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A LONG FAREWELL: DEPICTING THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, 1920-1950

INTRODUCTION

The last forty years of the Ottoman Empire's existence were marked by important political developments as well as by the transformation of almost every aspect of social and cultural life. This turbulent period, from the first experiments in parliamentary democracy to the dissolution of the empire after the First World War, had reverberations which are felt in Turkey and other Ottoman successor states unto this day.²

This age of change has been examined by historians from a multitude of angles. A desideratum so far remains a re-appraisal of this period on the basis of autobiographical narratives, a genre which flourished in Ottoman and modern Turkish from the 1870s onwards, as it did also in Arabic. Until rather recently, it was believed that autobiography is an intrinsically western literary genre which could only emerge and flourish in the intellectual atmosphere of European enlightenment, while the Middle Eastern context lacked an awareness of and an interest in the individual person.³ Research over the last decades has shown that this is not the case.⁴ Arabic

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³ A prominent advocate of this view is Georges Gusdorf, see his essay 'Conditions and limits of autobiography', James Olney (ed.) (1980): *Autobiography: essays theoretical and critical* (Princeton, NJ: UP) 29-48. This view was shared even by scholars within Middle Eastern Studies, see for example Franz Rosenthal (1937): 'Die arabische Autobiographie', *Studia Arabica* 1, 1-40.

⁴ An example for the numerous works about modern Arabic autobiographical writing is Robin Ostle et. al. (eds.) (1988): *Writing the self: Autobiographical writing in modern Arabic literature* (London: Saqui Books). An excellent introduction to and analysis of older autobiographical texts from the early Islamic

autobiographies of the 19th and 20th century have been used with benefit by scholars of literature and historians, while Dwight D. Reynolds and his collaborators have shown that there indeed exists a considerable corpus of autobiographical narrative in Arabic before the genre in the western sense made its appearance in the Middle East. An article of autobiography and education in Syria and Lebanon by Christoph Schumann provides not only a fascinating case study, but also an extremely useful discussion of the possibilities and difficulties of using autobiographical material for historical inquiry (Schumann 2001).

While a large amount of research has been done on Arabic autobiography in modern and pre-modern times, this genre in Ottoman and Turkish has received considerably less attention. A few autobiographical texts are usually mentioned in overviews of Ottoman source texts (e.g. Faroqhi 1999, 163-167). A more detailed overview of the genre can be gained through entries in encyclopaedias, such as the *Türk dili ve edebiyat ansiklopedisi*, and the articles by Cemal Kafadar (Kafadar 1989) for the pre-modern period and Ibrahim Olgun (Olgun 1972) for the 19th and 20th centuries. Individual texts of the period before the advent of European-style literary genres have been analysed by Cemal Kafadar in his aforementioned article and especially by Jan Schmidt (Schmidt 2002). Similar treatments of late Ottoman and modern Turkish writers can be found in a volume of proceedings of a conference on autobiographical writing in Turkish literature (Akyıldız et al. 2007). To my knowledge the only analysis by a historian of a specific topic and period through the medium of autobiography is Benjamin Fortna's study of experiences of late Ottoman education (Fortna 2001).

The main focus of this paper will be on a small group of five autobiographies which were written in English for a Western audience and published between 1920 and 1950. The Ottoman Empire was multi-ethnic and multi-faith; different traditional allegiances and emerging nationalist leanings make the classification of an author with regards to their nationality vexatious for the outsider and difficult even for expert scholars. In the context of the end of the empire, a helpful approach might be to treat the authors discussed in this paper not according to 'what they were' but 'what they became' after the transition from the Ottoman Empire to its various successor states.

period onwards is Dwight D. Reynolds (ed.) (2001): *Interpreting the self: Autobiography in the Arabic literary tradition* Berkeley: California UP).

Thus, my collection of authors can be listed as three Turks, one Albanian and one American of Sephardic Jewish extraction.

As a first glimpse of the 'Ottoman worlds' presented in the texts, I have chosen memories of childhood as a period when the distinctively Ottoman or 'oriental' setting is presented as still firmly established and the authors' younger selves were still oblivious of the momentous changes of the period. It will be seen that childhood reminiscences are steeped in melancholic nostalgia. Considering that nostalgia is concerned with the present just as much with the past, this is not surprising as all authors experienced some form of displacement or exile and were writing their accounts far from the places they had grown up in.

