

STRUGGLING FOR INDIVIDUALITY: THE ISTANBUL YWCA

A PhD Dissertation

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THE ISTANBUL YWCA

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To my mother, Oya Karabağ



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of
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by

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ABSTRACT

STRUGGLING FOR INDIVIDUALITY: THE ISTANBUL YWCA

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This study argues that the YWCA's mainly American staff, observing that familial, social and educational structure prevented women from independent decision-making in Istanbul, promoted individuality by their labor and health practices between 1913-1930. The YWCA contributed to a discourse on the role of women that accentuated their individuality by promoting an autonomous professional identity instead of women's maternal and marital roles. Putting emphasis on their individual's needs first, they encouraged women to stand on their own, and to formulate and pursue their own professional goals as well as take care of themselves. The YWCA's American staff promoted both having a profession and a healthy body as aims in and of themselves without links to nationalism, or motherhood, thus forming a contrast with the late Ottoman State's and Early Republican state's ideologies while simultaneously challenging the gender roles

and patriarchal codes. Their prioritizing having a career over marriage and motherhood contributed to feminist activism.

Keywords: Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), working women, individuality, career, health



ÖZET

BİREY OLMA MÜCADELESİ: İSTANBUL YWCA

Karabağ, Müzeyyen

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Tez Danışmanı: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Kenneth Weisbrode

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Bu çalışma İstanbul’da 1913-1930 yılları arasında, aile, sosyal ve eğitim yapısının kadınların bağımsız karar vermesini engellediğini gözlemleyen YWCA’nın esasen Amerikalı kadrosunun iş ve sağlık pratikleri üzerinden kadınları birey olmaya teşvik ettiğini savunmaktadır. YWCA, kadınların annelik ve evlilik rolleri üzerinden tanımlanan rollerindense özerk bir profesyonel kimliği teşvik ederek, kadının konumu hususunda birey olmayı vurgulayan bir söyleme katkıda bulundu. Kadınların önce bireysel ihtiyaçlarını vurgulayarak, kadınları kendi ayakları üzerinde durmaya, kendi profesyonel hedeflerini formüle edip peşinden koşmaya ve kendilerine bakmaya teşvik etmişlerdir. Milliyetçilik ve annelikle ilişkilendirilmeden, kadının kendisi için profesyonel meslek ve sağlıklı bedene sahip olmayı teşvik eden YWCA’nın Amerikalı kadrosu, geç Osmanlı dönemi ve Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi ideolojileriyle bu açıdan zıtlık oluşturmuş, toplumsal roller ve patriarşik kodlara da meydan okumuştur. Evlilik ve annelik yerine kariyere önem vermeleri feminist aktivizmine de katkı sağlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Genç Kadınlar Hristiyan Derneđi [Genç Hristiyan Kadınlar Birliđi], alıřan kadın, birey olma, kariyer, sađlık



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The 1910s were an era of instability, changing borders and maps, the rise, fall, and reinvention of nations, and calls for war or pleas for peace. The fact that so many went to war and lost their lives on the battlefields also encouraged a higher number of women to join the workforce. It was during these times of transformation that the Young Women's Christian Association's staff came to the late Ottoman State, precisely in 1913. This association¹ would witness not only war but also the foundation of modern Turkey in the 1920s.

The Balkan Wars (1912–1913), World War I (1914–1918) [WWI] and the Occupation period/War of National Liberation (1919–1923) caused a proliferation in the number of women's associations in which philanthropic services and mobilizing relief work for the poor, orphans, soldiers, war widows, refugees, and the wounded became urgent. In parallel to the difficulties caused by wars, the number of women associations providing aid and temporary work increased simultaneously. Kadir Yıldırım has written that non-Muslim women would request

¹ In 1913 Frances Gage and Anna C. Wells (Brown) were appointed to work in Turkey by YWCA National Board of United States. See [White], "Summary History by Margaret White," undated, p.1, microfilm reel 63, Microfilmed Records Reel List Part 2a. Subject Files, 1899-1950, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA (hereafter cited in text as microfilm reel number, YWCA-SSC).

the state to take action in unemployment before 1908 whereas before that year, the working lives of Muslim women were quite limited. The associations interested in directing women toward positions as tailors and seamstresses included the Charitable Women's Organization for the Consumption of Local Products [Mamulât-ı Dahiliye İstihlâk-i Milli Kadınlar Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi] (1912), the Ottoman Society for the Defense of Women's Rights [Osmanlı Müdafaa-i Hukuk-ı Nisvan Cemiyeti] (1913), the Ottoman Turkish Club for the Protection of Women [Osmanlı Türk Hanımları Esirgeme Derneği] (1913) and the Turkish Women's Tailor's Cutting Home [Türk Kadınları Biçki Yurdu] (1913).² The Ottoman Society for the Defense of Women's Rights, interested in girls, widows and children who had suffered financially as a consequence of war, was also eager to promote education and vocational training for poor girls. With the opening of an arthouse, production of sewing and Turkish handicrafts was also encouraged. The 1913 Ottoman coup led by Enver Pasha and Talaat Pasha signified the start of a new period until the end of World War I, in which the Committee of Union and Progress [CUP]³ was in charge. The CUP's centralized policy and fervent nationalism contributed to the discontent in the Balkans which erupted in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). One year after the Balkan Wars, the Ottomans would join Germans to fight against the allies in the First World War (1914–1918). In a period of transition throughout which wars shaped the nation, the issues surrounding women were also

² Kadir Yıldırım, *Osmanlı'da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2013), 94–5.

³ The reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909) ended with the Committee of Union and Progress taking power. Mehmed V (1909-1918) came to the throne after the Young Turk Revolution which restored the Constitution and the Parliament. The sultan's power was now only symbolic as the CUP was the dominant political power, "try[ing] to control the grand viziers." The CUP had a kaleidoscopic structure: Islamists, liberals, Turkish nationalists and secularists reflected the complexity of the CUP's cadre, having a variety of different interests simultaneously. See Norman Stone, *Turkey: A Short History* (London: Thames&Hudson, 2010), 136.

on the agenda of the CUP cadres. Yavuz Selim Karakışla has focused on the Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women [Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslamiyesi], whose Board was composed of male officials from the CUP—in charge of the government, was set up by Enver Pasha in 1916. An increase in the number of Muslim prostitutes along with poverty and starvation, a source of concern to the public and the CUP government played major roles in the birth of this association. Providing temporary work for war widows during WWI, the aim was to preserve the honor and chastity of women by offering them short-term employment, while at the same time directing women towards marriage and quitting their jobs, thus allowing their husbands to be the breadwinners. Karakışla has remarked that until the beginning of the WWI men were expected to work while their wives were expected to be housewives and it was not at all common for women to participate in working life. Disintegration of family ties due to women's joining workforce concerned the cadre of the Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women. Therefore, they came up with a law (an article), obliging women members to marry at a certain age. Creating professional opportunity for women was not the main goal of the Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women; the main aim was to protect women from the evils of the world by offering temporary work for them.⁴ The 1910s also signified increasing numbers of journals and freedom in the press under the CUP rule. While journals proliferated during the time and male writers dominated the press, *Kadınlar Dünyası* stood out from the rest on women's periodicals, with a female cadre focusing on feminist issues, questioning their social and educational status. Receiving an education, the

⁴ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Savaş Yılları ve Çalışan Kadınlar: Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyeti (1916–1923)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015), 73–199.

opening of more schools, the right to join the workforce were among the subjects for which women advocated in the context of the feminist movement in the late Ottoman state.⁵ Zihnioğlu classifies the period from 1908 to 1922 under the grouping as the Second Constitutional Monarchy Period Ottoman Feminism in which the women's movement demanded to be more visible in the public sphere by being involved in political and working life.⁶

Alan Duben and Cem Behar have stated that the prominent radical feminists of the 1910s called for women's participation in the political and public spheres, and demanded the right to work without excepting women's main roles as mothers and wives.⁷ Nezihe Muhiddin—a suffragist of the 1910s and 1920s and a key founder of the Turkish Women's Union for women's earning the right to vote—advocated for women to be active in both the public and political sphere, stated that the sacred role of women was motherhood.⁸ Halide Edip Adivar, one of the leading feminists of the period, defended women's right to vote and wished to expand their roles in public sphere; she also glorified the role of motherhood. She stated that women should be as qualified as men; however, women should also maintain their domestic duties, as well as their patriotic and maternal roles; “A woman, first, is an Ottoman, a patriot... The rights of a country are a thousand times more important and honorable than those of women. Thus, while yelling out for their rights, women must remember that these rights are for breeding a child for the homeland.”⁹

⁵ Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Istanbul: Metis, 1994).

⁶ Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız Inkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003), 20–24.

⁷ Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *Istanbul Households; Marriage, Family and Fertility, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 215–17.

⁸ Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız Inkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003), 105–107.

⁹ Muzaffer Derya Nazlıpınar Subaşı, “Halide Edip Adivar and Her Perception of ‘New Woman’ Identity,” *Uluslararası İnsan Çalışmaları Dergisi / International Journal of Human Studies* 1, no.2 (2018), 277–84.

The key feminist association, the Ottoman Society for the Defense of Women's Rights, established in 1913, supported women's right to work using rhetoric that stressed the national and economic benefits of such engagement. Nicole Van Os has argued that the key motivation of such action was neither the individual need nor desires of women, but the economic need of the country.¹⁰ Once the Republic was established, women's movements were suppressed,¹¹ the state-sponsored feminism dominated the era, encouraging women to have jobs, pursue careers, and participate in charitable work projects, but at the same time expecting them to be educated mothers and wives first and foremost because mothers had the responsibility to raise the next generation for the well-being of the nation. Motherhood and nationalism were thus concepts intrinsically linked with one other. In the Early Republican State, the Turkish Civil Code¹² legitimized men as breadwinners and decision-makers, and wives needing the consent of their husbands if they decided to work.¹³

Women's maternal roles were glorified and given the utmost importance both in the late Ottoman state and Early Republican period. Motherhood was associated with the nation's progress and well-being. In the period of the CUP, although job opportunities for women were opened, women were nevertheless not

¹⁰ Nicole Van Os, "Osmanlı Müslümanlarında Feminizm," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet'in Birikimi*, Vol. 1, ed. Mehmet Ö. Alkan (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 335–47.

¹¹ In 1923, the Women's People Party defended women's right to vote and petitioned to be recognized as an official party. Their request was not processed by the male officials, who thus delayed full suffrage rights for women in the 1920s. The Kemalist regime was in favor of creating the perception they were the ones who granted women their rights. Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003), 50–149.

¹² The Turkish Civil Code (1926) was adapted from the Swiss Civil Code.

¹³ Zehra F. Arat, "Turkish Women and The Republican Reconstruction of Tradition," in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, eds. Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 62–64.

intended to pursue a career; their employment was planned only to be short-term. This expectation of the state could be seen in the example of the Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women, where women were expected to get married and quit their jobs so that their husbands could provide a living for them. During the Early Republican period, women were not treated the same as male breadwinners and career-oriented men, and women did not have freedom to start their own business without the consent of their husbands. Women were also expected to be educated mothers for the progress of the nation.

The health politics of the state emphasized motherhood as well. Women were encouraged to do sports with rhetoric claiming that they needed to be strong for the sake of raising strong children during the CUP reign.¹⁴ Selim Sırrı Tarcan, a leading statesman both in the late Ottoman State and in the new Republic, urged women to participation in sports. He argued that women should join sports because their reproductive rate would greatly benefit from having stronger bodies.¹⁵ While “... the Kemalist state continued to employ a traditional definition of female roles and emphasized reproduction and child care as the primary functions of women,”¹⁶ Sertaç has stated that “Sport was a crucial tool in Atatürk’s nation-building project, and women’s involvement was essential. As future mothers of the next generation, women were expected to have healthy and strong bodies.”¹⁷ Neither regime

¹⁴ Osman Tolga Şinforoğlu, “Selim Sırrı Tarcan ve İsveç Jimnastiği: Beden Eğitimde İsveç Modelinin II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi Türk Eğitim Sistemine Entegrasyonu” (PhD diss., Gazi Üniversitesi, 2015), 106–7.

¹⁵ Gertrud Pfister and Ilknur Hacısoftaoğlu, “Women’s Sport as a Symbol of Modernity: A Case Study in Turkey,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no.13 (2016), 1470–82; Demet Lüküslü and Şakir Dinçşahin, “Shaping Bodies Shaping Minds: Selim Sırrı Tarcan and the Origins of Modern Physical Education in Turkey,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no.3 (2013): 195–209.

¹⁶ Zehra F. Arat, “Turkish Women and The Republican Reconstruction of Tradition,” 72.

¹⁷ Sertaç Sehlíkoglu, “Sports: Turkey” in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, vol.14, eds. Suad Joseph and Elora Shehabuddin (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

separated women's maternal and nationalistic roles from their health-related practices in the period 1913-1930, as they did in their labor practices.

Yet, as this study claims, in this period, there was an agency, the YWCA's mainly American staff, promoting women's participation in the workforce, pursuing careers and healthy bodies with a different rhetoric, which put the emphasis on personal necessity and related these issues more to the progress of one's self. It was the YWCA of the USA, which started their work in Istanbul in 1913, opening programs officially in 1919 in the same city, as well as operating an Employment Bureau. Their health practices also emphasized personal necessity rather than maternal and nationalistic aspects, which thus conflicted with the governments of the period.

Not only has existing scholarship on labor neglected the existence of the Employment Bureau of the YWCA in Istanbul, the literature on women's movement and feminism in Turkey has also ignored the presence of the YWCA¹⁸

¹⁸ The existence of the YWCA does not appear in the historiography of labor and feminism movements of the early twentieth century of Turkey. Yavuz Selim Karakışla, in his book *Women, War and Work in the Ottoman Empire: Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women (1916–1923)* referring to Donald Quataert's article published in 2001 entitled "Labor History and the Ottoman Empire 1700–1922," mentioned the limitations of the historiography on working women. In the literature, for the period between 1913-1930, there is not a single study covering non-Muslim women's labor associations and Muslim associations simultaneously in a detailed way. While the focus is on Turkish women associations, the literature on the women's movement bringing the perspectives of both Muslim and non-Muslim women movements together in the 1910s and 1920s in terms of analyzing their similarities, diversions and collaboration is absent and needs further to be developed. Studies that focused on other labor and women associations contributed to the women labor historiography to a great extent are Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Savaş Yılları ve Çalışan Kadınlar: Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyeti (1916–1923)* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015); Kadir Yıldırım, *Osmanlı'da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2013); Elif Mahir Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Yüksel Işık, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze İşçi Hareketinin Evrimi (1876–1994)* (Ankara: Öteki, 1995). Studies that focused on women associations and women movements include Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Yeni Hayat: İnkılap ve Travma 1908–1928* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2017), Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Istanbul: Metis, 1994), Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003).

and its cadre. The existing scholarship on the YWCA in Turkey¹⁹ has been scarce. Amanda Izzo, by pointing out that the YWCA in Turkey had “a non-proselytizing program,” and was open to all faiths and nationalities, drew attention to the indigenization of the YWCA staff without a detailed analysis of its centers and without revealing local board members. She has claimed that the new Republic’s secular law, separating the religion from the state, banned dissemination of religious and missionary education in Turkey, and pushed the YWCA staff to make the choice of whether they would keep “Christian” in their name; by changing their name, they relinquished their Christian identity for the sake of spreading their Christian ideology such as love, Christian sisterhood and serving others.²⁰ Result

¹⁹ Regarding the YWCA’s activities in the USA, the historiography is more extensive. The Social Gospel Movement of the 1890s to some extent catalyzed origins of a non-religious transformation of the YWCA and YMCA in the USA. The rise of urbanization, along with mechanization and industrialization in the Gilded Age increased social inequalities, namely the gap between rich and poor. The Social Gospel movement, in which theologians such as Walter Rauschenbusch played a key role, brought social and moral reform to the fore, urging urban middle and upper class to take action to reduce social and economic inequality, at a time the state did not promote or develop dynamics of welfare. By taking action, they would thus bring God’s teachings to life and practice rather than leaving them in the realm of theory. See Harald Fischer-Tiné, Stefan Huebner, Ian Tyrrell, eds., *Spreading Protestant Modernity: Global Perspectives on the Social Work of the YMCA and YWCA (c.1889–1970)* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2021), 1–5. See Cecelia Tichi, *Civic Passions: Seven Who Launched Progressive America (and What They Teach Us)* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Although the American YWCA had its roots within an evangelical culture, in the early twentieth century, the association focused on advancing the rights of women in work and social issues, rather than being concerned primarily with the goal of moral improvement. See Raymond A. Mohl, “Cultural Pluralism in Immigrant Education: The YWCA’s International Institutes 1910–1940,” 113, and Joanne Meyerowitz, “preface,” in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, N. Mijagkij and M. Spratt, eds., (New York: NYU Press, 1997). Educational opportunity, higher wages, and the right to vote were some of the issues the YWCA primarily concerned itself with in this period. While it was common to perceive the YWCA as only offering sports programmes, it also actively engaged in issues related to women’s class, ethnicity, and race. See Nancy. M. Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906–1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 3. Focusing mainly on the global activities of the Young Men’s Christian Association [YMCA] and the YWCA’s branch in Shanghai, and emphasizing their “secular agenda,” a recent study argued that the YMCA and the YWCA’s programs regarding health, sports, education and recreation spread Western knowledge in a global context and promoted a “Protestant modernity.” See Harald Fischer-Tiné, Stefan Huebner, Ian Tyrrell, eds., introduction to *Spreading Protestant Modernity: Global Perspectives on the Social Work of the YMCA and YWCA (c.1889–1970)* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2021), 1–26.

²⁰ Amanda L. Izzo, “‘By Love, Serve One Another:’ Foreign Mission and the Challenge of World Fellowship in the YWCAs of Japan and Turkey,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 24, no.4 (2017): 347–72.

Çatalbaş, in an article focused mainly on the YMCA Turkey, briefly mentioning the YWCA's recreational and educational programs, has claimed that both the YMCA and YWCA advocated Protestantism and pursued missionary activities along with contributing to nationalistic propaganda among minority groups.²¹ Bilgi has incorrectly stated that Dorothea C. Blaisdell was an American missionary carrying out missionary work and devotion to Christianity. Bilgi added that American missionaries provided services in health and education to the Armenian community in Adana.²² In contrast to the existing scholarship majorly focusing on the Christian ideology of the YWCA, the present study presents the YWCA as promoting and contributing to women's individuality in the late Ottoman and Turkish state as an active feminist association.

This study argues that the YWCA's mainly American staff, observing that familial, social and educational structure prevented women from independent decision-making, promoted individuality by their labor and health practices between 1913–1930. The YWCA contributed to a discourse on the role of women that accentuated their individuality by promoting an autonomous professional identity instead of women's marital and maternal roles. They encouraged young women in Istanbul to make more decisions about their careers and health-related activities, urging detachment from parental and societal authority. Putting emphasis on their individual's needs first, they encouraged women to stand on their own, and to formulate and pursue their own professional goals as well as take care of themselves. The YWCA's American staff promoted both having a profession and

²¹ Resul Çatalbaş, "Young Men's Christian Association'ın Türkiye'de Faaliyetleri," *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 55, no.1 (2014):101–122.

²² Mahinur Bilgi, "20. Yüzyıl Başlarında Anadolu'da Faaliyet Gösteren Amerikalı Protestan Misyoner Kadınlar: Dorothea Chambers Blaisdell ve Theresa Huntington Ziegler," (Master's thesis, Ankara Üniversitesi, 2019).

exercising to have a healthy body as aims in and of themselves without links to nationalism, duty, or motherhood, thus forming a contrast with the late Ottoman State and Early Republican state's ideologies while simultaneously challenged the traditional and patriarchal codes. The YWCA's American staff actually prioritized having a career over marriage and motherhood, contributing to feminism at the same time. In order to situate the YWCA within the broader context of women's social and political activism, this study also highlights a number of key Turkish feminist figures such as Nakiye Elgün, Latife Bekir and Lamia Refik Fenmen, who served as board and committee members for the YWCA, and thus contributes to the biographical literature as well. This study also further demonstrates the labor activities of the YWCA in Anatolia to understand the YWCA Istanbul more comprehensively.

The YWCA of the USA, coming to Turkey, had as its key agenda progressing the rights of women in the labor force. This study demonstrates that while in Istanbul the number of women with whom the YWCA staff interacted who stayed at home was high, although outside the metropolis, in places like Merzifon, Sivas, Izmir and Adana, the YWCA secretaries also had a chance to interact with female factory workers and focused on improving their labor conditions including wages, working hours and leisure times. In Istanbul, by contrast, there was a different story. In Istanbul, they observed that young women were not supported in making their own choices because of familial and societal pressure. The YWCA's mainly American staff, interacting with a high number of women who stayed at home, had to change their labor strategy in Istanbul by first promoting the idea of 'working for one's self,' 'following a career,' 'take care of one's self' rhetoric. They developed an alternative strategy by first establishing the value of work as a

practice for the development of selfhood. The YWCA staff disseminated the idea of pursuing a profession by guiding members through their Employment Bureau, offering professional training, organizing talks, and presenting career-oriented role models. The aim was to instill the value in young women of prioritizing career over marriage even if this meant individuals would end up in familial and social conflicts. The YWCA's mainly American staff was against the idea that marriage itself was a career. Financial independence was foregrounded as the means for young women to direct their personal choices, take control of their lives, and achieve liberation from oppressive structures. The YWCA's American staff claimed that "The complete independence of choice in marriage will be realized for young women only when economic independence is more assured."²³ The YWCA's American staff were successful in bringing professional skills to the ones they were able to influence, enabling them to start a career-oriented life, and reminding them that marriage should not be the ultimate goal of a woman or regarded as a career plan. With the ones they were able to influence, those participants would start to question their conceptions about work. For example, in Belkıs Halim Vassaf's case; after her talk with the YWCA's American camp director, she stated " 'It is my mission and patriotic duty to go to Anatolia, the remotest part of Turkey for work, or go anywhere where my motherland assigns me to.' She [The YWCA secretary] was astonished by what I said. She said 'No' to me. 'There is not anything called duty. If a person likes the job, s/he does it, if s/he does not, s/he does not.' " In her account, she added that "However, because we are always raised for the purpose of duty, it is very strange for me and hard to

²³ Ruth Woodsmall, "Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey," October, 1926, pp.2–30, reel 64, YWCA-SSC.

understand that people should work based on their preference rather than duty at that moment.” This woman, after attending the YWCA camp, later joined the YWCA as a board member. Receiving a scholarship with her YWCA connection, she went to the United States and her husband had to go along despite her social circle’s questioning whether she was crazy.²⁴ In another case, the YWCA staff encouraged a young woman follow her own career and not to marry despite her mother’s trying to marry her to a wealthy husband that she was not in love with.²⁵ It was no coincidence that the YWCA’s American staff encouraged young women to write about the expansion of freedoms they would obtain once women started to support themselves financially and independently. Simultaneously, women’s decision-making power regarding marital status would increase. By assigning their participants essays prioritizing financial freedom over marriage, they promoted the idea that economic independence was a step towards individuality, allowing the opportunity to use one’s skills, take control of one’s life and enhance one’s role in the decision-making process. From 1913–1930, at a time when the late Ottoman State and the Early Republican state prioritized women’s main roles as mothers and wives, the YWCA’s mainly American staff were successful in terms of making young women question their maternal/marital roles as the primary goal of their lives as well as making them question familial and societal pressure.

Standing on one’s own feet financially and socially, pursuing a profession and taking care of one’s self out of personal desire and inclination rather than simply to fulfill maternal or marital obligations can be considered as expressions of individuality.

²⁴ Gündüz Vassaf, *Annem Belkıs* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 116–120, “my translation.”

