experience and insight into this foreign culture. Spurr uses Fanon's 1967 description of European attitudes toward the Eastern woman: "Unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure" (Spurr 177). Ellison wants desperately to understand the mysterious Turkish culture. For Ellison, the easiest way to accomplish this is to unveil her. Ellison wants to reveal her mysterious beauty and the hidden secrets that so many of her countrymen have misinterpreted and eroticized. Leila Ahmed in her book, Women and Gender in Islam, understands this as an affront to Islam. She remarks:

Only if these practices intrinsic to Islam (and therefore Islam itself) were cast off could Muslim societies begin to move forward on the path of civilization.

Veiling- to *Western* eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies- became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies. (Ahmed 152)

Though Ellison claims to desire to create a true understanding of the Muslim Turkish woman, she is also emphasizing the vast different-ness between the Turkish and the English. While campaigning to cast off the veil, Ellison is asking that the Turkish woman give up her religion, her heritage, her culture. But Ellison does not realize that by doing this, it would break the Turkish woman's resistance and reduce her to the status of other "colonized" people. The Turkish woman, representing Turkish society, would be open for European conquest. This conquest would create a much-altered way of life for the people of Turkey, much like the British exploration into the heart of Africa did. Turkey would no longer be Turkey.

Perhaps Islamic women choose to keep the veil as an act of colonial resistance. By adhering to the traditional dress, Turkish men and women were still guaranteed control of one arena. The English, the French or Germans might bombard the Turkish society with literature, politics, religion or weapons but the traditional veil remained mysterious, untouchable, sacred and unchangeable. Ahmed reiterates:

The veil came to symbolize in the resistance narrative, not the inferiority of the culture and the need to cast aside its customs in favor of those of the West, but on the contrary, the dignity and validity of all native customs, and in particular those customs coming under fiercest colonial attack- the customs relating to women-and the need to tenaciously affirm them as a means of resistance to Western domination. (Ahmed 164)

The fiercer that cultures such as Ellison's fight to unveil women, the stauncher the Eastern culture will resist. After all, that may be the one thing they can hold on too. During and after World War I, Turkey saw major political and social changes. Nermin Abadan-Unat traces the development of the Turkey of the future in the article "The Impact of Legal and Educational Reforms on Turkish Women." Abadan-Unat describes Turkish reform:

An impetus for genuine reform came with World War I, which created jobs for women in ammunition and food factories. In a parallel movement, banks, postal services, central and municipal administration, and hospitals began to open their doors to women. But though the changes were accelerated by the demands of the war machine, they did not meet with universal approval. Official policies

prescribed permitted skirt lengths and a special imperial decree was needed before the veil could be discarded during office hours. (Abadan-Unat 178)

Ellison was not in Turkey in 1919 to be a triumphant witness to these radical changes in Turkish society. But, as is clearly evident, these changes came about because of World War I, a European war. Furthermore, Abadan-Unat observes that:

In 1919 the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the occupation of Istanbul by British soldiers, and the landing of Greek soldiers in Izmir aroused a storm of outrage and protest throughout all strata of the population. Turkish women also were provoked into political activism. (Abadan-Unat 178)

The Europeans, just a few years after Grace Ellison's infiltration, proved to be yet another catalyst for the collapse of an ancient empire and a culture. Turkish women may have been "provoked" into activism, but at what cost to their society? Ellison and Western contemporaries may undoubtedly see this paradigm shift as a positive since, as Abadan-Unat reports:

Addressing the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Ataturk publicly acknowledged the heroic deeds of Anatolian women in his speech of 3 February 1923. He formally promised that 'Turkish women shall be free, enjoy public education and occupy a position equal to that of men, as they are entitled to it.' (Abadan-Unat 178)

While the Western world, and certainly Ellison, would have been cheering Ataturk's speech, what did the Turkish women feel? After years of war and occupation by foreign soldiers, this newfound freedom may have been frightening as well as liberating. It would have been exciting if Ellison could have traveled back to Turkey in the 1930s to

witness and record the changes that occurred because of World War I. Did all of the Turkish women throw off the veil? Was society better or worse because of the Brits? I wonder how she would have answered those questions.

The Harem

Ellison used the veil as a means to argue for equal rights for women around the world. Much as she used the veil to blast through myths surrounding Eastern women and further her political cause, she constructed her references to harem life quite similarly. She immediately appeals to the erotic for the sake of her readers. Ellison comments:

To the Western ear, to be staying in a Turkish harem sounds alarming, and not a little-yes, let us confess it-improper. When, before I left my own country, I had the imprudence to tell a newspaper correspondent that I was longing to get back to the quiet harem existence, I was accused of “advocating polygamy,” for to the uninitiated the word “harem” means a collection of wives, legitimate or otherwise, and even the initiated prefers he knows no other meaning. (Ellison 2)

At once, she piques the interest of proper English readers through the use of words such as “harem” and “polygamy.” Then, because she claims to have immersed herself within the harem, she claims authority over the subject. She has first-hand knowledge and experience in this situation and may educate the naïve readers back home in Mother England.