This paper is going to argue further that most of the authors use a distinct style in portraying the world they grew up in, employing what I will call 'exotic', 'orientalist' or 'orientalising' motives. The frequent use of such exotic scenery and blatantly orientalist paradigms, familiar from Western orientalist discourses such as travel writing, is at first glance rather striking. It might be helpful to bear in mind that a yearning for oriental worlds lost or in the process of dying out was a very current attitude in early 20th century literature (Haag-Higuchi 1997). On the other hand, I feel slightly reluctant to overrate the much-evoked topic of 'orientalist narrative', a reason for the use of which might simply be that these scenarios existed and the authors lived within them. Another explanation that comes to mind is that the authors were catering to certain tastes and expectations of their Western audiences. I would argue that the authors discussed in this paper in some cases reproduced topics and atmospheres, such as the romantic oriental setting provided by Islamic architecture or the unwashed but picturesque appearance of local populations. These were familiar from the travel writings of Western authors, beginning in the 19th century and still much in vogue after the First World War (Korte 2003, 141 and El Kholly 2001).

I will then move on to a look at the way the larger regional context is presented. All but two of the authors examined here grew up in Istanbul, the capital and cultural centre of the Ottoman Empire. This paper, in the second part, will try to move away from this Istanbul-centred perspective and take a look at how authors describe the Ottoman periphery, in this case the Empire's Arab provinces or the Balkan countryside. It will be seen that what applies to childhood homes holds true also for the Ottoman eastern or western periphery: the authors describe these regions in

terms of the unusual. While most of the authors retain an eye for the nostalgic, the romantic and the picturesque, when describing the periphery a more negative tone comes into the narratives. This takes the shape of a critical or patronising attitude *vis-à-vis* the described or comment on the 'gathering storm' of political unrest. It must of course be taken into consideration that these accounts were written with the benefit of hindsight several years after the events they portray and might convey as much information about the authors' opinions or experiences at the time of *writing* as at the time of *experiencing*. This of course is the phenomenon known to literary criticism and psychology as *Nachträglichkeit* (King 2000: 20-22 and Marcus 1994: 1-10 and 135f). To put it simpler, at the time of writing the authors had experienced a fair share of war, upheaval and often displacement. Their negative experiences may in some cases have influenced the tone in which they worded the accounts of their experiences.

The phenomenon of 'Ottoman Orientalism', a distinct attitude towards the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire shown by administrators or intellectuals, has been analysed by Ussama Makdisi in a seminal article (Makdisi 2002). Makdisi has shown that there existed a tendency to belittle and patronise the Arab provinces of the empire and to emphasise the civilising powers of the Ottoman state. This attitude, according to Makdisi, was in line with the different ways in which the Ottoman state sought to assert its hold on these provinces in a time of rising nationalist tendencies and respond to European encroachment (Makdisi 2002: 787). It became especially significant during the First World War against the backdrop of the Arab revolt. Among the examples Makdisi provides, we encounter Halide Edip, one of the authors analysed in this paper, on her way to organise schools and orphanages in Syria. According to Makdisi, hers is a mission to bring education and enlightenment to the empire's backward eastern domains (Makdisi 2002: 793f, on schooling also see below p. 7f). Notions of an 'exotic other', more commonly located in a broadly defined 'East', are also applied west of Istanbul, in the Ottoman domains on the Balkans. I will present excerpts from two authors describing scenes they remember from their childhood in Salonica (modern Thessaloniki) and around Vlora in Albania respectively. The notion of the Balkans as an exotic 'other Other' often described by Western authors in similar, if not the same, terms as the Middle East, has been explored extensively by Maria Todorova, who speaks of 'Balkanism' as a variety of Orientalism (Todorova 1997: 119f).

