

# Construction of Gendered Identities in Turkish National Memory: ‘Our’ Women and ‘Other’ Women in the Stories of Ömer Seyfeddin\*

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*ÖZET* Bu makale, Türk millî hafızasında Türk kadın kimliğinin ve ona karşıt olarak konumlandırılan ‘öteki’ kadın kimliğinin oluşumunu Ömer Seyfeddin öykülerindeki kadın karakterlere odaklanarak ele almaktadır. Makalenin amacı, erken Türk milliyetçiliği çerçevesinde Türk kadınının millî bir özne olarak inşası ile Türk olmayan/gayrı-Müslim kadınların ötekileştirilmesi yoluyla oluşturulan ‘öteki’ kadınlar/‘bizim’ kadınlarımız ayrımını incelemektir. Temel iddia, Türk millî edebî kanonunun oluşmasında merkezî bir figür olarak Ömer Seyfeddin’in ve hikâyelerinin bu kadın kimliklerinin millî hafızada yerleşmesinde temel bir rol üstlendiğidir. Ömer Seyfeddin ikili bir söylem benimseyerek ‘öteki’ kadınları, bir yandan cinsel objeler olarak sunarken, bir yandan da milliyetçi özneler olarak olumlamaktadır. Öykülerindeki Türk kadın karakterler de—yani ‘bizim’ kadınlarımız da—bu ikili algıya göre şekillenmekte, kimi zaman kurban, kimi zaman anne, kimi zaman da uyandırılmayı bekleyen millî bir özün taşıyıcıları olarak betimlenmektedirler.

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*ABSTRACT* This article analyzes how Turkish woman’s identity and the ‘other’ women placed in opposition to her have been constructed in the Turkish national memory by focusing on women’s images in the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin. It aims to explore the making of Turkish women as national subjects, and the otherization of non-Turkish/non-Muslim women as counter subjects of this gendered national identity in the case of early Turkish nationalism. It argues that being a central figure in the Turkish national canon, Ömer Seyfeddin and his stories are key to the shaping of these gendered national identities. The article aims to show the double discourse Ömer Seyfeddin follows by depicting the ‘other’ women as sexually active, immoral subjects on the one hand and as devoted nationalists on the other. His admiration for and the otherization of the ‘other’ women shape his depiction of the Turkish women—that is, ‘our’ women. They are usually represented either as victims of the male brutality of other nationalisms, or as mothers, as bearers of a traditional, national essence, waiting to be awakened by the Turkish male subject.

*KEYWORDS* Turkish nationalism, national memory, gender, Ömer Seyfeddin.

## INTRODUCTION: NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL MEMORY

Recent literature on the history of nation-states has been dominated by a perspective critical of nationalisms. Following Benedict Anderson in his approach to nations as

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imagined communities, this critical perspective implies that nationalism should be analyzed in relation to the cultural system which surrounds it and from which it takes its roots.<sup>1</sup> The importance of cultural aspects of nationalism and nation-building has also been underlined by Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, who refer to the process of ‘invention of tradition,’ which they claim serves the critical function of establishing and/or symbolizing artificial communities.<sup>2</sup> As Hobsbawm notes, invented traditions play this function by “inculcating certain values and norms of behavior to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.”<sup>3</sup>

This suitable historic past is usually found in the ancient times of a community. Customary traditional practices are institutionalized, ritualized, and reproduced in a manner amenable to the ends of the new nation and to national purposes. ‘New’ inventions of the nation-building process, such as national anthems and flags, are supported by the so-called ‘old’ ones, and, more importantly, reflect and reproduce them. These national inventions, both old and new, find their legitimacy in a certain history. This national history depends only partially on what has been preserved and is actually available in the social memory. “[It] has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so.”<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the process of invention goes hand in hand with the creation of a new and national memory.

National memory itself is not easily defined. However, grasping its centrality for the nation-building process and nationalist ideology proves a less daunting task. Nationalism is not only interested in a discourse of origin and the construction of a past, but it also aims to create an identity in the present, with its notions of the self and the other.<sup>5</sup> As Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone suggest, “memory with its particular purchase on the construction of subjectivity, and its insistence bearing on the present, must equally be central (equally central with the discourse of origin) in constituting the historical narrative of identity within which the nationalist subject is produced.”<sup>6</sup>

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1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).
  2. Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
  3. Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, pp.1-14.
  4. Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” p.13.
  5. Abbas Vali, “Nationalism and Kurdish Historical Writing,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 14 (Spring 1996), pp. 23-51.
  6. Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, “Patterning the National Past: Introduction,” in Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds.), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp.169-174.

At a certain point in history, this historical narrative of national identity necessitated the cultivation of a national memory, which gradually came to be differentiated from social memory, the latter being weaker than national memory in terms of its ideological hegemony. The cultivation of a national memory was possible with the advancements in communication technologies in publishing, and the rise and development of the modern state and capitalism.<sup>7</sup> The nation-building process is marked by a selective reconstruction of existing social memory which produces the grand national narrative. After the establishment of the nation-state, this national narrative, through the leadership of the nationalist elite—including journalists, writers, and historians—is constantly reproduced and circulated via all available means of socialization. The memory created by this narrative becomes the common memory of a nation, reminding its members how to perceive both the self and the other.

This article looks at the construction of these perceptions in the case of Turkish nationalism. More specifically, by analyzing women's images in the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin, it focuses on how Turkish women's identity and the 'other' women placed in opposition to her have been portrayed in the Turkish national memory. In doing this, I aim to explore first, the making of Turkish women as national subjects, and second, the otherization of non-Turkish—mainly Bulgarian, Greek, and Armenian—women as counter subjects of this gendered national identity.<sup>8</sup> I follow the feminist critique of nationalism literature in emphasizing the centrality of gender to understanding nationalism and the nation-building process.<sup>9</sup> Feminist scholars have shown that rather than a secondary

7. Halil Bertay, "Tarih, Toplumsal Bellek, Güncel Nevroz: Türkiye'nin Avrupa ile 'Aşk-Nefret' İlişkinin Historiyografik ve Politik Boyutları," *Grenzfall Europa/Avrupa'nın İnce Eşiğinde, Deutsch-Türkisches Symposium 1998/Türk-Alman Sempozyumu 1998* (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 1999), pp.353-367. These three developments, conceptualized as print capitalism, are also emphasized in Anderson's explanation of invention of nation and nationalism (See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*).

8. There is certainly a differentiation between Turkish and non-Turkish women in the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin. The ultimate others of the Turkish women in his perception are non-Muslim women in general, and Bulgarian, Greek and Armenian women in particular. Therefore, the expression 'other women' used in the article should be read as usually referring to them. 'Our women,' of course, refers to Turkish women who are unquestionably imagined as Muslims. Non-Turkish Muslim women, such as Arab women, are certainly excluded from this category. As Bertay mentions, Bulgarians, Greeks and Armenians are depicted as the 'eternal enemies' of the Turkish nation in the Turkish nationalist discourse, crystallized in its most vulgar form in the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin. See Halil Bertay, "Türk Milliyetçiliğinin 'Sıcak Plazma'sı,'" *Taraf*, 6 September 2008.

9. For a critical evaluation of the existing literature on nationalism, see Nira Yuval-Davis, "Nationalism, Feminism and Gender Relations," in Montserrat Guibernau and John Hutchinson (eds.), *Understanding Nationalism* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2001), pp.32-52. For a key article discussing

dimension, or just one element among many, gender has been a determining factor in nationalist constructions, and therefore, it is impossible to grasp nationalism in its totality without gendering it. As Parvin Paidar claims, “the question of women is far from an optional extra,” and any discourse that addresses the political and social reorganization of a society, such as nationalism, has necessarily entailed a redefinition of gender relations and women’s identity.<sup>10</sup>

An analysis of the works of Ömer Seyfeddin is crucial to understanding the construction of Turkish national memory, and hence the making of gendered national identities, which are in fact an integral component of that memory. His stories, which constitute the foundation of the short story genre in Turkish literature, can be seen as the earliest and most desperate manifestations of a nationalist call for awakening.<sup>11</sup> As Erol Köroğlu argues, his stories reflect the main problems, discussions, and events of early Turkish nationalism as they were crystallized in the modern Turkish collective memory.<sup>12</sup> Ömer Seyfeddin was one of the most influential members of a generation of Turkish intellectuals who perceived themselves as nationalists with a mission: the mission of coping with European superiority by becoming part of the civilized world, while at the same time affirming an authentic, national identity. All tensions, contradictions, and dilemmas embedded in this mission can be read in the gendered language of Ömer Seyfeddin. His stories can be taken as examples of literary texts which, together with others, constitute a national canon essential for the reproduction of the national identities created by the asserted national memory.