In the book Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel, Inderpal Grewal discusses the perceptions and portrayals of ‘the other’ by the European writer. Grewal finds:

Popular portrayals of Asian women showed them in harems and houses, in poses either erotic or idle; mostly upper-class women were described. Travel narratives also emphasized such roles, suggesting that these women, unlike the English, were wholly given over to erotic pleasures; the only work they were shown doing was ornamenting themselves. (Grewal 44)

Indeed, Ellison does participate in this type of discourse. For the harems, or homes, that she stays in and visits are those of wealthy Turkish families who have many servants. Ellison's narrative, on the other hand, is a blend of political propaganda and exoticism. The Turkish women that she encounters are beautiful, civilized, well dressed. Some are educated while others are not. In this respect, Ellison separates herself from the stereotypical English travel writer. Grewal also compares the stereotypical representation of the nineteenth-century English lady. Grewal puts forth:

Yet it must be kept in mind that despite the prevalent nineteenth-century discourse of work, the idealized, beautiful Englishwoman was one who was idle, who had servants for housework and did not work outside of the home. Thus, it was paradoxical to find fault with all "Eastern" women for the very quality that made Englishwomen beautiful: a life of leisure and submission to men. (Grewal 45)

By 1913, Ellison was on the cusp of a Western sexual revolution. British conceptions of femininity were slowly shifting from those of the nineteenth century. While Ellison most likely had her share of servants both at home and abroad, including Miss Chocolate in Stamboul, she could become the new Englishwoman. A woman of the world. She traveled; she wrote for the *Daily Telegraph*; she was a nurse during World War I. Perhaps, Ellison's adamant desire for Turkish reform came about because of the joy that

she obviously found in her work that took her out into the wider world. Unfortunately, this desire to liberate, was often at the expense of the Turkish subject, as can be seen in the following passage:

A chapter, at least, on harem life will always add to the value of the book; for the word “harem” stirs the imagination, conjures up for the reader visions of hours veiled in the mystery of ages, of Grand Viziers clad in many- coloured robes and wearing turbans the size and shape of pumpkins, and last, but not least, is supplied for the reader’s imagination a polygamous master of the harem, and they have made him the subject of their coarsest smoking-room jokes. Poor Turks! How we have humiliated them! The Turk loves his home and he loves his wife. He is an indulgent husband and a kind father. And yet we judge him from the books which are written, not to extend the truth about a people, but only to sell; the West expects to hear unwholesome stories when it reads of the Eastern homes (Ellison 15)

By reminding her readers of the privilege of admittance into the harem that she earned, she becomes the voice, the authority on all things Turkish for the British readers. So, as she claims that she desires to dispel the myths and the jokes surrounding the Turks, she is still profiting by continuing to propagate such myths. She describes the turbans as pumpkins and reminds the readers of the abundance of exotic women behind those closed Turkish doors. She entices the English reader further with the mention of the rare privilege of entering the harem. A reader could easily overlook the statement about the kind Turkish father and focus more on the base connotations of that of the “indulgent husband.” After all, wouldn’t most readers want to discover how this Turkish man is

indulgent whether sexually or materially? Even as she claims to dispel myth, she is utilizing these myths and those largely European books to create an exotic, mysterious civilization that must be explored and understood. Even though she admits that she understands the misrepresentations of the Turkish people, she goes so far as to question a Turkish woman, Halide- Hanoum, about the same: how to dispel myth and further the advancement of Turkish women. Halide-Hanoum tells Ellison:

To delete for ever that misunderstood word 'harem,' and speak of us in our Turkish 'homes.' Ask them to try and dispel the nasty atmosphere which a wrong meaning of that word has cast over our lives. Tell them what our existence really is. (Ellison 17)

Through this statement by a true Turkish woman, Ellison's is granted power and authority to explore the subject of the harem. While indeed, it is important to understand the harem from the Eastern perspective, as a part of the home for female family members, Ellison places Halide- Hanoum, a powerful activist in Turkish society, in the position of the misunderstood, the oppressed, the marginalized. It is implied that Halide-Hanoum is voiceless and powerless in her society as well as in the British society so Grace Ellison must speak for her. Ellison, the educated, emancipated English subject has the sole right to do this. If Ellison must speak for the submissive Eastern woman, then she is further propagating this myth of the erotic, exotic, helpless Eastern woman. Reina Lewis, who has studied Middle Eastern culture and Grace Ellison extensively, suggests, "The mythic sexualized harem was the pivot of a well-established Western fantasy of Oriental depravity, that was both proof of the Oriental's inferiority and source of much pleasurable and envious contemplation" (Lewis, "Comparative Modernities" 191). So

while Ellison desired to enlighten the British regarding these Oriental fantasies, she was in turn using these same evocative terms in order to sell her books. As long as these fantasies of depravity exist, then these fantasies are further proof that Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries desperately need a righteous country like England to lead them out of darkness and sin.