THE AUTHORS

The first of the books written by Turkish authors, in order of publication, is *House with Wisteria: The Memoirs of Halide Edip*, the autobiography of the writer, educator and politician Halide Edip Adivar (1884-1964).⁵ Halide Edip is a famous and often controversially discussed figure in recent Turkish history, famed for being one of the few high-ranking women who actively took part in the struggle for Turkish independence after the First World War.⁶ She was forced into exile in 1926 after the ban on the opposition Progressive Republican Party, of which her husband had been secretary general. Rehabilitated in 1940, she worked as a lecturer at various Turkish universities and became an MP for the Democrat Party (Çimen 2005).

Like Halide Edip a child of urban intellectual background, Selma Ekrem (1902-1972), granddaughter of the famous poet, novelist and playwright Namik Kemal, grew up in a wealthy, progressive family in Istanbul and Jerusalem, where her father was provincial governor. After graduating from the highly renowned American College for Girls in Istanbul, Selma Ekrem left Turkey and settled in the United States, where she worked for the Turkish embassy and as a journalist. Ekrem was a prolific writer on Turkish current affairs, but is most well known for a collection of Turkish fairy tales and her autobiography *Unveiled: the autobiography of a Turkish girl*.⁷

Irfan Orga (1908-1970) also was a very productive author, but like Selma Ekrem is best known today for his autobiography. In *Portrait of a Turkish family* he describes his childhood and early youth.⁸ Orga was born into a wealthy Ottoman family who sank into poverty following his father's death during the First World War. Orga became an officer in the Turkish air force after his graduation from Kulleli military academy. He settled in England in 1948 with his English wife and embarked upon a literary career (A. Orga 2004: 304f).

⁵ Halide Edip Adivar: *House with Wisteria: Memoirs of Halide Edip*. New ed. Charlottesville 2003 (first publ. London 1926).

⁶ Anon. (1976) : „Halide Edip Adivar”. *Türk Dili ve Edebiyat Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1, Istanbul, 68. For a more recent reappraisal of Adivar's work, see Hülya Adak (2001): *Intersubjectivity: Halide Edip (1882-1964) or the 'Ottoman/ Turkish (woman)' as the subject of knowledge*. PhD thesis, University of Chicago.

⁷ Selma Ekrem: *Unveiled: The autobiography of a Turkish girl*. London 1931.

⁸ Irfan Orga: *Portrait of a Turkish family*. New ed. London 2004 (first publ. London 1950).

The reminiscences of Ismail Kemal Bey (1844-1919), or Ismail Qemal Vlora in Albanian, take us further back in time than the other works examined here. Ismail Kemal was born into a family of Albanian notables in Valona (modern Vlore, Albania). In 1860 he embarked on a career as an Ottoman civil servant, eventually holding various provincial governorships. In 1900, Ismail Kemal fell out of favour with Sultan Abdulhamid II. and went into exile in Western Europe. Disillusioned with Ottoman affairs, Ismail Kemal's political activity shifted towards the emerging Albanian nationalist movement, in which he took an influential part. During the First World War, Ismail Kemal was once more exiled, this time to Paris, where he wrote his autobiography, entitled *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, with the help of the British journalist Somerville Story (Barchard 2004, Skendi 1967: 458-63). While his book is primarily a political memoir, it nevertheless contains some accounts of the author's personal life, especially his childhood.

Leon Sciaky (1893-1959) was born in Salonica (Ottoman Selânik, modern Thessaloniki) into the city's large Sephardic Jewish community. His father and grandfather were wealthy grain merchants and landowners with far-reaching business interests in the southern Balkans (DE Falbe 2007). The Sciaky family immigrated to the United States in 1915, where Leon studied civil engineering, and in the 1930s turned to teaching (P. Sciaky 2007: 249-57). His autobiography *Farewell to Salonica: City at the crossroads* was first published in 1946.⁹ Together with Ismail Kemal, Leon Sciaky in this paper stands as a representative for the Ottoman Empire's non-Turkish population.

DEPICTIONS OF THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

1. Childhood worlds and education

All of the autobiographical accounts examined here start with childhood memories and the earliest incidents the authors remember – or imagine remembering. These early memories are placed within a distinctly 'Eastern', 'oriental' looking scene marked by Islamic architecture, most notably the mosque and the minaret. The authors portray themselves as products of a world which, at least in its outward

⁹ Leon Sciaky: *Farewell to Salonica*. Repr. London 2007 (first publ. Philadelphia 1946).

appearance, is at first glance markedly different from that of their readers. In the examples given below, the mosque and the minaret stand as markers, as if to show the reader that he is to learn about an 'Eastern', 'oriental' childhood.