²⁵ “Report of Miss Jane Brewern, Education Secretary to Constantinople YWCA, from October–December 1923,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

American feminist women in the early twentieth century, who explicitly called themselves “feminists,” were involved in the concept of “individuality.” American historians of women have written about two or three generations of “the New Woman,” beginning with the appearance of college-educated new women, such as Jane Addams, who pursued “careers” in settlement houses and other venues; these women generally dedicated themselves to the service of others, applying various maternalistic-inflected notions to reform and the public realm. By the 1910s, a new cohort of women with very different outlooks, attitudes, and values appeared. These women, many of whom identified themselves as “feminists” and/or radicals of one sort or another (socialists, anarchists), often did not primarily dedicate themselves to serving others, but to expressing and developing themselves, getting jobs as journalists, writers, and professionals, demanding suffrage and full civil rights, as well as claiming the right to express their heterosexual desires and other characteristics on par with men. The term “feminism” covers this context and this is the group of American women that confronted the “modern” in the most direct sense—mainly by rejecting old-style Victorian ideas of what it meant to be a woman. Sara M. Evans also wrote, “the individuality of the new woman and the working girl also marked a shift away from communal domesticity, undermining Victorian culture with a new drive toward autonomy, pleasure and consumption.”²⁶

In the 1920s, the New Woman was associated with involvement in the political and social issues of her time and motherhood was not necessarily excluded

²⁶ Sara M. Evans, *Born For Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 146–7. See Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

whereas the Modern Girl was more linked with a more consumer type of woman who was usually single in the global context, according to a study:

Queries about our use of “girl” have often turned into questions about the distinction between the Modern Girl and the so-called New Woman. In answering these, we note that the New Woman is frequently figured as the mother of the Modern Girl: contemporaries identified the New Woman with reform and with social and political advocacy and associated her daughter with the “frivolous” pursuits of consumption, romance, and fashion. While our research suggests a close association between the Modern Girl and commodity capitalism in all contexts, it also questions hard and fast distinctions that align New Women with political activism and Modern Girls with consumption. New Women were often avid consumers and passionate advocates of “free love,” and Modern Girls embraced a variety of political projects including socialism and nationalism.²⁷

The YWCA’s American staff came into a late Ottoman context which was being shaped by the new nationalist movements and the clash between the “old” versus the “new, the “modern” versus tradition, “alla turca” versus “alla franga,” and “eastern” versus “western.” In a transforming atmosphere like this in which families and social circle were involved in women’s decision-making, how did the female individual’s choices relate to her career and body evolve? This study also traces this question by arguing that the YWCA promoted individuality through its Employment Bureau and health policies. Although the terms individualism and individuality are different, and there are different types of individualism, one may nevertheless provide a background for the other one to develop in a non-western context. There is a huge Western literature on individualism ranging from Tocqueville, Émile Durkheim, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Karl Popper and other thinkers. *Habits of Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* is one

²⁷ Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G. Poiger, Madeleine Yue Dong, and Tani E. Barlow, eds. *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2008), 9–10.

of the classics on different conceptions of individualism in the American Context.

Harry C. Triandis wrote:

[Robert] Bellah et al. (1988) also identified several kinds of individualism: religious, utilitarian, and expressive. For example, according to the biblical individualist, the individual relates directly to God; the utilitarian emphasizes exchanges that maximize returns for the individual. Expressive individualists emphasize having fun. The self is the only reality that really matters. However, individualism is compatible with conformity, since people who do not know what is right have to depend on social comparisons to guide their life.²⁸

In *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, W. E. B. Du Bois observing that it was the individualist mindset preventing America to reach socially and economically levels of a democratic nation— claimed that the Civil War changed the perception of white Americans because they started to have faith in reaching success in their lives by working hard and having self-discipline, as a consequence of individualist thinking.²⁹ One of the representations of this figure in the popular culture was American president Herbert Hoover, who became an orphan at the age of nine and later made a success out of himself by working hard, had a faith in “rugged individualism.” Anyone could achieve on their own without the help of the government. Participating night classes, earning his own money while he was a student, he had an inspiring rag to riches story as a self-made man. He worked as a miner worker, then as an engineer. At the same time, in his book entitled *American Individualism* published in 1922, he identified himself as “an American individualist;” in his interpretation, the reflection of the term was a

²⁸ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 30.

²⁹ Jack Turner, “American Individualism and Structural Injustice: Tocqueville, Gender, and Race,” *Polity* 40, no.2 (2008): 197–215.

more “progressive individualist,” which put emphasizing on helping other people who are in need.³⁰

Inglehart and Welzel in *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*, have emphasized that “High levels of individualism go with high levels of autonomy and high levels of self-expression values.”³¹ This could be seen in the late Ottoman context, as well. Alan Duben and Cem Behar, in their book *Istanbul Households: Marriage, family and fertility 1880–1940*, have mentioned that in the second half of the nineteenth century, the French Revolution’s ideas and western values circulated among elite circles. Translated French novels concerned with the idea of love challenged arranged marriages. The concept of love and liberty were seen as connected with each other, as could be seen in the example of Ahmed Midhat’s short story (1871), entitled *Teahlül* (Marriage). One of the main characters named Mazlum Bey (Sir Mazlum) in the story asked this question in one of the scenes: “when there are still no individual liberties (*hürriyet-i şahsiye*) in our country how can a man choose the girl he wants, or a girl the man she desires?” In another novel, *Sergüzeşt* (*Adventure*) published in 1888 at a time marked by Abdülhamid II’s autocratic regime and censorship, the character Celal, in a conversation he had with his uncle, revealed his dislike for arranged marriages. Giving examples from novels of the late nineteenth century, Duben and Behar have observed: “Was this rebellion against parental (and, indirectly, state) authority in the literary world of late nineteenth-century Istanbul a reflection of nascent individualism in Ottoman

³⁰ Eric Daniels, “A Brief History of Individualism in American Thought,” in *For the Greater Good of All*, Donelson R. Forsyth and Crystal L. Hoyt, eds. (New York Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 76.

³¹ Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 135–46.

society?” The idea of individualism was hard to be accepted among people who lived in Istanbul and valued communal life but still, the concept of love in the novels challenged those norms indirectly. Ottoman intellectuals, who were part of the New Literature movement, spread “utopian individualism,” as a consequence of their envy toward European life in terms of its wealth, science, and autonomy. “Individualism, as the late nineteenth-century Ottomans first came to know it, whether in love or politics, was the expression of a rejection of the past, and of the shackles of repressive family, community and authority,” according to Duben and Behar. From 1908 to 1918, as nationalism gained momentum, anything against national, moral and patriotic values would often also be linked with individualism.³² In the newly established republic, although the West was taken as a model in the modernization process, not all of its concepts were admired or adopted. One of the Western concepts that was ignored was individualism, in the sense of standing out from the rest.³³ One of the influential thinkers of the late Ottoman State and Early Republican State until his death in 1924, Ziya Gökalp, whose thoughts on education were fundamental to the “Kemalist nation-state,”³⁴ was in favor of an education for the masses which would serve the interest of the nation rather than the individual’s personal interest.³⁵ “In both Gökalp’s and Atatürk’s terms it was perceived that society is a source of individuality, freedom

³² Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family, and Fertility, 1880–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1991), 92–94. Duben and Behar referenced to scholar Niyazi Berkes on “utopian individualism.”

³³ Hande Eslen-Ziya and Umut Korkut, “Political Religion and Politicized Women in Turkey: Hegemonic Republicanism Revisited,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 11 (2010), 311–326.

³⁴ Raşit Çelik, “Unity vs. Uniformity: The Influence of Ziya Gökalp and John Dewey on the Education System of the Republic of Turkey,” *Education and Culture* 30, no.1 (2014):17–37.

³⁵ Mansoor Moaddel, *Islamic Modernism, Nationalism, and Fundamentalism: Episode and Discourse* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 157.

and creativity for people. This notion however is in contradiction with the western concept of individuality in that men is conceived as a source of freedom and creative resources for the society,” as noted by Ayvalioğlu.³⁶

In the mainstream historiography of American individualism, as suggested by Linda K. Kerber, the individual is usually implied as male.³⁷ To trace the development of female individuality, women’s perspectives, accounts and movements inevitably became a source for exploring this theme.

The first chapter will introduce the staff of Istanbul YWCA. Not perceiving themselves as missionaries, the YWCA staff differentiated their mission from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions [ABCFM]. Revealing prominent feminists and modern figures of the late Ottoman State and Early Republican Turkey who participated in the activities of the YWCA and served as Board members, this chapter will also provide a bird’s eye view of the participants in Istanbul. To understand Istanbul case better, the second chapter will highlight by contrast how the YWCA aimed to develop labor policies for the female factory workers they contacted elsewhere in Anatolia; the YWCA's American staff took the initiative in terms of contacting factory directors to discuss improving the wages and working hours of female factory workers, as well as encourage recreation and leisure activities during breaks. Thus, they acted almost as a local trade union of sorts. Along with pointing out the structural obstacles preventing women from developing career thinking in Istanbul in the late Ottoman State, the third chapter will also offer a historiographical background for understanding Early Republican

³⁶ Namık Ayvalioğlu, “Cultural Revolution of Atatürk,” *Psikoloji Çalışmaları* 15 (2012): 49–58.

³⁷ Linda K. Kerber, “Women and Individualism in American History,” *The Massachusetts Review* 30, no. 4 (1989): 589–609.

Era women and Westernization. The fourth chapter will suggest that in Istanbul from the beginning the YWCA staff were not in contact with factory workers. They were in contact with a high number of young women who stayed at home. The YWCA's mainly American secretaries saw young women who stayed at home as lacking a sense of individuality, since they did not have career goals or purposes. They encouraged young women to develop individual identity and exercise self-expression by guiding them to be independent career-oriented women, because for them, standing on one's own feet financially and acquiring a profession that one loved to do were the ways that young women could gain control of their own lives and were therefore indispensable if these women were to become individuals. They prioritized having a career over marriage and motherhood. In the fifth chapter, the YWCA's contribution to individuality by the health practices³⁸ will be explored. The YWCA's American staff educated young women to be more conscious of their physical bodies and health practices, contributing to the spread of the idea of individuality by promoting recreational activities for one's own self and empowerment; it was thus more a responsibility to one's self rather than a national, maternal and patriotic duty, contrasting with the late Ottoman State's and Early Republican state's ideologies.

This study shows that the Istanbul YWCA stressed the idea of working for one's own self and focusing on one's own career despite social and familial pressure since having a profession was a vital tool for attaining individual selfhood; they prioritized career over maternal roles, developing a feminist discourse. This study claims that in Istanbul the YWCA's American staff, by prioritizing career

³⁸ Michel Foucault, finding roots of the "care of the self" in the Ancient Greco-Roman world, elaborated on self-care and self-cultivation as a form of individuality in the first and second volumes of his work *History of Sexuality*.

over marriage/motherhood, encouraged young women to pursue a career and stand their own feet financially so that they could also take the control of their own lives and have a say in their choices at a time when parents and social circles were involved in their decision-making, as well as the ideologies of the state which prioritized maternal roles. The YWCA Istanbul also offered a different approach to how women should take care of their bodies and minds. While the state constructed its labor and health culture through maternal and nationalist politics, the YWCA's American staff promoted an understanding of physical self-care and sports as a part of responsibility to one's own self and happiness in the 1910s and 1920s.

The entire YWCA archives are located in the Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History at Smith College. Sophia Smith College's archives on the YWCA, biographical and research work of the YWCA staff will be used as main primary sources, supplemented by the newspapers, the journals, statistics, and books of the period.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND ON THE ISTANBUL YWCA

In a cosmopolitan, multiethnic and international hub like Istanbul, an urban woman was not satisfied with being a member of only one club; like a kaleidoscope, women's memberships were multiple. It was through these associations that women increased their public visibility and took social action. The characteristic of the educated women who went to women's clubs was to enter and exit different associations, co-operate with other associations in social and economic terms, and maintain productive interactions with each other despite having different goals. It was thus not surprising that the YWCA secretary Clara L. Bissell, the executive secretary of Stamboul YWCA Center, taught a course for free at Turkish Hearths,³⁹ while another YWCA secretary Melika Emir was also involved in the same association which ardently promoted nationalism.⁴⁰ Other local organizations the YWCA was in touch with included the Turkish Red Crescent, the Turkish Women's Union, orphanage foundations, hospitals, Constantinople College and other schools in Istanbul as well as international civil and business organizations

³⁹ Turkish Hearths [Türk Ocakları] was founded in 1912. Spreading Turkish nationalism was one of the major goals of the association.

⁴⁰ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.79, p.84, p.153.

such as the YMCA, the League of Nations, the American Red Cross, Near East Relief, and other relief groups. This chapter highlights the cadre of the YWCA and its multinational members, as well as providing background information on the work of the YWCA. In a cosmopolitan city like Istanbul, where the population had changed due to wars, the YWCA of the USA - by establishing an association in the capital of the late Ottoman state – was no different than Istanbul itself in terms of its multinational and multi-religious structure with its cadre and its members, although from its establishment until 1930 the American staff was mainly in the supervisory role in its centers.

This chapter also highlights that the YWCA staff, defining themselves more broadmindedly than the ABCFM, conflicted with some of the members of the ABCFM in issues involving women's liberation in the public sphere. Another reason the YWCA staff saw themselves as more broadminded than the ABCFM was that the ABCFM did not have any local Board members. By recruiting Turkish board members, the YWCA gave power to its local staff and put forth an effort to be accepted as a women's association rather than a religious one. The YWCA not only recruited feminist and modern figures of the late Ottoman State and Early Republican Turkey under its roof, but was also feminist in terms of political issues by promoting consciousness regarding the suffrage issue through women like Nakiye Elgün in the 1920s; in the 1930s, it lent full support to the IWSA. The YWCA increased the number of Turkish Board members in the 1930s; a number of them were key figures in the struggle for suffrage and were involved in advocating the rights of women in education.

1. General Information on the YWCA

Social and physical mobility in Istanbul was remarkable in the early twentieth century; the demographic structure of Istanbul was transformed during the war years; it was a center for Muslim and non-Muslim refugees, immigrants from Anatolia, locals, philanthropists, and relief workers. When these new settlers came to Istanbul, they brought their mentalities, backgrounds and traditions with them, making it distinctive city of interaction, a crossroads, in which one of the parties was the YWCA of the USA.

The alleged claims of the de facto presence of the YWCA in Turkey could be traced back to the speech given by A. H. Haigazian in 1893, saying that the YWCA and the YMCA, as well as Christian Endeavor Societies had been established.⁴¹ Yet, the idea of setting up an official YWCA branch in Turkey was discussed only two decades later, in 1911 after the World's Student Conference which took place in Istanbul. In 1913, the National Board of the YWCA in the USA directed two secretaries, Frances C. Gage and Anna C. Wells (Brown), to work in Turkey, both in Istanbul and in the interior, contributing to war relief. Besides Istanbul, the YWCA had secretaries in Merzifon, Harpoot, Sivas, Talas, as well as local centres in Izmir and Adana, which were closed in 1922.⁴² The closure of the Adana Center was due to political and economic reasons whereas the Izmir center was closed due to a fire. The Istanbul YWCA's Pera Center opened programs for

⁴¹ A. H. Haigazian, speech, "Have Missions in Turkey been a failure?" 1893. Haigazian was US-educated missionary.

⁴² [White], "Summary History by Margaret White," undated, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC, and "Memorandum on the Y.W.C.A. in the Near East," September 27, 1926, microfilm reel 64, p.1, YWCA-SSC.

young women in 1919; the Stamboul Center of the YWCA was set up in Beyazıt⁴³ in 1921.⁴⁴ During World War I, the YWCA had helped young women whose families had fallen apart. The famous Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova's sister was one of them, losing her brothers, husband and her baby in the wars. On her way to England, she reached Istanbul by boat in 1919. The YWCA offered her shelter and protection.⁴⁵ One of the YWCA's branches, entitled Migration Service, also helped refugees move to new cities, providing them with passports and tickets during the Occupation period. The International Migration Service of the YWCA, opened in 1921, "[gave] friendly aid to women, children and families," "[gave] practical advice before they start on their journey, assisting them in securing passports and tickets, providing information on emigration laws and customs of the country to which they are going, helping locate lost friends or relatives, protecting girls travelling alone."⁴⁶

Margaret White, who worked as the general secretary of the YWCA in the late Ottoman State, coming to Istanbul in February 1919, noted that the first task of the YWCA was to make a general survey regarding working women. Talking to employed women and employers in stores on the Grande Rue de Pera, she found

⁴³ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," Appendix B, "Memorandum on the YWCA (1927)," p.21, Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, Record Group 5; "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.32, Box 329 Folder 7, Record Group 5. International work, YWCA of the U.S.A. records, Sophia Smith Collection MS324, Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts. (hereafter cited in text as Box number Folder number RG number, YWCA-SSC)

⁴⁴ [White], "Summary History by Margaret White," undated, p.1, History section, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁵ "Copy of Miss Margaret White's letter" to Miss Lyon, June 8, 1919, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁶ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.97, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC. In 1930, the Migration Bureau did not run any more although assistance was provided in emergency cases. Maro Depanian of the YWCA's Pera Center helped with those cases, reporting to the Headquarters of the International Migration Service. Even in 1929, the YWCA handled 36 migration cases, twenty-seven were completed during the year and nine still awaiting completion"

out that many of them requested that the YWCA teach English. At least 100 girls participated in evening lessons at Sommerville House, which White claimed comprised “the nucleus of girls that immediately enrolled as members when the Service Center was opened in June at 31 Rue Yemenidji.” Their work in Istanbul “developed with great rapidity” once Carrie Young and two more secretaries joined them in August 1919.⁴⁷ From the start of the Istanbul YWCA, its Board, which conducted the administration of the YWCA, consisted largely of American women who were well educated, having graduated from well-known colleges and universities; the majority of them had international teaching experience.⁴⁸ In the 1930s, the number of Turkish Board members would increase.⁴⁹ In a Progressive era in which social activism was becoming the norm for women, the YWCA in Turkey had humanitarian and philanthropic concerns which included raising funds for children in orphanages and the poor, providing medical care such as treatment for trachoma, accommodating travelers, sheltering female refugees, and even providing them with official passports. The YWCA offered a range of courses and programs from language learning to gymnastics, tennis, history, swimming, music, literature, dancing, and reading classes. The YWCA also had groups such as drama, citizenship, and art, and also sponsored organized recreational and educational activities at schools, hospitals, factories, orphanages and playgrounds as well as sending physical education teachers and leaders to orphanages and schools, all of which contributed to urbanization in the late Ottoman and Turkish state. In 1924,

⁴⁷ Notes to Appendix, p.156 in “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929 June, 1930,” Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁸ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.42, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁹ “Who’s Who-Board Members Istanbul Service Center, 1938-1939,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

securing an educational permit from the Turkish government, the YWCA continued its work under the name of the American School of Language and Art (Amerikan Lisan ve Sanat Dershanesi).⁵⁰ In April 1933 budget restrictions led to the closure of the Pera Center, while the Stamboul Center continued its work.⁵¹

New public areas such as libraries, YMCA centers, and playgrounds emerged and were transformed as a result of urbanization. Considering the YMCA as a “reform-oriented urban institution,” Thomas Winter in *Making Men, Making Class: The YMCA and Workingmen, 1877–1920*, has stated that “Such spaces played important roles in the attempts of urban, entrepreneurial elites and emerging new, professional, managerial middle class to define themselves and their social purpose and to give shape and direction to social change.” Emphasizing that urban elites were eager to shape people’s behavior with such public spaces, he added that they were also willing to transfer their cultural codes to cities that grew and spread in an uncontrolled way. Middle-class professionals, bringing their skills and knowledge to such institutes like the YMCA played a leading role in those public spaces and contributed to the social transformation.⁵² The YWCA was not different than the YMCA in terms of contributing to the urbanization and modernization of the city. Working for the good of the community, the YWCA was an active agency in shaping the city with their organizations in schools, orphanages, and hospitals. During the late Ottoman state, the YWCA was not under any control of the state which enabled them to act freely. They did not need any official permission to

⁵⁰ It was recognized by the Turkish government as a private school, “dershane.” See “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.27.

⁵¹ “Summary History by Margaret White,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵² Thomas Winter, *Making Men, Making Class: The YMCA and Working Men, 1877-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1-2.

operate whereas in the new Republic they would have to secure a permit from the government.

2.2 The Cadre of the Istanbul YWCA

Frances C. Gage⁵³ was one of the first secretaries of the Istanbul YWCA along with Anna Welles Brown. Gage⁵⁴ graduated from Carleton College, in Minnesota. She had received teaching education and practiced her field in the United States. She later wished to extend her work abroad. She chose Turkey over China to work as a teacher. In 1890s, she worked at the Girl's School in Merzifon, having learnt Turkish quickly. After her teaching experience there, she returned to America to work as the travelling secretary of the YWCA in centers including Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana.⁵⁵ She came back to Turkey in 1913, this time as a YWCA secretary with Anna Welles Brown. Anna Welles was a graduate of Bryn Mawr College. She was involved in the British Student Movement and with the British American work in Paris. She participated in the World's Student Christian Federation Conference in Constantinople in 1911.⁵⁶ Dorothea Chambers Blaisdell was also a graduate of Bryn Mawr College. However, she had been born in

⁵³ Establishing the YWCA in Constantinople was vital for Gage, because the city had a strategic importance, being that it was "the key to all Western Asia and always will be", in her words. See Frances C. Gage, Letter to Miss Spencer, January 8, 1916, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁴ Gage had also an office at Bible House in Istanbul. Notes to Appendix, p.156 in "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Wilson, *The Road Ahead: Experiences in the Life of Frances C. Gage* (New York: The Women's Press, 1918) 1–50.

⁵⁶ *Bryn Mawr Alumnae Quarterly* vol. 7-8 1913–1915 V. 7-8 (Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr Alumnae Association 1913–1915).

Erzurum in 1896. As someone born and raised in Turkey, she was effectively a local, knowing the customs and languages of the Ottoman State. Speaking Turkish fluently, she had also learned Greek and Armenian from her friends and French from her private lessons. After completing her BA degree at Bryn Mawr and an MA degree at Columbia University, she came to Adana and worked as the YWCA secretary. Her father was William Nesbit Chambers who worked for the American Board of Mission in Erzurum and Adana. Her mother, Cornelia Pond Williams Chambers—who worked at Women’s College in Istanbul, was also “a missionary daughter.”⁵⁷ Another missionary daughter who worked at the YWCA in Turkey was Margaret B. White. White’s father was George Edward White, the President of Anatolia College. White was “familiar with the languages spoken of the country,”⁵⁸ having spent “much of her youth” in the Ottoman State. Like Blaisdell, she went to the United States for her education, and received her degree from Northfield Seminary and the National Training School.⁵⁹ Gage, Brown, Blaisdell and White were not the only YWCA secretaries who had graduated from well-regarded schools. From the beginning, its Board, which conducted the administration of the YWCA, consisted largely of American women.⁶⁰ These women in the main had international teaching experience,⁶¹ in China, the Americas, and India.⁶² By the late

⁵⁷ She had mentioned that the ancient history courses she had attended at the university broadened her perspective and understanding of the history of her hometown Adana. *Missionary Daughter: Witness to the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Author House, July 29, 2002), v–19.

⁵⁸E. Dodge Huntington, “In Constantinople during the War,” [reprinted from *Women's International Quarterly*] (1919), *The Muslim World*, 10: 36–41.

⁵⁹Young Women's Christian Association of the U.S.A. War Work Council. *War Work Bulletin* (New York, N.Y.: The Council, 1917–1919).

⁶⁰ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.42, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁶¹ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.42, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁶² “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.50 Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

1920s, three board members of the YWCA were Turkish while the administration related to finance and management was mostly American.⁶³ “Aims for 1930” included having “more non-American members” on the committees.⁶⁴ The Turkification of the YWCA directory board of Turkey then increased in the 1930s.⁶⁵

The YWCA also had picked Board members who made contribution to the feminist movement in Turkey. Nakiye Elgün, a leading figure regarding female’s education, was one of them; she served as an Honorary Board member of the YWCA in the 1920s.⁶⁶ According to Zihnioğlu, Elgün was not truly a feminist because she was not sufficiently committed to the fight for women’s suffrage.⁶⁷ Elgün was a feminist, however, promoting suffrage education at the YWCA in the years before the right to vote in national elections and be elected was granted to women in December of 1934. For YWCA use, she prepared materials concerning the right to vote and definitions of citizenship since she defended that it was “the responsibility of an individual” to cast the ballot.⁶⁸ The YWCA was also feminist, promoting women’s consciousness regarding the suffrage issue through women like Elgün. She herself was one of the first women to be elected to parliament in the 1930s. Latife Bekir [Çeyrekbaşı] and Lamia [Refik] Fenmen, both of whom served

⁶³ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.146, Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁶⁴ Constantinople Service Centers Rules and Regulations for Board of Directors Adopted May 15, 1929, p.31, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁶⁵ Constantinople Service Centers Rules and Regulations for Board of Directors Adopted May 15, 1929, p.8, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. The YWCA in 1929 had to require the secretaries to obtain “a character or good conduct certificate secured from the Imam of the district which she resides[d] in.” The Imam had to approve whether the secretary was “of good moral character and leads an orderly life.” Constantinople Service Centers Rules and Regulations for Board of Directors Adopted May 15, 1929, p.8, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁶⁶ Clara L. Bissell, “Annual Report, Jan. 1, 1931,” pp.1–6, reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁶⁷ Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003), 58–59.