Ellison claims to understand the intricate workings of the harem even though she does realize that her fellow countrymen do not. Ellison is aware that the harem is not a place for sex and corruption but more of a secure nest for the women and children of the family. She describes the birth of a child which she participated in while visiting a harem:

The mother and daughter were picturesquely arranged. The mother, in her big bed, covered with priceless embroidery, and the child, in a smaller bed, covered with a smaller quilt of the same priceless embroidery, peacefully sleeping, and a French Sister of Mercy, with her big white *cornet*, playing the part of nurse. It was a pretty picture—a picture which brought tears of emotion to the eyes of the visitors. It is an old and beautiful masterpiece—the mother and her child—all the world over, and a masterpiece at which every true woman looks again and again, and always with delight. (Ellison 102)

Ellison is masterfully creating a work of art in this depiction of the Madonna and girl child. She uses the rich, luxuriousness of Eastern embroidery to emphasize the exotic locale of this timeless mother and child. And, yet this precious pair is sleeping under the careful guidance of a French Sister of Mercy. This “old and beautiful masterpiece” is under strict and watchful eyes of another empire, in this case, the French. There is, we

must remember, the Turkish Empire that is still in place, even though France is trying, apparently, to westernize it. Can the Turkish women not even give birth in the privacy of their own homes without the presence of a foreign empire? Perhaps the Western empires must keep a careful watch on the occurrences within the harem.

As Ellison tries to make the harem life appear less mysterious and erotic, and more timeless and elegant, she still, from her Western perspective, finds harem life exotic and even a bit restrictive. After all, Grace Ellison makes it clear that she enjoys the company of men. Perhaps what Ellison overlooks is the value that the Middle Eastern women place upon the harem as a way of life. In Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society, Fatima Mernissi explains through a survey of Muslim women, the oftentimes-overlooked cultural significance of the harem. She believes:

The seclusion of women, which to Western eyes is a source of oppression, is seen by many Muslim women as a source of pride. The traditional women interviewed all perceived seclusion as prestigious. In rural Morocco seclusion is considered the privilege of women married to rich men. (Mernissi 142)

I don't believe that Ellison realizes or appreciates the huge economic investment of the families with whom she stayed. Not only must the family provide for the children, they must feed and house the servants. Ellison does mention the servants and the luxuries of the home but instead of appreciating them, she finds harem life stifling and longs to go explore the city and talk with men. Conversely, the women with whom she stays know that they are very privileged to be provided for and not on the streets or working as a maid. In fact, Ellison preaches for education for women so that they can provide for

themselves. But, much like the Englishwomen of the Victorian era, it was thought to be an honor to remain well cared for at home. It might be said that it is the Turkish equivalent of the “angel in the house” phenomenon. To support this argument, Mernissi reiterates, “traditionally, only necessity could justify a woman’s presence outside the home, and no respect was ever attached to poverty and necessity. Respectable women were not seen on the street” (Mernissi 143). In fact, “only prostitutes and insane women wandered freely in the streets” (Mernissi 143). What Ellison arrogantly sees as oppression, the Turkish women at that time, see as privilege, a privilege after centuries of harsh regimes and civil wars. Ellison seems to enjoy the quietness and relaxation found within the harem, much like one would find at a health spa, but she does not seem to enjoy the protection and elite-ness of the harem situation. As Reina Lewis conjectures, Ellison reevaluates “the ‘protection’ offered by the apparent confinement of the harem system in relation to the travails of Western ‘freedom.’ So the image of the West which haunts Ottoman discussions of modernity is both produced by and productive of Ottoman discourses of gender, nation and culture just as the image of the Orient is imbricated within Western discourse” (Lewis, “Comparative Modernities” 192). Ellison appreciates her relative freedom and cannot understand the Turkish lifestyle partly because of the skewed discourses circulating between East and West. Since she is limited to using Western discourse, she cannot then begin to represent fairly the harem system. She cannot even actually completely conceive of it, in fact.

The Rights of Women

Ellison traveled to Turkey with many agendas. One was to find a provocative subject, such as the harem, for her book. After finding a provocative subject, Ellison began to weave her socio-political agenda into her rhetoric. I would like to argue that Ellison makes a subtle rhetorical shift from singing the praises of progress for Turkish women to one of advocate for future reforms in England. Her social concerns for British women were cleverly disguised as concerns for the liberation and equality of Turkish women. In fact it was common for middle and upper class British women to spend a great deal of time campaigning for charities and other worthy causes. This social commitment had far reaching implications, not just at home but abroad as well. Sara Mills concludes that social activism was a vested interest in imperial expansion. Mills relates this activism to “the duty of the Christian nations to colonise the ‘heathen’ nations, in order to convert them” (Mills 97). Turkey, for the British in the early twentieth century, became the “white man’s burden.” As Mills states, “it was thought to be a religious and moral duty to bring civilization to these regions of the world” (97). While Ellison desires to liberate and enlighten the Turkish people, more specifically the veiled and oppressed women, Ellison also assumes the position of the “colonizer” and the Turkish woman as the “other” or the “heathen.” Hence, by creating this type of discourse, Ellison is, like her predecessors, assuming the “white man’s burden.” Ellison believes that the Turkish women can only achieve liberation through the guidance of a country as civilized as England. This mission becomes Ellison’s moral duty to womankind.

In her efforts to liberate Turkish women, Ellison strives to eliminate prejudice and stereotypes with her text. Lewis believes that Ellison, like many other women travelers, wants to shatter stereotypes surrounding Eastern women by explaining the freedoms they do have. Ellison comments upon the modern Turkish women's organizations, the relative ease of divorce, and the indulgence of Turkish husbands. By addressing these issues within her text, Ellison is using the Oriental woman as a symbol for the women's movement in England.