Leon Sciaky in the prologue to his autobiography *Farewell to Salonica* shows himself as a boy of five standing on a balcony and listening to the muezzin's call to prayer from a mosque close to his house. This scene is placed at sunset, and one of the first adjectives of the scene, and indeed the whole book, is 'melancholic' (Sciaky 2007: 10). Not only is the scene exotic, but it is also hinted that it is a memory from a lost world: Sciaky's home town Salonica was lost to Greece in 1912, by the time Sciaky's book was first published the city was called Thessaloniki and the call to prayer was no longer heard. A similarly 'orientalising' scene stands at the beginning of Selma Ekrem's autobiography *Unveiled*. At first glance, this opening scene presents a slight paradox as it shows Istanbul covered with snow, a type of weather not primarily associated with Levantine shores. But quickly, a distinctly 'oriental' setting is evoked, as if to remind the reader where he is: 'Constantinople has donned her bridal dress; she is all curves and softness except for the tall minarets that stretch dreamily to the sky.' (Ekrem 1931: 1). These settings take the shape of scenes from everyday life or views of landscapes which any western reader of contemporary travel literature would have instantly recognised as belonging in 'the East'. A similar passage describing Istanbul may be found in Lady Annie Brassey's account of a Mediterranean cruise, first published in 1880. This, too, stands at the beginning of the author's account of Istanbul: 'Mosques in every direction, with their round domes surrounded by slender minarets towering one above the other, looking like sentries keeping guard over the shrine' (Brassey 2004: 54).

The exotic scene is not only set by architecture, the human cast of characters also has its special aspects. At the beginning of her childhood memories, Halide Edip Adivar describes the servant entrusted with her care as the so-called *lala*, 'that indispensable personage in every old Turkish household, for which [...] no European equivalent can exist, for it arose from the roots *wholly foreign to them, wholly Oriental*' (Adivar 2003: 6, my italics). She continues by explaining that the institution of the *lala* was closely linked with the traditional separation of public male and enclosed, domestic female worlds. It was only as a small girl, accompanied and protected by the *lala*, that she could partake in both realms. This companion and protector embodies for Halide Edip the positive essence of her old-fashioned

childhood world which she finds lacking in modern times:

‘He brings with him into memory that *je ne sais quoi* of the old-world service –devotion, attachment, pride, possession even –which the modern Turkish world has forgotten but which made so much of the warmth and colour of the old household life’ (Adivar 2003: 6).

In Irfan Orga’s autobiography *Portrait of a Turkish family*, the author tells the story of how, as a small boy, he used to accompany his grandmother to the public bathhouse. The bathhouse, (*hamam* in Turkish) could be counted among the most emblematically ‘oriental’ settings, immortalised by European Orientalist painting and countless literally steamy erotic fantasies. Apart from the *hamam*’s frequent appearance in visual art, European travel literature about the Ottoman Empire abounds with accounts of this institution and its role as a social gathering place which for women took the place the coffee house took for men.¹⁰

Irfan Orga’s grandmother’s excursions to the *hamam* resembled small military campaigns for the preparations they took and the amount of commotion they caused in the household. When the grandmother had reached the *hamam*, little Irfan on her hand and a picnic basket-laden servant girl in tow, she would settle there for the day like a queen descending among lesser mortals, surveying the young girls of the neighbourhood, commenting on their physical features and their chances of finding a husband (Orga 2004: 26). Part of the strangeness of the *hamam* setting is the food consumed after the bath, a menu which would have been unfamiliar to most European or American palates in the age before mass tourism. The dishes served on tablecloths spread on the bathhouse floor had melodious, but foreign-sounding names such as *köfte* (meatballs), *börek* (stuffed pastry) and *turşu* (pickled vegetables). The culmination of enjoyment came with young Irfan’s favourite, the syrupy sweetmeat called *kadın göbeği* (lady’s navel) (Orga 2004: 28). Childhood reminiscences frequently contain passages on going to school. Writers often use this context to juxtapose traditional and modern styles and methods of education. Subjects and teaching methods which might have seemed decidedly exotic to European readers are described along with experiences not unfamiliar to western schoolchildren, such as dressing up for school in uncomfortable clothes.