⁶⁸ Bissell, “Annual Report, Jan. 1, 1931,” pp.1–6.

on the directory Board of the suffrage-focused Turkish Women's Union, joined as Board members of the Istanbul YWCA in the 1930s. Latife Bekir was a supporter of both education rights for women and suffrage; she was "interested in all kinds of social work" engaged in "the child welfare organization and mothers union as well as the [YWCA] Center."⁶⁹ Lamia Fenmen served as the vice-president of the Board of the YWCA⁷⁰ and "[learnt] much through her experience at the [YWCA] Service Center, which she [used] in the other organizations," including serving as a delegate to the [International] Woman Suffrage Alliance Conference.⁷¹ The YWCA staff lent full support to women's suffrage by participating in the IWSA.⁷² Tezer (Ağaoğlu) Taşkıran, head of the Turkish Normal School, became a board member of the YWCA in 1936;⁷³ and later served as the deputy of Kastamonu and Kars. One decade later, her sister Süreyya Ağaoğlu, known as the first Turkish female lawyer who successfully demanded that the law faculty be opened to women, would also work at the YWCA.⁷⁴ Belkıs Halim Vassaf, the sister of Zekeriya Sertel,

⁶⁹ She was married to "post master general at Ankara [sic]." See "Who's Who-Board Members," Istanbul Service Center, 1938–1939, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁷⁰ "Who's Who-Board Members, Istanbul Service Center, 1938–1939," p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁷¹ Istanbul Service Center, "Leadership" ["General file for more detailed confidential report prepared for Miss Lyon for her trip July 1934 by M. B. White"], microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. "Lamia Hanim- has been active on the Board and Activities Committee since the fall of 1932. Chairman of the latter since Mehlika Hanim resigned. She is prominent among Turkish women leaders through being Vice-President of the Kadın Birli[ğ]i [sic] (Women's Union) and on the Hunayi Etfal [sic] (Child Welfare Board) [sic]. She was one of four women voting delegates at the Balkan Union in Istanbul, the fall of 1931, also a delegate to the Woman's suffrage Alliance Conference in April 1933. She is learning much through her experience at the Service Center, which she uses in the other organizations."

⁷² Ruth F. Woodsmall, "The International Suffrage Alliance Congress, Istanbul, April 18–25, 1935," Box 35, Folder 6, Series IV Writings: Publication and Reports, Miscellaneous 1935–46, n.d., YWCA-SSC.

⁷³ "Turkey Community Folder: New Board Members," October 10, 1936, reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁷⁴ "Boğazların Müdafaası: Amerikada [sic] bulunan Süreyya Ağaoğlu'nun basına beyanâtı," *Cumhuriyet*, January 2, 1947, 1–3.

was affiliated with the Stamboul Center of the YWCA in 1929–1930.⁷⁵ Vassaf — who had graduated from American College for Girls, Turkish Normal School and Istanbul University, and worked as a teacher—served as Vice President in Board members of the YWCA Istanbul from 1938–1939.⁷⁶ Sabiha Sertel, a prominent feminist, journalist and the wife of Zekeriya Sertel, interacted with YWCA’s Stamboul Committee in the 1920s.⁷⁷ Nermin Muvaffak [Menemencioğlu], whose father, Ahmet Muvaffak Menemencioğlu, was one of the Young Ottoman leaders and Namık Kemal’s grandson, worked at the YWCA as an English teacher from 1929–1930.⁷⁸ She was a graduate of the American Girls’ College and Brown University. Nebahat Karaorman, Director of the Department of Education at the Turkish Normal School, served as the Chairman of the Education Committee of the YWCA.⁷⁹ A socialist and a prominent figure of the Labor Party, Behice Sadık Boran, had participated in training activities of the YWCA during her studies in university. Although she was “not on service committee,” she “came to Michigan University to study for Physical director fall of 1934 [sic.]”⁸⁰ She would later become one of the key figures in labor history in Turkey.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Appendix D Personnel, “Stamboul Center 1929–1930,” p.38–40 in “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁷⁶ “Who’s Who-Board Members, Istanbul Service Center, 1938–1939,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁷⁷ “In 1921, Nakie [sic] Hanum was a member of Stamboul Committee, also Madame Houshed Bey (on the camp committee in 1928 and so continued her interest to that date at least) and Madame Zacheriah [sic] Bey (husband, editor of Resimli Ay, but Madame Z. has not been interested or active of late years).” See Notes to Appendix, p.159 in “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁷⁸ Appendix D Personnel, “Stamboul Center 1929–1930,” p.38–40 in “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC. Her name was written as Nermine Mouvafak in the YWCA’s primary sources.

⁷⁹ “Who’s Who-Board Members, Istanbul Service Center, 1938–1939,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁸⁰ Istanbul Service Center, “Training,” undated, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁸¹ She wrote a book entitled *Turkey and the Problems of Socialism* in 1968. She became a member of Worker’s Party of Turkey in the early 1960s. She was associated with union leaders and contributed to political awareness by encouraging workers to join the labor party.

Taking into consideration that the international and interreligious structure of the YWCA was like Istanbul itself, a cultural melting pot, where different ethnicities interacted with each other,⁸² and in which many layers of interaction had to be taken into consideration. As for the local staff at the YWCA, a number of them had graduated from Constantinople Woman's College including Maro Depanian, Sona Depanian, Aishe Said, Meliha Ali, Araxie Mukdjian, Nezihe Shevky, Louise Mamigonian, Philomela Carabashoglu, and Nermino Salih. There were also a number of local staff who had graduated from the Greek Central School and the American College in Smyrna.⁸³ Eunice Panousis, a Greek woman who had graduated from the American School for Girls in Izmir, was the librarian of the YWCA. Helen Kalaydjoglou, who had graduated from one of the top Greek lycées in Istanbul and also had Greek origins, worked as an assistant teacher in the typing and stenography classes, including in English ones. Maro Depanian, an Armenian college graduate, was one of the best stenographers of the YWCA, and also worked in migration and commercial work. Aishe [Ayşe] Said was Turkish and had graduated from Constantinople College; she worked at the Information desk as well as dealing with translation and interpretation.⁸⁴ The YWCA was eager to train young women and then have them employed at the YWCA as staff. However, the YWCA's American staff observed that in the early years of the association, "those young women "[were] not accustomed to carry responsibility and must go through a long period of individual training." The YWCA was willing to "turn a gymnastic

⁸² "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul Turkey," Confidential, November 1929-June 1930," p. 43, Box 329, International Work Folder 7, YWCA-SSC.

⁸³ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul Turkey," Confidential, November 1929-June 1930," p. 43, Box 329, International Work Folder 7.

⁸⁴ "Constantinople Service Centers January 1928," p.10, Woodsmall Box 63 Folder 11, Series V. Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Reports, Interim, 1921-1928, YWCA-SSC.

class over to the local members of the staff.” However, young women, lacking confidence and distrusting their training still wanted American secretaries to teach those classes. Eventually, however, they would accept the responsibility to conduct classes and even surpassed the American secretaries in the number of students.⁸⁵ A number of local staff in the 1920s reflected that they had limited power regarding final decision making in the staff meetings when compared to the American secretaries.⁸⁶ Although English was spoken, local secretaries lifted the language barrier in the association; Vartanoush Parounakian, who worked at the Center, was Armenian;⁸⁷ Mehlika Emir, who worked like a social worker, was Turkish.⁸⁸ There was a notable number of the American staff speaking Turkish as well.

The Istanbul YWCA did not send delegates to the world conferences in the late 1920s and also was not connected to world movements of the YWCA.⁸⁹ The operating difference of the institution according to the geographical region was obvious. Mehlika Emir was quite surprised when she was sent to a conference in Romania by the YWCA. Her remarks on the conference showed that the activities of the YWCA in neighboring countries could differ dramatically based on the region, as another YWCA staff of Istanbul noted that “[Mehlika] found how very different the type of the development of the Association program was in each of these countries.” After her conversation with the YWCA staff from neighboring countries, Mehlika became aware that in describing the actions of the YWCA

⁸⁵ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.75, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁸⁶ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.50, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁸⁷ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.75- 79, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁸⁸ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.79, p.84, p.153 Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC. “She [Mehlika Emir] is assisted in her work by a half-time secretary, who is at present on six months’ trial.”

⁸⁹ “Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930,” p.53

globally in over-general terms, one would miss the unique contributions the YWCA made in each country. The question which occupied her mind was “if there were such differences in countries so close to Turkey, how much greater differences there must be in countries further removed?” The conference made her realize “the diversity of their work.”⁹⁰

2.3. Members

The statistics of the YWCA members in Istanbul were recorded, unlike those of the members from Anatolia. Registrants’ ages usually ranged from 16–31 years and above.⁹¹ The number of Muslims was low in the Pera Center at the beginning of the association while in Stamboul Center of the YWCA it was high. In the late 1920s, in the Stamboul center of the YWCA the majority of the registrants were Turkish and Muslim whereas in Pera center Armenians, Greeks and Jews

⁹⁰“Annual Report, Confidential, Part II, Genevieve Lowry, General Secretary of Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey, From September 1929–1930,” p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁹¹ In November 1920, 16–19 years old registered members was 400 out of 870 whereas the number of women who were 20–24 years old was 266, and 25–30 years old was 130, and age 31 and above was 71. Only three people were 15 year olds. See “Membership Report, Service Center Y.W.C.A., Constantinople, Report of November, November, 1920,” microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. It should be kept in mind that the data excluded mothers who attended the YWCA. Moreover, the YWCA reached different age range of girls and women through their activities in colleges, schools of Istanbul. In the late 1920s, 13–31 years and above also attended the Centers. Acting under the name of Amerikan Sanat ve Lisan Dershanesi, the regulations of the YWCA made clear that for taking classes, one should not be under 12 and “Those who wish to be registered have to bring Birth, Vaccination and health certificates.” Constantinople Service Centers Rules and Regulations for Board of Directors Adopted May 15, 1929, p.8. Girl Guide Group of the YWCA, which wanted them to train them in being leaders of troupes, was organized for girls under 16 years old. In January, 1928, the number of 13–16 year olds were 70 in Stamboul Center and 137 in Pera Center while the number of 17–20 year olds were 47 in Stamboul Center and 268 in Pera Center; the number of 20–30 year olds were 51 in Stamboul Center and 139 in Pera Center, the number of women who were over 30 were 15 in Stamboul Center and 71 in Pera Center. The total number of members was 798, consisting of 183 Stamboul members and 615 Pera Members in 1928 January. See Clara L. Bissell, “Constantinople Service Centers. January, 1928,” pp.17–18, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

outnumbered the number of Turks. Over the years, deportations caused a decline in the number of Armenians. In 1921, in the Stamboul Service Center (which excludes the Pera Center and unregistered participants), out of 165 members, there were 72 Turks, 37 Armenians, and 32 Greeks. The rest included Americans, Russians, Tartars, Jews, and Albanians. There were 80 Muslims, 32 Orthodox Christians, 22 Protestants, 27 Gregorians, 4 Catholics, and 2 Jewish people.⁹² The number of Greeks in the association increased compared to the number of Armenians by the end of 1921 due to the Greek press praising the YWCA's work in their newspapers.⁹³ According to March 29, 1922 report, in two years' time, the total number of members reached 3096, excluding unregistered members.⁹⁴ This data gives a picture of the ethnicities of registrants although unregistered members were not recorded:

Annual Statistics Jan. 1- Dec. 31, 1929 ⁹⁵

1. Turkish citizens

		Stamboul Center	Pera Center	Total
Turk	Mother tongue	114	39	153
Armenian	Mother tongue	59	117	176
Greek		46	131	177
Syrian		1		1
Bulgarian		2	2	2
Georgian		4	4	4
Israelite		1	61	62
Albanian			1	1
Guldanie [<i>sic</i>] ⁹⁶			1	1
Total Turkish Citizens		227	352	579

⁹² "Report of Miss Clara Bissell, Secretary of the Stamboul Service Center, May 1 to December 1, 1921," microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁹³ "Report of Miss Margaret B. White, General Secretary, from January thru' November 1921," p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁹⁴ "Facts About the Y.W.C.A. In Constantinople," March 29, 1922, microfilm reel 64, YWCA-SSC.

⁹⁵ "Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930," p.57-8, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁹⁶ In the primary source, this is written as Guldanie. Since there is not a word or nationality like this, what Guldanie represents is unclear and unknown. The word might mean Dutch since "gulden" mean monetary unit of Holland.

2. Non-Turkish Citizens

	Stamboul Center	Pera Center	Total
American	7	10	17
English		8	8
Greek	6	35	41
Italian		12	12
Russian	1	13	14
Bulgarian	1		1
Roumanian		2	2
French		3	3
German		2	2
Persian	4	1	5
Austrian	1	2	3
Spanish		3	3
Czechoslovak		1	1
Hungarian		1	1
Dutch		2	2
Polish		1	1
Syrian		1	1
Asyrian		1	1
Total non-Turkish citizens	20	98	118

Some of the mothers of the registrants used to be cautious when they heard the name of the YWCA. However, in the late 1920s, an increasing number of mothers of the participants also attended the weekly recreational programs of the YWCA,⁹⁷ including lectures, concerts and tea parties.⁹⁸ Compared to earlier years, the increase in the number of mothers attending showed that the YWCA was earning the trust of mothers, even on the Anatolian side of Istanbul.⁹⁹ Mothers of YWCA members were not registered members, but they could attend the social activities

⁹⁷ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.79, p.84, p.153 Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC. "She [Mehlika Emir] is assisted in her work by a half-time secretary, who is at present on six months' trial."

⁹⁸ "Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930," p.61, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁹⁹ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.79, p.84, p.153 Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC. "She [Mehlika Emir] is assisted in her work by a half-time secretary, who is at present on six months' trial."

and trainings of the association just like official members.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, some mothers requested that the YWCA provide information on school children's problems.¹⁰¹ Along with providing personal help to mothers, such as how to take care of a child and knowledge on municipal rights, recreational activities were also offered.¹⁰² Mothers benefited from the information that their daughters learned in the YWCA courses as the girls would pass education on to their mothers. An example of this was a girl who taught her mother the new Latin-based Turkish alphabet.¹⁰³ The YWCA reported: "Even when the mothers do not come to the Center, they know what their daughters are doing there and are interested in it. One mother showed us her notebook: her daughter is learning the new Turkish characters at the Center, and teaching them to her at night."¹⁰⁴ In the YWCA, Mehlika Emir was "extremely popular not only with the girls but also with their mothers who often come to her with their special problems."¹⁰⁵ Phoebe Clary was also among the mothers' favorites. Speaking Turkish very well, she interacted with

¹⁰⁰ "Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930," p.61, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁰¹ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.91, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC. For mothers, how to take care of a child was one of the courses given at Stamboul Center: "One of the aims stated, 'to discover and provide classes and activities which would interest adults,' has been partially realized through a course on child care given at Stamboul Center for Turkish mothers. This course grew out of a remark made by İsmail Hakki Bey (the head of the Educational Department of Stamboul University), when he attended the Stamboul Publicity tea. Talks with Nakie [sic] Hanım (outstanding Turkish woman educationalist) revealed that such a course had never been given before. She stated that various Turkish organizations, such as the Himaye Etfal, the Red Crescent, the Kadın Birliği [sic], had given lectures to mothers, but that no outlined course giving opportunity for discussion had been given and that there was a real need for such a course." Ibid., p.92.

¹⁰² "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.152, Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁰³ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November 1929-June 1930," 94-95, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁰⁴ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.94-95, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC. One of the things the YWCA contributed to Mustafa Kemal's westernization politics by spreading Latin based alphabet to women.

¹⁰⁵ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.79, p.84, p.153 Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC. "She [Mehlika Emir] is assisted in her work by a half-time secretary, who is at present on six months' trial."

families and went to their homes, gaining their trust and confidence.¹⁰⁶ Special occasions, including weekly Tuesday gatherings, were open to participants' friends, families and other members of the community.¹⁰⁷

2.4. Non-religious definitions, and difference between missionaries and the YWCA

The YWCA staff emphasized that the membership policy had nothing to do with religion:

There had always been a Service Center membership which was never upon a religious basis but upon one of interest and participation in the activities of the program offered by the Centers. In other words, it has been always practically as we have it today except that we now call the girls registrants.¹⁰⁸

According to another report, converting people into Christianity was not the main goal of the YWCA:

We have an enrollment of 773 in the two centers. The girls represent 19 nationalities and 6 religious groups. Of the total, 650 are Turkish citizens and an increasing number are Moslem Turks. Our non-proselytizing program of education and service, with its stress on good citizenship and 'abundant' personal living makes an ever growing appeal. The secretarial staff together with teachers makes a group of thirty, would you see us! We are Turks, Americans, Armenians, Greeks, German, French, Circassian, Egyptian-Persian. I use to think we were apt to become sentimental over "living our internationalism" but when I see us all together and know our mutual interest and co-operation I realize that perhaps these unostentatious Service Centers where we all pull together are a great and needed

¹⁰⁶ Mehlika Emir to Miss Lyon, "(Copy) A letter from A Stamboul Leader (Not for publication)" January 21, 1930, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC and "Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930," p.61, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁰⁷ "Annual Report, January 1, 1931, Clara L. Bissell, not for publication," microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁰⁸ Notes to Appendix, p.155 in "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929- June, 1930," Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

contribution to this country, just now. In them Greek, Armenian and Turk have shared joys and common interests with mutual respect and even trust.¹⁰⁹

As aforementioned, by declaring that the YWCA in Istanbul did not have a religious mission,¹¹⁰ the YWCA staff highlighted women's liberation in their aims despite being confused with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions [ABCFM] by prejudices in Turkey:

A discussion group started by Miss Florence Wilson under the auspices [sic] of the International Institute for Peace and Education, has led to many Turkish contacts. The women have been very frank in saying that they wished nothing to do with the Y.W.C.A. because of the "C" in the name. They said that the feeling was wide-spread that regardless of the name we go under, we are the Y.W.C.A and are interested in spreading Christian influence in Turkey. There have been many frank talks on the matter which, from our point of view, have been rather disheartening because it makes one realize how deeply entrenched are the old prejudices and how unwilling are the women to even consider what advantages an international women's movement might have.¹¹¹

The YWCA identified itself as totally different and independent from the ABCFM missionaries, finding them "narrower" in mentality in a number of different cases, although they did contact and collaborate with them occasionally.¹¹² The tendency to draw the line between the missionary workers and the YWCA workers can be

¹⁰⁹ Genevieve Lowry, Memo, "Constantinople February 1, 1929," microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹¹⁰ Notes to Appendix, p.155, in "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929. June, 1930," Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

¹¹¹ "Constantinople Service Centers Rules and Regulations for Board of Directors Adopted May 15, 1929," p.25–26, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. The YWCA also cared about what officials thought about them: "There seems to be a change in the kind of missionaries coming out to Turkey. In the past, thirty years ago, missionaries had given wrong ideas of Turkey. The newer ones were fair to Turkey, but perhaps still influenced by the older ones. The new ones were more interested in helping Turkey and less in narrower religious work," said a VIP in Ankara. See Appendix B, "Supplementary Memorandum on Interviews with the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Education held at Angora, February 18, 1930," in "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.29 Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

¹¹² Ruth F. Woodsmall, "Report on Visit to Near East Centers," April 1921, p.10, Box 63, Folder 7–11, Series V. Professional Activities, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, YWCA-SSC.

seen in the reports of the YWCA's secretaries. The Board's contribution to the YWCA was summarized in these lines: "The rapid development of the Y.W.C.A. in the Near East has been in large measure due to the long period of preparation by the missionaries. However there have been no direct pieces of cooperation carried on with the Mission, and although in close connection, the Y.W.C.A. acts quite independently."¹¹³ While a few members of the Association were indeed participants of the Board, the YWCA considered itself, in its own description, as "an absolutely independent organization on its own feet."¹¹⁴ In 1929, "On the whole it has been decided that it might be wiser not to try to have American Board women become members of the Centers, as it makes for confusion in their minds as to their status in the work."¹¹⁵ Clara L. Bissell, executive secretary of Stamboul YWCA Center, called attention to the fact that the YWCA was different from the ABCFM since they had Turkish members on their board, which made them "a little broader in our [their] attitude."¹¹⁶

The YWCA secretary Dorothea Chambers Blaisdell, who worked in the Adana YWCA in the 1920s,¹¹⁷ whose parents were missionaries, shared her concerns about the ABCFM because she observed that it limited the social freedom of young women. As a non-Turkish woman born in Erzurum in 1896, she witnessed the last stages of the Hamidian Period, World War I and the Early Republican

¹¹³ "A short history of Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Activities in Turkey," (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2006). Rifat N. Bali published the primary source.

¹¹⁴ "A short history of Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Activities in Turkey," (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2006).

¹¹⁵ "Constantinople Service Centers Rules and Regulations for Board of Directors Adopted May 15, 1929," p.25, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹¹⁶ "Copy of Letter To Miss Lyon from Clara L. Bissell, March 16, 1932," p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹¹⁷ She had mentioned that the ancient history courses she had attended at the university broadened her perspective and understanding of the history of her hometown Adana. Dorothea C. Blaisdell, *Missionary Daughter: Witness to the End of the Ottoman Empire* (s.l.:AuthorHouse, 2002), v-19.

Period. His father's circle included the Turkish Minister of Marine Djemal Bey, the Governor of the city, the principal and many other influential people of the city.

Upon her arrival in Adana where she began her work in the YWCA, she realized the missionaries' dissatisfaction about the new workers in their circle, who in their eyes had begun carrying on the missionary endeavor without the missionary tradition they had so long been loyal to. To give such an example of the older-generation missionaries' concerns, she offered up Miss Webb, the principal and housekeeper of the girls' school, who was critical upon hearing a rumor. Someone who worked at the ABCFM told a story about a native nurse being out with one of the American staff in the Near Relief Ford until midnight and another American staff member was seen drunk. In Miss Webb's opinion, such an event was highly disappointing; she strongly disapproved of it because it was against her moral laws well as her traditional missionary understanding. Blaisdell believed that the old circle of missionaries condemned such things as they felt angry at "the fall of the idol of American purity," associating it with Christianity. As a missionary daughter herself and as someone who worked at the YWCA, she wished to stand out not as William's daughter but with her professional identity, she emphasized that the YWCA was fundamentally different than missionary work:

And to the community outside the missionary circle I was still the Badveli's [William Chambers's] daughter. But I came back to Adana as Y.W.C.A. Secretary, not as Badveli's daughter. I was an adult representing an American organization which was allied but not identified with missionary work, and this was especially important point. To many in America such fine points may seem overdrawn, but there were things of weight involved in this differentiation. When I reached Adana, the crux of the matter seemed

to lie in the fact that Y.W. secretaries could dance and Near East Relief workers did dance, but missionaries did not! ¹¹⁸

Blaisdell's father approved of her participation in dance in the States for dancing there was not seen as an immoral activity unlike in the late Ottoman State, or so he claimed. For that reason, he was uncomfortable with her dancing in the late Ottoman State, as he assessed that in a Middle Eastern country which had "rigid sex taboos," dancing would be interpreted in a negative and immoral way. Her father was disappointed by the fact that she had later defied him on this issue. Unwilling to see his daughter dancing and thus participating in an activity he did not believe suitable, he deliberately avoided such parties which the missionary groups, Near East Relief and the YWCA attended from time to time. Her mother was not disturbed by her choice, in Blaisdell's words; "she thoroughly enjoyed watching what had always been forbidden fruit." Blaisdell revealed that her French circle living in Adana had a difficult time in evaluating the YWCA secretaries' understanding of "Protestant sectarian morals." She further described the distinction that "We Y.W. secretaries would not smoke and we would not drink, but we would dance and play bridge." She was quite surprised when she was classified as a nun by a hostess from her French circle due to her abstention from alcohol.¹¹⁹

Blaisdell, in the Adana YWCA, organized recreational activities for young women both in factories and schools. Having a club composed of around sixty girls at the American school with limited equipment, they had managed to create enjoyable activities, such as playing basketball without actual baskets. Basketball

¹¹⁸ Local people might call her father as Badvelli, mispronouncing Blaisdell. Dorothea C. Blaisdell, *Missionary Daughter: Witness to the End of the Ottoman Empire* (s.l.:AuthorHouse, 2002), 147–148.

¹¹⁹ Blaisdell, *Missionary Daughter: Witness to the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 147–56.

was not a threat for the American Board of Missionaries, as dancing was. There was to be a dramatization of Cinderella, commissioned by Blaisdell, which the girls would perform in the YWCA's factory center. Her account showed that the YWCA's performance had to be cancelled because of the conservative views of the older missionaries at the American school- they were disturbed by a scene in which Cinderella would dance. They prevented the dramatization from going forward, and opposed Blaisdell's encouraging the girls towards dancing, much to her chagrin.¹²⁰

2.5. Conclusion

The Istanbul YWCA's cadre and members had a multinational and multi-religious structure much like the city itself. The YWCA brought women from different backgrounds under one umbrella, providing a platform and an opportunity to share their opinions at a time the nationalism was gaining momentum in women movements in Turkey. The YWCA also penetrated into other associations in Istanbul by teaching courses or recruiting members from them. The YWCA's Board and administration were primarily drawn from the American staff in the 1920s, while in the 1930s, the number of the Turkish Board members increased. The YWCA of the USA picked American staff who had graduated from Ivy League colleges to work. In parallel, the American staff in Istanbul picked local staff who were well-educated, and recruited Board members who had been key feminists,

¹²⁰ Dorothea C. Blaisdell, *Missionary Daughter: Witness to the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 148–71.

suffragists, and leading figures in education of the late Ottoman State and Early Republican Turkey. The influence of feminism was evident among the Board members. The YWCA's American staff would fight for suffragism through recruiting figures like Nakiye Elgün in the 1920s, and Latife Bekir and Lamia Refik Fenmen in the 1930s. The YWCA was more than a relief or philanthropist group in the late Ottoman context and the Early Republican Turkey, supporting women's liberation in politics, as well as women's social liberation such as dancing. As a background chapter, also revealing this side of the YWCA is crucial in terms of understanding that the YWCA was a feminist association in Istanbul.