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the centrality of gender in a case-analysis, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, “The Gender of Modernity: Reflections from Iranian Historiography,” in Israel Gershoni, Hakan Erdem, and Ursula Woköck (eds.), *Histories of the Modern Middle East: New Directions* (London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2002), pp.75-91. For a Turkish volume collecting some key articles on the issue, see Ayşe Gül Altınay (ed.), *Vatan, Millet, Kadınlar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000).

10. Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.2.

11. In his article published in the first issue of *Türk Sözü* in 1914, Ömer Seyfeddin characterizes the journal as a bridge between the educated, nationalist Turkish youth and the sleeping Turkish nation, waiting to be awakened. As a main theme, awakening frequently appears in Ömer Seyfeddin’s stories, poems, and articles. He was also a determined supporter of the idea that literature should educate the masses in order to further national aims and ideals (See, Erol Köroğlu, *Türk Edebiyatı ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı, 1914-1918: Propagandanın Millî Kimlik İnşâsına* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), pp.351-387).

12. Erol Köroğlu, *Türk Edebiyatı ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı, 1914-1918*, p.352.

## CONSTRUCTION AND REPRODUCTION OF TURKISH NATIONAL MEMORY: FORMATION OF A NATIONAL CANON IN TURKISH LITERATURE

Similar to other nationalisms, Turkish nationalism had its own agenda of cultural transformation via a cultural rejuvenation. Literature has been perceived as a tool to encourage society to accept new national norms and values and, as such, it has played a key role in the creation and reproduction of Turkish national memory. As Gregory Jusdanis claims, literature was the mirror of the new nation; institutionalized as the national literature, it has become a means in the formation of an ideological consensus.<sup>13</sup> Formation of such a nationalist consensus in the Turkish context made the achievement of some of the nationalist aims, such as national unity, possible at the level of discourse even before their achievement at the political and institutional levels.

Although there is a general consensus regarding the importance of literature in the construction of Turkish nationalism, whether or not one can justifiably speak of a national canon in Turkish literature remains a topic of debate. Some scholars argue that the overwhelming coherence or consensus required for a body of literature to be defined as a national canon has not been the case for Turkish literature.<sup>14</sup> Others, however, do identify a national canon in Turkish literature shaped by the influence of ‘Anatolian Humanism’—‘Mavi Anadoluculuk’—represented namely by Cevat Şakir Kabaağaçlı (Halikarnas Balıkcısı), Sabahattin Eyuboğlu, and Azra Erhat.<sup>15</sup> According to these scholars, the Anatolian humanists follow the example of the Western humanists who see the roots of Western civilization in ancient Greece and the Latin world, replacing in the case of Turkey ancient Greece and Rome with Anatolia and its peoples. In doing so, Anatolian humanists not only attempt to find a solution to the identity problem of the new Turkish Republic, but their work also constitutes a literary canon since it creates a tradition. This cooperation between Anatolian humanism and Kemalism lays the groundwork for the construction of a national culture and exhibits parallels with the construction of Third World nationalisms as well.

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13. Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

14. For example, see Orhan Koçak, “Kanon mu, Siz İnaniyor musunuz?” *Kitaplık*, 68 (January 2004), pp.60-65.

15. For example, see Kaya Akyıldız and Barış Karacasu, “Mavi Anadolu: Edebi Kanon ve Milli Kültürün Yapılandırılışında Kemalizm ile bir Ortaklık Denemesi,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, No. 91 (Summer 1999), pp.26-43; and, Barış Karacasu, “Mavi Kemalizm, Türk Hümanizmi ve Anadoluculuk,” in Ahmet Insel (ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce, 2: Kemalizm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), pp.334-343.

Such an approach to the national canon in Turkish literature poses two problems. First of all, it places too much emphasis on the role of authors and elites in the formation of the national canon, to the degree that it risks underestimating the role of the political authority, whereas the state is in fact an important agent of canon formation. Mao's efforts to form a canon under the influence of the Cultural Revolution, or Hitler's desire to constitute a German canon grounded in his own ideological position, are just two examples reminding us of how canon formation is in fact a complex political process. In the absence of such definitive political pressure, as Jale Parla notes, other factors may influence canon formation, such as the spirit of the period, ideological and social turning points, or certain cultural transformations.<sup>16</sup> Under the complex circumstances which define periods of transformation, authors' quests for novelty, literary critics' attempt to establish new criteria, dialogue between readers and authors, and limitations and pressure of the state and popular culture all emerge in combination with one other to shape the national literature.

Secondly, claiming that Anatolian humanism has formed the basis of the Turkish national canon limits the process to the republican era. However, earlier indications of the emergence of a national canon can be found beginning in the latter decades of the Ottoman Empire, especially after the Balkan Wars. Moreover, it was Turkish nationalism rather than any other ideology which constituted the very basis of this canon.<sup>17</sup> This was a period when Ottomans faced the transition from an empire to a newly emerging nation and nation-state. As Parla writes, it was a typical transformation period, creating a suitable environment for the formation of a national canon.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, it can be argued that the first concrete examples of the idea of a national canon as well as attempts to form one can be seen in this transformation period under the leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress. Manifestations of an early form of Turkish nationalism appeared in *Genç Kalemler*, written by Ali Canip [Yöntem], Ziya Gökalp, and Ömer Seyfeddin.<sup>19</sup> Other journals, like *Türk Yurdu*, followed it. The critical point here is that these journals and literary figures had links with the political authority on all levels. The articles, poems, and stories by these nationalists provided the earliest guidance for the new Turkish nation, and were very much shaped by the nationalist ideology of the Young Turks. Starting with these efforts, a nationalist literature and a cadre of nationalist authors emerged.

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16. Jale Parla, "Edebiyat Kanonları," *Kitaplık*, No. 68 (January 2004), pp.51-53.

17. For a more detailed discussion, see Erol Köroğlu, *Türk Edebiyatı ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı, 1914-1918*.

18. Jale Parla, "Edebiyat Kanonları."

19. Murat Belge, "Türkiye'de Kanon," *Kitaplık*, No. 68 (January 2004), pp.54-59.

It is therefore not surprising that Ömer Seyfeddin, who was the most influential voice of this new nationalist literature, also enjoyed a canonical respect long after his death. Throughout the Republican era, during which one can see a more systematic and institutional effort to create a national literary canon, Ömer Seyfeddin served as a constant reference and guide. As such, his stories acted as the building blocks of the national canon. Whether pro-Kemalist or not, most of the authors of this time shared a common nationalist framework in their literary works, for which Ömer Seyfeddin provided the basic perspective. This nationalist framework has been key to the construction of the identity of national woman, the image of the national woman's other, and the narratives of an imagined Turkish national past. The contemporary popularity of Ömer Seyfeddin's works and particularly his hegemony in Turkish school textbooks even today point to his unquestionable authority, his sacrosanct place in the national canon.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the women in Ömer Seyfeddin's stories have played a crucial role in the formation of gendered images in the Turkish national memory and nationalist discourse.

#### WOMEN IN NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

Cynthia Enloe claims that “nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope.”<sup>21</sup> It emerges from the anger of the male elite, or more specifically, from their anger at being emasculated. Because the homeland and the nation are always depicted and perceived as a woman, any threat to them poses for the men a threat of emasculation. Nationalism, therefore, has always been something engendered and intimately bound to sexuality and gender roles.