While Ellison claims that she is working toward change within Turkey, by comparing the strengths and weaknesses of women of both societies, Ellison is actively advocating for the rights of Englishwomen. Lewis asserts, "The real or imagined status of Oriental women came to operate as an index of female liberation for Western discussions of emancipation" (Lewis, "Comparative Modernities" 188). For example, Ellison describes the newly acquired freedoms for Turkish women:

It is time Europe saw the Turkish woman as she really is; saw her splendidly organized Red Crescent Society, her woman's paper edited by a woman, her programme for the national health, for the training of nurses and doctors, and even telephone clerks, for the near future. Surely, honour should be given where honour is due, and although, for reasons I will explain later, it will be some time before the Turkish woman can or before it would be wise for her to cast aside the veil, she is not what Europe generally imagines she is. She has awakened from the darkness and horror of the Hamidian regime with a courage and determination to show the world that one sex cannot govern a country, that the woman's voice must be heard in every matter of importance-not in the anonymous manner of

yore, but openly and honestly and above-board, as is her right- and that if one sex is to be kept in ignorance it shall not be the women. (Ellison 16)

Ellison praises the progress of Turkish women in this passage. She passionately trumpets their determination and frankness. Yet, Ellison claims that this progress is not achieved through the anonymity of the veil or through the seclusion of the harem. Ellison strategically utilizes the mention of the Red Crescent Society and the Hamidian regime as a decoy, so as not to offend any staunchly traditional minded English subjects. This passage of determination and frankness could quite easily describe the plight and progress of the English women's suffrage movement, for which Ellison was a strong advocate.

Throughout An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem, Ellison uses the Turkish women as a mask, or a veil, for the Englishwomen. By disguising the Englishwomen behind the veils of the Turkish women in her narrative, Ellison may advocate for her truer cause: the women's movement in *England*. She writes:

I have faith in the women of Turkey. With education-for these women, though of great culture, are not educated-they will acquire the necessary perseverance and exactitude, the lack of which keeps the Turkish woman behind the rest of Europe. With improved means of communication and organized work, too, her character will develop. She can take her place splendidly in a big cause. (Ellison 17)

By replacing "England" for "Turkey" and "English" for "Turkish," readers will uncover Ellison's truer agenda. This passage is about both Turkey and England. Ellison envisions education and work for the Englishwomen of the future. Inderpal Grewal believes that women writers like Ellison use this subversive style because "they could

uphold their supposed racial and national superiority over Eastern women that, many Englishwomen felt, justified their possession of equal rights with men” (Grewal 65).

Ellison is deploying a particularly gendered rhetorical strategy. She compares the struggles and advancements of East and West. To further contrast the differences between the cultures, and illustrate England’s superiority over Turkey, Ellison writes of her civilized host, a Turkish man, in Stamboul:

My host, an exceedingly well-read, intelligent officer, speaking two European languages, and having served three years in the German army, is a man with ideas of feminism and government and social questions quite half a century before his time. (Ellison 28)

Ellison creates a civilized Turkish gentleman, most likely quite different than her unenlightened English readers could have expected. Yet, as Ellison implies, this highly educated, progressive Turkish gentleman is living with female Islamic fanatics who will not move out of the dark ages “and he is surrounded by a household of ignorant fanatics who can neither read nor write. He would give his wife complete liberty this very day if it were possible, and, although she has more liberty than any woman I know, for her sake he cannot too openly defy Islam” (Ellison 28). Ellison strokes the masculine ego, yet she belittles the Turkish women in their strict adherence to custom and religion. Ellison obviously views this traditionalism as nonsense.

If men are willing to grant women their freedom in society, then the outcome lies fully within the women’s hands to do as they see fit. Ellison is also placating the Englishmen’s concern regarding social reform. She is releasing the civilized man from the responsibility and placing the sole burden upon women. For she writes that even

though the Turkish man is forward thinking, women are slow to change. This notion, I am sure, would be less threatening to an Englishman than the alternative, which would be an army of women, marching for freedom. Ellison herself even remarks on the past attempts of liberation. She counsels:

There are some ladies here who blame the Turkish women for not taking their freedom as other women have done; there are times, too, when I feel inclined to sigh for the militant spirit of the Englishwoman, but until one has really been behind the veil one can have no idea of what “fanaticism” really means. Isolated rebellion is of no use- a protest here and there may, or may not, help, but a movement only really counts when women march out in an army, and nothing will ever make them turn back, and there is no fear of death. (Ellison 28- 29)

This is Ellison’s call for the women of the world to unite and be unafraid. This call is not fanaticism, as Ellison sees the wearing of the veil because of religion as fanaticism.

Perhaps, this is her warning to Englishmen; they have not experienced true fanaticism.