CHAPTER III

THE YWCA AND FEMALE FACTORY WORKERS IN ANATOLIA

This chapter argues that outside Istanbul, specifically in Merzifon, Adana, Sivas and Izmir, the YWCA had a chance to interact with female factory workers and focused on improving their poor labor conditions. In Istanbul, however, interacting with only a small number of women working in factories, the YWCA had to develop different strategies compared to those they followed in these other centers; in Istanbul, they directed their focus towards creating jobs for them first. This chapter therefore brings out the efforts of the YWCA secretaries for improving the conditions of employees at tobacco and textile factories as well as contributing to women's employment in the lace industry, contacting the managers of the factories to provide better wages and workhours for female factory workers. Without organizing workers, the YWCA chose to play an intermediary role between the managers of companies and female factory workers with the goal of improving the rights of workers.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Committee of Union and Progress inherited an economy from Abdülhamid which was characterized by dependence on foreign capital, running up large debts to foreign countries and the

capitulations, which all caused the Ottoman economy to suffer financially.¹²¹ After World War I and the Independence War, the impoverished state would require significant economic leaps.¹²² The Ottoman economy's lifeblood was agriculture; the industrial life was minimum and quite "underdeveloped," and so the weather also played a major role in making profit. In a state where industry was minor, to choose a job in the industrial sector was difficult for men but especially for women.¹²³ Mustafa Kemal and his circle thus inherited this underdeveloped industry from the CUP. Korkut Boratav wrote, "A typical symptom of industrial backwardness is revealed by symbolization of the slogan of "three whites" as the Republican's Turkey's first industrialization move." These three whites were cotton, sugar and flour. The lack of industrial inheritance showed itself in how hopes were placed in agricultural products such as sugar and flour as having the potential to develop industry.¹²⁴

The Ottoman State did not experience the industrial revolution in a similar way to America or Europe. Some historians have pointed out that the proletariat did not come into a noticeable existence in the Ottoman State, and this they never united or came up with a socialist agenda.¹²⁵ The Ottoman State' which did not have a huge number of people working in factories, had a low number of working women as well as lacking laborer neighborhoods with poor living conditions.

¹²¹ Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908–2015* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2019), 24th edition, 21–25.

¹²² Mahfi Eğilmez, *Değişim Sürecinde Türkiye: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Sosyo-Ekonomik Bir Değerlendirme* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2018), 118.

¹²³ Kadir Yıldırım, *Osmanlı'da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2013), 84.

¹²⁴ Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908–2015* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2019), 24th edition, 21–2.

¹²⁵ Y. Doğan Çetinkaya and Mehmet Ö. Alkan, eds., *Tanzimat'tan Günümüze Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Tarihi 1839–2014 Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Alanlar, Yeni Sorunlar* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015), 9.

Istanbul was characterized by artisans and shopkeepers rather than “industrial workers.”¹²⁶ In addition to the scarcity of industrial job opportunities, the Ottoman society had a strong prejudice against the very concept of women’s work due to its traditional gender roles. Men were usually the breadwinners.¹²⁷

In the Second Constitutional period, non-Muslims merchants and tradesmen benefited from liberalism and the politics of economic openness, while Muslim artisans and craftsmen could not compete with them. A high number of merchants were non-Muslims whereas the artisans and craftsmen tended to be Muslims. After the Balkan Wars, the CUP favored a nationalist attitude in the economy, supporting Muslim artisans and craftsmen. To fuel the Muslims’ business, Muslims were called to stop shopping at non-Muslim groceries in 1913 and 1914. Moreover, more than 450 Muslim groceries were opened to support Muslim trade.¹²⁸

In 1913 and 1915, outside of Istanbul and Izmir, there were only 10 industrial enterprises in the food sector. In Izmir, the number of industrial enterprises in food was 23 and in Istanbul it was 43. In 1913 and 1915, the number of soil, leather, wood and stationary industrial enterprises were non-existent in the Ottoman State with the exception of Istanbul and Izmir. By contrast, the number of weaving industry enterprises (excluding Izmir and Istanbul) was 55 in Anatolia in 1913 and 1915, and thus weaving was one of the main enterprises in Anatolia,

¹²⁶ Paul Ginsborg, *Family Politics: Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival 1900–1950* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 84–87. What contributed to shaping the Ottoman artisan was the concept of the “ümme” (the Islamic community) and neighborhoods (mahalle) where low and high classes both lived together. At least ten streets which was located around the mosque would form a *mahalle* (neighborhood) in which social life would be shaped by the mosque (religious festivals or events), *hamam* (public bath) and the coffee houses, as suggested by Ginsborg. Coffeehouses was a male’s sphere where women could not be a part of whereas hamam was open for both sexes (men’s and women’s areas were separate). Women mixed socially with other females in hamams. It was a popular spot for talking about potential husband candidates for families.

¹²⁷ Yıldırım, *Osmanlı’da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler*, 84–85.

¹²⁸ Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat 1908–1918* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2019), 8–11. The book was first printed in 1982.

although it still employed only a negligible portion of the population. In 1913, the number of people who worked in the weaving industry was 7,765 in total, declining to 6,763 by 1915.¹²⁹ To put these figures into context, in 1914, 14,450,217 million people lived in Anatolia.¹³⁰

From 1913 to 1915, while the number of female factory workers in munition sector was growing, the number of women who worked at munition factories was still quite low in the Ottoman state. However, the number of female factory workers in manufacture industry saw an increase of up to 30 percent. In 1915, Urfa experienced strong demand for female workers in the stocking industry; the sources indicate that 1,000 women were involved in that kind of work there. Another popular location where women were employed in stocking factories was Adana. She added that “there were ... 4,780 [women] in carpet making in İzmir, Sivas, Ankara and Konya (including Akşehir, Isparta, and Niğde); 11,000 in textile manufacturing in Aydın; and 1,550 textile workers in Kütayha, Eskişehir, and Karahisar-ı Sâhib.” Women were employed in factories in Kocaeli out of necessity during the war, and women were also employed in the weaving industry in Diyarbakır.¹³¹ Women worked in the rug workshops of Oriental Carpet Ltd. in İzmir, Sivas, Burdur, Isparta, Urla, Maraş, and Adana.¹³² Women who worked full time at textile and soap factories earned much less than male workers, receiving one

¹²⁹ Tevfik Güran, *Resmi İstatistiklere Göre Osmanlı Toplum ve Ekonomisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2017), 344–351.

¹³⁰ Servet Mutlu, “Son Dönem Osmanlı Nüfusu Ve Etnik Dağılımı,” *Nüfusbilim Dergisi* 25 (2016): 3–38.

¹³¹ Elif Mahir Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 120–121. Selanik was among the cities where noticeable number of women worked in tobacco industry in the late 1890s. See Yıldırım, *Osmanlı'da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler*, 88–89. Selanik was lost in 1912 and was no longer a part of the Ottoman Empire.

¹³² A. Gündüz Ökçün, (prep. by) *Ottoman Industry Industrial Census of 1913, 1915*, Historical Statistics Series Volume 4, (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1997), 116.

half the pay. Women were paid 4–6 kuruş per day in the textile sector while female soap workers earned 2–6 kuruş. The wage gap (earning at least fifty percent less than men) was no different for women who worked in the fields of Izmit, Aydın, Urfa, or Akka. Along with the poor wages, women worked long hours in Bursa and Adana in particular, toiling 14 to 15 hours a day. In some cities in Turkey, female factory employees worked only seven to nine hours a day.¹³³ Prior to World War I, in a limited industrial life—which was transforming and with the introduction of modern technology such as cables, electricity, trams—women worked long hours for low wages in Turkey.¹³⁴ In 1908, Istanbul and various cities witnessed waves of strikes, with at least 110 being recorded.¹³⁵ One of them was among bakery workers, demanding a pay increase. Strikes of workers from different sectors tended to emphasize the same problem; the low wages they earned, although another issue they pointed out was related to working conditions.¹³⁶ The number of skilled workers dropped in the Ottoman state due to military conscription during World War I, with another reason being the deportations of Armenians and Greeks who had worked as artisans and craftsmen. The increasing number of Muslim males fighting in the war thus meant an increase in the number of women and children laboring. However, during World War I, discussing their wages with their employers was hard for female workers as they could be easily replaced with another worker due to the sheer numbers of women who wanted to join the

¹³³ Yıldırım, *Osmanlı'da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler*, 90–1.

¹³⁴ Basil Mathews, “Woman In the Near East,” *The Moslem World* 9, no.3 (1919): 240–6.

¹³⁵ Donald Quataert, “Labor History and the Ottoman Empire, C. 1700–1922,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60, (2001): 93–109.

¹³⁶ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, “The 1908 Strike Wave in the Ottoman Empire,” *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 16, no.2 (1992): 153–77.

workforce as compared to the previous era.¹³⁷ From 1913 to 1918, there were only five strikes.¹³⁸ During the occupation period, there were only 11 strikes, solely among railway workers.¹³⁹ The government discussed a law and prepared an article to protect female and child labor in 1910, but never approved it.¹⁴⁰ At the Izmir Economic Congress—which was organized in 1923—one of the issues the participants discussed was how long the duration of pregnancy leave should be. Attendees were in favor of a total “8 weeks of leave before and after giving birth.”¹⁴¹

Female labor did not constitute any sort of threat to entrepreneurs, as the cheap labor was a boon to them. One of the factors lying behind their low wages was that female membership in unions was very low. Another reason was gender discrimination which justified low female wages because only men were considered as “real workers” and women workers had no choice but to accept a secondary status.¹⁴² During WWI, Ottoman women did not want to lose their jobs, and it was

¹³⁷ Yiğit Akin and Elizabeth Thompson, “Labour, Labour Movements and Strikes (Ottoman Empire/Middle East)” in 1914–1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, eds. Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2017-08-2.

¹³⁸ Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict*, 144–146.

¹³⁹ Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict*, 145–146.

¹⁴⁰ Yıldırım, *Osmanlı’da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler*, 349–350. According to the report of American experts, which dated 1936, gender pay gap was high and needed to be regulated. Another thing which needed to be changed was working hours. They suggested it to be shortened. The new Republic needed to come up with regulations on safety and insurance for workers. Another issue they stressed was the necessity of opening Employment Bureaus in the city. They preferred the State to provide employment bureaus for people. American experts were not sympathetic to workers to unionize and make strikes. They did not encourage the State to make concessions in that issue. See Yüksel Işık, *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze İşçi Hareketinin Evrimi (1876–1994)* (Ankara: Öteki, 1995), 94–95.

¹⁴¹ Yüksel Işık, *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze İşçi Hareketinin Evrimi (1876–1994)*, 98. By 1936, one of the articles of the labor law concerned pregnant workers, and granted the right of pregnancy leave only 3 weeks before the birth and 3 weeks after the birth.

¹⁴² Metinsoy cites Ahmet Makal’s book entitled *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Çalışma İlişkileri* pp. 196–7 while providing this information. Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict*, 136.

hard for them to negotiate their wages during the war time unlike their British and American peers. During WWI, the number of British women in trade unions tripled.¹⁴³ Unlike in the late Ottoman state in which the female membership in unions was very low,¹⁴⁴ Leo Wolman stated that from 1910 to 1920 in the United States, female membership in the trade unions quintupled.¹⁴⁵

From 1913 to 1918, Kadir Yıldırım has emphasized that there was “stagnation” in labor movements and strikes, as well as organizations that were socialist. From 1914 to 1921, most of the strikes took place in Istanbul; the other cities which witness strikes were Balıkesir, Zonguldak and İzmir.¹⁴⁶ Taking into consideration the low female membership in unions and strikes from 1914 to 1921 and that most of the strikes took place in Istanbul, the rights of female factory workers in Anatolia were not a priority, although from 1910, women did start to be more involved in strikes in cities such as Bursa and Bilecik. This chapter contributes to current historiography by introducing the YWCA’s efforts for employment and improving rights of female factory workers in Anatolian cities such as Merzifon, Sivas, İzmir and Adana in those years.

3.1. Merzifon

¹⁴³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴⁴ Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict*, 136.

¹⁴⁵ Leo Wolman, *The Growth of American Trade Unions, 1880–1923* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1924), 97.

¹⁴⁶ Yıldırım, *Osmanlı’da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler*, 286, 171, 366–367.

In the end of 1890s, George E. White, describing how Armenians had been deported in Merzifon, noted that “One of the most rewarding efforts for relief in Marsovan was a weaving industry in which 150,000 yards of cotton cloth were manufactured, together with quantities of Turkish toweling, which were sold on the common market ...”¹⁴⁷ Marsovan (Merzifon) was one of the places in Anatolia where cotton cloth was produced.

Frances C. Gage had worked as a teacher in a college in Marsovan in the 1890s, and years later she wanted to return to Turkey. During World War I, when she returned to Marsovan as the YWCA Turkey’s first secretary, she found an impoverished city, families selling their valuable materials and animals for clothing to the army and financing soldiers while doctors, butchers, and men in the bazaar were all joining the military. According to Elizabeth Wilson, Gage, confronted this situation on returning to Turkey:

After all, pioneering in an old land is only a little harder than pioneering in a new. That she was coming back to a Turkey greatly altered in the last fifteen years she knew well. That was one reason for wanting to come. Turkey had begun to move. The status of woman had advanced. She [Gage] could gain a better education and use it more freely than before. Women and children were being employed by native and foreign firms, in rug and tobacco and other manufactories. The young married women were being carried away by unworthy social ideals. ‘The world is too much with us,’ Frances Gage quoted more than once.¹⁴⁸

In 1914, while Turkey was dealing with the poverty and confusion of the large-scale war, in Marsovan, Gage was doing her best to provide funds for work. She wrote in her notes: “We are still using our money to keep work in the hands of as many as possible and it is wonderful how our little pile adds to itself in this way.”

¹⁴⁷ George E. White, *Charles Chapin Tracy: Missionary, philanthropist, educator: first president of Anatolia college, Marsovan, Turkey* (Boston, Chicago: The Pilgrim press, 1918), 36.

¹⁴⁸ Elizabeth Wilson, *The Road Ahead: Experiences in the Life of Frances C. Gage* (New York: The Women’s Press, 1918), 76–7.

Gingham-weaving was one of them. Due to its unprofitable and unstable condition, Gage would complain about manufacturers who did not invest enough in this branch of manufacturing. She insisted that they should have put money into this industry. Another alternative kind of work that they promoted was preparing wool for stockings. This was a risky business as well because it was an expensive investment and there were not any guarantees that people would buy stockings because, in Gage's words, "people will go barefoot if they must, you know."¹⁴⁹ In the association, Gage was also coordinator of the Committee for Relief Work. In Marsovan, she helped 47 families of weavers financially regarding their business:

The Committee for Relief Work which I had organized in the Association before I left Marsovan has relieved 47 families of weavers. We gave them 25 dollars at the beginning and they used the money twice in two months in selling the goods bought from the weavers, and now have bought with this money some goods to clothe the poor.¹⁵⁰

In 1916, under the leadership of Gage, the YWCA was involved in organizing "industrial work" for Mr. Peet, who was a supporter of the business with his relief money, which was "75 dollars a week." Mostly girls worked for this project, and although the cost of supplies such as thread and embroidery materials was more than expected, they were happy with the success of the project since it enabled the girls' employment.¹⁵¹ Moreover, Gage worked as the director of a committee which was responsible for arranging gingham-weaving, bobbin-winding and weaving

¹⁴⁹ Frances C. Gage, "Marsovan notes," December 23, 1914, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁵⁰ "Letter from Miss Frances C. Gage," Marsovan, Turkey, December 3, 1914, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁵¹ Frances C. Gage, Letter to the Foreign Department of the Young Women's Christian Associations of the United States of America, Constantinople, July 15, 1916, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

tasks for more than hundred women. She would also travel to nearby towns to teach and employ women in this field.¹⁵²

In 1914, the YWCA in Merzifon set up a lace counter which employed 20 families. At first, exporting the lace to the USA was considered, though when this was unsuccessful, Gage would decide to purchase some of the unsold lace herself. She encouraged a number of young married women to sell lace to earn money for the poor.¹⁵³ Those women “collected 25 dollars which they put into this enterprise for the poor.” Gage wrote: “I am glad that to be able to place that capital again in their hands to circulate.”¹⁵⁴ Gage organized women for sewing and bought the capital when it was necessary so that not only families would not be unemployed but also the poor would benefit from their work.

Gage encouraged women to work rather than stay at their home and occupy their minds with their personal problems. It was considered a success just to make girls go out in a society where the mothers-in-law made decisions about their daughters-in-law’s lives most of the time. As Gage’s biographer Elizabeth Wilson explained in detail:

The little Young Women’s Christian Association in the city of Marsovan, with Miss Gage standing back of it, opened up a lace industry which gave employment to three hundred poor girls and women, for which she stripped the market of thread which was selling at fifteen cents a spool. And this when the younger women were not allowed by their mothers-in-law—those enforcers of etiquette—to be seen on the streets even bound for an Association meeting. Good social form dictated that they should stay in the house and mourn over their anxieties and troubles.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Elizabeth Wilson, *The Road Ahead: Experiences in the Life of Frances C. Gage*, 92–3.

¹⁵³ “Letter from Miss Frances C. Gage,” Marsovan, Turkey, December 3, 1914, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁵⁴ “Letter from Miss Frances C. Gage,” Marsovan, Turkey, December 3, 1914, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Wilson, *The Road Ahead: Experiences in the Life of Frances C. Gage*, 92.

In the same year, Gage was very eager to meet with the directors of tobacco factories and discuss the needs of their women workers. The tobacco industry was growing in the beginning of the twentieth century. In her reckoning, there were 50 tobacco companies in Turkey. More than 20 of them were either an English or American companies, selling tobacco abroad. She had a meeting with the agent of the British-American Company and inquired about the problems of women working in factories. He gave her the permission to visit the factory. She stated that “the manager is [was] anxious to do all that can be done for the girls physically, and in quite ready to give us entrance for other influences, though the girls are so rude and bold that he speaks hopelessly of results. He is, of course, wrong.”¹⁵⁶ She had faith in female factory workers unlike the manager.

3.2. Sivas

On the road to Sivas, when passing from Harput, Gage expressed her sadness when she saw how poor conditions were for the villagers who were barely able to food and clothing for themselves. She revealed that she wished she had enough funding to provide help to them and questioned if there was any chance that the Red Cross would provide funding for Turkey.¹⁵⁷

When Gage travelled to Sivas in 1914¹⁵⁸, one of the main aims she had was to observe and contact the young women who worked in the rug-making industry,

¹⁵⁶ “Copy of letter from Miss Gage to Miss Spencer, April 1, 1914,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁵⁷ “Extracts-Letter from Frances C. Gage, October 23, 1914,” microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁵⁸ According to Frances C. Gage, Sivas was “one of the very strongest Armenian centers, about two fifths of the population being from this nationality.” See Memo, Frances C. Gage, Sivas, Turkey, September 13, 1914, p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. Aside from helping girls in labor issues

on which the city depended heavily. She was dismayed by the long hours of work and low pay young women earned in rug-making in Sivas. According to Gage, in 1914, “There are [were] 3000 young women and little girls working from 10 to 14 hours a day at a wage from 5 to 25 cents a day.”¹⁵⁹ Of Sivas’s population, which was 1,169,443 in 1914,¹⁶⁰ nearly one quarter of the population worked in the rug-making industry. “Every knot” depended on difficult finger work. She depicted how delicate, fragile and tiring the labor was and was quite astonished how they did not make any mistakes but rather created very complicated and beautiful patterns; “a miracle of accuracy,” as she put it. However, the working conditions were not pleasing to Gage. The women worked continuously, not taking any breaks, and spending most of the day in the factory. Gage did not put the blame on the managers of the Smyrna Company in Sivas, but rather blamed families for wanting their children to work because longer hours meant more money for very low-income families. She stressed: “the pay is so small that they [parents] do not want them to stop even to eat. They take their bit of dry breads in bites as they work.” Gage resolved to improve the poor working conditions in this industry and decided to get in touch with “the managers of the entire industry in Smyrna.” In Sivas, “Most of this rug work is under the great Smyrna Company and they have factories

in the interior, the YWCA functioned as a war relief organization in Sivas in 1921 and 1922, by helping dislocated Armenian girls after the war. In Adana and Sivas, the early 1920s marked the deportation of Armenian families. They were separated from their family members and scattered to different places, losing their homes. Edna L. McFarland worked with the “girls who were forcibly married to Turks during the war and who after the armistice were given the chance to leave those homes if they so desired.” Marriage of those girls meant that they worked as servants and mistresses in houses of these men as stated by McFarland. See E. McFarland, “The Girls Shelter Home At Sivas,” January 24, 1922, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC; Report of Edna L. McFarland, (stationed at Sivas for the past six months), October 11, 1921, p. 1–2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. They were also helping Greeks and Armenians refugees during the state of the war. See “Copy of letter from Margaret White to Miss Lyon, March 18, 1919,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁵⁹ Memo, Frances C. Gage, Sivas, Turkey, September 13, 1914, p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁶⁰ Tevfik Güran, *Resmî İstatistiklere Göre Osmanlı Toplum ve Ekonomisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları), 2017, 55.

in many parts of the interior. I rather think that before much can be accomplished in improving conditions, I shall have to get at the managers of the entire industry in Smyrna. If only we could get a typical Association started there, it would soon interpret us to all these ramifying interests.” In order to raise wages and improve working conditions of young women in Sivas, Gage saw it necessary to go to Izmir and form an association there. She also imagined what Jesus would have done in the same situation, seeing the deplorable conditions of these workers. She remembered Jesus, his teachings and Gospel in terms of his aid to people in need, and thought his solution would have been to provide the “rest all these tired little bodies” needed and offered them food and love. Gage even talked to doctors about the health conditions of female workers. She wanted to use the association funds to help young women working in the factory.¹⁶¹

3.3. Izmir

One of the reasons Gage considered opening a branch in Izmir was in order to talk to the managers of the Smyrna Company. Advancing the rights of workers was on the agenda.¹⁶² The YWCA was interested in improving unemployment in Izmir.¹⁶³ White was also in favor of opening a branch there, which she believed would help girls improve themselves. She also found it important to open a war Service Center

¹⁶¹ Memo, Frances C. Gage, Sivas, Turkey, September 13, 1914, p. 2–3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁶² Memo, Frances C. Gage, Sivas, Turkey, September 13, 1914, p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁶³ Margaret White, Letter to Miss Lyon, April 13, 1919, Constantinople, p.3 microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

in 1919 in Izmir because of its high population and its “strategic location.” White saw parallels between young women in Izmir and Istanbul, saying “the girls in Smyrna, as in Constantinople, have come out of the exclusiveness of their former life; they want to be like European [sic] or American girls.”¹⁶⁴ However, the supposed moral degradation¹⁶⁵ of the young women living in there also caught her attention. In Izmir, White depicted rich women as seeking pleasure and sating their desires in the short-term and only thinking of themselves- in contrast to other types of young women who had positive qualities such as those attending the American School in Izmir. She did not provide sufficient detail, though clearly directing those women was a concern of hers. White was also interested in the high number of women working in textile and tobacco factories, and seasonal workers in Izmir; at least 10,000 women were employed in industrial work in pre-war times, she noted.¹⁶⁶

3.4. Adana

Adana was one of the centers of cotton production with its textile mills and factories, including the Greek-owned Mavrumatis’s textile mill which was later sold to two Turkish families, the Tyrpani brothers mill which was also sold to Turkish merchants after the occupation period, and Cosma Simyonoğlu’s factory

¹⁶⁴ Margaret White, “Report to Executive Committees,” August 7, 1919, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁶⁵ Margaret White, “Report to Executive Committees,” August 7, 1919, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁶⁶ Margaret White, “Report to Executive Committees,” August 7, 1919, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

which passed into the hands of the Turkish government and was renamed the Adana Bez Fabrikası after the departure of Simyonoğlu to Greece in 1923, and Rasim Dokur's Turkish-owned factory which was established in 1911.¹⁶⁷

The YWCA Adana made contact with the female workers in the Simyonoğlu factory. Clara L. Bissell, while she was in Cilicia Adana in 1920, met with factory workers in Simenoghlu's (also known as Symeonogluou) factory during their noon hours. Within a limited time, she taught them physical activities, English lessons and songs in Turkish, even bringing an organ with her. Young women in the factory lacked knowledge of songs and had no idea how to sing them and so Bissell helped them to improve their music skills.¹⁶⁸ Bissell shared in her account that she was so happy to be in touch with these factory workers that she wanted to continue working with them. She could see that the girls forgot their own problems when she spent time with them and had the chance to be entertained for a short time. She also boosted employee morale at work, but going to the factory during the week was not easy for her because it was outside the city center and according to her fellow Americans in Cilicia the road was dangerous and she risked being abducted by the "Chettas."¹⁶⁹ For that reason, they did not want her to continue her work there. In one case, Bissell arrived late and the young women at the factory had been worried about her, thinking that that she was kidnapped. Bissell wanted to continue her work there despite the risks of her travelling back

¹⁶⁷ İnal referred to Edward Clark's PhD thesis entitled "The Emergence of Textile Manufacturing Entrepreneurs in Turkey: 1804–1968" (PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1969). Vedit İnal, "The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Ottoman Attempts to Catch Up with Europe," *Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no.5 (2011): 725–56.