One of the main arguments of the feminist literature on nationalism is that women have been treated as passive objects rather than active participants in all nationalist movements.<sup>22</sup> They have been the symbols of the nation: symbols of its purity and honor. In Enloe's words, this is because nationalist men see women as

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20. His stories are among the most popular works taught in Turkish language and literature courses. For an article which claims that Ömer Seyfeddin's stories can be helpful for other courses as well in the Turkish primary education curriculum, see Hulusi Geçgel, “Ömer Seyfettin Hikâyelerinin İlköğretim Programında Kullanılabilirliği,” paper presented at *1. Düünden Bugüne Ömer Seyfettin Sempozyumu*, 9-11 Mart 2007. The paper is available at [http://turkoloji.cu.edu.tr/YENI%20TURK%20EDEBIYATI/hulusi\\_gecgel\\_omer\\_seyfettin\\_ilkogretim\\_programlari.pdf](http://turkoloji.cu.edu.tr/YENI%20TURK%20EDEBIYATI/hulusi_gecgel_omer_seyfettin_ilkogretim_programlari.pdf).

21. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p.44.

22. In fact, this is valid not only for nationalism, but also for other political projects. As Valentine M. Moghadam writes, “women frequently become the signs or marker of political goals and of cultural

“1) the community’s—or the nation’s—most vulnerable *possessions*; 2) the principle *vehicles* for transmitting the whole nation’s values from one generation to the next; 3) *bearers* of the community’s future generations—crudely, nationalist wombs; 4) the members of the community most *vulnerable* to defilement and exploitation by oppressive alien rulers; and 5) most susceptible to *assimilation* and cooptation by insidious outsiders.”<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, men have to control women; women’s behavior, thoughts, public visibility, clothes, sexuality, and bodies must be strictly monitored. Nationalism and the nationalist project that it asserts consequently appear to be strictly dependent upon the continuity of patriarchy and its reproduction.

The patriarchal control over women’s lives also stems from the perception of them as reproducers of ethnic identities, culture, national differences, and, perhaps most importantly, the boundaries of ethnic/national groups.<sup>24</sup> Women as national boundaries make it acutely imperative for the nationalist male elite to entrench their control over women’s sexuality. That is why sexual behaviors/attitudes of women often constitute the main distinction of one nation from another.<sup>25</sup> In other words, before they act, live, or die for the nation, women simply function as representatives: ‘our’ women represent the boundaries of our nation for the ‘other’ men.

This function also emerges in identifying women with the collective territory, spirit, honor, and, of course, collective memory. The identification of women with the collective stems primarily from their association with children and family. This goes hand in hand with the metaphor of the nation as one big, happy, extended family—a metaphor which prevails in the nationalist discourse. For nationalisms, the nation is a family in which women and men play their ‘natural’ roles: women as mothers, and men as natural leaders of the family.<sup>26</sup> The honor of the women is the honor of the men, the family, and the nation.<sup>27</sup> It is then not a coincidence that there is ‘Mother Ireland’ or ‘Mother Russia,’

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identity during processes of revolution and state-building, and when power is being contested or reproduced.” For a detailed discussion, see Valentine M. Moghadam, “Introduction and Overview: Gender Dynamics of Nationalism, Revolution and Islamization,” in Valentine M. Moghadam (ed.), *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (London: Zed Books, 1994), pp.1-17.

23. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, p.54.

24. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, “Introduction,” in Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (eds.), *Woman-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.10.

25. Nira Yuval-Davis, “Gender and Nation,” in Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller (eds.), *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.23-35.

26. Joane Nagel, “Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21/2 (March 1998), pp.242-269.

27. Enloe finds that when a woman from the community is raped or photographed by a colonialist man, it is the honor of the community’s man that is assaulted in Third World nationalisms (See, Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*).



that feminine symbols are to be found in all national histories, and that war rape targets not only women's bodies, but especially the enemy nation/territory/identity that they are perceived to represent.<sup>28</sup>

Women's role as mother is also critical for nationalists to protect the patriarchal division between the private and the public domains. Partha Chatterjee emphasizes how public/private distinction is vital for nationalist projects, because it functions to ensure that women are confined to the domestic sphere.<sup>29</sup> This distinction serves to protect women from the threatening outside world—'women' meaning, in this context and in this metaphor, the very honor of the nation. This understanding results from the inner tensions of nationalism. Especially in those cases in which the nationalist project intersects with the agenda of catching up with the West, the nationalist elite often face a dilemma: they call for modernization and progress on the one hand, which necessarily includes modernization of women—the so-called 'woman question'; on the other hand, however, they aim to maintain an authentic cultural/national essence, the protection of which hinges upon women and their staunch attitude against over-Westernization. According to Chatterjee, in order to transcend this tension, nationalisms create divisions such as outside/inside, material/spiritual, and public/private, all of which correspond to a gendered distinction. This strategy serves to balance the change that comes with modernization by emphasizing women and men's distinct roles for the nation, that is, by attributing domestic roles to women, most importantly the role of mother, and public roles to men.

This, however, does not mean that women do not have public roles within the nationalist framework. In fact, on the condition that women continue to perform their primary roles in the domestic sphere, all nationalisms in one way or another include women as participants in the nationalist project. Through patriarchal means, they are made to internalize the national good defined by the male actors, and asked to represent and reproduce it in the society: "women are controlled and meant to conform to an idealized construct of womanhood and community."<sup>30</sup> As public actors, women are obliged to

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28. Likewise, many national projects in the early Twentieth Century entailed legal controls over reproduction based on national interests. See, Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (eds.), *Maternity and Gender Politics: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

29. Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp.233-253.

30. Hannah Papanek, "The Ideal Woman and the Ideal Society: Control and Autonomy in the Construction of Identity," in Valentine Moghadam (ed.), *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp.42-75.

maintain their modesty.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, while including women as participants, nationalist projects reproduce stereotypical images of women as virtuous and modest, with social control mechanisms such as virginity and sexual division of labor constantly emphasized. Zehra Arat characterizes this process as “reconstruction of the traditional.”<sup>32</sup> However, one should note that this reconstruction is possible only through the invention of a national understanding of morality. It is this new national morality that is transmitted from one generation of women to the next via national memory.

Although some women tried to assert a more independent identity by using the space nationalist projects provided them,<sup>33</sup> and even women who became involved in the nationalist discourse did not always accept being patronized or marginalized,<sup>34</sup> women’s images and roles have been defined and shaped by the patriarchal framework of the nationalist discourse. The Ottoman/Turkish case is no exception in this regard. As Palmira Brummett shows in her detailed analysis of cartoons published in the Ottoman revolutionary press between 1908 and 1911, women stand for the Ottoman nation, and its vulnerability and response to European imperialism.<sup>35</sup> Since these cartoons are products of a period when the empire was perceived to be under serious threat by foreign powers, “these threats and the potential for the Ottoman state to respond to them were embodied in images of women who symbolize the nation and its citizens: their honor, their weakness, their need for protection, or their valor in the face of adversity.”<sup>36</sup> Combined with the

31. For a discussion of this point for the Turkish case, see Fatmagül Berktaş, “Cumhuriyet’in 75 Yıllık Serüvenine Kadınlar Açısından Bakmak,” in Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu (ed.), *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998).

32. Zehra F. Arat, “Turkish Women and the Republican Reconstruction of Tradition,” in Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi (eds.), *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Power, Identity and Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp.57-78.

33. On this point see Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, p.55.

34. For many of the Eastern nationalisms, nationalism and feminism were initially very closely linked. See Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1994). See also Valentine Moghadam, *Gender and National Identity*. For a comparative analysis, see Nilüfer Çağatay and Yasemin Nuhoğlu-Soysal, “Comparative Observations on Feminism and the Nation-building Process,” in Şirin Tekeli (ed.), *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1995), pp.263-272. For an inspiring analysis of the rise of women’s feminist consciousness within the nationalist context in Egypt, see Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). For Ottoman women’s movement, see Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1994). For the tension of feminism and the nationalist elite in the Republican period, see Yaprak Zihniöğlu, *Kadınlar: Nezihe Muhittin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadınlar Birliği* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003).

35. Palmira Brummett, “Dressing for Revolution: Mother, Nation, Citizen, and Subversive in the Ottoman Satirical Press, 1908-1911,” in Zehra F. Arat (ed.), *Deconstructing Images of “The Turkish Woman”* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), pp.37-64.