Nothing, man or religion, will not stop a true, united women’s movement. Ellison is campaigning for a united women’s movement. But, she realizes the importance of including men within society to help advance the cause. She reports on a women’s meeting that she attended while in Turkey:

The hall in which the feminist meeting was held was the large lecture hall of the university, lent by the men. Men were the stewards, and all four speakers were men. Strange and chivalrous as it seemed to me to see the men conducting the women’s meeting, I was, however, disappointed not to hear a woman speak. (Ellison 66)

Perhaps to use men's pride to her advantage, Ellison comments upon the generosity and support of these Turkish men. She does want women to be active participants in shaping the future, and expresses this through her disappointment at the lack of women speakers. Ellison is less than a militant feminist, as some might understand her to be. She wants men and women to work together for the greater good of civilization, but if men will not help, then the women must march together with "no fear of death" (Ellison 29). Indeed Ellison compares the Turkish women's movement that seems to be largely supported by men to that of the English women's movement that seems to have been met with resistance by men. Grace Ellison reasons,

As I have said before, it is not for me to criticize the methods of the women of a civilization so totally different from our own. The men are urging them to take their freedom, and helping them all they can, but if they will be free they themselves must strike the blow. The women of another civilization cannot help them except by giving them the benefit of education whenever they ask for it.

(Ellison 77)

As Ellison contemplates on the successes of a women's movement with or without men, she analyzes the methods used by Western and Eastern civilizations. Contrary to her statement though, she does criticize a civilization so different from her own throughout the text. While she claims to be an objective observer, she espouses her beliefs and stereotypes that turn her account into a very subjective piece of literature.

Ellison uses this different civilization of Turkey to promote her personal social agenda, and in so doing, she encourages Englishwomen who might desire a change in the status quo. She tells her women readers that they "must strike the first blow" (Ellison

77). And only “native women” can do this for themselves. The only benefit that can be obtained from another nation is one of education. So for the Turkish women, about whom she appears to be writing about solely, Ellison is powerless to change their society because she is not a part of it. She, and her country, will only be able to benefit them with education. Though her rhetoric may seem powerless in regards to change for Turkish society, it may be highly useful for her intended English audience. By comparing and contrasting the two civilizations and the levels of freedom and progress for women within each society, Ellison becomes a powerful voice for the British women’s movement.

Through her comparisons, England is often granted a more knowledgeable, far superior role. As Ellison quotes Turkish feminist Halide-Hanoum, “Surely we in England should try to understand better the Turkish women, for it is to us they still turn for guidance, example, and, above all, sympathy” (Ellison 18). She emphasizes the notion of the “white man’s burden.” Yet, Ellison tries to use this appeal to advocate for the women’s movement and shared tolerance between the cultures of such different nations. For Ellison, though, the Turkish people do not need tolerance, she adores everything Turkish; they need British guidance and example to show them how to create a “civilized” society.

Ellison utilizes such problematic discourse as a means to promote her cause, the women’s movement. Only by stroking the pride of the British Empire, can she hope to convince its subjects of the relevance and importance of the women’s movement.

Inderpal Grewal maintains:

Empire was a matter of pride as well as a policy that did not need contestation. It was important to see themselves as part of a “civilizing” nation, for that could imply a nation that would not subjugate or exploit its own people. (Grewal 66)

Ellison, through her choice of title and her discourse, aligns herself with England, a “civilizing nation.” Because England is this great “civilizer,” then England cannot oppress or subjugate her women as Turkey, an “uncivilized” nation, does. Ellison further shapes the distinctions between “the colonizer” and “the other.” If Turkish women and British women are at all similar, then one could assume, based on Grewal’s statement, that Ellison is implying that since England is such a civilized nation, that she and England must rectify these social inequities immediately so that England will remain that much more advanced than Turkey, who still seems to be living in the dark ages of veiled women and harems. At one point within the text, Ellison blatantly affirms this argument. She states:

What I do protest against, however, is that an action committed by a Turk should be called “a crime,” and yet committed by a Christian neighbour “a diplomatic error.” And so in this question of women. “See,” says Europe, “how the Turk treats his women.” “See,” I might answer, “how the British Government treats its women.” (Ellison 80)

There is an interesting paradox within Ellison’s rhetoric. Openly, Ellison critiques the British government’s poor treatment of women. In her text, she proves to Europe the need for social reform within Turkey and then she slams the European superpower, her homeland, England. She publicizes the inequities that occur at home, as well as abroad for British women. Through this single passage, Ellison reveals her veiled socio-political

agenda in a shockingly straightforward manner. Yeshim Ternar understands Ellison's paradoxical discourse as related to the constraints of femininity that she was subjected to in England of the early twentieth century. Ternar observes:

Grace wavered between two different types of feminism and femininity. The Suffrage movement with which Grace allied herself in England was concerned mainly with securing voting rights for women and the general amelioration of economic, social and legal conditions regarding women's existence. (Ternar 156)

Ellison veils her propaganda for the British women's movement because of her femininity. She did not want to be seen as 'unladylike' or 'uncivilized.'

Ellison knows that the best possible way in which to further her cause was to compare and contrast an unenlightened nation, such as Turkey, to England. This would be a relatively safe way to promote her feminist ideas while retaining her femininity; this, she would not jeopardize her status in British society. While she trumpets for women's rights, Ellison is deeply connected to and concerned with maintaining her identity of ladylike propriety. Apparently, she is concerned with maintaining this façade because she knows that she must reach both female and male readers. Ellison knows that she must represent herself as a true English woman: a woman of good taste, elegance, exquisite manners, and solid common sense in order to avoid alienating her traditional-minded English readers with her progressive, radical notions of women's liberation. At the same time, however, Ellison gets wrapped up in her feminist fervor, which results in the markedly more strident condemnation of gender relations operating within early twentieth century England.