¹⁰ One of the most famous and frequently quoted accounts is the description of the *hamam* in Mary Wortley Montague’s *Turkish embassy letters* (London 2001, p. 57-60).

Leon Sciaky's introduction to school, according to his autobiography *Farewell to Salonica*, was a slightly uncomfortable experience. After growing up, as he puts it 'like the weeds around the odd corners of the garden', Leon made his way to the Jewish primary school in Salonica holding the hand of his father, having received a 'vigorous scrubbing' at the hand of a servant and wearing 'an uncomfortably clean sailor's suit and creaking new tan shoes' (Sciaky 2007: 75). Leon's first memories of school are marked by an atmosphere of dullness and boredom. Teaching was in Ladino (the Judeo-Spanish dialect spoken by the Sephardic Jews of Salonica) as well as Ottoman. Leon Sciaky reports that 'the abstruseness of the aphorisms of old Hebrew philosophers totally defied our comprehension (Sciaky 2007: 75f). Aside from being merely a reminiscence of things past, this passage might again be interpreted as belonging to a nostalgic discourse. With Salonica lost to Greece and its multi-ethnic setting destroyed by war and population exchanges, writing down his story was the only way in which Leon Sciaky, while living a 'new life' in America, could re-create and save from oblivion the lost world he was a product of.

The schooling Ismail Kemal experienced growing up in the Ottoman Balkans at the middle of the 19th century was a mixture of the conventional and the exotic. His early years were turbulent, as Ismail Kemal's father, together with other notables, had opposed the implementation of the *Tanzimat* reforms in Albania. The government was able to suppress the rising and exiled the ringleaders to Konya in central Anatolia. Ismail Kemal's mother and her children, together with other high-ranking Albanian families, were brought to Salonica. (Kemal 1920: 9-11). In Salonica, Ismail Kemal was sent to a primary school, of which he does not give any details except that he learned Turkish there, having hitherto used only Albanian (Kemal 1920: 13). He continued his education, after the return of his family from exile, at the Zossimaia Gymnasium, a Greek higher secondary school of high repute in Yanina (Kemal 1920: 17).¹¹ This more conventional acquisition of learning is given only limited space in Ismail Kemal's memories. What he is more concerned about presenting to the reader was his 'Albanian education' (Kemal 1920: 13). While Ismail Kemal's father was a cosmopolitan mind who had learned several languages, including French, he was anxious to see his son grow up as a 'perfect Albanian' (Kemal 1920: 13). The chief elements of an Albanian education of the time, according to Ismail Kemal, were

¹¹ Two other key figures in the Albanian national movement, Naim and Sami Frasheri, were also alumni of this school.

'horse-riding, shooting and hunting', and accordingly the boy not only engaged in different sort of vigorous field sports, but was also sent on prolonged tours on horseback through the countryside, accompanied by a retinue of young men of other notable families. The element of exoticism comes into the account again, when Ismail Kemal describes his companions:

'All these young men were dressed in the national costume of rich embroidered cloth or velvet, and armed with pistols and *yataghans* in silver gilt, which they carried in embroidered belts' (Kemal 1920: 14).¹²

As regards the authors' agenda in writing their autobiographies, we can of course assume that some of them were simply written to earn a living. This is the case for example with Irfan Orga, who lived in dire circumstances in London after resigning his commission in the Turkish army (A. Orga 2004: 304f). Both in the case of Irfan Orga and Leon Sciaky, a further incentive for writing an autobiography might have been the nostalgic longing for lost times, places and people. In Orga's case, the author explicitly states that remembering his childhood world is an act of bringing back to life the people who formed his personality (I. Orga 2004: 9).

Taking into account that autobiographical writing, while describing the past, often has a purpose in the present, Ismail Kemal's depiction may be seen as his attempt to portray himself as having partaken of the best of two worlds. More directly, he shows himself to his compatriots as being a 'true Albanian', imbued with traditional virtues. For the benefit of his western European readers (it must not be forgotten that his memoirs were written in exile in Paris), Ismail Kemal included the reference to the Modern Greek element in his education (Glenny 2000: 414).