36. Palmira Brummett, “Dressing for Revolution,” p.39.

infiltration of the European way of life, women's bodies and dress became particularly central to debates about cultural hegemony, national honor, and protection of the national culture.<sup>37</sup> Depending upon the political position of the cartoonist, however, women's images could signify different things: a veiled woman could represent the strength of the Ottoman society, or its ignorance. Likewise, both men and women could harm the national honor. But the blame in the case of men would be directed towards seductive European women; *alla franca* Ottoman men were depicted as vulnerable to the wiles of the temptresses of the other culture.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, in depictions of Ottoman women, there is usually an effort to differentiate them from European women. Hence they are most often shown to be dressed in traditional clothing. When they are dressed in a European style, they are either portrayed as modern individuals who are as powerful as Europeans, or as traitors collaborating with the imperialist enemy. In this second type of cartoon, women represent the specific regions of the empire, such as Crete or Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ottoman men, on the other hand, are always seen in the position of defender, constantly seeking to protect Ottoman women, and consequently their own national honor and masculinity. Images of European states as men signify Europeans as aggressive, militaristic, greedy, threatening, and lustful.

The critical point here is that although the images of women (and men) in these cartoons certainly exhibit parallels with the images of women commonly propagated in nationalist discourse, as described above, it is in this case the Ottoman nation that is concerned. The stories of Ömer Seyfeddin, however, are concerned with the Turkish nation, and thus it is Turkish culture and honor that the women depicted in these stories are held to represent. The common theme for both intervals is what Brummett calls "the cultural schizophrenia of the empire": on the one hand there is a strong threat of European imperialism and an attempt to challenge it, while on the other there is a desire for modernization and civilization. However, in Ömer Seyfeddin's stories, marked by the realities of the Empire after the Balkan Wars, it is the threat of being colonized which is felt most acutely. The loss of the Balkans, the brutality of the Europeans, and the enemy collaborators roaming in Turkey's midst—especially those whose collaboration, due to their lack of any nationalist feelings, was entirely unconscious—shape Ömer Seyfeddin's depiction of the Turkish woman and her others, and through this, Turkish national memory itself.

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37. Palmira Brummett, *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-1911* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), p.67.

38. Palmira Brummett, *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-1911*, pp.221-257.

## 'OTHER' WOMEN IN THE STORIES OF ÖMER SEYFEDDİN

First of all, it should be noted that Ömer Seyfeddin uses a strong, gendered language; he constantly makes reference to sexuality and frequently employs sexual imaginary. His main characters are usually male—nationalist or not, men are the active subjects. Even as a nationalist subject, the nationalist position of a woman is almost always expressed, approved of, and appreciated through male eyes. In other words, in Ömer Seyfeddin's literature, nationalist identity is perceived as a male identity, and nationalism is full of characteristics of masculinity.

Secondly, Ömer Seyfeddin's nationalism is not in a defensive position against the hegemony of the West and the threat posed by Balkan nationalisms. Rather, his nationalism is mostly offensive, and does not hesitate to utilize the images employed by Western Orientalists in a reverse fashion. This orientalization is particularly evident in the way he approaches the Balkans with the aim of asserting Turkish superiority, but it is not limited to the Balkans.<sup>39</sup> Unlike the cartoons Brummett discusses, the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin not only reflect the actual situation, an interpretation of the real circumstances in which Turkish women are victimized, but they also depict an ideal situation in which the idealized and emulated West is in fact a weak woman, degenerate and immoral. This Orientalist view can be seen as one of the main axes shaping the complexity of early Turkish nationalism as it is reflected in the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin. The reason I discuss images of non-Muslim/non-Turkish women in his stories first also has to do with this Orientalist perspective; his depiction and construction of 'our' women were very much fashioned by taking 'other' women as a reference point.

The image of non-Muslim women in Ömer Seyfeddin's stories is a complicated if not an ambiguous one. Since his nationalism coincides in a sense with the childhood of a nation, it reflects the instability, confusion, and restlessness which typically mark this early phase. In the case of the images of the other women, this becomes evident in the double discourse that Ömer Seyfeddin employs. On the one hand non-Muslim women—whether of European or Balkan origin—are depicted as evil, sexually promiscuous, and free-spirited, with a passionate soul and lacking any sense of morality or honor. Sometimes, they are depicted as prostitutes. It can be argued that essentialization of non-Muslim women as immoral sexual objects in Ömer Seyfeddin's stories constitutes

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39. For a discussion on the relationship between nationalism and Orientalism in the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin, see A. Ezgi Dikici, "Orientalism and the Male Subject of Turkish Nationalism in the Stories of Ömer Seyfeddin," *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 11/1 (April 2008), pp. 85-99.

an early example of an important component of the Turkish national memory, which is still valid in the popular national imagination in Turkey.

On the other hand, coupled with this depiction of the other women as wanton sexual objects, is a very evident admiration for them. Non-Muslim women are most often beautiful, educated, modern, and, most important of all, dedicated nationalists. For the civilized and intellectual men of the empire, like Ömer Seyfeddin himself, they are more attractive than Turkish women, both mentally and physically. In “Nakarat” (“The Refrain”), for example, Ömer Seyfeddin tells the story of an Ottoman officer in Macedonia who is attracted to a Bulgarian girl.<sup>40</sup> Told in the form of the officer’s diary, it portrays a romantic, naïve young man who is disappointed by the miserable conditions of the Ottoman army. The story, which includes autobiographical elements, realistically reflects the difficult situation the Empire faces in the Balkans, while effectively depicting the region as a poor, foreign land whose people are distant, even hostile, towards the Ottomans.<sup>41</sup>

In the story, from the window of his room the young officer sees a Bulgarian village girl whose beauty dazzles him. The girl acts as if she is attracted to the Ottoman officer as well. Here, Ömer Seyfeddin is clearly expressing his criticism of the Ottoman male elite’s unfaithfulness and lack of nationalist sensitivity concerning the threat that the Balkan nationalisms posed to the Empire. Although the Bulgarian girl is not elite, or an intellectual woman, and therefore not expected to be supportive of her national identity, it turns out that she is in fact very conscious of her nationality and a courageous defender of the national goals. Without fearing the reaction of the Ottoman officer, she sings a song with a refrain meaning “İstanbul will be ours [*i.e.*, Bulgarian] one day.” The young officer, who does not know any Bulgarian, thinks that she is singing a love song. For him, sexual desire takes precedence, and so he can think of nothing but the Bulgarian girl’s attractive body as she pokes fun at him by means of this misunderstanding.

This story clearly reflects an admiration for the beauty of non-Muslim women. Ömer Seyfeddin portrays the young officer as if he cannot think of anything but the body

40. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Nakarat,” in *Ömer Seyfettin’in Toplu Eserleri, 1: Bomba* (İstanbul: Rafet Zaimler Yayınevi, 1962), pp.137-158, first published in *Yeni Mecmua*, 3/63 (1918).

41. Tahir Alangu claims that the story “Nakarat” relies directly on Ömer Seyfeddin’s own diary, reflecting his own experience in the Balkans, and that the officer in the story is his close friend Aka Gündüz (See, Tahir Alangu, *Ömer Seyfeddin: Ülkücü Bir Yazarın Romanı* (İstanbul: May Yayınları, 1968), pp.119-125). For more on the Orientalist elements in the depiction of the Balkans in the story see, A. Ezgi Dikici, “Orientalism and the Male Subject of Turkish Nationalism in the Stories of Ömer Seyfeddin.”

of the Bulgarian girl: “Oh my God! What hips... I had never paid any attention to the beauty of hips in İstanbul. Such beauty is reminiscent of the granite sculptures of the art of yore.”<sup>42</sup> The officer’s fascination, however, abruptly comes to an end when he learns the real meaning of the song and that the Bulgarian girl is the daughter of an old priest who became a guerilla fighter and was killed in battle against the Ottomans. Humiliated and ashamed, the young officer regrets his lack of human characteristics:

“How is a human being any different from an animal? Is it not the human being’s holy, eminent, high ideal that sets him apart? And so I realized: I had had no such human ideal, not until now. I had lived everything by tasting with my body, by feeling with the dream of my sexual desire, through my brutish inclinations.”<sup>43</sup>

The high ideal Ömer Seyfeddin underscores here is nothing other than the national ideal itself. It is impossible to be a human being without having nationalist consciousness/ideals, and in this regard, the Bulgarian girl is in superior position to the Ottoman officer. The story ends with his confession: “For a week now I have been lying here in the forests of Velmeğe, pondering the difference between me and that brave daughter of the guerilla priest who died for an ideal sacred to him. For a week now...”<sup>44</sup> What Ömer Seyfeddin stresses here as being unacceptable is that a Bulgarian, and moreover an ordinary non-Muslim woman from a small village, should prove to be a more courageous nationalist than an Ottoman officer.