Nationalistic Propaganda

A prominent rhetorical tendency throughout Ellison's text is her promotion of nationalism and patriotism. Nationalistic propaganda operates as Ellison's veil. In order for Ellison to retain her femininity and disseminate her radical viewpoints, she eloquently utilizes nationalistic propaganda to argue for social reform. She hopes that this nationalism will mask more controversial topics and serve as a link for the common good of society as a whole. Yet, Ellison is met with some resistance. Inderpal Grewal maintains that

while Victorian imperial culture inculcated a belief in English superiority because of race and civilization and created orientalist notions of "inferior" cultures, bourgeois Englishwomen fighting for their rights used nationalistic rhetoric for vastly different reasons than working-class Englishmen, for instance. Their utilization of the discourse of beauty, domesticity, and nation reveals a specific class and gender position. (Grewal 58)

Ellison's patriotism toward England promotes her social cause which is women's suffrage and liberation and makes women an asset to the empire. She compares women's patriotism to men's:

With the women the patriotism has the same foundation of giving to a cause (far, far more than they can afford they have given to the fund), but a woman's patriotism is more complete than that of a man- there is in it a mixture of fine religious feeling, a pious cult for traditions and responsibility as mothers of the race. (Ellison 84)

Ellison masterfully weaves patriotism into religion, piousness and responsibility- all hallmarks of British national identity. As she puffs up English pride, she also utilizes the British's reverence for the state and act of motherhood to strengthen her argument. "Woman is the destiny of man, and the Turkish woman, because of her lack of education and her cloistered condition, has been unable to give to the country the men it needed" (Ellison 84). After all, only educated women provide a country with sound, educated citizens and leaders. She implies that if England (and Turkey) does not educate women then the future of the country will be at stake. This could very likely jeopardize England's power in the world arena.

However, Ellison's use of motherhood is problematic; it is also quite sexually charged. If the Turkish women are Ellison's stand-ins for Englishwomen, then Ellison is further tracing the extreme divisions between the sexes. The Englishwomen then become "the other," the oppressed. Wendy S. Mercer sees this type of use of the reproduction system as a further means of the oppression of the "other." Mercer explains that the female body is "saturated with sexuality" (Mercer 150). Mercer also points out that women tended to the children at home, which means that the women clothed and fed the future labor force (Mercer 150).

Mercer believes that traditional capitalist system "was based on an exaggeration of biological sexual difference and drew similarly on biological justifications for its exploitation of foreign peoples. Clearly, the body was the focal point of oppression of this period" (Mercer 150). While Ellison may have been appealing to the English's dedication to the capitalist system and profit to benefit the English women at home, she is drawing distinguishing differences between men and women throughout the world.

Women, as child bearers, have the power to shape a nation. To do this, women in England must be educated so that they can provide capable, intelligent workers for society. Hence, the British have an inherent right to be in Turkey because they must educate the Turkish women (and men) so that Turkey can emerge in the new century as a powerful nation, able to fight off marauding (anti- British) regimes that are attempting to gain a stronghold in Turkey.

Ellison is attempting to create a modern national identity for the Turks. National identity is often linked with religion, race, literature and art. Ellison constructs a patriotic Turkish woman and implicitly, a patriotic Englishwoman through these elements. Grewal reiterates, “A discourse of religion and race is essential for constructing this nationalist female subject” (Grewal 60). Ellison participates in imperial discourse when she cites the lack of British influence upon Turkish literature. Through her eyes, England has failed to educate and enlighten the Turkish society. The Turkish library that she describes seems to lack British influence, which she finds very disturbing:

I must add, however, in defence of the Turks, that this neglect of our literature is very largely our own fault, what have we done to spread the knowledge of our language in the near East? And what has France done? Les Dames de Sion, the Lazarists, and the innumerable other orders who, when driven from France, sought the hospitality of the kindly Turk, what have they not done to further the knowledge of their language, not only in Constantinople, but throughout the East? And we? (Ellison 118)

Ellison finds this lack of British influence to be the fault of her government; somehow, somewhere during the Age of Empire, the English must have overlooked Turkey. And

now look! The French, England's nemesis, have crept in and spread their literature and language. Lewis concludes:

The imperial project might have been supported by an ideology that saw all Europeans as superior to all colonized peoples, but it also brought Europeans into competition with each other for the new lands and markets of the colonies and for cultural supremacy. (Lewis, Gendering Orientalism 73)

Though Turkey was not a colony, it was a viable component of the campaigns of World War I. The Allies needed to gain Turkey's support to acquire a military position in the Mediterranean as well as in Asia. Many countries, at this time, were courting Turkey. Thus, it was indeed time to enlighten the Turks to finer literature, British literature:

The Turks may not quite agree with me, but it has seemed to me everywhere I went that our literature comes as a surprise to them. We have the reputation of being a solid, matter-of-fact, honest nation, with a mighty fleet. England still puts her hall-mark of "all-rightness" on everything she touches, but somehow literature and art are not expected of us. The Turks will tell you they have read our masterpieces, they know our literature...but I saw none in any of the libraries of the colleges I visited. Voltaire, Rousseau, V. Hugo, Vigny, Anatole France, Pierre Loti, and now a "promise" of Wells and Kipling. (Ellison 118)

Ellison is astounded at the lack of British literature; it seems to be a rather personal affront to her to find only French authors in a Turkish library. By some huge oversight on the part of the British government, England has not left her stamp of "all-rightness" on the literature and thoughts of the Turkish people. Ellison's astonishment marks her implicit construction of a patriotic identity for Englishmen and Englishwomen.