Selma Ekrem and Halide Edip wrote about ten to twenty years earlier, at a time when the events leading to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Turkish republic were still fresh in the memory of a western audience and information on Turkish affairs in high demand. It seems therefore possible that both authors wrote in order to inform their European audience and explain events from a personal perspective. This is even more the case with Ismail Kemal, who as a high Ottoman civil servant and statesman was ideally placed to witness events of far-reaching

¹² A *yataghan* is the traditional weapon of the southern Balkans and western Asia Minor, a one-edged, slightly curved short sword.

political consequences, enlivened with personal memories, especially about his picturesque childhood. With Selma Ekrem, informing western audiences remained a lifelong mission obvious from her vast output of articles on Turkish politics and culture. With Halide Edip, another motivation for writing might have been the fact that she had fallen from grace with the Kemalist regime and tried to tell her own story as an alternative history of the Turkish liberation struggle.¹³

2. The Ottoman periphery

Selma Ekrem moved to Jerusalem as a small girl, where her father had been appointed provincial governor. It seems striking to me that Ekrem depicts the Ottoman eastern provinces in very much the same way a western contemporary would have done, namely as a picturesque meeting place of different cultures and of exciting new scenes such as the ceremonies and dress of orthodox Jews (Ekrem 1931: 52- 54). The other aspect of her account, which can be found frequently in western travel writing as well, is the description of the Arab lands as chaotic, backward and in dire need of civilising influence. Selma Ekrem for example comments on how she and her nanny were shocked by the dirtiness of their new surroundings and its inhabitants:

‘In a shady corner we came upon a bundle of filthy clothes where flies were gathering by the hundreds. We approached and discovered that the bundle was and Arab in a dirty *mashlah* which he had pulled over his face. He was sound asleep, crouched like one of his camels’ (Ekrem 1931: 53).

Not only standards of personal hygiene are criticised, Ekrem also finds fault with some social conditions in Palestine. She remembers her and her sister’s consternation when the girls, along with their mother and female servants, were confined to the women’s quarters, the *haremlik*, of the governor’s residence, unable to play outside and explore their environment as they had been accustomed to in Istanbul (Ekrem 1931: 49). I would argue that such criticism must be met with some caution. Selma Ekrem grew up in a, for the time, extremely progressive family. Her father had not confined her mother to the *haremlik* and allowed her to socialise freely,

¹³ This has been argued by Hülya Adak in her article ‘National Myths and self-na(rr)ations: Mustafa Kemal’s ‘Nutuk’ and Halide Edip’s ‘Memoirs’ and ‘The Turkish Ordeal’’, Irzik, Sibel and Güzeldere, Güven (eds.): *Relocating the fault lines: Turkey beyond the east-west divide*. South Atlantic Quarterly special edition 102 2/3 (spring/summer 2003), 509-527.

even with male visitors. As Ekrem herself admits, this was highly unusual in the upper echelons of Ottoman society. Gender segregation was not an exotic phenomenon of the eastern provinces, but widespread even in the Ottoman capital. Criticising this practice might therefore not reflect a social reality along the lines of enlightened capital versus backward periphery, but might be an attempt of the author to portray herself and her family background as more progressive than average. Ekrem's perspective is that of the late 1920s when she wrote down her reminiscences, the time of the Kemalist reforms and numerous initiatives for women's empowerment in Turkey.¹⁴ By the time Ekrem was writing, the *haremlük* had all but disappeared. When she was a child in Jerusalem, it was the norm rather than the exception.

Ekrem also comments on the uneasy and fragile peace between ethnic and religious groups, between the rising nationalist movements and the Ottoman central power represented by her father as governor, whom she quotes as saying: "This city, it is hard to manage with all its religions and hatreds. The people are like a river held back by a dam, any moment the surging waters may break it and cover us all." (Ekrem 1931: 61). Similar comments on the explosive atmosphere of the Arab lands are made by Halide Edip, who travelled to Syria during the World War I to run several government schools and orphanages. Halide Edip denounces Arab nationalism as 'an instrument in foreign hands' (Adivar 2003: 332) and presents the population of Syria and Palestine as locked in fanaticism and internal struggle:

'There was a hot and unwholesome atmosphere, mixed with a religious passion verging on hysteria. The Turk alone had a calm, impartial, and quiet look. He divided these spots justly among them all, and stood calmly watching, stopping bloody quarrels and preventing riots in the holy places' (Adivar 2003: 352).