¹⁶⁸ "Report of Clara L. Bissell, August 5, 1920, Adana Cilicia," p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁶⁹ Çete is a Turkish word, meaning gang. The secretary used the word chettas to refer to these bandit gangs.

and forth because she had bonded with the girls and had seen how her visits made them more cheerful and lively.¹⁷⁰

Dorothea Chambers Blaisdell, the YWCA's secretary in Adana, observing young female workers non-stop work shifts, put effort into improving the conditions in cotton factories. The YWCA Adana, under her directions, organized activities including story-telling, watching movies, and a dress-making workshop. Blaisdell was glad to see that female factory workers were quite interested and absorbed the knowledge she tried to pass on to them, though she sometimes had difficulties with them. In one case, a worker took quite a long time to be able to do even basic math such as adding one to one, though the workers usually embraced her assistance with great enthusiasm and interest.¹⁷¹

Similarly to the YWCA Istanbul Center, the YWCA Adana also cared for orphans. Their French classes had a conversation club in which they could practice French with one another to further improve their skills and while they practiced French, these members were also preoccupied in sewing dresses for the orphanage as well. The YWCA Adana also focused on recreational activities both in its schools and the factories. They had playgrounds, folk-dancing and general gym activities.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Clara L. Bissel, Letter to Miss Wilde, June 15, 1920, Cilicia Adana, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

¹⁷¹ Blaisdell, *Missionary Daughter: Witness to the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 158–59.

¹⁷² Blaisdell, *Missionary Daughter: Witness to the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 158.

3.5. Conclusion

The YWCA acted like a trade union by taking an intermediary position to negotiate an increase in the wages of rug workers while shortening their hours as it could be seen in Sivas's case in 1914. The YWCA did not organize the workers to negotiate with the managers but rather YWCA secretaries themselves took the initiative to advocate the rights of female factory workers. The YWCA discussed opening a center in Izmir after observing the poor conditions in Sivas rug factories and learning the company responsible was based in Izmir. The YWCA, interested in providing job opportunities for young women in Izmir, was also eager to reach young women working in textile and tobacco factories, as well as seasonal workers. In Merzifon, the YWCA, under the charge of Gage, not only helped girls find employment in lace industry but also provided small employment opportunities for families by hiring them for gingham work. In Adana, the YWCA provided recreational and educational activities for female factory workers working in cotton factories.

In these locations, women's trade unions were not active during the stay of the YWCA in the 1910s. The number of female factory workers increased since textile grew in cities like Adana and carpet-making also saw an increase in Izmir. However, the YWCA staff did not stay long enough to develop consciousness among workers regarding their status, working conditions, and their low wages, although the staff took the initiative and put an effort to better their rights in that context. Frances C. Gage died in July in 1917 and by 1922, the YWCA centers in Adana and İzmir were no longer active.

The case of Anatolia was used in order to better comprehend Istanbul. The primary goal of the USA YWCA was to be a voice for the industrial workers in the early twentieth century, acting like a shelter for the working women. In Anatolia, like in the US, they were able to reach industrial workers. Interacting with a high number of female factory workers in Anatolia compared to Istanbul, the YWCA prioritized developing the rights of industrial workers, being in interaction with both factory workers and the male directors of the companies, negotiating for the rights of workers. In Istanbul, it was a different story.



CHAPTER IV

LACK OF CAREER GUIDANCE IN ISTANBUL

In the Second Constitutional period (1908–1918), young women in Istanbul had difficulty in investing in their career dreams and could not plan their professional lives. This chapter focuses on why young women did not plan their career goals by emphasizing three different reasons; parents' lack of encouragement for women at home, the lack of educational opportunities for young women, and the lack of societal encouragement of young women's professional goals. Daughters were encouraged from an early age to be unexpressive and silent. Their opinions did not matter and were often not respected, and girls who sat at home not planning their lives were of little concern to their parents. The majority of parents did not encourage their daughters to dedicate themselves to an occupation or a job. Educational opportunities for pursuing their dreams were also limited for young women as compared to men. Societal pressures also played role in young women's lack of planning for their career goals. Along with pointing out the structural obstacles preventing women from developing career thinking, this chapter also offers a historiographical background for understanding Early Republican Era women, Westernization in Turkey and Westernization.

4.1. Lack of career guidance at home

The channels through which women shared their ideas and reflected on daily issues were quite limited. The dominance of male writers in newspapers made it difficult for women to present issues from the female perspective.¹⁷³ Taking into consideration that most of the journals related to women were also published by male writers in the early 1910s, *Kadınlar Dünyası* (Women's World) stands out among the male dominated journals because it was published by women and it covered the issues of the day exclusively through women's eyes. *Kadınlar Dünyası* was published by a cadre of Istanbul women between 1913–1918, 1918–1921; along with providing information on issues such as women's rights in different countries, how to raise babies and children, and human anatomy, it also reflected on the problems of women of the time and their struggle for their voice to be heard and taken into account. As Serpil Çakır mentioned in her book *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, the journal *Kadınlar Dünyası* had a feminist tone, dealing with inequalities between men and women persisting in the Ottoman State. In the early 1910s, the writers of the journal and people who sent letters to the journal were thus critical of a woman's position in her society.¹⁷⁴

Women were oppressed even when they were children, according to Muhterem Fahri, writing from Gedikpaşa Istanbul. Women's emotions, dreams and goals were mocked by men from an early age. She was critical of parents' attitude

¹⁷³ Atiye Şükran, "Türkiye'de Bir Kadın Gazetesi Çok mu Görülüyor," no.46, May 19, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, trans. Fatma Büyükkarcı Yılmaz and Tülay Gençtürk Demircioğlu, (Istanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 465–467. Demircioğlu and Yılmaz translated all the issues of *Kadınlar Dünyası* from Ottoman script to latin-based Turkish alphabet.

¹⁷⁴ Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Istanbul: Metis, 1994).

towards their daughters, and their lack of respect for the decisions of their daughters. She pitied women because they were treated like “slaves,” having no control in their lives.¹⁷⁵

In 1913, children,¹⁷⁶ who kept quiet and kept their thoughts to themselves, especially around adults, were considered to be well-mannered and well-trained by their parents. However, these parental expectations needed to change according to Sıdıka Ali Rıza, who suggested that behaving in a well-mannered way meant having a healthy body, mind and good morals. She had a nationalistic approach in terms of emphasizing that this would be the attitude one who considered the country’s interest would take.¹⁷⁷

Women were not free to speak their own mind and express their thoughts in 1913; if they braved to do so, they were often mocked, according to Pakize Nihat from Beşiktaş. The reason for this attitude was related with the country’s under-developed situation. In such conditions it was hard to have access to education because elders themselves did not believe in the value of education. She

¹⁷⁵ Muhterem Fahri, “El Aman,” no.10, April 13, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 97–98. Perihan Arif from Sarıgözel was also critical of the phrase “women have long hair and short brains.” She suggested that some women believed in this saying. See Perihan Arif, “Azim ve Sebat,” no.34, May 7, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 348.

¹⁷⁶ In US, in the nineteenth century, Victorian child rearing had repressive features, for example, the expectation that children be unquestioningly obedient to their parents while in the late Ottoman state, in the early twentieth century, total obedience was still expected by the parents. In USA, in the nineteenth century, middle-class parents disapproved of impulsive behavior in their children, believing that children needed to control their behavior. Parents had a responsibility to control their emotions too. Victorian parents were against physical violence toward their children because physical violence would suggest the loss of control of over themselves. In the prescriptive literature, mothers were discouraged from invoking fear in their children. Raising fearful children meant creating unhealthy individuals. Using fear in childrearing also indicated of “an emotional abuse of parental authority.” In the early twentieth century, manuals advised parents to hide their own fears when they interacted with their children. Avoidance of fear was thus encouraged. If the children feared anything, parents should listen to their problems and offer them solutions. See Peter Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: NYU Press, 1994), 17–22, 102–3.

¹⁷⁷ Sıdıka Ali Rıza, “Usul-i Terbiye Nâkisarımızdan,” no.34, May 7, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 345.

disapproved that parents would rather have their daughters sitting around and gossiping at home instead of investing in themselves and their future.¹⁷⁸

In 1913 in Turkey, women were expected to behave in certain ways. Parents did not question the way they raised daughters. “A wife has to obey every word of her husband [...]”, Nesrin Salih from Cihangir Istanbul noted in her article entitled “Turkish Girls,”¹⁷⁹ which was published in *Kadınlar Dünyası*. Mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law interfered in the affairs of the married couples; and the wife’s role was to accept what the elders told her. Women had to remain silent; because a woman’s expressing her thoughts would be perceived as immoral and indecent behavior.¹⁸⁰

Parents did not encourage their daughters or their sons to dedicate themselves to an occupation or a job right after their graduation. Their upbringing and social codes thus had a profound effect on their lack of self-confidence, as emphasized by Fatımatüzzehra in 1913. To dedicate oneself to work, arts, and occupation were considered as “shame,” she noted. Parents not minding their daughters being idle and staying with their families were problematic for her. Envyng American and English young women, she emphasized that daughters and sons living in those countries were self-committed to a profession that was useful to them and to their countries.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Pakize Nihat, “Hukukumuz,” no.26, April 29, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 267–268.

¹⁷⁹ Nesrin Salih, “Türk Kızları,” no.52, May 25, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 51.–100. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, trans. Fatma Büyükkarcı Yılmaz and Tülay Gençtürk Demircioğlu (Istanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 16–8. Demircioğlu and Yılmaz translated all the issues of *Kadınlar Dünyası* from Ottoman script to latin based Turkish alphabet.

¹⁸⁰ Nesrin Salih, “Türk Kızları,” no.52, May 25, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 51.–100. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 16–8.

¹⁸¹ Fatımatüzzehra, “Teşebbüs-i Şahsi Ne Demektir?” no.21, April 24, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 211–12.

How much did mothers care about their daughters' interests and demands? Their daughters' demands to participate in school trips under the supervision of their teachers were unimportant to a majority of them, according to Nebile Kâmuran from Fındıklı. She claimed that mothers would find school trips indecent and unnecessary, ignoring that these experiences could actually contribute to their daughter's development. This was reflected in the low number of daughters who participated in school trips with their teachers.¹⁸²

Bedia Nigar from Makrıköy disapproved of mothers-in-law and other relatives who decided on their daughters-in-law's home affairs. She insisted that the home was the place where only one woman should be in charge, the wife.¹⁸³

Parents deciding whom their daughters should marry was another product of a system that did not care what young women thought, S. L. wrote. Parents choosing their daughters' husbands ignored what their daughters wanted, preventing them from determining their own futures.¹⁸⁴ Social status and profession were important for parents when they chose a husband for their daughter. There were a high number of parents who preferred their daughters to marry clerks rather than craftsmen.¹⁸⁵

Celal Nuri, a feminist, journalist, statesman, owner of the newspapers *Âti* and *İleri* and the writer of *Kadınlarımız* (Our Women), wrote in 1913 that "There is no 'career' for our daughters other than marriage."¹⁸⁶ Celal Nuri questioned how

¹⁸² Nebile Kâmuran, "Maarif," no.24, April 27, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 246-247. Kâmuran counted two girls schools in Istanbul. Such a big city like Istanbul, the low number was a disgrace, she implied.

¹⁸³ Bedia Nigar, "Hikmet-i İctimaiye," no.23, April 26, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 231-232.

¹⁸⁴ S[in] L., "Tecdüt Devri Ne Zaman Hülûl edecek?" no.17, April 20 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 170.

¹⁸⁵ Kadınlar Dünyası, "Marangoz Başvekil Damadı," no.35, May 8 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 352-353.

¹⁸⁶ Celal Nuri İleri, *Kadınlarımız*, 1913, trans. Halit Erdem Oksağan and Abdullah Musab Şahin

parents raised their daughters and concluded that wealthy daughters had only one main goal in their lives which was to become wives,¹⁸⁷ which he found quite disappointing. Dreaming of having a career was totally foreign to them. Nuri suggested that society valued women's bodies rather than their minds, and women's lack of educational opportunities resulted in women being idle and spending their time at home mostly chatting with neighbors, activities which would not move society forward.¹⁸⁸ He challenged his readers to imagine if boys were given knitting and sewing materials at a young age and girls were given a scientific education. For him, women were equal to men in terms of intellect and reason. There was "injustice" in how women were treated by their society, being denied equal opportunities and status. "Many women in our time are unemployed and they are bored because they don't know what to do [with themselves]. This causes a lack of meaning and purpose, but a woman will not experience this if she can read, write and work to earn her living." In addition, her purpose in life would broaden if she saw that she has potential not only in marriage but also in other walks of life.¹⁸⁹

Some parents discouraged their daughters by mocking them when they earned a diploma, i.e., "Oh my daughter, by reading that much, will you become a scrivener?"¹⁹⁰ Another common statement was that a "young woman should not be

(Istanbul: Kaknüs, 2017), 157–158. The only wish of young women until the age of 20 was to get married.

¹⁸⁷ Emine Keskiner, "Celal Nuri İleri'nin Ahlâka Dair Görüşleri (İlel-i Ahlâkıyyemiz Eseri Üzerine Bir İnceleme)" in *Son Dönem Osmanlı Mütefekkirleri ve Ahlâk Anlayışları*, eds. İsmail Kurt and Seyit Ali Tüz (Ankara: Düzce Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2017), 223.

¹⁸⁸ Celal Nuri İleri, *Kadınlarımız*, 1913, trans. Halit Erdem Oksačan and Abdullah Musab Şahin (Istanbul: Kaknüs, 2017), 157–8, 95–162.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 184–186.

¹⁹⁰ Fehmiye Çerkes Cemal, "Ezkiya-yı Nisvanı Yetiştirmek," no.35, May 8, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 360–361.

a scholar.” What was expected from her was taking care of the house and obeying her husband.¹⁹¹

What families needed was reform, as suggested by the board of *Kadınlar Dünyası*, because family members were not adapting to the era they were living in, which was in the midst of constant transformation. The members of the family needed to support rather than discourage one another, the latter being far more common in families of the time.¹⁹²

In 1919, Fatma Fuad, a writer in the journal *Genç Kadın*, in her article entitled “Kadın ve Kadınlık 4” (Woman and Womanhood 4), attacked the societal concept of morality which appreciated women’s shyness, lack of free expression and absence of courage. She emphasized that a woman should be free to express her thoughts and refrain from being “meek as a lamb.” Girls needed to be encouraged in that direction rather than being accused of lacking manners. The harmful overprotection of parents also needed to change, as seen in the popular saying among parents “Don’t let her [daughter] know the world. Keep bad things away from her.” Conversely, one needed to be prepared to overcome the challenges of life.¹⁹³ The same writer also suggested that young women needed to have a knowledge of cooking and sewing even in families which employed maids. She added that there would be benefits to developing practical life skills in these matters

¹⁹¹ M. S.[in], “Terbiye-i Benatın Ehemmiyeti,” no.47, May 20, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 482–483.

¹⁹² Kadınlar Dünyası, “Aile Hayatı, Teavün-i Umumi,” no.45, May 18, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 454–455.

¹⁹³ Fatma Fuad, “Kadın ve Kadınlık 4,” no.4, February 13, 1335 [1919], in *Genç Kadın 1919 Ocak-Mayıs (Yeni Harflerle)*, prepared by Çiçek İlengiz (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2011), 47.

rather than having a professional sense.¹⁹⁴ Self-sufficiency was itself controversial for daughters of families which had maids.

4.2. Lack of guidance in education

In the nineteenth century, both sexes at the age of five and six could attend the Sıbyan mektebi (a traditional elementary school) where Islam's precepts were taught to children. In 1858, Inas rüşdiye (upper elementary schools) started to be opened for girls.¹⁹⁵ In 1876, it was made "a constitutional requirement" for both sexes to attend the primary schools.¹⁹⁶ Secondary (*idadi*) schools and high schools (*sultani*) for girls were low in number until 1918. By contrast, vocational schools where girls learned midwifery, weaving and nursing increased in number.¹⁹⁷ Along with these schools, home education was an alternative for well-to-do families. In the nineteenth century, American missionary schools began to promote female education. One of these was the Constantinople College for Women which was opened in 1871 at Arnavutköy in Istanbul, offering education in a variety of fields ranging from the arts to science.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Fatma Fuad, "Kadın ve Kadınlık 6," no. 6, March 13, 1335 [1919] in *Genç Kadın 1919 Ocak-Mayıs (Yeni Harflerle)*, prepared by Çiçek İlengiz (Istanbul: Kadın Eserleri ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2011), 47.

¹⁹⁵ Yücel Gelişli, "Education of Women from the Ottoman Empire to Modern Turkey," *SEER: Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* 7, no.4 (2004):121–135.

¹⁹⁶ "Preface," *Genç Kadın 1919 Ocak-Mayıs (Yeni Harflerle)*, xxiii.

¹⁹⁷ Betül Açıkgöz, "The Advent of Scientific Housewifery in the Ottoman Empire," *Paedagogica Historica* 54, no.6 (2018):783–799.

¹⁹⁸ Floyd Henson Black, "The Native Schools," in *Constantinople To-Day; or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople; a Study in Oriental Social Life*, ed. C. R. Johnson, (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 416.

In the early 1910s, Hester Donaldson Jenkins, who worked at the American College for Girls for nine years, recorded her observations regarding “middle-class Istanbul Muslim women” in these words:

The amusements of a Turkish lady we should consider rather mild. She is seldom intellectual [. . .] nor have lectures, clubs, concerts, and reading circles been opened to her under the old regime. She is not athletic even in her youth, so she plays no tennis or golf [. . .] She plays no games, such as bridge, whist or dominoes, although Turkish men are fond of games of chance. She does not become absorbed in fancy work, her hands do not require her to be occupied. What then does she do?¹⁹⁹

Upbringing and socio-economic status clearly played their roles in how women made choices in their lives; the lack of encouragement towards working, education and social life was omnipresent in well-to-do families. Above all, a woman needed to know how to take good care of her home. “Won’t we initiate anything, won’t we come up with an invention? Won’t we work, will we sit lazily like this?” were the questions asked by a female writer in 1913. The wellness of the nation depended on women’s participation in the workforce, she noted. She was also disappointed that her parents had not provided her with a quality education. Complaining that the number of schools were not satisfactory in the country, she was nevertheless confident that women could even open schools at their own initiative.²⁰⁰

In 1913, what many peasant women really needed was to learn how to read and write; this meant that there was a need to open more schools for women according to Hatice, a teacher at the city Konya, who wrote an article entitled “Peasant Women” in one of the issues of *Kadın Dünyası*. She pointed out that not everyone welcomed women reading and writing in the society. However, she

¹⁹⁹ Paul Ginsborg, *Family Politics: Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival 1900-1950* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 83.

²⁰⁰ Leman Aziz, “Vazifelerimiz,” no.46, May 19, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 473-474.

claimed that a high literacy rate for women would mean that the nation would be in a superior position compared to other ones.²⁰¹ One contemporary idiom stated “Women should read less. If she reads until her prayer time, it is satisfactory.”²⁰²

In 1913, women writers in the journal frequently drew attention to the inadequacy of girls’ education. The number of schools for girls was low, and the number of girls who had access to education was concomitantly low.²⁰³ Furthermore, the low quality of the education provided at home,²⁰⁴ and the fact that parents terminated their daughters’ education at a young age or provided no education at all were all among the problems women were faced with.²⁰⁵ It was also common for parents not to provide their daughters education opportunity in the name of religion. Şaziment from Valideçeşme complained that grandfathers did not support the girls’ education at all; they justified themselves by arguing that the education of girls was against the laws of religion.²⁰⁶

The scarcity of books in school libraries and the lack of variety among them was another obstacle to the advancement of scientific knowledge among women.²⁰⁷ Emine Seher Ali emphasized that girls needed to be directed to read arts, history, literature and science books rather than reading romance novels.²⁰⁸ Atiye Şükran from Kadıköy, Istanbul stated the same need for women; what they needed to read

²⁰¹ Hatice, “Köylü Kadınları,” no.51, May 24, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 51. –100. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 10.

²⁰² Memnune bint-i Hasan, “Muhterem Büyük Hemşirelerim,” no.22, April 25, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 226–7.

²⁰³ *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 4–173.

²⁰⁴ Aziz Haydar, “Karşılıklı Şikayetler,” no.10, April 13, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 99.

²⁰⁵ Azize Haydar, “Bizde Kız Evlatların Tahsili,” no.13, April 16, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 128.

²⁰⁶ Şaziment, “Kadınlığımızın Mevki-i İçtimaisi,” no.23, April 26, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 235-236.

²⁰⁷ Atiye Şükran, “Ne İçin Çırpınıyoruz?” no.24, April 27, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 241–2.

²⁰⁸ Emine Seher Ali, “Teavün,” no.11, April 14, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 104.

were not novels, tales or legends but topics related to art, trade, industry and crafts which would be more useful for their futures.²⁰⁹ The same concern would be raised by Pakize Sadri who lived in Beşiktaş, İstanbul. She criticized young women getting caught up in romance novels instead of thinking about a profession or the arts.²¹⁰ In 1919, a writer in *Genç Kadın* (Young Woman), critical of women reading novels, suggested young women be directed to other fields of life rather than “fantasy.”²¹¹

Leman Aziz’s letter to *Kadınlar Dünyası* shows that women did not know which jobs they could pursue, where they wanted to work or what they wanted to do with their lives.²¹² Having no guides, their lack of professional goals or planning in their lives was evident. In the next issue, Emine Seher Ali responded to her letter, saying that “Let’s decide to work.” The rest would follow easily once they decided to work, in her view. One of the suggestions she made was to support each other financially. They could collect money to buy the start-up material needed for a small business, for example a sewing machine. Moreover, she suggested that women should be in touch with institutes which could provide access to a network for them.²¹³

In fact, the lack of a network or an association where women could communicate with other professional-minded women was a major problem for women who were willing to work. Not knowing where to start or whom to look to

²⁰⁹ Atiye Şükran, “Ne Güzel,” no.13, April 16, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 126–7.

²¹⁰ Pakize Sadri, “Şikayetlerim,” no.56, May 29, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 51. –100. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 58–9.

²¹¹ Hüseyin Zâti, “Kitâblar ve Mecmualar,” no.6, March 13, 1335 [1919], in *Genç Kadın 1919 Ocak-Mayıs (Yeni Harflerle)*, 85–7.

²¹² Leman Aziz, “Muharrem Kadınlar Dünyası’na,” no.25, April 28, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 260.

²¹³ Emine Seher Ali, “İş Görebiliriz!” no.26, April 29, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 263–4.

for guidance, women did not know how to apply for jobs or start a business. Leman Aziz voiced concerns about this. It was hard to get in touch with right people who knew about business. She suggested that even with a small amount of capital they could start a small business by investing in a stocking loom. They could then provide daily wage for a small number of young women.²¹⁴

4.3. Society's lack of career guidance

Mehmed Faik Bey in his book *Saâdet-i Aile* (Happy Family), published in 1899, emphasized that it was a woman's duty and role to stay silent and remain calm during any "discussion" with her husband. A woman should keep her thoughts to herself, in accordance with the religious law. Another reason he pointed to was women's inferiority to men. Women were expected to be absolutely obedient to their husbands. At the same time, they were also supposed to bring cheer to their husbands, opening conversations that he would find interesting or else risk having him lose interest in her. Women, who were in charge of household chores, were also tasked with bringing peace and joy into the home, again as reflected by Mehmed Faik Bey. Women were to be as a mirror to their husbands, smiling when they smiled.²¹⁵ There was no room for self-expression in the women Mehmed Faik

²¹⁴ Leman Aziz, "Muhterem Hocacığım," no.34, May 7, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 346-8.