In Ömer Seyfeddin’s stories, while ordinary non-Muslim women are found attractive thanks to their sexual appearance, the greatest admiration is reserved for intellectual, modern, non-Muslim women, the reason being that there were so few Ottoman equivalents of them. In, for example, his short story “Bomba” (“The Bomb”), Ömer Seyfeddin tells the story of a Bulgarian couple, Boris and Magda.<sup>45</sup> Boris is an intellectual Bulgarian man who has had the great fortune of finding his intellectual and modern counterpart. In such a relationship, sexuality, which in fact usually appears in Ömer Seyfeddin’s

42. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Nakarat,” p.146: “Aman yarabbi! Ya kalçaları... Ben İstanbul’da hiç kalça güzelliğine dikkat etmemişim. Eski sanat asırlarından kalma bir granit heykel gibi...”

43. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Nakarat,” p.152: “İnsanın hayvandan farkı ne? Mukaddes, âlî, yüksek bir fikre sahip olması değil mi? İşte anladım, bende şimdiye kadar böyle insanî bir fikir yokmuş. Her şeyi uzviyetimle tadarak, şehvetimin hayalile sezerek, hayvanî temayüllerimle arzu ederek yaşamışım.”

44. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Nakarat,” p.158: “İşte bir haftadır, Velmeğe ormanlarında, kendince mukaddes bir fikir için ölen komite papazın o cesur kızıyla aramızdaki farkı düşünerek yatıyorum. İşte bir haftadır...”

45. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Bomba,” in *Ömer Seyfettin’in Toplu Eserleri, 1: Bomba*, pp.27-49, first published in *Genç Kalemler*, 2/9 (1911).

stories either as an attack on the part of other (non-Muslim/non-Turkish) men in the form of a rape, or a sign of immorality and lust, becomes an important component of love.<sup>46</sup>

Ömer Seyfeddin's representation of the relationship between Boris and Magda as an ideal couple also shapes the representation of Magda as a non-Muslim woman. Although she is a mentally liberated, educated, free woman who freely engages in sexual relations with her husband before their marriage and who is capable of discussing political issues with Boris, Magda becomes a housewife after her marriage and dedicates her life to her home and husband. Such an image of other women is by no means rare in Ömer Seyfeddin's stories. This fantasy is grounded upon the basic patriarchal assumption that whether Muslim or not, an ideal woman is one who belongs predominantly to the domestic sphere. That is why in Ömer Seyfeddin's stories, when a non-Muslim woman works, she usually works as a prostitute. Any portrayal of an Ottoman woman in similar circumstances, however, is completely out of question.

One last point about "Bomba" is the images of the non-Muslim/non-Turkish men depicted in the story. Although Boris is shown as a positive character, all other Bulgarian men are painted as negative, or even evil. What makes Boris a good Bulgarian is his utopian socialist position, which does not pose any threat to the Ottoman Empire. He has no nationalist ideas and in fact he is planning to go to America with his wife in order to escape from the Bulgarian nationalist guerillas. In contrast, nationalist male characters representing other nationalisms are brutal, violent, militarist, and lustful to such a degree that they do not even hesitate to abuse their own nation's women. It is precisely this kind of enemy that Turkish women are advised to maintain their guard against, as will be discussed in the next section.

Balkan women are not the only other women who play roles in Ömer Seyfeddin's stories. Rather, the other women featured cover a range of identities, depending upon the reigning conflict of the day, such as the Balkan Wars, World War I, or the Armenian Question. "Primo: Türk Çocuğu—1. Nasıl Doğdu" ("Primo: A Turkish Boy—1. His Birth"), for example, reflects the context immediately following the Italian invasion of

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46. One point underlined by Ömer Seyfeddin in this story is the beauty of genuine love between a man and a woman, coupled with an intellectual exchange. His admiration for such a relationship, and depiction of young Ottoman people deprived from it because of the conservative environment strengthened by Islam appear in other stories as well. See, for example, Ömer Seyfeddin, "Aşk Dalgası," in Ömer Seyfeddin, *Bütün Eserleri, 9: Aşk Dalgası—Bahar ve Kelebekler—İlk Düşen Ak* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, [1988]), pp.48-62, first published in *Genç Kalemler*, 24/25 (1912).

Tripoli.<sup>47</sup> The protagonist of the story is Kenan, a Turkish engineer educated in Europe, where he has become assimilated. Although Seyfeddin's predominant concerns in this particular story are clearly European colonialist ideology and the construction of a purely imperialist Europe, the message is conveyed by means of Kenan's personal enlightenment.

Kenan is married to Grazya—*i.e.*, Grazia—a beautiful, elite Italian nationalist. Grazya marries Kenan because, like her father, she believes that the entire population of Anatolia and Rumelia is in fact of Greek origin. The manner in which Grazya is depicted as at once both a modern Western woman and completely subservient to her father is a critical aspect of the story. The image of Grazya's father is that of a calculating Western man eager to take advantage of his Turkish groom in order to further his imperialist goals, and a man who does not hesitate to demand money from Kenan in return for Grazya's hand in marriage. Here, the emphasis on the dependence of women on the male members of the family reflects the patriarchal nature of the nationalist discourse. In this regard, there is no difference between Grazya and any ordinary Eastern woman who is simply sold by her father, to whom she is utterly subservient. Ömer Seyfeddin at this point clearly exaggerates Western perceptions of the East and uses them in a reverse fashion.

Admiration for other women's beauty, intellect, and most importantly, nationalist stance is not enough to prevent construction of them as enemies of the nation—again, other women representing other nations and nationalisms. Kenan, who has been a humanist, a universalist, an admirer of European civilization, and a freemason, faces the savagery of European imperialism in Africa with the Italian invasion of Tripoli. Ashamed of his *naïveté* and lack of national awareness, Kenan becomes a proud Turk, an identity he has been ignoring for so long. Right at the moment of his enlightenment, Kenan begins to see his Italian wife as a complete alien to him, and in fact, as an enemy. While she is talking about how the Eastern Question might be solved to the benefit of imperialism, Kenan becomes ashamed of having been married to such an enemy for nearly ten years:

“That deep and perceptive silence, that brave calm which always come to us [*i.e.*, Turks] after tremendous, unsettling shocks of excitement, after tremendous sadness, and tremendous hopelessness, changed his temperament; it made him dull. How could he live together with such an alien, a Wes-

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47. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Primo: Türk Çocuğu. Nasıl Doğdu?” in *Ömer Seyfettin'in Toplu Eserleri, 1: Bomba*, pp.51-81, first published in *Genç Kalemler*, 3/13 (December 1911). Tahir Alangu argues that *Primo: Türk Çocuğu* was in fact planned as a novel by Ömer Seyfeddin and it reflects his own anger at the Italian invasion, following again his diaries. The story directly attacks those Turkish intellectuals who support cosmopolitan ideas and way of life (See, Tahir Alangu, *Ömer Seyfeddin*, pp.185-193).



tern woman who was the enemy of his generation and who considered the invasion and collapse of his *patrie* as something pleasant and favorable?”<sup>48</sup>

At the end of the story, Kenan forces Grazya to make a choice between remaining an Italian and therefore accepting the divorce, or becoming a Turk and therefore putting on the veil and forgetting Italian and her past. This is a striking example of the idea that women have no essential nationality. Even their nationality is determined by men, upon whom they are shown to be completely dependent. Grazya faces the choice of either becoming a Turk or remaining as a representative of the West: “Grazya was sobbing like a coward, a female model of the weak, sick, and lazy West, which will be crushed beneath the ultimate supremacy of the victorious, young, caustic, and vigilant Turan.”<sup>49</sup>

Ömer Seyfeddin’s imagination of women and his construction of their roles in nationalism and the nation-building process find their clearest reflection in his story “Ashâb-ı Kehfimiz: Bir Ermeni Gencinin Hatırâtı” (“Our Seven Sleepers: The Memoirs of an Armenian Youth”).<sup>50</sup> He tells the story through the eyes of a young Armenian man Hayikyan” *i.e.*, Haikian—who was a revolutionist defending the Armenian cause up until the Young Turk Revolution took place—that is, until the 1908 Revolution causes him to have a complete change of heart and mind. He starts to believe that he is an Ottoman and that it is possible to live together under the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the story, however, all non-Muslims in the Empire, including this Armenian man, realize that Ottomanism is nothing but a dream; indeed, the only ones who fail to arrive at this realization are the Turkish intellectuals. As this aspect of the story—while worthy of further investigation—falls outside the bounds of the purpose of this article, let us turn our attention to another crucial aspect of the story—that of the role of the Armenian women in Armenian nationalism.