In short, the way the Arabs are shown by Halide Edip could be interpreted as the author's way of suggesting that they were incapable of overcoming their difficulties without the help of the Ottoman government. Considering that Halide Edip's account was written in the 1920s and her Turkish nationalist background, this passage might also be read as a critique of the post-World War One re-ordering of the Middle East

¹⁴ Of course, the whole of Ekrem's book, starting with its title *Unveiled*, can be understood within a feminist discourse.

and an insinuation that greater Syria might have better been left under Turkish rule.

Moving from the empire's eastern periphery to its western borderlands, Leon Sciaky describes a visit with his grandfather to Kilkis, a village in the hinterland of Salonica inhabited mainly by Bulgarian peasants, where his family had estates. Sciaky describes these surroundings far from the urban centre in terms of the idyllic, primeval and picturesque, as a timeless world living in accordance with the rhythm of nature:

'They [the peasants of Kilkis] were part and parcel of the soil they tilled, these sowers and reapers of grain; as earthy as the pungent, freshly turned furrows curling over their ploughs in the spring. Shearers of sheep and spinners of wool were they, driving their cattle to pasture and tending the herds on the grassy slopes. Hewers of wood and makers of sun-dried bricks to build their houses, labouring long and hard to produce the life-sustaining wealth: food, shelter and clothing' (Sciaky 2007: 149).

Unlike Ekrem, Sciaky pays little or no attention to what she perceived as lack of culture and progress. But Sciaky, like Ekrem, is aware of the tensions under the peaceful surface, in this case the often violent conflict between Christians and Muslims and between the nationalist factions and the Ottoman administration. He tells of the elimination of a Muslim notable and landowner by IMRO, the separatist Macedonian revolutionary organisation (Sciaky 2007: 152-155). The Muslim had demanded to marry the daughter of a Christian peasant, and, arriving to collect his bride, had found himself 'confronted by a half-dozen well-armed *comtadjis* [guerrilla fighters]', who without further ado shot him in a field (Sciaky 2007: 155).

Ismail Kemal, interestingly, makes little mention of political upheaval or banditry, part of the main stock of topics in late 19th and early 20th century accounts of the Balkans (Todorova 1997: 122, 132f). Instead, Ismail Kemal focuses on the reforms and public works he and other Ottoman administrators initiated in the Ottoman Balkan provinces, for example during his governorship of Varna on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast (Ismail Kemal 1920: 44ff). Where Ismail Kemal is entirely in line with contemporary European account of the Balkans is in his placing the region firmly into 'the East'. At one point in his memoirs, Ismail Kemal comments on general requirements of reform in 'the East', substantiating his points with examples not

taken from Damascus or Beirut, but from his experiences in Köstence, modern Constanța in Romania (Ismail Kemal 1920: 73). This is only one of the first instances in which Ismail Kemal not only commented on how Ottoman governance might be improved, he also actively campaigned for reform and wrote several memoranda to the Sultan. Eventually, his efforts led to his being removed from the Ottoman civil service and exiled.

Overall, the reading of autobiographical accounts of the 'Ottoman peripheries' bears out the idea of an Ottoman, or in this case, rather 'late or post-Ottoman' brand of Orientalism as postulated for example by Ussama Makdisi. Again, it might be useful to see the incentives for the authors' taking this point of view both within and outside the Ottoman/Turkish discourse. From an Ottoman perspective, there are clear motives for taking a patronising attitude towards the Empire's periphery in order to portray the Ottoman state, and maybe the Turkish Republic as its successor, as a far abler trustee of the peoples' interests than the diverse, centrifugal and chaotic separatist and nationalist movements. In the case of authors writing for a western audience, it might again be a case of serving the expectations of European or American readers already shaped by western writers' accounts of 'the East'. This attitude works just as well with the Balkans. Here, both a distinct Ottoman central state perspective in Makdisi's sense exists, as well as serving western appetites for 'Balkanist' narratives of the kind Maria Todorova has examined.