²¹⁵ Mehmed Faik Bey, *Mutlu Yuva: Saâdet-i Aile*, 1899, prepared by Eser Sazak and M. Ali Özkan (Istanbul: Semerkand, 2018), 22-3, 42-45. In US family life, Victorian parents were supposed to control their anger. Expressing anger was associated with being a bad person as well as being a bad role model to their children. Among the Victorians, men's losing their temper in their working life was an accepted behavior—because working life could be stressful for them. They could channel their anger in working life. However, women, being more confined to home, were expected to be the calming force of the family. Home was associated with peace and tranquility. Parents needed to eliminate anger from their home as it was "a haven in a heartless world." See Peter

Bey portrayed; they were but a shadow and reflection of their men. In their arguments with their husbands, women should not speak their mind even if they felt justified but should keep their thoughts to themselves, because men carried the burden of the whole world on their shoulders.²¹⁶ Women should socialize only with people that their husbands approved of. Moreover, women should only go to the places with the permission of their husbands, dressing plainly and simply so no one would pay undue attention to her.²¹⁷

One of the issues pointed out by another writer was that the woman was confined to home, burdened with domestic tasks such as cleaning, preparing food, washing the clothes, knitting and the like. Women's lacking the roles that could contribute the working society was one of the issues that was criticized in the journal:

First of all women cannot see the world. Because she was created for sitting within four walls, cooking, cleaning the house and pleasing the husband. For her to go out is forbidden by religion. Secondly, women are mute. She has no right to say anything against the cruelties of man and illogical actions of him. Because, [men think that] she has long hair and short brain. Man can think; woman cannot. As she cannot think, she has no right for making a claim. All the families are built on these false principles [teachings]. Poor women! Even whimpering of them is inappropriate. Yes, her having feelings are unwelcome. She is expected to have no emotions like a stone.²¹⁸

Anatolian women peasants found Istanbul women idle and lazy because they were not engaged in work, as indicated by Atiye Şükran. In her reflection, peasant women equipped in knowledge of life were superior to urban women from Istanbul, for they were actively working. Cutting wood, making bacon, selling chicken, and

Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York; London: NYU Press, 1994), 17, 102–3.

²¹⁶ Mehmed Faik Bey, *Mutlu Yuva: Saâdet-i Aile*, 46–7.

²¹⁷ Mehmed Faik Bey, *Mutlu Yuva: Saâdet-i Aile*, 45.

²¹⁸ Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, 169.

cultivating the fields were one of the areas where they worked and participated in life side by side with men. Women from Istanbul could take them as an example and an inspiration. Their participation in working life was what they had seen from their parents as they were raised to work.²¹⁹

Kadınlar Dünyası underlined that women had as much right to work as men, and furthermore that Islam did not grant work as a privilege only to men. The journal also declared that the next generation's brightness would be related to the spread of scientific knowledge among mothers.²²⁰ Men of course disapproved of women working and gaining education, as claimed by Belkıs Ferit from Beşiktaş. Their ignorant attitude did not help women progress in the political, social or economic realms.²²¹ Pakize Nihat from Beşiktaş defended that women could easily be successful at male-dominated jobs if they were only given the opportunity.²²²

Muhterem Fahri, who wrote from Gedikpaşa Istanbul, was critical of the popular saying; "women have long hair and short brains." Men had no right to judge women, she noted.²²³ Men acted like they were the masters of women, wrote Şaziment from Valideçeşme. They treated women as an object of desire, disregarding women's happiness and freedom.²²⁴ Feriha Iclal from Erenköy complained about the same thing; men objectified women by treating them as a toy

²¹⁹ Atiye Şükran, "Anadolu Kadınları Ne Diyorlar?" no.42, May 15, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 424-5.

²²⁰ "Çalışmak Hakkımızdır," no.19, April 22, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 187.

²²¹ Belkıs Ferit, "Mâni-i Terrakimiz Nedir?" no.24, April 27, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 247-248.

²²² Pakize Nihat, "Hukukumuz" no.26, April 29, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 268.

²²³ Muhterem Fahri, "El Aman," no.10, April 13, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 97-98. Perihan Arif from Sarıgözel was also critical of the phrase "women have long hair and short brain." She suggested that some women believed in this saying. See Perihan Arif, "Azim ve Sebat," no.34, May 7, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 348.

²²⁴ Şaziment, "Kadınlığımızın Mevki-i İhtimaisi," no.23, April 26, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1-50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 235-6.

and also dismissing the fact that women could contribute to the world equally in many ways.²²⁵ “For men, womanhood is like a fruit, only seen as entertainment by them,” the board of *Kadınlar Dünyası* complained. They were disappointed that “our [their] laws have no validity, nor our [their] lives are important.” Men needed to value different qualities in women and recognize women in both social and family life.²²⁶

According to Seniha Fuat from Göztepe, Ottoman women had no financial power to stand on their own feet, being entirely dependent on their husbands. Envyng European women, she pointed out that European women’s participation in the workforce contributed to the development and welfare of their nations.²²⁷ As can be seen in articles from *Kadınlar Dünyası*, nationalism also played a role in supporting the idea of women entering the workforce,²²⁸ working meant producing domestic goods and advancing the nation on the world stage.²²⁹ Women had a role to play and a mission not only to raise children but also in production that would contribute to the nation. Seniha Fuat from Göztepe pitied women’s education in Turkey when compared to that in European countries by saying “In our country education of women is not given importance, once she read and write just a little bit, which is considered as enough, none of industrial education is taught to them.” In the Ottoman State, she added that mothers needed to learn national issues so that

²²⁵ Feriha İclal, “Kadınlıkta İrfan,” no.23, April 26, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 237.

²²⁶ Kadınlar Dünyası, “Lüzum-ı İttihad Teşrik-i Mesai,” no.29, May 2, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 292.

²²⁷ Seniha Fuat, “Maarif,” no.28, May 1, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 290.

²²⁸ Nevbahar, “Terakide Şahsiyat ile Uğraşmak Olmaz,” no.33, May 6, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 336.

²²⁹ C. H. “Milli Moda,” and Nihat “Hukukumuz,” no.26, April 29, 1329 [1913], pp.270–1, 268, Maizer Cavit, “İstihlâk-i Dahili Kadınlar Cemiyet-i Hayriyesine,” no.26, April 29, 1329 [1913], pp.269–70, Emine Seher Ali, “Tedkik,” no.12, April 15, 1329 [1913], in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 115–6.

they could instill those teachings to their daughters. Moreover, cooking and sewing were among the duties of mothers to teach their daughters.²³⁰ Motherhood was thus associated with nationalism, childrearing, and housework.²³¹

4.4. Women in the late Ottoman State and Early Republican Turkey

In the beginning of the twentieth century, women could work as teachers, but their number was low when compared to men. Before 1914, women could not work as civil servants.²³² The right to have more educational opportunities, the right to join the workforce and to take an active role in the associations were among the subjects women advocated in the Second Constitutional period. Women's efforts for improving their status in the public and private sphere can clearly be seen in their publications.²³³ Nationalism also played a role in supporting the idea of Muslim women entering the workforce; working meant producing domestic goods and advancing the country on the world stage.²³⁴ Since the Ottoman economy's lifeblood had been agriculture, with industry only a minor concern, choosing a job

²³⁰ Seniha Fuat, "Maarif," no.28, May 1, 1329 [1913] in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)*, 290.

²³¹ In the United States, in 1919, Crystal Eastman claimed that "many feminists are socialists." She was journalist and labor lawyer and defended granting women the right to vote. Without confronting any legal and social obstacles, women should be able to follow a profession they like and ensure their economic freedom, she defended. Also she recommended that at a young age, daughters and boys should be taught not discriminate any jobs and house chores based on sex. She wrote: "It must be womanly as well as manly to earn your living, to stand on your feet. And it must be manly as well as womanly to know how to cook and sew and clean and take care of yourself in the ordinary exigencies of life." Crystal Eastman, "Now We Can Begin," 1919, in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, eds., Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 130–13.

²³² Yıldırım, *Osmanlı'da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler*, 91–3.

²³³ Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Istanbul: Metis, 1994).

²³⁴ Nevbahar, "Terakide Şahsiyat ile Uğraşmak Olmaz," no.33, May 6 1329 [1913], C. H., "Milli Moda," and Nihat, "Hukukumuz," no.26, April 29, 1329 in *Kadınlar Dünyası 1–50. Sayılar (Yeni Harflerle)* (Istanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 262–336.

in the industrial sector was difficult for men but especially so for women. In WWI, although the non-Muslim male population decreased as a consequence of deportations, the ones exempted from the conscription kept their industrial jobs, in parallel narrowing down the scale of Muslim women's entering into such jobs.²³⁵ Nevertheless, the number of women in the textile and munition sectors was growing.²³⁶ While WWI enabled women to work as civil servants like post office clerks for the first time, the post-war period saw a high number of women yielding their positions to men.²³⁷ Because of Istanbul's cosmopolitan nature, there are many layers of interaction which should be taken into consideration. Although the high inflation rate and poverty reduced the purchasing power of the people,²³⁸ Istanbul still became a shelter for refugees such as Muslim migrants from the Balkans, Armenians and Greeks because of deportations in some cities of Anatolia, and Russians due to Bolshevism, thus experiencing an increase in its population. White Russian women worked in cafes, restaurants, and bars, expanding the working spaces available to women.²³⁹ A study in which the YWCA collaborated revealed that "Jewish women entered stores as employees before women of other nationalities. There was long a prejudice among Greek women against such work, in which finally were forced to engage. Turkish women entered last, when men were called away for army services [...]." ²⁴⁰ Short after the Armistice of Mudros,

²³⁵ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Savaş Yılları ve Çalışan Kadınlar: Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyeti (1916–1923)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015), 59.

²³⁶ Elif Mahir Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 120–1.

²³⁷ Yıldırım, *Osmanlı'da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler*, 90–3.

²³⁸ E. Dodge Huntington, "In Constantinople during the War" [reprinted from *Women's International Quarterly*] (1919), *The Muslim World*, 10: 36–41.

²³⁹ Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Yeni Hayat: İnkılap ve Travma 1908-1928* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2017), 75–6.

²⁴⁰ L. S. Moore, "Some phases of Industrial Life," in *Constantinople To-Day; or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople; a Study in Oriental Social Life*, ed. C. R. Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 188.

the occupation of Istanbul by Italian, French and British allied troops, along with the presence of American naval personnel, increased the multicultural and international character of the city. The women's movement, in parallel, operated in relation to protection of the motherland and preparation for the war against imperial forces. By speaking against the occupying forces in rallies and protests in Istanbul, women's resistant political identity came to the fore. Additionally, groups of patriotic and nationalistic women's associations were founded in some cities of Anatolia.²⁴¹ Joining the national struggle organized by Mustafa Kemal, women carried ammunition to men, provided food and clothing aid, and in some cases even entered into armed conflicts directly.²⁴²

When the new Republic was established, women were granted rights such as compulsory elementary education in 1924, equal rights to both sexes in divorce and banning polygamy in 1926, voting in municipal elections in 1930, and voting in national elections and the right to be elected in 1934. In the new Republic, the employment of women and the participation of women in social life was encouraged in patriarchal codes. Zehra Arat has stated that the articles of the new code of 1926 which was adapted from the Swiss code presented that males were the breadwinners of the family (Article 152/ II), and also decision-makers of the family in terms of choosing in which place to live (Article 152/II), and the wife needed to have the consent of her husband when she decided to work (Article 159/II) and the house tasks were assigned to the wife (Article 153//II). Depending on the husband financially and socially, Arat has said that "the society henceforth has not treated

²⁴¹ Deniz Kandiyoti, "End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey," in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 37–43.

²⁴² Şefika Kurnaz, *Cumhuriyet Öncesinde Türk Kadını (1839–1923)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Aile Araştırma Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 1991), 119–122.

“work” as a right of women, or as a means for fulfilling her individual needs.”²⁴³ Metinsoy referencing Deniz Kandiyoti, emphasized that although Turkish reforms granted rights to women, the patriarchy was only partially challenged in the Early Republican period, “not liberating them [women] truly.”²⁴⁴ Durakbaşı stated that in the same period, “professional identity,” which was shaped by being “sexually modest” and obeying (preserving) the moral codes, gained importance in the type of women Atatürk projected; if these qualities were not present, women would lose respect in the patriarchal society.²⁴⁵ Arat has emphasized that “the development of female consciousness and female identity” were not on the agenda of Atatürk. He was more interested in developing educated mothers and wives, who would be the architects of the future by raising the next generation for the wellbeing of the nation. Atatürk said in one of his speeches: “The most important duty of woman is motherhood. The importance of this duty is better understood, if one considers that the earliest education takes place on one’s mother’s lap. Our nation had decided to be a strong nation.” In another speech, Atatürk required mothers to be educated since this would affect the child they raise: “If they [women] really want to be the mothers of this nation, this is the way.” Arat has argued that Atatürk’s politics were far away from being feminist. “The new modern woman” was expected to lift the veil for the sake of having a “civilized nation” but she should still not be extreme in her choices of clothing and behavior. Maintaining chastity and codes of honor were

²⁴³ Zehra F. Arat, “Turkish Women and The Republican Reconstruction of Tradition,” in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, eds. Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 63–4.

²⁴⁴ Elif Mahir Metinsoy, “Preface,” in *Türk Kadını 1918/1919 (Yeni Harflerle)*, prep. by Birsen Talay Keşoğlu and Mustafa Keşoğlu (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2010), xxii.

²⁴⁵ Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Halide Edip: Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2000), 20–30.

equally important.²⁴⁶ Women thus became the symbolic representatives of Westernization and breaking with the “old” Ottoman state in the new Republic. Kandiyoti observed that in the late Ottoman State, women’s movement operated in relation to protection of the fatherland and preparation for the war. In the inner dynamics, women represented a unity of Ottoman moral and cultural values for the traditional political actors. Adding that “[...] the vagaries of successive legislative exercises with respect to personal status and the family attest to the difficulties of reformative action in this domain until Ataturk severed the gordian knot of Shariah,” Kandiyoti remarked that women would be a part of nation-making project of Kemalist revolution which separated of religion and the state in institutions, which had emphasis on Westernization, Enlightenment values as well “republican concept of citizenship.”²⁴⁷

4.5. Westernization

Westernization also brought contents and discontents in the new Republic between young and old generation. Girls were exposed to western style of life through print and visual culture. A “new woman” in modern life was emerging in the public sphere, challenging old norms with their fashion, make-up, hairstyle and social habits, influenced by print and visual culture, creating tension with the older generation. In the public sphere, another concept which challenged the old norms

²⁴⁶ Zehra F. Arat, “Turkish Women and The Republican Reconstruction of Tradition,” in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, eds. Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 58–63.

²⁴⁷ Deniz Kandiyoti, “End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey,” in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 42–3.

was the transformation of the *harem and selamlık*, which separated men and women in the private sphere and had been part of Ottoman culture. It was no longer legally supported by the government; in 1923, Atatürk also removed the veil in transportation which separated men and women. Women thus penetrated modern life, no longer being separated from men in the public sphere.²⁴⁸

Westernization was identified with progress and modernization in Early Republican Turkey.²⁴⁹ What marked western modernity was the significant changes brought with industrialization and the opposing interest of different classes, pointed out by Göle. However, Turkish modernization differed from western modernity because Turkish modernization was shaped by both “the Westernism and secularism of reformist elites.” Reformists had a broader aim when they secularized and westernized the women because they were a tool they were using to secularize the nation as a whole from its former Islamic practices.²⁵⁰

How did the YWCA understand Westernization in Turkey? The YWCA secretary Lowry saw the West as a role model for Turkey—but she realized that to some degree Turkey adopted western life in its own way, by taking only the features it wanted to adapt from the West.²⁵¹ Turkey’s Westernization was complex and had many unique elements according to the YWCA staff. They pointed out that the roots of Westernization went back to the end of the eighteenth century in the Ottoman State. After losing the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–74 and signing the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji, the Ottoman State realized that significant reforms were

²⁴⁸ Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Yeni Hayat: İnkılap ve Travma 1908–1928* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2017), 115–6; Nermin Abadan-Unat, *Women in Turkish Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 12–3.

²⁴⁹ Zehra F. Arat, “Turkish Women and The Republican Reconstruction of Tradition,” 58.

²⁵⁰ Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 11.

²⁵¹ “Genevieve Lowry, Annual Report, Confidential, Part II, from September 1929–September 1930,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

needed to gain back its power. The beginning of the nineteenth century signified the Westernization of the army in the Ottoman Empire. One aspect of it was new techniques and teachers being imported into the Ottoman State from Europe to train students. The spread of Western educational practices contributed to an increase in the number of people reading Western plays, novels, poetry and philosophy. In the 1850s, students in the military also interacted with Western culture by going abroad to countries such as France. Influenced by the ideals of equality and justice, they demanded reforms to be made in the government with an aim of changing the Constitution. They not only published their own journals abroad, but also attempted to get other students to join their movements. Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) tried to subdue the voices of those new groups by implementing oppressive measures. However, his actions were futile. His autocratic regime would not be successful in preventing these ideas from spreading in the Ottoman State.²⁵²

Ruth Woodsmall noted that the factors contributing to the liberation of women were “the increasing number of educated Turkish women, the growing contact of Turkey with the West, the economic pressure of the World War and high tide of success of the Nationalists with their aggressive policy of Westernization.” She added that the Turkish Civil Code was not the beginning of the liberation of women although it granted legal rights to women. However, she also noted that geographical differences should be taken into consideration when evaluating these factors as she added that “In Constantinople women are [were] taking advantage of their new privileges; in the Interior very few women have any conception of a change in their position.” Thus, the difference between the interior and

²⁵² “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey, November, 1929-June, 1930,” 1–3, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

Constantinople, different racial and religious backgrounds made the social transformation of Turkey more complex.²⁵³

In the new Republic, the YWCA staff was concerned that the revolution was imposed from above.²⁵⁴ The YWCA staff saw this issue as creating challenges in the society because, in the transition from the old regime to the new regime, everyone was quite confused regarding how to arrange their lives and their relationships. The question that occupied the minds of people living in Turkey was how modern Western culture would be adapted to Turkish culture.²⁵⁵ In the opinion of the YWCA staff, Westernization was limited in Turkey because it did not reach all segments of the society; and this aspect of it made the issue more complex. They concluded that westernization had failed to reach the Anatolian peasants who had fought the war for Independence.²⁵⁶ The YWCA staff stressed that peasants did not grasp Westernization thoroughly because they were uneducated and were not involved. Bureaucrats were in favor of the dissemination of Western ideas and culture but still wanted to keep these influences under their control. The YWCA report stated, though without indicating their names, that there were also reactionary Islamist groups who associated Western ideas with Christianity.

²⁵³ Ruth Woodsmall, "Social Conditions in Turkey," October, 1926, p.2–3, microfilm reel 64, YWCA-SSC. Another title she added for this report was "Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey." While I am referencing the report, I will reference to the former title.

²⁵⁴ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul Turkey," November 1929-June 1930," p.23, Box 329, International Work Folder 7. According to Lowry, two opposed groups existed among women regarding the issue of voting. The first group's claim which was characterized by traditional values and characteristics, was that they did not need to "fight for their right to vote" because "it was graciously given to them by the men of the country. The second group believed that the fact that their right to vote was given to them by men was disappointing and offensive— because it placed men in a superior position compared to women, by making men decision makers with regard to women's rights. See "Genevieve Lowry, Annual Report, Confidential, Part III, from September 1929 -September 1930," p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁵⁵ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul Turkey, November 1929-June 1930," p.23, Box 329, International Work Folder 7.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p.23.

Therefore, these Islamists were against a Western lifestyle.²⁵⁷ The veil was not prohibited by the state. However, according to Lowry, wearing the veil made someone a “relic” of a world which modern Turkey was no longer a part of.²⁵⁸ There were cases in the Interior where these old codes were challenged by the YWCA staff. The YWCA Adana secretary Blaisdell was critical of some aspects of the local culture, especially of the rigid marriage customs every bride in Adana had to go through. Blaisdell claimed that people expected the bride to act in a submissive and obedient way, such as speaking in a lower tone of voice, as such characteristics were valued and appreciated by the people. A bride was expected to “not to raise her eyes from her help when she was seated before the guests in her mother’s home” as an act of obedience. Other customs included the bride having to act unhappy while leaving her father’s house because this would demonstrate loyalty, and her kissing of the important and elderly guests’ hands, specifically her mother-in-law’s –who “would control her life.”²⁵⁹ Westernization had failed to change these customs. Blaisdell reflected on the limited power and independence a young woman had upon marriage as she mentioned a bride usually had to live in the house of the groom’s parents where she was tasked with handling household chores. A bride’s possessions were also under the control of her mother-in-law. In another case, Givan Effendi (Sir), who had a Greek Parentage, had received a good education and worked in the congregation, desired a wedding that did not put the bride to go through all these difficult processes in the name of customs and traditions. He then requested Dorothea’s mother to organize an American wedding for him and the orphan girl from Izmir he was planning to marry. Dorothea

²⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.1–3.

²⁵⁸ Genevieve Lowry, “Minarets,” [undated], p.5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁵⁹ Blaisdell, *Missionary Daughter: Witness to the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 24–6.

Blaisdell stressed that the man cared for the girl's happiness and they eventually married in Blaisdell's home in "true American fashion" which afforded more freedom and advantages for the bride. Not only did the bride and the groom have the freedom to leave before their wedding guests but the relationship and control over the bride by the mother-in-law was kept to a minimum.²⁶⁰

The YWCA's westernization concerns could also be understood at the same time by reading G. Howland Shaw, who was affiliated with the US Embassy and studied Turkish families with regard to how they had been affected by the Westernization process. According to Shaw, different family types and relations in Turkey varied from one geographical region to another. A peasant family from Eskişehir adopted different norms in comparison to a merchant's family in Istanbul.

Contrast is also to the fore in any investigation of Turkish family life. The present-day apartment home of the descendants of the ruling class of the Ottoman Empire, chiefly to be found in Istanbul, is one thing; what for want of a better term can be called the middle-class home of the small merchant of Istanbul or Izmir is something else; and the peasant home of Anatolia is the setting for a still third type of family life, differing in important respects from the two.²⁶¹

He divided 44 families into three groups for that reason. In Group A, you could see families from the Pera District, fluent in multiple languages and educated abroad. They belonged to "the former governing class of the Ottoman Empire." They decorated their houses in the modern style. Ancestors of this group had experienced the Westernization of the Ottoman State in the nineteenth century and had thus adopted these changes into their lives in an earlier phase. The number of people

²⁶⁰ Blaisdell, *Missionary Daughter: Witness to the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 24–6.

²⁶¹ G. Howland Shaw, *US Diplomatic Documents on Turkey III: Family life in the Turkish Republic of the 1930's*, [1933], presented and annotated by Rifat N. Bali, (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2007), 18.

who were in Group A was decreasing. He guessed that the number of people in Group A was around 8,000. They were mostly living in Istanbul though a few lived in Ankara. He described the people in other group in these words: "Group B, if the idea of class were applicable in Turkey, would be called the middle-class." In his categorization, in this group, there were "petty Government officials and army officers of the lower ranks." According to Shaw, "this group has felt the full impact of the recently accelerated Westernization, and it is the group in which the greatest number of conflicts and the more serious conflicts are to be found," as parents in this group were more traditional and conservative in their beliefs and life-styles. Their circle was limited and they were not in much contact with group A. They had not studied abroad, and they had not interacted with foreign cultures. They lacked knowledge of speaking other languages. Their children interacted with modern life by going to public places such as schools, cinemas, theatres and the like and thus encountered modern life through these agencies by being exposed to "intensive Westernization." He guessed that the number of people in this group was nearly a million and a half. In the last group, Group C, there were the peasants of Anatolia, who belonged to the agriculture sector, at least ten million out of thirteen million population. In this group "Westernization has only just begun to penetrate." They were "representing about 80% of the population, has as yet scarcely been touched by Westernization."²⁶² Similar to Shaw's observation, Ruth Woodsmall, the YWCA's secretary, observed that the social and economic freedom of women did not penetrate into the towns of the interior. Besides, in Anatolian villages, not only one could see still examples of polygamy although it was banned at the time but

²⁶² G. Howland Shaw, *US Diplomatic Documents on Turkey III: Family life in the Turkish Republic of the 1930's*, [1933], 18.

also women, having less social freedom, were tied to their old traditions such as their veils and head-coverings, she noted.²⁶³

The new capital of Turkey, Ankara, was an exception in the Interior, representing “an extreme contrast between the old conservative Oriental town and the new (for Turkey) ultramodern tendency.” She described a ball –organized by the state to celebrate the anniversary of the Declaration of the Republic—as an example having all the modern and European characteristics which would be a role model to the Interior. She wrote: “The influence of Angora in modernizing the Interior will be greater than Constantinople since Angora is closely in contact with all parts of the Interior and bears the stamp of being 100% Turkish.” Non-Muslim women in the Interior, specifically in the villages, were influenced by this slow progress. Excepting polygamy, she said that they followed a similar lifestyle to Muslim women by wearing a veil and accepting their husbands as superior in position. In addition to this, different sects experienced the Westernization at a different speed because “Protestant communities were always said to be more free than Orthodox since more in contact with Western influence. But Christians as a whole were conservative and did not assume an advanced social position.” They were not dominant in politics as they were a minority and thus went along with what majority did, in her judgment. In this respect, the new Republic and the new civil code which changed the lives of Muslim women also transformed the lives of non-Muslim women.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Ruth Woodsmall, “Social Conditions in Turkey,” October, 1926, p.3–5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁶⁴ Ruth Woodsmall, “Social Conditions in Turkey,” October, 1926, p.3–6, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

Genevieve Lowry, who was involved in the YWCA work, commented that western trends brought secularism in education: “no religion, even Mohammedism can be taught in the schools.” Lowry believed that modern Turkish youth were generally “agnostic.” They were in conflict with the older generation, who thought that youth lacked the comprehension of ethics and moral values.²⁶⁵

Western trends brought both contentment and discontent in the new Republican State. The YWCA followed the “clash between the old and new” not only from the Turkish magazines and newspapers but also through eyewitness accounts of those conflicts. “A conservative and fearful mother,” who participated in the discussion session, shared her concerns with the YWCA. She was against her daughter’s reading any material or book related to “the new ideas” that could change her daughter in a way that she did not approve of. An ordinary scene for the YWCA secretaries was to witness some of the older women in charshafs (veils) bringing their daughters to the parties the YWCA threw. One of those mothers complained that she had trouble keeping her daughter at home. She preferred her daughter to go to the YWCA rather than any other place, because the YWCA was a safe space where she could have entertainment and physical activities at the same time.²⁶⁶

The YWCA secretaries in many different primary sources used the word “prepare” often while they were defining their mission in Turkey. They believed that girls needed to adapt to the new life in Turkey, which was constantly being transformed. According to secretaries, it could be challenging for the girls, without the help of secretaries, to adjust to the new changing standards. The YWCA

²⁶⁵ Genevieve Lowry, “Minarets,” undated, p.6, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁶⁶ “Genevieve Lowry, General Secretary Service Centers, Annual Report, Confidential, Part III, From September 1929- Sept. 1930,” p.14, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

justified their help to girls as preparing them for the challenges this new life would bring.²⁶⁷

4.6. Conclusion

In the early 1910s the discussion of women's social and educational issues by women gained momentum in Istanbul. Familial, social and educational structure did not encourage women to think about their career planning to a great extent in the early twentieth century. Nationalism became one of the dominant factors which led a higher number of women willing to join the workforce, and desire access to education. World War I created a break in the number of women entering the field of work. Kemalist reforms encouraged women to join working life in patriarchal and nationalist codes, assigning them the mission to carry the nation to an advanced level among other countries. Turkish westernization, highlighting generational conflicts, was experienced differently based on socio-economic status and geographical factors. The dynamics surrounding women in the 1910s and 1920s were more built on patriarchal and traditional structures in Istanbul. The state came up with many legal accomplishments for women in the new Republic, however,

²⁶⁷ "Report of Miss Dorothy E. Brown, April-June 1926, Pera Service Center, Istanbul," p.4 microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. In the booklet, prepared by the YWCA Turkey, under the title of "Membership Leaflets," regarding the role of the association in Turkey, again "unpreparedness of Turkish women" for the modern world was mentioned. The YWCA promoted the idea that they played a key role in making young women ready for the New Regime. "In this movement of progress for the women of Turkey, the Young Women's Christian association is playing a vital role. As a woman's organization representing Christian ideals, it is peculiarly fitted to bridge the gap for the Turkish women between the unpreparedness of the present and their opportunity for the future." Membership leaflets, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

how those reforms actually challenged the patriarchal social order and gender codes were another question.