Hayikyan’s enlightenment—reminiscent of that of Kenan’s—develops parallel to the love he feels for his wife Hayganoş. In other words, the love for a woman almost becomes a mirror image of one’s awareness of his nationality, with the formation of a

48. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Primo: Türk Çocuğu. Nasıl Doğdu?” p.71: “Bize daima büyük ve sarsıcı heyecanlardan, büyük kederlerden, büyük meysusluklardan sonra gelen o derin ve müdrük sükûn, o cesur soğukkanlılık, mizacını birden değiştirmiş, ağırlatmıştı. Şimdiye kadar neslinin düşmanı olan bu ecnebi kadınla, vatanının zaptı ve iflâsını hoş ve muvafık gören bir Garplı ile nasıl yaşamıştı.”

49. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Primo: Türk Çocuğu. Nasıl Doğdu?” p.81: “Grazya, muzaffer, genç, kavi ve uyanık Turan’ın muhakkak galebesi altında ezilecek olan zayıf, hasta ve miskin Garb’ın korkak ve kadından bir timsali gibi hıçkırığa hıçkırığa ağlıyordu.”

50. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Ashâb-ı Kehfimiz: Bir Ermeni Gencinin Hatırâtı,” in Ömer Seyfeddin, *Bütün Eserleri, 4: Harem* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, [1988]), pp.9-72, first published as *Ashâb-ı Kehfimiz* (İstanbul: Kanaat Matbaası, 1918).

family through marriage becoming a metaphor for nation-building: “After I enjoyed a taste of this flavor [*i.e.*, the flavor of love], I enjoyed the flavor of a wife, of a son, of a family, and then of a nationality.”<sup>51</sup> It is possible to see here a typical example of the general perception of the nationalist discourse identifying the nation with women and family:

“As she said to me, ‘Love your nation,’ I began to love her. Indeed, what is the difference between true love for a woman and love for one’s nationality? The first one leads us to a conclusion of ‘specie, family,’ and the second to the will of ‘community, public conscience.’ As there cannot be a family without love, so too can there not be a nationality without hatred and fanaticism.”<sup>52</sup>

Hayganoş represents how other women are nationalist enough to foster the evolution of their men: they are the reasons for the strength of the other nationalisms. A constant theme in Ömer Seyfeddin’s stories appears here in its clearest form: Other women are *very* aware of their national identities as well as their duties. Creating this kind of loyal woman is paramount to the preservation of the national awareness of the entire community. By making women part of the national project, he argues, it becomes possible to form a family, and therefore, a nation:

“I again understand that if there were no women, and love, there would not be family, happiness, or nationalities; we human beings would pass our time on this world like plants, as miserable, passionless, unlucky, idle beings not fueled by the fire of competition. Women who teach us love, also teach us the [sanctity of the] family. Family, in turn, cultivates in our minds the holy sentiments of nationality.”<sup>53</sup>

These ideas of Ömer Seyfeddin can be taken as a direct message to Turkish women that they should be at least as loyal and nationalist as the other women in order to preserve Turkish identity and Turkish national morality.

As I mentioned earlier, Ömer Seyfeddin’s admiration of the other women is not enough to prevent his essential construction of them as sexually promiscuous, dishonest,

51. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Ashâb-ı Kehfimiz: Bir Ermeni Gencinin Hatırâtı,” p.59: “Bu lezzeti tattıktan sonra zevce, evlât, aile, sonra da milliyet muhabbetini duydum.”

52. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Ashâb-ı Kehfimiz: Bir Ermeni Gencinin Hatırâtı,” p.69: “‘Milletini sev...’ dedikçe, ben onu sevmeğe başladım. Zaten hakiki bir kadın aşkıyla milliyet aşkının arasında ne fark vardır? Birincisi aşk bizi ‘nevi, aile’ neticesine, ikincisi ‘cemaat, umumî vicdan’ iradesine götürür. Aşksız aile olmadığı gibi, kinsiz taassupsuz bir milliyet de olamaz”.

53. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Ashâb-ı Kehfimiz: Bir Ermeni Gencinin Hatırâtı,” p.72: “Yine anlıyorum ki, kadınlar olmasa, aşk olmasaydı aile, saadet olmadığı gibi milliyetler de olmayacak, biz insanlar dünyada sefil, ihtirassız, şanssız, rekabetsiz, miskin, perişan, nebatat gibi, gelip geçecektik. Bize aşkı öğreten kadın, aileyi de öğretiyor. Aile de mukaddes milliyet hislerini bizim dimağımıza ekiyor.”

and shameless, at times even attributing to them the role of prostitute. While this depiction of women as evil creatures may be due in part to the conventional image of the non-Muslim, it is mainly shaped by the predominant perception of women's sexuality and their ever-present potential for immorality. All of the women characters in Ömer Seyfeddin's stories, even the nationalist other women for whom there is some level of appreciation, are very carefree when it comes to their sexuality. Other women are always beautiful, sexually attractive, and seductive.

In Ömer Seyfeddin's stories, which deal more closely with the topic of sexuality, there is a detailed description of other women's bodies. Amongst the characters in these stories, there are neither Turkish women as prostitutes, nor Turkish men as rapists. Other women *always* volunteer for sexual encounter. In "Busenin Şekl-i İptidaisi" ("A Primitive Form of Kissing"), for example, we find a non-Muslim prostitute, who is very clearly shown to have volunteered for the position: "Here lies a hysterical woman."<sup>54</sup> Such depictions of non-Muslim women as prostitutes reaches its peak in the story "Koleksiyon" ("The Collection"), which includes amongst its characters a Levantine woman who has sex with men in her family's house, with the permission and encouragement of her family; in fact, her mother too engages in prostitution.<sup>55</sup> What is most shocking about this story, however, is the fact that Ömer Seyfeddin goes so far as to depict the young daughter of the family having sex with her dog. In this depiction of a Levantine family, Ömer Seyfeddin thus serves the purpose not only of humiliating other nations by means of showing its members engaged in immoral behavior, but also of normalizing what he has constructed. That is, the non-Muslim others of the Turkish woman are depicted as essentially immoral, or at best, essentially inclined to be so. What makes Ömer Seyfeddin so crucial to the construction of the other in Turkish national memory is this latter characteristic of his works in particular.

#### 'OUR' WOMEN IN THE STORIES OF ÖMER SEYFEDDİN

Ömer Seyfeddin's construction of 'our' women, as indicated above, is shaped by his perception and imagination of 'other' women. In all stories where the context is

54. Ömer Seyfeddin, "Busenin Şekl-i İptidaisi," in Ömer Seyfeddin, *Bütün Eserleri, 5: Yüksek Ökçeler* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, [1992]), pp.33-43, first published in *Teşvik*, 2 (1909): "İşte isterik bir kadın."

55. Ömer Seyfeddin, "Koleksiyon," in Ömer Seyfeddin, *Bütün Eserleri, 9: Aşk Dalgası—Bahar ve Kelebekler—İlk Düşen Ak*, pp.40-45, first published in *Zekâ*, 19 (1913).

national, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, Turkish women represent the essence of the Turkish nation. However, his depiction of Turkish women is shadowed by his disappointment and anger because of the lack of any real example for the ideal Turkish woman he had in his mind. In other words, when Ömer Seyfeddin tells a story about an ideal Turkish woman, it is most often not a story based on actual circumstances, or his observations. Ömer Seyfeddin's ideal Turkish woman appears *only* in fiction, where there is a construction of an ideal future for the Turkish nation. Therefore, Turkish women need to be awakened by the nationalist male subject, like Ömer Seyfeddin himself, in order to reach that ideal future Turkish nation.