CONCLUSION

It has already been shown in the first part of this paper that the question of the authors' motives for writing their life stories in a certain way is interesting and form a direct link between the act of writing autobiography and the authors' experiences. Their self-depiction vis-à-vis a western audience was guided by the will to generally inform and entertain as well as possibly personal motives.

The way in which the authors present 'Ottoman worlds' in detail is interesting. On the one hand, an ordinary everyday life is depicted, especially in the context of childhood memories. On the other hand, these experiences are embedded in a distinctive Ottoman or oriental setting, characterised by oriental 'props' such as Islamic architecture. This partly is the logical consequence of the authors having lived within

these settings and remembering them. It might also be possible that the authors served expectations of their western readers who were used to certain topics of 'romantic Orientalism'. As examples it might suffice to mention some of the most famous exponents of the orientalist genre, the novels by the French writer Pierre Loti, the travel books and fictional works of the Swiss author Annemarie Schwarzenbach or such famous English travel writers as Freya Stark and Wilfred Thesiger. In the case of Ismail Kemal, his colourful account of his 'Albanian education' mirrors an interest in the wild and the picturesque common to many 19th and early 20th century western travel accounts of the Balkans.¹⁵ This region in particular, being perceived as 'wild or 'unspoiled' became the focus of travel writers' attention in the age of beginning mass tourism, its manifold conflicts only adding to its attractiveness (Hammond 2009, ix).

It has already been hinted at that other reasons may lie behind the specific way in which lost Ottoman worlds are depicted, often linked to the position of the authors at the time of writing. In some cases, straightforward nostalgia both determined the style of writing and was an incentive for writing, as in the case of Irfan Orga and Leon Sciaky, both exiles far from home and with little chance of return. Halide Edip also wrote in a similar situation, exiled by the very Republic she had fought for. Selma Ekrem's autobiography is mainly the story of a young woman finding her place in the world, and some of her attitudes (for example her criticism of the Arab provinces) might have served to portray her as an especially emancipated specimen of Turkish womanhood. An intriguing case is that of Ismail Kemal, who portrays himself as an Albanian and product of an Albanian upbringing. At the same time, he informs the reader of his western-style schooling and paints a picture of himself as a progressive Ottoman administrator. At the time he wrote his memoirs, Ismail Kemal had come full circle and had become an Albanian statesman. Writing in 1920, temporally very close to the momentous changes which brought about the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Ismail Kemal might have had in mind addressing a triple audience: His newly independent country of Albania, the Ottoman Empire which had rejected him and a western European audience interested in 'Eastern' affairs. Writing autobiography can be seen as a way for the authors of positioning themselves to an audience and making sense to of the events they witnessed and the fates which befell them.

¹⁵ One of the last flowers of this genre is Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*.

Another aspect which might surprise the modern reader of these texts is the existence of an Ottoman/Turkish brand of Orientalism, a critical and patronising attitude towards the empire's eastern provinces, as becomes obvious for example in Selma Ekrem's memories about Jerusalem. While a patronising, 'orientalist' attitude as outlined by Ussama Makdisi makes sense in the Ottoman imperial context, it takes some thinking to imagine why this mindset is still encountered in texts written in republican times, with the Arab provinces irretrievably lost. One reason might be the production of 'exotic worlds' as outlined before, or in the case of Selma Ekrem and Leon Sciaky nostalgia for childhood sceneries. The case is less clear with Halide Edip, who experienced the Arab lands as an adult. Seen in the light of Halide Edip's strong Turkish nationalism and her book being directed at a western audience, one might interpret her attitude as a message to the western powers that the Arab lands might better have been left in Turkish hands. Still harder to place is Ismail Kemal, who, even though he eventually fell foul of the Ottoman State, portrays himself as a loyal civil servant and administrator. His account of the Albania he saw in his youth is free of 'Balkanist' criticism, not surprising in an author turned Albanian nationalist describing his motherland.

These, however, are preliminary interpretations. The description of the Ottoman Empire by Ottomans, or in this case 'former' Ottomans, its presentation to western audiences and the lingering presence of Ottoman paradigms after the end of the empire in my opinion are phenomena which deserve further investigation.

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