Yet, this promise of Wells and Kipling that Ellison mentions is interesting to discuss as a point of resistance by the Turks. After all, “Discourse can be not only an instrument or an effect of power, but also a point of resistance” (Spurr 184). This Turkish promise to acquire British classics may be a smug joke played on Ellison by the ‘other’ to appease her British pride. As David Spurr suggests, “One suspects that a rather elaborate joke is being played on the representatives of colonial order” (Spurr 187). The Turkish speaker and Ellison realize that by having a library full of French books, it negates the self-righteous importance of the British Imperial process. By having these French books, the Turks are accepting the French, as colonizers, into their culture. By not having British books in the libraries, it is an act open resistance to British culture. The Turks understand this and so does Ellison. This resistance to British culture is a resistance to British authority. Spurr expands:

The manifestation of difference and ambivalence within the voice of colonialist authority, a manifestation which allows us to see both colonizer and colonized-not as equally burdened-but as sharing in some measure a sense of entrapment within the structures of power (Spurr 187)

Ellison and the Turks are trapped within the structures of power in this enterprise. Ellison, as a British subject, feels the need to spread the legacy of her “civilized” nation to the ends of the earth. This British subject is used to holding the strength and power in the colonial relationship. Yet here, through the simple act of not having British books in a library, the “other” resists the traditional authority of the “white English man” but cannot escape the entrapment of the white, *immoral*, French man.

Authenticity

The resistance to British literature in Turkish libraries can serve to inform the audience about the shaping of the modern national identity of Turkey after the age of Empire, after the Hamidian regime, but before World War I. Ellison may not delve into deeply political and controversial repercussions of post colonialism, yet she illustrates the ramifications, clearly enough through her descriptions of libraries, home, art and furniture. Ellison searches for the authentic identity of Turkey. This quest for the authentic can be problematic. Turkey, throughout the ages, has been crisscrossed by many varieties of men, each leaving artifacts that shaped modern Turkey. Ellison seems to be fascinated with veils, turbans, harems, and mosques. She grants no authenticity to the very vital Christian Turks or Greek Orthodox Turks. Her fascination with the Muslim Turkey leads her to overlook the rest of Turkey. Therefore, her quest for authenticity is subjective, even misguided, because by focusing on the Muslim Turks, she grants authenticity only to those aspects that specifically appeal to her ideological frame. The authenticity she claims to uncover is, in fact, her creation.

Ellison's quest for the authentic Turkey focuses on the Turkish home. She believes that she may find the true Turkey if she is admitted into and studies the furnishings of private homes. While in these homes, Ellison reports on the interior decorating fashions:

For a long time now, European furniture has been the fashion in Turkish homes. At first this craze for everything Western began in the homes of the Government officials, but it has been gradually spreading ever since, so that to-day, in the smaller homes, cheap, gaudy furniture of the worst kind has replaced the beautiful

embroideries and accoutrements of the East. And now the pendulum will swing the other way. With this new movement of “Turkey for the Turks,” thinking women like my hostess, who look round their houses to-day, must necessarily ask themselves the question, “Is this really a Turkish home?” With as much zeal, then, as she showed in filling her house with the ornaments of the lands she longs to visit, my friend Fatima has now begun to collect the furniture, ornaments, and embroideries for the real Turkish room which is to be mine when next I visit this country. (Ellison 19-20)

The Turkish government officials were the first to accept European furnishings and ideas into their homes, most likely due to the fact that these officials had the most contact with Europeans. Then the trickle down effect occurred. This proliferation of European décor touched many homes in the land. Nonetheless Ellison understands the motivations of the new regime of Young Turks. It is disenchanting to realize that while ‘modern’ Turkish women are once again decorating their homes with Turkish ornaments, they are artificially recreating Turkey. The truer, more authentic Turkey was erased when the European sofas and paintings arrived.

This new Turkish home will be an artifact created after colonialism and serves as a mode of resistance to further colonialism. This new Turkish home is a deliberate construction, not a genuine artifact. Ellison seems to be excited by the prospect of staying in such as exotic Turkish room the next time she visits Fatima. This Turkish room will fulfill her exotic Turkish fantasies much better than those furnishings she is used to from Europe. After all, when she visits Turkey, she wants to feel like she is in an exotic land, not in a British hotel. She describes their quests through mosques and tombs

for authentic Turkish artifacts “so that the next time I come to Turkey I shall not have the disappointment of traveling all these miles to sleep in a room furnished with an Empire suite” (Ellison 20). It seems problematic that Fatima, a Turkish woman, must travel to mosques and bazaars to discover what Ellison sees as truly Turkish. Due to years of colonialism and wars, Fatima does not have ready access to the truer Turkish identity. Fatima must take Ellison, the British woman, to the Turkish monuments to find what the British define as Turkish, as if Ellison’s British superiority grants authenticity and rightness to a Turkish identity. To Ellison, anyone who is tainted by contact with the British cannot be authentically Turkish.