In the stories which take place in an atmosphere that reflects the circumstances of the period, our women usually appear as pure victims in the hands of brutal foreign men and under the illegitimate suppression of other nationalisms. This is particularly so in the stories which are shaped by the trauma Ömer Seyfeddin and other Turkish nationalists experienced because of the loss of the Balkan territories. Turkish women are always in a defensive position, trying to escape from the immoral demands and sexual abuse of the brutal Balkan men for the sake of protecting their honor. They are innocent, passive, and threatened women symbolizing the hopeless situation of the empire *vis-à-vis* aggressive Balkan nationalisms. If they succeed in protecting their honor, even if it costs them their lives, this symbolizes a hope for the nation, a nation which does not lose its honor, and therefore has the right to live.

Ömer Seyfeddin's "Beyaz Lale" ("The White Tulip") is a telling example of a story in which Turkish women are attributed the role of pure victims.<sup>56</sup> In the story, Bulgarians invade Sérres and brutally kill all Turks, with the exception of young, healthy boys and beautiful girls who can be assimilated into the Bulgarian nation. Lale, being the most beautiful Turkish woman in the town, is selected by the Bulgarian commander, Radko, for himself. She symbolizes not only the Turkish nation but also the Orient as a whole.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, the streets of Sérres and the house of Lale's family are described in a way that gives the reader the impression that the Orient, which is about to be raped by the West, will lose its sacredness forever as a result of this attack. Radko, the symbol and embodiment of other men's violent lust, represents

56. Ömer Seyfeddin, "Beyaz Lale", in Ömer Seyfeddin, *Bütün Eserleri, 10: Beyaz Lale* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, [1990]), pp.7-52, first published in *Donanma*, from issue 53/5 to 60/14 (1914).

57. In his depiction of Lale, Ömer Seyfeddin totally reproduces the Western representation of Oriental women as mysterious beauties. Dikici claims that he, in fact, shares Radko's eroticization of these hidden flowers and admires their purity (See A. Ezgi Dikici, "Orientalism and the Male Subject of Turkish Nationalism," p. 90).

the West that would rape the Turkish nation; in other words, that would sully its national essence. Ömer Seyfeddin's description of Lale can be seen as an example of this idea:

“She is as powerful as she is beautiful. With the nimbleness of her nineteen years, she is able to resist the enemy, to violently contest it. She was taken unawares, she was persuaded, she was deceived. If she had not opened the door downstairs, she would not have been captured alive, she would not have permitted this cruel, dishonorable man's dirty lips to sully her body, for she would have fought him to the death.”<sup>58</sup>

The nationalist perception of women which equates them with the essence of the nation, or the nation itself, and thus vulnerable to defilement and exploitation by oppressive foreign men is clearly seen in this story. Ömer Seyfeddin does not depict Lale or any other Turkish woman as a conscious nationalist aware of her national duties. Still, Turkish women somehow ‘naturally’ know that they are responsible for the chastity of the nation. That is why Lale commits suicide, and Radko rapes her dead body. Radko represents the ultimate evil, an exaggerated brutal image of the other men constructed by Ömer Seyfeddin.

This moral strength of the Turkish women, which helps them to defend their honor, is like a reflex originating from a religious and traditional essence. Although Ömer Seyfeddin's nationalism has a problematic relationship with Islam, it is interesting to observe that when it comes to the honor of Turkish women, he does not abstain from employing Islamic, and even mythical references, to describe both the position of Turkish women and the situation itself. The depiction of Lale's dead body as an angel, asleep and praying to Allah, and the description of how she reaches out with her hand, seeking to hold on to Adam are only two examples of the religious tones of his literature when Turkish women are concerned.

In the stories in which he depicts dedicated Muslim/Turkish women, Ömer Seyfeddin chooses to describe them as asexual women, old in terms of age and having no feminine quality. Fatma Hanım in his story “Tos” (“The Butt”) and the foster mother in “Gizli Mabet” (“The Secret Temple”) are both examples of such asexualized women symbolizing mainly the strong chastity, honor, and essence of the Turkish nation, as well

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58. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Beyaz Lale,” p.46: “Güzel olduğu kadar kuvvetli idi. On dokuz yaşının verdiği çeviklikle düşmana dayanabiliyor, onunla boğazlaşılabiliyordu. Ah boş bulunmuş, kanmış, aldanmıştı. Aşağı kapıyı açmasaydı sağ olarak ele geçmeyecek, ölünceye kadar karşı gelerek vücudunu bu namusuz zalimin pis dudaklarına kirletirmeyecekti.”

as of the East.<sup>59</sup> In the latter story in particular, Ömer Seyfeddin's emphasis on the traditional can be even interpreted as being contradictory to his pro-modernization stance. Furthermore, lack of any sense of threat possibly posed by the behavior of such women in these kinds of stories once again reflects the patriarchal perception of women's sexuality as evil and seductive. As discussed earlier in the article, this perception of women's sexuality is universal in the eyes of all nationalisms. That is why women are viewed as being vulnerable to defilement and exploitation; that is why they are seen as being susceptible to assimilation and cooptation, and that is why nationalists take the matter of controlling women's sexuality so very seriously. It is needless to say, Ömer Seyfeddin's construction of our women can clearly be read as an example of such an understanding.

Turkish women sometimes appear as negative characters as well. This is also due to women's essential potential for evil because of their sexuality. The story "Piç" ("The Bastard") is a good example in this regard. In the story, two Turkish men, former classmates who haven't seen each other for years, reunite in Egypt.<sup>60</sup> Ahmet Nihat tells his friend who is a nationalist—and who is in fact skeptical about Ahmet Nihat's Turkishness because of his modern, French-like appearance—that he is in fact a Frenchman, and not a Turk. After learning that his mother had had a sexual relationship with a Frenchman, he finds his real father and then changes his name and his religion. The behavior on the part of the Turkish woman that is deemed unacceptable here is of course her engaging in sexual relations with a foreigner, and therefore, sullyng the essence of the Turkish nation. The nationalist man's reaction upon learning of his friend's parentage, and his friend's mother's guilt, reflects in fact Ömer Seyfeddin's own hatred for such Turkish women: "Now, my Turkish head was overtaken by rage; the faith I have in the unreachable chastity of the Turkish *harem*, that innocent and sacred dream was now broken, was now shattered."<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, in some of Ömer Seyfeddin's stories, marrying a non-Muslim, or non-Turkish woman is shown as completely normal behavior for Turkish men. However, the same is not valid for Turkish women, and in fact, for women of any nationality when the nationalist discourse is concerned. For one woman alone to have a sexual relationship

59. Ömer Seyfeddin, "Tos," in Ömer Seyfeddin, *Bütün Eserleri, 5: Yüksek Ökçeler*, pp.108-118, first published in *Zaman*, 3 February 1335/1919; "Gizli Mabet," in Ömer Seyfeddin, *Bütün Eserleri, 11: Gizli Mabet—Kurumuş Ağaçlar—Nokta* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, [1996]), pp.7-15.

60. Ömer Seyfeddin, "Piç," in Ömer Seyfeddin, *Bütün Eserleri, 9: Aşk Dalgası—Bahar ve Kelebekler—İlk Düşen Ak*, pp.7-22, first published in *Türk Yurdu*, 4/22 (1913).

61. Ömer Seyfeddin, "Piç," p.21: "Artık asabiliğim, Türk kafamı tutmuş, Türk hareminin erişilmez namusu hakkında beslediğim iman, bu masum ve mukaddes hayal artık kırılmış, artık perişan olmuştu."

with a non-Turkish man is enough to make Turkish nationalists skeptical about the chastity of all Turkish women, and the purity of the Turkish nation:

“I was constantly thinking about Ahmet Nihat’s unpleasant, unmannerly behavior, his cool reverences and peculiar attitude at the school. And then I recalled the dandies in İstanbul, with their long nails, their fashionable clothes, their monocles, who deny their Turkishness, who hate Turkishness, who despise Turkishness and strive with their entire beings to be European. I said to myself, “Are all of them bastards?” “Did all of their mothers get pregnant in Beyoğlu?”; and in awful nightmares I saw huge, black, bloody crosses in the color of bronze and fire, rising in the midst of torn, red, ruined crescents.”<sup>62</sup>

One other point less apparent in these sentences is the feeling of hatred towards the feminine characteristics of some men. These characteristics make Ahmet Nihat less Turkish in the eyes of Ömer Seyfeddin. Once again, nationality is defined by masculine characteristics.