CHAPTER V

FROM STAY-AT-HOME WOMEN TO CAREER-MINDED WOMEN: THE ISTANBUL YWCA

By examining the labor policies of the Young Women's Christian Association in Istanbul from 1919 to 1930, this chapter argues that the YWCA's mainly American staff were critical of women who did not have career goals and who wanted to stay at home—because their idea of being “an individual” meant working, or at least having a career goal. They contributed to encouraging young women to develop individuality and exercise self-expression by guiding them to be independent career-oriented women. By establishing an Employment Bureau, offering business training, and organizing talks on working women, the YWCA encouraged young women to gain their financial independence and pushed them towards making active decisions about their careers, detaching them from parental and societal authority. For the YWCA's American staff, working for oneself and focusing on one's own career became the key to taking control of one's life and pursuing one's own happiness and potential, all of which were part of attaining a sense of individuality. This prioritizing having a career over marriage and motherhood contributed to feminist activism in both the late Ottoman State and Early

Republican Turkey at the same time. The YWCA praised women who rose in their profession despite all the difficulties and societal pressures they experienced. This chapter also claims that the YWCA, by encouraging women to plan their lives and to set career goals, indirectly promoted the liberation of women from their family ties and marriage responsibilities and encouraged them to put their individual needs first. The YWCA's mainly American staff at the Istanbul centers promoted the value of a professional identity for women beyond the bounds of nationalistic duty or motherhood, which contrasted with the late Ottoman state's and Early Republican Turkey's ideologies while simultaneously challenging gender roles and patriarchal codes. The Committee of Union and Progress [CUP], in charge of the government in 1913, supported women entering the paid workforce on a short-term basis, whilst directing women towards an ultimate goal of marriage. In the Early Republican period, women's working rights legally were inferior compared to men since women were not assigned legally as breadwinners of the family, needed husband's permission to work and still they had to maintain their primary roles as wives and mothers. Atatürk encouraged women to have jobs, careers, and participate in charitable work projects, but at the same time he expected them to be educated mothers and wives because mothers had the responsibility to raise the next generation. For Atatürk, motherhood and nationalism were concepts inextricably linked with each other. In one of his speeches, he stated that women had a vital mission due to their maternal roles because a nation's power depended on mothers passing educational skills on to their children.²⁶⁸ By contrast, the Istanbul YWCA

²⁶⁸ Zehra F. Arat, "Turkish Women and The Republican Reconstruction of Tradition," in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, eds. Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 60–1.

promoted having a profession without emphasizing motherhood and marriage, thus contrasting with the late Ottoman state's and Early Republican Turkey's ideologies—while simultaneously challenging traditional and patriarchal codes.

5.1. Stay-at-home Women

Outside Istanbul, in Merzifon, Adana, Sivas and Izmir, the YWCA interacted with female factory workers in the late Ottoman state. Conditions in Istanbul were markedly different and posed new challenges for the YWCA. There, interacting with a high number of young women based largely in the home, the organization had to develop strategies actively to encourage young women to pursue paid work opportunities.

In a city which was hard hit by the financial and economic crisis of 1919,²⁶⁹ the YWCA defined “one of the first tasks” as conducting research on the employment of young women in Istanbul. Margaret B. White, the General Secretary of the Istanbul YWCA, “estimated” that in January 1919, the number of women living in the city who worked at offices was 299, the number of factory female workers was 700, the number of women who worked in the telephone sector

²⁶⁹ The war and the poor conditions it brought upon people not only destroyed the trade to the point of barely existing but also decreased the purchasing power of the local people, further hampering their financial sources. Elizabeth Dodge Huntington, a YWCA volunteer in Turkey, who was involved in Robert College and American College for Girls, blamed the state as they were deaf to the problems of ignored orphans and widows who suffered the most from the conditions mentioned above, by not creating any special policies for them. Huntington revealed that “Djavid Bey, Minister of Finance, said publicly in 1918 that the cost of living had increased over nineteen hundred per cent during the War.” She continued that the poor could only buy low quality bread in small amounts. She described people who had had adequate financial sources before the war who now begged for bread. See E. Dodge Huntington, “In Constantinople during the War,” [reprinted from *Women's International Quarterly*] (1919), *The Muslim World*, 10: 36–41.

was 200 and the number of young women worked at shops, stores, and the like were 500, a total of only 1700.²⁷⁰ The population of the city was estimated to be 1,104,984.²⁷¹ In another study, the YWCA concluded that the number of women who worked in factories in Istanbul was very low. The proportion of women staying at home as well as types of paid employment taken up by young women drew the attention of the YWCA staff:

The facts showed that there were practically no factories in the city, where women were employed except a large tobacco company, with a very low class of women employees, but many girls were at work in the tiny eastern shops for sewing, weaving, rug mending, etc., also many young women were to be found in shops, stores, banks, business and government offices. The conclusions also revealed that the Turkish young women had for the first time gone into employment outside the home and it was now considered proper for any young woman to leave the shelter of her home to go into an office position. Here then was a real field of service for the YWCA with these employed women; besides the whole large number of girls accustomed to staying at home after a short schooling of about six years with almost nothing to do but learn a bit of French, music, embroidery, and painting; and all the younger school girl group.²⁷²

In November 1920, 870 YWCA members were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their occupations. According to the survey, 589 of them did not relate themselves with any jobs and categorized themselves “at home” whereas the

²⁷⁰ Margaret White, letter to Miss Lyon, April 13, 1919, Constantinople, p.1 microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. White wrote, the “nationality of [the] girls- Greek, Jew and Armenian. It is of peculiar interest that Mohammedan girls have begun to be employed in public places only since the war.” She added that Muslim women had started to work in the tobacco factory, in a small number of stores and candy stores, and in the Turkish Post office. In the stores, young women worked at least 10 hours a day while they worked only 9 hours a day in the tobacco factories. White further noted that “wages are low. In stores 5 to 7 liras a month. Young apprentices (14 or 15) are taken in with no wage” or sometimes were paid a pittance. Women who worked in factories were paid better when compared to those in the stores. In 1921, even the ones who worked received low wages. See Vesper Bell, “Near East: Report on Finance, Economic and Business Conditions,” July 1921, pp.1–2, microfilm reel 64, YWCA-SSC.

²⁷¹ Fred Field Goodsell, “Historical Setting,” in *Constantinople To-Day; or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople; a Study in Oriental Social Life*, ed. C. R. Johnson, (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 17–20.

²⁷² M. B. White, “Report of the Constantinople YWCA 1919 to 1924,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

number of clerks and saleswomen was 121, the number of doctors and nurses was 10, teachers 54, students 23, and the number of dressmakers were 17. Job categories in which the numbers were fewer than 10 included hairdressers and manicurists, cooks, dentists, governesses, house keepers, photographers, painters, stenographers, social workers, and telephone operators.²⁷³

Between January and November 1921, the number of members who stayed at home was 75 percent; only 20 percent of the members worked in offices, banks, shops and schools.²⁷⁴ In January 1922, in Pera Center alone, out of 886 women, the number of women who stayed at home was 685 out of 886. The number of saleswomen was 62 whereas the number of students was 49, teachers 38 with the rest pursuing other occupations.²⁷⁵ On March 7, 1922, out of 206 at the Stamboul Center, stay at home women numbered 118 whereas the number of students was 41, the number of teachers was 10, the number of secretaries was eight, the number of

²⁷³ "Membership Report, Report of November 1920," microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁷⁴ [White], "Report of Miss Margaret B. White, General Secretary, to Constantinople Y.W.C.A. Service Center, From January thru' November 1921," p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. In 1921, in the Stamboul Service Center (which excludes the Pera Center), out of 165 members, there were 72 Turks, 37 Armenians, 32 Greeks. The rest included nationalities from America, Russia, Tartar, Hebrew, Albania. Out of 165 members, there were 80 Muslims, 32 Orthodox Christians, 22 Protestants, 27 Gregorians, 4 Catholics, 2 Jewish people. See Report of Miss Clara Bissell, Secretary of the Stamboul Service Center, May 1 to December 1, 1921, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. According to their nationalities, in November 1920, out of 870, there were 425 Armenians, 225 Greeks, 19 Turks, 94 Hebrews, and 29 Russians. In Istanbul, the lowest numbers of members were from Bulgaria, Belgium, Switzerland, Syria, Spain, Poland, Egypt and France. The number of Turkish women increased heavily once the Republic was set. The YWCA was popular among young women 16–19; their number was 400 out of 870 whereas the number of women who were 20–24 years old was 266, and 25–30 years old was 130, and age 31 and above was 71. See "Membership Report, Service Center Y.W.C.A., Constantinople, Report of November, November, 1920," microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. In 1930, the number of Turkish girls in Pera Center decreased while it was high in Stamboul Center. Out of 246, only 16 was Turkish. The YWCA Pera Center aimed to raise the number of Turkish girls in Pera Center. See "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.91–2, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

²⁷⁵ "Report of Y.W.C.A. Membership, January 3, 1922, Pera Babek [sic] Constantinople," microfilm reel 64, YWCA-SSC. The number of young women whose average was 12–16 years old was 11, 16–20 years old was 359, 20–30 years old was 319 and 30 and above was 97 out of 886 in Pera Center. According to nationality; 22 of them were American, 272 of them were Armenian, 319 of them were Greek, 22 of them were Turkish, 59 of them were Russian, 127 of them were Hebrew and the rest included nationalities such as Australian, Austrian, Belgian, Bulgarian, English, French, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Czechoslovakian, Serbian, Swiss, Syrian and Spanish.

typists was four, and the rest included young women who were nurses, secretaries, dentist apprentice's, dressmakers, telephone operators bookkeepers, treasurers, and the like.²⁷⁶ In January 1926, the YWCA's Pera Center reported that the number of its members who stayed at home was 565 while the number of teachers was 25, the number of students was 23, the number of clerks was 13 and the number of secretaries was seven. Only one doctor, one nurse, and one dressmaker attended the YWCA courses.²⁷⁷ In 1928, out of 183 members in the YWCA's Pera Center, the number of women who recorded the home as their occupation was 127, while students numbered 24, teachers 16, nurses 6, and business secretarial workers 7. In 1928, in the YWCA's Stamboul Service Center, out of 615 members, 526 of them categorized themselves at staying at home, and the rest included students, clerks, teachers, secretarial workers, maids, telephone operators, nurses, maids, governesses.²⁷⁸

In 1929, when filling in their course registration forms and answering the question related to jobs, a high number of young women filled in their occupation as "home" on the forms.²⁷⁹ The number of young women who stayed at home with whom the YWCA interacted was excessive, and this was a big concern for the secretaries. They strongly insisted that the progress of an individual was related

²⁷⁶ "Statistics for Stamboul Service Center Constantinople, March 7, 1922," microfilm reel 64, YWCA-SSC. Out of 206, in Stamboul Center, the majority of them were Turkish young women, numbering 97 while the number of Greeks were 34, the number of Armenians were 45, the number of Americans were 7 and the rest included nationalities such as Albanian, Arab, Belgian, Circassian, Georgian, Hebrew, Irish, Levantine, Syrian and Tartar. The number of women who were 13–16 years old was 57, while the number of women who were 16–20 years old were 77 whereas 20–30 years old numbered 59, and over 30 years old numbered 30.

²⁷⁷ "Report of January 1926, Pera Service Center," [Dorothy Brown's section], microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁷⁸ C. L. Bissell, "Constantinople Service Centers. January, 1928," pp.17–8, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁷⁹ "Constantinople Service Centers Rules and Regulations for Board of Directors Adopted (15 May 1929)," p.25, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

with being in touch with the outside world, being social and having access to education.²⁸⁰

Key YWCA personnel were critical of the trend for young women not taking up paid employment, and staying “at home.” Margaret B. White argued that being unemployed was not only non-productive but also caused young women to become internalized and dwell too much on themselves. For White, working meant a distraction from one’s personal problems in offering relaxation and escape.²⁸¹

She concluded that the number of women who attended the YWCA’s Service Center for activities was relatively low from 1919 to 1924 because women undertook responsibilities to their elders at home. She stressed that “Sunday is the day in this land when daughters are expected to stay at home to help their mothers receive, or to make calls or go to entertainments with their parents.”²⁸² While traditional family values and obedience were the basis of society and of foundational importance, young women’s responsibility to their families and their elders was constructed here as having a constraining effect on their social lives. A Greek mother’s three daughters Marianthi, Katina and Cornelia attended the YWCA’s Stamboul Service Center. When the mother lost her son, the secretary of the YWCA spoke to the family. “We hope the mother was persuaded that the Service Center needs the loyal support of the girls, and that the girls will be better off in active lives than sitting at home and mourning according to the Greek custom.” Contrary to their customs, girls continued to participate in the YWCA

²⁸⁰ M. B. White, “Service Center Y.W.C.A., Constantinople, Report of November 1920,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁸¹ M. B. White, “Report of Constantinople Service Center. April 1920,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁸² M. B. White, “Report of the Constantinople Y.W.C.A. 1919 to 1924,” p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

classes which they could certainly not have done without the help of the association.²⁸³

Another factor which contributed to young women's staying at home was the gendered bias within the education system in Turkey, according to the key YWCA personnel. The wealthy parents usually provided their daughters private education; this meant that girls "are kept at home and tutored in a strange mixture of languages, in piano lessons and painting."²⁸⁴ The low number of schools for girls, as well as their difficulty of access, represented another concern for the YWCA staff. A high number of Muslim and Christian girls lacked school education and even the ones who began schooling tended to quit once they reached the ages of 12–14 years in the late Ottoman State. White added that while Christian and Jewish families did not send their daughters to schools because they were not able to pay private school expenses, the government schools were also not an option, because "no Christian or Jew wishes his children to attend the government schools in Turkey."²⁸⁵ YWCA staff critiqued the quality of school education too: "the home training and whole education system of the country are against any self-expression in children or any development through play."²⁸⁶ In contrast, in their membership leaflets, the Istanbul YWCA promoted self-expression as a quality that girls and young women could gain by joining the organization, through first being led into spheres of community service and civic consciousness:

²⁸³ "Report of Miss Margaret B. White, General Secretary, Summer months," 1925, p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁸⁴ M. B. White, "Summary Report of Y.W.C.A. Constantinople; October 1st 1922 to July 1st 1923," p.7, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁸⁵ "Summary Report of Y.W.C.A. Constantinople; Miss B. White October 1st. 1922 to July 1st, 1923," p.7, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁸⁶ [White], "Report of Miss Margaret B. White, General Secretary, to Constantinople Y.W.C.A. Service Center, From January thru' November 1921," p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. In orphanages, these features could be seen as well. When children at orphanages were introduced to people, they did not smile, having "a stiff formal manner."

Young married women and girls of leisure who have never had in Turkey the outlets for self-expression so widely enjoyed by American women are being led into channels of community service through the Y.W.C.A., and a new civic consciousness is thus being created.²⁸⁷

In everyday life, young women's access to public space was under the supervision of their mothers, and the YWCA's work also had to negotiate these inter-generational politics. Especially in relation to girls, one of the problems which caught the attention of the Istanbul YWCA secretaries was the often overprotective attitudes of mothers in terms of not "trust[ing] their children to be on the streets alone," which was thought to make it challenging for girls to come to YWCA centers alone.²⁸⁸ The Girl Guide Group²⁸⁹ of the YWCA, which was organized for girls under 16 years old, held a required meeting every Saturday afternoon for activities; it was of concern for the parents because of the possibility that "the Girl Guide movement would take their girls out of the home." Miss Clarke, who worked for this movement in schools such as Gedik Pasha, had a hard time persuading the parents to allow their daughters to join.²⁹⁰ When young women married, they needed to get permission from their husbands to continue attending. Claire L. Bissell was surprised by a friend's overprotecting attitude over his wife, as he did not give her permission to pass from Beyazıt Square, believing that it was a dangerous place to walk through. Bissell wrote, "... those of us without husbands

²⁸⁷ "The Y.W.C.A. in Turkey," Membership Leaflets No. 39-40, undated, [History section], microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁸⁸ [White], "Report of Miss Margaret B. White, General Secretary, to Constantinople Y.W.C.A. Service Center, From January thru' November 1921," p.4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁸⁹ They wanted them to train them in being leaders of troops.

²⁹⁰ Margaret B. White, "Report of Constantinople Service Center, April 1920, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. In the eyes of the parents, according to White, the war already changed their daughters' behaviors and morals in a negative way. When the girls joined this group, some parents became anxious regarding what they saw as the "military side of the movement." Because of the "perverted conception of the whole movement," the YWCA personnel decided to work on this program.

negotiate it safely several times a day.” Bissell wondered sarcastically whether her friend’s wife had used the tram all the time to reach the YWCA center when she was taking language courses there.²⁹¹

In Istanbul in this period, parents had authority over their daughters, making it difficult for girls to make personal decisions. The YWCA secretaries regularly stressed that they were bothered by this concept of family authority which they found quite different, and certainly much stricter, than their American experiences. White pointed out that parents and teachers were the control mechanisms that limited young women’s ability to use judgement and the process of making choices:

Our clubs have been specifically useful to the general membership in developing individual girl, for the young women here are so accustomed to being brought up under the thumb of a mother, the strict authority of a father, and a stern teacher at school, that they lack in push and initiative very greatly.²⁹²

The mothers of young women were involved in most areas of decision-making regarding the lives of their daughters. Even most educated young women needed to obtain their mother’s consent and permission to work in the public space, as reported by the Istanbul YWCA:

Miss Clary has made inquiries and finds that while the mothers of most of the girls who have taken the course were willing that their daughters take typing, they still hesitate about allowing the girls to go into offices where men are employed. There is still enough of the old conservatism that carries over into this field.²⁹³

²⁹¹ Clara L. Bissell, “Annual Report, January 1, 1931, not for publication,” microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁹² M. B. White, “Report of the Constantinople Y.W.C.A. 1919 to 1924,” p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

²⁹³ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.71, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

YWCA staff were concerned too with the potential drive and ambition that young women had in relation to work. According to a collaborative research project conducted in 1920 by several American agencies including the YWCA, female store workers lacked ambition and had no career goals, as working in stores was simply seen as a temporary occupation for them. The organization interpreted this as the female employees lacking a notion of professionalism; their only goal in life was to get married and have families (as suggested by the evidence of their quitting work when on marriage). It was believed this attitude also affected the women's work performance in a negative way, as female store workers sold less than male store workers and often seemed more passive when engaging with customers.²⁹⁴

Marriage was perceived as a career in and of itself. The YWCA staff stressed that women in the new Republic actually had many options other than marriage. They could choose to obtain a bachelor's degree or to go to work. Within this context, Nebahat Karaorman, who taught at the Chapa Normal School and also worked for the YWCA, suggested that any woman could pursue a career regardless of whether they were married or single. It was possible for a married woman to pursue her studies at a university while also having a husband and children. There were other examples, such as a wife who worked with her famous doctor husband in the same clinic. Yet another example was a woman who was in charge of the direction of a magazine with her husband in the same publication house. Marriage would not thus be an excuse or a valid reason for not working, in the eyes of the YWCA staff.²⁹⁵ Karaorman was also not in favor of arranged marriages.

²⁹⁴ L. S. Moore, "Some phases of Industrial Life" in *Constantinople To-Day; or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople; a Study in Oriental Social Life*, ed. C. R. Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 183–8.

²⁹⁵ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.22, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC

Karaorman was additionally critical of the system in Turkey under which young women and men had to marry without even seeing each other before their wedding. The critique here was that parents were too focused on financial issues in deciding whom their sons and daughters were to marry, which prevented their daughters from making their own choices in respect of their personal lives. Even in the new Republic, old traditions and conservative expectations were relevant in some of the families of Istanbul which she observed. She said, “In spite of the doing away with our veils and “charshafs” and appearing in modern costumes, I can say that we do not have yet a real social life in Turkey. Many of the daughters of our middle class families still suffer under the chains of the old system marriage.”²⁹⁶

Directing women to work and finding jobs for them was one of the main goals of the Istanbul YWCA. One of the main centers of the YWCA was at the heart of Pera, a strategic location due to its close proximity to the Pera Palas Hotel, the American Embassy, business offices, banks, and lycées such as St. Benoit and Galatasaray, and the Tunnel which connected Galata with Pera. The YWCA staff stated that in Pera, “not only can the working girls be reached easily, but the type of the girl ‘who stays at home.’ ”²⁹⁷ The other YWCA center in Istanbul was located at Beyazıt, close to the universities, schools, cafeterias and the Bazaar. From that center, making contact with young working women was difficult, especially when compared to the Pera Center. However, the number of young Turkish women who

²⁹⁶ “Nebahat Hanem’s Answer: Certainly the New System!” *Milliyet*, March 26, 1930, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. Nebahat Hanım was very happy that child marriages had been abolished in the new Republic; one had to be at least 17 to get married by law. Arranged marriages did not encourage young women and men to mingle in social life. However, according to Nebahat Hanım, “the freedom to choose a husband or a wife gives home life a new meaning.”

²⁹⁷ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.32, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

attended the Stamboul Center of the YWCA was higher than the Pera Center which was more diverse in ethnicity.²⁹⁸

It is not as accessible to business girls as the Pera Center, for in Stamboul the business offices are mostly in the immediate neighborhood of the Bridge. But on the other hand, it can reach the type of quiet, timid Turkish girl who has never been 'drawn out of her shell' and has never had in the past such opportunities as a Service Center can give.²⁹⁹

5.2. The Employment Bureau

Multiple associations were interested in directing women towards positions as tailors and seamstresses in the late Ottoman State during the First World War. These included the Charitable Women's Organization for the Consumption of Local Products, the Ottoman Society for the Defense of Women's Rights, the Ottoman Turkish Club for the Protection of Women, and the Turkish Women Tailor's Cutting Home.³⁰⁰ The Red Crescent Embroidery Work-Room, which had operated since the Balkan War, was originally meant for Turkish war widows and Muslim refugees from Thrace. It gave jobs to "150 girls and women at the work-room and gave employment to 100 home-workers."³⁰¹ The Trinity Church Workroom offered employment based around Armenian handwork, while a Greek Employment scheme, the Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society was active in offering

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p.33.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p.32.