This modern Turkish identity is perplexing to Ellison. She writes, “Sometimes in the morning when I wake I still wonder where I really am. Am I in Europe, or am I in Asia?” (Ellison 20). If Ellison, as a British subject cannot tell if she is in Asia or Europe, how can we understand what the Turkish identity is after years of invaders and war? The new Turkish identity seems to be quite a mixture of Asia and Europe. The real Turkey that Ellison is searching for may not exist any longer, if it ever did.

Ellison further illustrates the ramifications of post colonialism through the conglomeration of decorations of her room in Stamboul. She takes inventory of the silver Eastern basin and jug on her washstand, the Venetian glass bon-bon service and “tables-tables of all nations” (Ellison 21). In her Turkish room she also finds “a signed portrait of Great Britain’s King and Queen, removed for a short while from its place of honour in the big salon as a sign of my friend’s great affection for one of their Majesties’ humble subjects” (Ellison 21). After her surveillance of the room, she remarks “Is it surprising that when I look round this curious room I wonder whether I really am in Turkey?”

(Ellison 21). On the cusp of World War I, Ellison understands that this room represents Turkey, a nation divided by empires. For centuries in Turkey there have been representatives from around the world, those tables from every nation. She wonders whether she is really in Turkey. The question she is really asking is “What is Turkey?” She expects to find veils and harems, which she does. But she does not expect the infusion of European furniture and décor. This perplexing fusion of cultures leads her on a desperate search for the authentic identity of a country. She does not realize that there is no absolute, true identity especially in a country historically divided by regimes and nation states.

Ellison accepts the importance of the Turkey for the Turks movement because she is so desperately seeking to uncover a true, united Turkish identity. Ellison writes, “One of the objects of this movement is to purify the language, to use exclusively Turkish words instead of a mixture of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, which takes away from the strength of the language and makes the study of Turkish so difficult even for the Turks” (67-68). Ellison acknowledges that language is power. If the Turks create a standard, pure Turkish language, then they are one step closer to developing a new national identity.

Even this acquisition of pure Turkish is problematic for Ellison if a “true” Turkish teacher does not give the instruction. She explains, “The cultured women, it is true, speak Turkish, but as their education has been given by French or English governesses, the study of their own language has been neglected, and at present they can best express themselves in a language not their own.” (Ellison 65). Perhaps Ellison, in her quest for an exotic, pure Eastern paradise, is advocating for a Turkey free of French

and British influence? Ellison is stating that if the Turks want to reclaim their language and power, then they must do so without French or British involvement. How does Ellison really expect this to happen after centuries of intermingling? The effects of war and imperialism can never be erased.

CONCLUSIONS

This intimate reading of An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem hopes to have revealed Ellison's progressive sociopolitical concerns surrounding the rights of women. While Ellison claims to advocate for social change for Turkish women, it is clear that she is also fighting for social change within her own country, England. She skillfully smooths over her radical rhetoric with fervent nationalism that would most likely appease even the staunchest conservatives.

While she often utilizes the Turkish women as a model for oppression in order to advocate for change, she also wants to befriend these exotic women. It seems that Ellison is calling for all women throughout the world to unite. Unfortunately, this noble mission often overlooks the significance of religion, tradition and heritage that is difficult, if not impossible, to relinquish. While Ellison attempts to "go native" and live as the "other" does in order to understand the Turkish culture, she cannot relinquish her British identity, which will always color her perspective of foreign cultures. Yet, it is her British-ness that makes her text so enjoyable and intriguing to analyze.

As Ellison advocates for women's rights, she is also reporting upon crucial developments about the shaping of a nation. Ellison details the disconcerting loss of Turkish identity due to centuries of transculturation. She wrestles with notions of identity, language and authenticity. While she praises Britain's progress and calls for assistance in educating the Turks, Ellison also bemoans the loss of the exotic that she craves. She searches for the real Turkey, which always eludes her; yet the zeal for her political mission never does.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A.



Fig. 1. Turkey Political Map, in Desmond Stewart, Turkey (New York: Time Incorporated, 1965).

Appendix B.



Fig. 2. Photograph of Grace Ellison and her Turkish servant, Miss Chocolate in Yeshim Ternar, The Book & The Veil: Escape From An Istanbul Harem (Montreal: Vèhicule Press, 1994) 60.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Precious Marie McKenzie-Stearns was born on April 2, 1975, in Sandusky, Ohio. She graduated from the University of South Florida in May 1997 with a B.S. degree in Special Education. She has worked as an elementary and middle school teacher in Immokalee, Florida and Wilmington, North Carolina. In 2001 she entered the graduate program in English at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington where she worked under the direction of Dr. Janet Ellerby and Dr. Lewis Walker. Ms. McKenzie-Stearns graduated in May 2003, and will begin a doctoral program in English literature at the University of South Florida in Tampa in August of 2003.