For Ömer Seyfeddin, in addition to the threatening potential rooted in their sexuality, Turkish women’s lack of any sense of nationality or national duty means that they are less deserving of appreciation than women of other nations, who do possess this sense. Although the entire Turkish nation is the target of his criticism and anger for being a late-comer in the race for nationalism, Ömer Seyfeddin employs a distinctly different tone when dealing with female characters. In the case of his male characters, Ömer Seyfeddin uses a sarcastic tone, while a more aggressive, spiteful tone is reserved for his female characters. This is due not only to the fact that women are perceived as being more responsible for the lack of national awareness in the society, but also because they prove themselves incapable of performing critical national duties, such as reproduction of nationalist essence, and ideology, in the way that other women perform such duties for their own nations. Therefore, he could only imagine a future in which every Turk is nationalist, including first and foremost Turkish women. Ömer Seyfeddin’s ideal nationalist woman is to be found in those stories in which he imagines such an ideal future for the nation. “Fon Sadriştayn’ın Oğlu” (“The Son of Von Sadristein”) is one such story.<sup>63</sup>

62. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Piç,” pp.21-22: “Hep Ahmet Nihat’ın mektepteki tatsız, biçimsiz hallerini ve soğuk reveranslarını, garip vaziyetlerini düşünüyor ve sonra İstanbul’da Türklüğünü inkâr eden, Türklükten nefret eden, Türklüğü hakir görüp bütün varlıklarıyla Avrupahlaşmaya çalışan uzun tırnaklı, son moda esvaplı, tek gözlüklü züppeleri hatırlıyor, içimden, ‘Acaba bunların da hepsi piç mi? Hepsinin anneleri Beyoğlu’nda mı gebe kaldı?’ diyor, korkunç kâbuslar arasında yırtılmış al ve harap hilâller içinde yükselen tunç ve ateş renginde büyük, siyah ve kanlı haçlar görüyordum.”

63. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Fon Sadriştayn’ın Oğlu,” in Ömer Seyfeddin, *Bütün Eserleri, 4: Harem*, pp.112-134, first published in *Yeni Mecmua*, 2/30 (1918).

In this story, Ömer Seyfeddin imagines a future Turkey which holds a national festival celebrating the birthday of a national poet, Orhan Bey. Sadrettin Bey, who divorces his Turkish wife because of her desire to live a luxurious life, and then goes on to marry a German woman twenty-five years hence, is unhappy about the shape his life has taken since his marriage to the German woman. Although she masterfully and even profitably manages the household economy, their life lacks emotion and his wife has no interest in Turkish nationality. Sadrettin Bey reads an interview with the national poet in which Orhan Bey explains that everything he knows, he learned from his mother:

“I learned everything from my mother. My mother raised me in a state of religious enrapture. The lyricism you hear in my poetry stems from the excitement that has filled me thanks to my religious upbringing, thanks to my mother. All of my poems, stories, and tragedies I first heard from her, in the form of a tale. Her spirit, a spirit of the people, inspired in me affection for the people, love for the people.”<sup>64</sup>

Sadrettin Bey decides to visit this ideal Turkish mother. When he goes to her house, he finds his first Turkish wife. He feels nothing but shame for not having valued this Turkish woman as she deserved, and nothing but regret for not having been a part of this national ‘temple’: “He left this sacred *Kâbe* of the nation, this emerald house, filled with the regret of a woeful heathen driven out of the temple whose truth he had once denied.”<sup>65</sup>

Glorifying women’s roles as mothers and underlining their loyalty to the nationalist project as an essential element of the success of the nationalist movement, Ömer Seyfeddin’s construction of the ideal Turkish woman reflects basic tendencies of *all* nationalisms. His perception represents a common feature of *all* nationalist discourses: a patriarchal glass encapsulating women. In his stories, there are no Turkish women who actively participate in the public sphere or work outside, even for the nationalist ideals. Ömer Seyfeddin’s stories leave us with an image of the ideal Turkish woman in the form of a chaste, morally satisfactory, nationalist mother who is aware of her national responsibilities of raising nationalist children and who has internalized her mission to protect national essence and purity. This is the image that the Turkish national memory

64. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Fon Sadriştayn’ın Oğlu,” p.121: “Ben her şeyi annemden öğrendim. Annem beni dinî bir vecd içinde büyüttü. Şiirimde duyduğunuz ‘lirizm’in menbaı ondan aldığım dinî terbiyenin heyecanlarıdır. Şiirlerimi, hikâyelerimi, trajedilerimi evvela masal halinde ondan işittim. Onun halktan olan ruhu bana halk sevgisini, halk aşkını, nefhetti.”

65. Ömer Seyfeddin, “Fon Sadriştayn’ın Oğlu,” p.130: “Vaktiyle hakikatini inkâr ettiği bir mabetten kovulan perişan bir dinsiz nedametiyle bu zümrüt yuvadan, milletin bu mukaddes Kâbe’sinden hızla uzaklaştı.”



has inherited. The Turkish ideal woman is neither an autonomous, nor an independent individual.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

If literature is the mirror of the nation, then the reflection we find in Ömer Seyfeddin's stories insofar as women are concerned is a nationalist reconstruction of stereotypical female images available in the patriarchal social memory. Ömer Seyfeddin attempts a national transformation of women, while preserving the religious and traditional elements attributed to them. What he did was to lead the process of selective reconstitution of images of women appropriate to the newly emerging nation's constructed national history, national culture, and national morality. He consciously reinforced the distinction between 'our' women and 'other' women, and cultivated the idea that this very distinction functions as the boundary that separates Turkish nation from others, and determines the superiority of Turkish morality over others. Hence, through his depictions of gendered national identities, Ömer Seyfeddin has had a decisive impact on the creation of Turkish national memory, and on its perceptions of the self and the other.

In the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin, non-Muslim/non-Turkish women are usually depicted as sexually promiscuous, libertine, and seductive, and in many cases, as prostitutes. Their sexual attractiveness do not only make them threatening, but also admirable for the educated male subjects of the Turkish nation. While morally degenerate, however, other women are in superior position to Turkish women because of their nationalist awareness and intellectual capacities. This superiority also marks the difference between Turkish nationalism and other nationalisms: other women, as devoted nationalists, strengthen their nations against the Turkish nation.

On the other hand, Turkish women represent Turkish essence, purity, and honor. Although not as nationalist as the other women, they have an inner reflex to protect their chastity, even if it means sacrificing their lives. However, despite this reflex, they too can become inclined to defilement, assimilation, and cooptation. This is so, because women do not possess an essential nationality, but rather an evil sexuality. The ideal Turkish woman then, for Ömer Seyfeddin, is an asexualized mother responsible for the biological, cultural, and moral reproduction of the Turkish nation.

What our women share with other women are their dependency on male control. Whether non-Turk or not, there is no space in the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin for an auto-

nomous woman who participates in the public sphere as an independent individual. By underscoring women's rightful place in the domestic sphere, Ömer Seyfeddin ignores the vital women's movements, politically active in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. It is this denial and reconstruction of women's traditional roles that give Turkish national memory, as it was cultivated by the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin, its overriding patriarchal tones, which have shown a remarkable continuity. Even when women did take their places as active participants in the nationalist struggle and nation-building process in Turkey, they would not be allowed to achieve liberation outside the boundaries of the 'gifts' bestowed upon them by the Kemalist regime.

I have argued that the stories of Ömer Seyfeddin played a decisive role in the formation of a national canon in Turkish literature, and consequently, in the construction of Turkish national memory. His nationalism emerged as an aggressive response to other nationalisms—particularly, Balkan nationalisms—influenced by the dynamics of the long war period that characterized the final decade of the Ottoman Empire. The trauma of the territorial loss, the imperialist threat posed by the West, and the fear of an ultimate defeat of Turkish nationalism shaped Ömer Seyfeddin's motives in seeing literature as a weapon to awaken the Turkish nation, and to create a map for its future. What is striking is that even long after this war period ends, this map still guides Turkish nationalism in its definition of the self and the other, in its understanding of the friend and the enemy, and that Ömer Seyfeddin still enjoys a place as a classic in contemporary Turkey.<sup>66</sup>

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66. Murat Belge, "Ömer Seyfeddin," *Edebiyat Üzerine Yazılar* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2000), pp.246-251.