³⁰⁰ Kadir Yıldırım, *Osmanlı'da İşçiler (1870–1922): Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2013), 94–5.

³⁰¹ Ruth F. Woodsmall, "Survey of the Social Agencies in the Near East," August 1925, p.26. The title was strikethrough text "Survey of the Social Agencies in Turkey," Box 63, Folder 7–11, Series V. Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Reports, Interim, 1921–1928, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

employment in embroidery and laundry. Foreign employment schemes included the Near East Relief which sought employment for Turkish, Armenian, Greek and Russian refugees in stitching and needlework while the American Welfare Workshop and salesroom supported women in dressmaking, although the majority of applicants comprised of Russians. Among the Employment Bureaus in Istanbul, however, the Armenian Central Committee's employment office at the Trinity Church provided jobs only for Armenians. The Jewish War Sufferers established an employment Bureau; yet the employment they offered for women was quite limited and not a success. Using a League of Nations office, the International Labour Bureau supported an Employment Bureau for Russian refugees in the early 1920s, which the Russians managed. Operating only in a limited scale, originally this was the first Zemstvos Employment Bureau.³⁰² Enver Pasha founded the Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women to provide temporary work for war widows during WWI and operated until 1923; the aim was to preserve the honor and chastity of women by offering them short-term employment, while at the same time directing women towards marriage and quitting their jobs, allowing their husbands to be the breadwinners. While the range of jobs to which they directed women was quite various compared to other Employment Bureaus, creating a profession opportunity for women was not the main goal of the Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women. Board members, composed of male officials from the Committee of Union and Progress, were more concerned by the disintegration of family ties due to women's joining

³⁰² Ruth F. Woodsmall, "Survey of the Social Agencies in the Near East," August 1925, pp.25–32. The title was strikethrough text "Survey of the Social Agencies in Turkey," Box 63, Folder 7–11, Series V. Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Reports, Interim, 1921–1928, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

the workforce. Therefore, they came up with a law (an article), obliging women members to marry at a certain age.³⁰³

White stressed that the YWCA staff needed to conduct research regarding employment conditions of the city, because unskilled and unsheltered women would greatly benefit from the services of the YWCA. The young women seemed pessimistic about their futures, according to White. She had spent enough time with them to come to the conclusion that young women were quite “discouraged with life.” There were many reasons why young women were disheartened in general. In the war they had often witnessed the deaths of their family members, and many were dispossessed with nowhere to live - all of which contributed to feelings that “life does not seem worth living.” White also wanted to create job opportunities for young women discouraged by the war: “The employment situation, if our survey at all favorable – would help girls who have training but no homes, nor start to get on their feet again.”³⁰⁴ In 1919, the cost of living was very expensive in Istanbul; due to the war, the Turkish lira had lost its value and inflation was out of control. The highest wage one could earn working at housework was around 3 dollars while the price of a shoe was \$25 while a suit \$75. The war even increased the price of a loaf of bread, though after America started to supply flour to Turkey, the price of bread did drop for a while. In a country which was hit hard by the financial and economic crisis it was also important for the YWCA to find employment opportunities for young women.³⁰⁵ White, in her research related to employment, included this information in a letter she received from a committee member:

³⁰³ Karakışla, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Savaş Yılları ve Çalışan Kadınlar, (1916–1923)*, 75–200.

³⁰⁴ “Copy of letter from Margaret White to Miss Lyon, March 18, 1919,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁰⁵ “Copy of letter from Margaret White to Miss Lyon, March 18, 1919,” Constantinople, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

I expect some plan for industrial work among women and girls will be worked out. Thousands are out of employment and nothing is being done for them. It occurs to me, that an industrial secretary to take up the girl problem might work in most wonderfully in connection with the more general work of our relief committee.³⁰⁶

Ruth F. Woodsmall, who was in charge of the Near East divisions of the YWCA and Turkey was also critical of the approach of employment bureaus in the region:

Constantinople presents a very great lack of employment bureau on anything like a scientific plan with any idea of public service. The paid employment bureaus without exception are very hit-or-miss affairs, with no system of investigation or follow-up and no study of economic conditions and needs. They are purely commercial and for the most part have a very ordinary second-rate clientele, both of employer and employee.³⁰⁷

The YWCA staff, observing that “the thousands [were] out of employment” and the state also lacked policies for the employment of women,³⁰⁸ wanted to create job opportunities for women free of charge regardless of their nationality, ethnicity or religion.³⁰⁹ By 1919, the Istanbul YWCA was already engaged in employment work. White was personally interested in placing young women into jobs. In one month, she received 30 applications for positions. Ten of them were placed in jobs by the Istanbul YWCA whereas the rest were unemployed. Value judgments were made about the different commitment and capacities of the young women. In White’s words, women “who are not ready for hard work have not been helped.”³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ Margaret White, letter to Miss Lyon [Sarah S.Lyon], April 13, 1919, Constantinople, p.2 microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁰⁷ R. F. Woodsmall, “Survey of the Social Agencies in the Near East,” [The title was strikethrough text], August 1925, p. 29.

³⁰⁸ Elizabeth Dodge Huntington, “In Constantinople during the War,” *The Muslim World*, 10:36–41.

³⁰⁹ C. L. Bissell, “Constantinople Service Centers, January, 1928,” p.12, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³¹⁰ M. B. White, “Report for July 1919,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

The Istanbul YWCA officially set up an Employment Bureau in 1920. The service was provided for free; all nationalities could apply to different job positions.³¹¹ The secretaries painted a unified picture of the center, stressing that everyone was equal in the association, and that “race, money, [or] class” did not matter.³¹² Both the economic conditions affecting the employment rate and the applicants lack of training³¹³ were major concerns to the YWCA when they opened the Employment Bureau. Many women came to the YWCA with very high expectations. In White’s opinion, the employment registry which was set up by the YWCA offered young women an opportunity to find what they were looking for; it broadened their ideas about work and aimed to find suitable jobs for them. However, the YWCA secretaries were also critical of some applicants, whom they assumed would prefer “‘an easy place,’ with good wages and no work.”³¹⁴ Because of this, not all applications were included in the registry system as it would be “impossible” to have a job category that would fit these latter requirements.³¹⁵ Notably, there were a high number of Russian refugees³¹⁶ who applied to the

³¹¹ Ruth F. Woodsmall, “Survey of the Social Agencies in the Near East, August 1925,” p.29.

³¹² C. L. Bissell, “Constantinople Service Centers. January, 1928,” p.13, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. There were cases in which the YWCA not only found jobs but also provided shelter. After working as a servant in a Turkish family, an Armenian girl who had nowhere to stay and work after the war, was sheltered at the YWCA for a while. The YWCA arranged to find her a job and stay with an Armenian family later on. See Margaret B. White, “Report of Constantinople Service Center, April 1920,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³¹³ Woodsmall, “Survey of the Social Agencies in the Near East,” p.29.

³¹⁴ Margaret B. White, “Report of Constantinople Service Center, April 1920,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³¹⁵ M. B. White, “Report of Constantinople Service Center, April 1920,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³¹⁶ “The types of employment available for [Russian] women have been domestic service, few clerical positions, casual sewing and teaching, et cetera, and work in restaurants and [sic] cafes. Although there have been more openings in domestic service than [sic] in other lines, this form of employment has been reluctantly entered by Russian women for two reasons: First, they have had no training and have little knowledge of household work, and Secondly [sic], taking up domestic servicemeans [sic] separation from the rest of their families. The large majority of the Russian women refugees are married and are supporting dependents, many of them “carrying their husbands on their back” as the phrase goes. Domestic service pays very badly, offering a bare living which is not sufficient for family support. Incidentally the conditions of work in the homes of the people of the country, Greek and Turkish, are most unsatisfactory and unpleasant. Clerical works, stenography

employment registry of the YWCA to be interpreters, but in the opinion of the YWCA staff they were unrealistic dreamers, because no city could possibly need such high numbers of interpreters. The “impossible” demands and dreams of young women were at times problematic for the YWCA, despite the organization’s wider aim of encouraging women’s individual aspirations.³¹⁷

There were practical challenges too, including difficulties in communication within Istanbul. Without telephones, reaching an applicant quickly was sometimes difficult, and there were cases in which letters were not received by the applicants or arrived earlier or later than expected, which created confusion.³¹⁸

From the very beginning of our work came the need of finding employment for young women. In a city where the telephone is non-existent in the great majority of homes, where addresses are almost impossible to locate, where thousands of refugees are seeking work, the problem has been enormous. It has only been possible to register young women coming to us with references, and on the other hand to register the few positions available: chiefly domestic service or governess work. We have tried to fit the woman to the need as best we could. A young woman of the country who speaks several languages has assisted in the employment department and for a year and a half has handled it herself. We also try to find suitable positions for the girls who take our commercial training, although such positions are very scarce at present with the great depression in business.³¹⁹

and typing positions have been much in demand. Trained, experienced stenographers and typists with a knowledge of French or English, several of them have succeeded in securing positions and have steadily improved their condition, but there have been on the whole many more applicants than positions.” See “Russian Women Restaurant Workers’ Need for Hosted Constantinople,” March 10, 1922, microfilm reel 64 YWCA-SSC.

³¹⁶ M. B. White, “Report of Constantinople Service Center, April 1920,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³¹⁷ White, “Report of Constantinople Service Center, April 1920,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³¹⁸ White, “Report of Constantinople Service Center, April 1920,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³¹⁹ White, “Report of the Constantinople Y.W.C.A 1919 to 1924,” p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

The YWCA acted as a mediator between the employers and potential employees. Each month 15 positions were filled.³²⁰ White noted: “In figures I can report 106 for employment applications to May ist [sic] 1920; with 45 placed. Out of the 61 not placed, many never returned the second time, others did not fit the positions we could find.”³²¹ Yet, from October to December 1920, the number of women seeking positions increased steadily; the women who registered as looking for jobs was 26 in October, 34 in November, and 66 in December. Concurrently, the number of women who were placed in jobs was 8 in October, 19 in November and 36 in December.³²² The number of women who applied to the Bureau grew in number in the following year as well:

Employment for women of all nationalities—Armenians, Greeks, Russians—is carried on thru’ our Service center. This work has not been easy because there is almost no employment to be found except domestic service, governesses, nurses and office work to a small degree. Our totals from June to October 1921 are as follows: Registrations 799, Placements 237, Orders 427, Not Reported 63, No. Refused, 155.³²³

The number of young women the Employment Bureau served per month was listed as 255 on March 29, 1922.³²⁴ Considering that the number of recorded members in this year was 1092,³²⁵ at least one fifth of the recorded members interacted with the Employment Bureau and looked for jobs. Job orders the YWCA received included

³²⁰ Ibid., p.29.

³²¹ Margaret B. White, “Report of Constantinople Service Center, April 1920,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³²² [White], “Constantinople Service Center Y.W.C.A. Report of General Secretary Margaret B. White for the month of December, 1920,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³²³ “Report of Miss Margaret B. White, General Secretary, to Constantinople Y.W.C.A. Service Center, From January thru’ November 1921,” p.4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³²⁴ “Facts About the Y.W.C.A. In Constantinople,” March 29, 1922, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³²⁵ Brochure, “Young Womens [sic] Christian Association: ‘Facts About the Y.W.C.A. In Constantinople,’ ” March 29, 1922, Box 1, Folder 10, YWCA in the Near East, General, 1920–1964, n.d., Elizabeth Dodge Huntington Clarke Papers, YWCA-SSC.

cooks, office workers, teachers, nurses, maids and governesses.³²⁶ The YWCA secretaries, operating like state employed social workers, acted as a mediator between the employer and the employee by trying to place women into different jobs in a bureaucratic manner:

We feel much encouraged by the employment work because you will see by the following report that we have been able to increasingly help the women coming to us for positions. Our employment secretary has been spending more time than we first planned in being here to answer the requests and the applicants as they come, hence I feel that we should ask her to give her whole time for employment and the commercial course.³²⁷

The YWCA would often direct young women to employers with whom the organization had established networks. Whether they would get the job or not was not certain, and “much depends upon the individual case,” as Helen Kalaydjoglou, the YWCA secretary in the Commercial Department in Pera Center, noted. The ones who were incompetent or unskilled would naturally get rejected by employers. Job opportunities for the “well-qualified” woman included working in banks, offices, and big companies as typists and stenographers. Kalaydjoglou stated that “others are [were] mere filing clerks, and others hold the positions of cashiers in big shops.” The YWCA’s courses on business were thus beneficial for women who were willing to be employed, but there were also young women who attended courses without a particular opportunity in mind; Kalaydjoglou identified the latter as “the leisure type who will never go out to work.” Placing such young women into jobs was much more difficult, taking more time, because they lacked interest and enthusiasm. Many women who were placed by the YWCA to a job position

³²⁶ “Employment Bureau Report, Nov. 1–30, 1922,” microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³²⁷ “Constantinople Service Center Y.W.C.A. Report of General Secretary Margaret B. White for the month of December, 1920,” p.2.

would show their appreciation and thankfulness to the YWCA secretaries, stressing that “the special training” of the YWCA had helped them to find a job. A young woman who was placed in such jobs would usually earn, “60 Turkish pounds [sic] to 120.” A top stenographer could earn “120 Turkish pounds [sic].”³²⁸ According to the 1929–1930 report of the YWCA staff, a woman worker earned a good salary if she worked in the office jobs of the foreign embassies and foreign business companies. The salaries women got in foreign schools however were low compared to what they could earn working in the embassies or firms.³²⁹ Still, women who learned foreign languages were one step ahead of the others when they applied for the jobs.³³⁰ In 1924, it was hard for the secretaries to calculate the salaries women earned in each job since the government did not set a fixed amount of wage. The salary range and working hours were determined by many factors, depending on the market, profession, education, institutions, and geography. Most of the firms offered lower wages. The highest paying jobs for women were in working at a foreign company and embassy as an office worker. However, top female paid jobs did not include sectors like foreign educational institutions.³³¹ Still, women who worked under foreign employers were paid better, had more recognition and less burdensome work compared to young women under the direction of local employers, as the business secretary, Maro Depanian noted that local employers, having financial funding problems, caused them to distribute the work among employees in an unequal way. Typists, clerks and stenographers were at the top of

³²⁸ Helen Kalaydjoglou, “Report January 1930,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³²⁹ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.45, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³³⁰ Ibid., p.70.

³³¹ Ibid., p.45. High waged job positions in Istanbul required translating skills, according to the YWCA staff. See Ibid., 70.

salary pyramids. But even these jobs, especially banks, consisted of working long hours, including occasional Sundays as part-time. The second tier of well-paid jobs included teachers, saleswomen, cashiers, fancy workers, all of whom were paid less despite working long hours; these comprised the majority of jobs in Istanbul.³³² At this time, the YWCA staff were concerned about how competitive the job market was. There was a significant competition among young women college graduates in finding positions with firms. Getting a job at one of these firms was difficult even for those candidates whose education had focused on business since so many young women were applying for these positions. Furthermore, there were not enough employment bureaus in the city to help direct all of the young women looking for work. In all of Istanbul, there were only three or four bureaus. Being chosen for a good position was based more on luck than any other reason and it was often hard to maintain a job for a long period of time. One always needed to show that she had enough “personal ability” in order to have a chance to keep the job.³³³

According to Jane Brewern, the Education Secretary of the Istanbul YWCA, one could see the consequences of the YWCA’s education policies in the fact that young women were being “placed in” a variety of job opportunities. She got very good feedback from the bosses about the young women they employed, which was understood to demonstrate the success of the scheme.³³⁴ One of the fields in the organization looked to place young women was in office work:

Through the Commercial Department, Miss Mayston is able to place practically all the girls who finish our courses in typing and stenography.

³³² Maro M. Depanian to Jean Grigsby Paxton, “Conditions of Business Girls in Constantinople,” December 31, 1924, pp.1–3, Box 63, Folder 11, Series V. Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Reports, Interim, 1921–1928, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, YWCA-SSC.

³³³ Ibid., p.45.

³³⁴ “Report of Miss Jane Brewern, Education Secretary to Constantinople Y.W.C.A., from October-December 1923,” [received February 1924], p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

The large demand for domestic work and the absence of any non-commercial employment service in the city had thrown upon us the responsibility of doing what we can toward connecting the demand and supply in this field.³³⁵

In 1927, for three months, the number of people who applied to domestic work was 125. However only 38 of them were employed although 70 of them got job referrals.³³⁶ In 1930, Kalaydjoglou reported that four of their girls started to work at the Ford Motor Company, “which is [was] a new opening in Turkey with \$60 salary.” The YWCA was glad that they were employed at a famous company with a high salary; they added that they would do whatever they could to help these girls to secure their job positions.³³⁷

The YWCA did not extensively publicize the employment service that they provided to young women, because this would have put them in a difficult position in the eyes of the government as they only had an educational permit in Turkey.³³⁸ Still, they continued their work and were in favor of making this program permanent. The staff working in the Employment Bureau was not numerous, making it hard to function in a “business-like way,” as the YWCA secretary Clara L. Bissell put it. The Employment Bureau of the YWCA not only searched for jobs for women, but also wanted to understand what employed women needed in the workplace and how to improve their conditions. The YWCA decided to appoint a full-time secretary to the Employment Bureau despite the licensing issues.³³⁹

³³⁵ “International Radiogram YWCA, from Irma E. Finley, Constantinople, 1927,” p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³³⁶ “International Radiogram YWCA, from Irma E. Finley, Constantinople, 1927,” p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³³⁷ Helen Kalaydjoglou, Report January 1930, [handwritten information and date on the top of the report is The Commercial Department 1929, Turkey] p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³³⁸ Ibid., p.3.

³³⁹ C. L. Bissell, “Constantinople Service Centers. January, 1928,” p.12, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

The Employment Bureau kept researching the number of women who were employed in Istanbul. According to Mayston's research, careers in medicine showed signs of growing in the city. She counted only two female physicians in Turkey, who had received their higher education abroad, in Germany and England respectively. Medicine faculties only began to admit women in 1922 in Turkey, she reported.³⁴⁰ While women had been allowed to receive medical training in the United States since the nineteenth century and Mayston pointed out that in the late nineteenth century, midwives in the Ottoman State were numerous, women were not allowed to have medical training at that time. In the nineteenth century, Mayston stressed that being a midwife in Turkey had been considered a respectable profession, unlike in the United States. In Istanbul, courses were available to women who wanted to become midwives.³⁴¹ Nursing then became more popular among women due to the wars in the 1910s. Mayston pointed out that the American Hospital was one of the first to offer professional training in the nursing field. Their nurse training program was initiated in 1920, having 55 graduates in the first year. The program required 30 months to complete and students of the program received stipends. As reported by Mayston, the Turkish Government's nursing training program lasted for 28 months. Some of the war orphans were included in the program when it first opened, and graduates were assigned to different regions in Turkey for a fixed period. By the end of the 1920s, the Business secretary stressed that nursing had become a popular profession among young women. Another

³⁴⁰ Elizabeth B. Mayston, Business Secretary, Report on Vocational Training and Guidance, Constantinople, February, 1928, pp.1–2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. In 1927, the number of Turkish women medical graduates was just seven and women were not admitted to law training until 1928. Didem Konya, "Türkiye'nin İlk Kadın Doktoru Safiye Ali ve Çalışmaları," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Researches* 19, no.42 (2018): 35–54.

³⁴¹ Elizabeth B. Mayston, Business Secretary, Report on Vocational Training and Guidance, Constantinople, February, 1928, pp.1–5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

emerging career path for young women in 1928 was becoming a lawyer. “Within the last six months the first Turkish woman lawyer has been admitted to the bar,” Mayston wrote. She stressed in her report that women had started working as clerks and secretaries in banks in 1920. Another profession, in her view, which was common for young women was working as telephone operators at the Telephone Company, which was a joint investment of the Americans, English and French.³⁴² Ruth Woodsmall said that loss of so many men in World War I and the economic depression afterwards were the main factors that transformed women’s role into “a forced economic independence.” Mentioning that both Muslim and non-Muslim women were affected by this transformation, she emphasized in 1926 that “the changes have been much more marked among Moslems than Christians since Christians for a number of years entering public positions. With Moslem women it has been a question of only a few years.” She added that the number of Muslim women who worked in the public positions were few. The new Republic saw a significant number of Muslim women holding public positions and all types of working positions.³⁴³ Turkish women’s great interest in business and the new positions emerging in the country, as well as the progress in equality between men and women, gave hope to the YWCA secretaries that the future of young women in the Near East was bright and open to progress.³⁴⁴ In the new Republic, women could now get taxi driver licenses as well as licenses to open publishing houses. The number of women who enrolled in universities also increased in the Early

³⁴² Elizabeth B. Mayston, Business Secretary, Report on Vocational Training and Guidance, Constantinople, February, 1928, pp.1–5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁴³ Ruth Woodsmall, “Social Conditions in Turkey,” October, 1926, p.2–4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁴⁴ Microfilms in “History,” Section, “The Y.W.C.A. in Turkey,” *Membership Leaflets*, Nos. 39–40, unauthored, undated, no page number, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

Republican period and this further widened the range of job opportunities for women. Women now worked in many fields, as “street-sweepers, household workers by the day, domestic and street-venders, governesses, teachers, dress-makers, milliners, cashiers, book-keepers, waitresses, ushers in cinemas, mail clerks in post offices, telegrapher (said to be better than men), telephone operators, chiropodists and manicurists, trained nurses, midwives, dentists, doctors and lawyers.”³⁴⁵ Muslim women’s joining the workforce also meant also more social freedom, meaning women’s presence in cinemas and theaters, participation in social activities with men such as eating at restaurants, attending the balls in the new Republic in Istanbul and were “preparing themselves for economic independence,” in her words. Except in Ankara, though, “women in the interior (Anatolia), on the contrary are [were] as yet scarcely conscious of any change in their position either economically or socially.”³⁴⁶

The YWCA staff stressed that the Turkish government did not enforce enough laws regarding improving working conditions of the city.³⁴⁷ Maro M. Depanian, business secretary of the YWCA, in 1924, observed that “working girls” had one to two hours break and they were allowed to go anywhere they preferred during their break. Cashiers, saleswomen and occasionally office girls did not have the permission to go anywhere they like when they were on break, but had to stay at the workplace and eat very quickly, which Depanian was concerned about. Another

³⁴⁵ This information is in two reports: Ruth Woodsmall, “Social Conditions in Turkey,” October, 1926, p.2–4, microfilm reel 64, YWCA-SSC and “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul Turkey,” Confidential, November 1929-June 1930, p. 22, Box 329 Folder 7 (International Work), RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁴⁶ Ruth Woodsmall, “Social Conditions in Turkey,” October, 1926, p.2–5, microfilm reel 64, YWCA-SSC.

³⁴⁷ “Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930,” p.45, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

issue she mentioned was that these girls had to work for long hours in the same unventilated space. Moreover, the bosses were demanding and not at all considerate regarding their conditions. Milliners worked in an unventilated space lacking sufficient air and light beneath “very low roofed attic.” Moreover, although “They [kept] plying their needles all day long in those holes [they] hardly earn[t] enough for a decent living.” Saleswomen’s workplace and wages were no different than milliners. They had “a nerve racking job with very little pecuniary, return.”³⁴⁸ Compared to the saleswomen’s workplace, young women doing piece work had more fresh air because they worked at home without any supervision by the employer. However, their wages were uncertain and changed in relation to the market and demand. “A local teacher’s life too is not very enviable. She is overworked in the full and true meaning of the word,” Depanian emphasized. The quality of education teachers received changed based on where they taught. However, Depanian wrote, “But the little pay she gets with the lot of work who does surpass all deficiencies in her educational background. It may seem unbelievable to you but it is true that there are teachers here that receive the insignificant amount of 15 liras or 8 Dollars a month, and do the work of several women.” The general demands of the workers were fewer working hours with better salaries, which Depanian noted and added: “It is strange to observer that this demand comes stronger from the class that is better paid ...”³⁴⁹

The ideal working conditions, in the YWCA secretaries’ opinion, included working in an office position with balanced working hours, breaks, rest facilities

³⁴⁸ Maro M. Depanian to Jean Grigsby Paxton, “Conditions of Business Girls in Constantinople,” December 31, 1924, pp.1–3, Box 63, Folder 11, Series V.

³⁴⁹ Maro M. Depanian to Jean Grigsby Paxton, “Conditions of Business Girls in Constantinople,” December 31, 1924, pp.1–3, Box 63, Folder 11, Series V.

and paid vacations. The YWCA's Business secretary Elizabeth B. Mayston defined the Telephone Company as having some of the best working conditions for young women in the city. The company offered reasonable working hours and facilities for its employees, such as a restaurant and a rest space. Women worked 8 hours a day and they had a one-hour lunch break. Women who completed one year of service were eligible for 10 days of vacation leave, which would increase depending on the number of years they had worked for the company.³⁵⁰ Mayston, while discussing the role of different ethnicities involved in the Telephone Company, gave the impression that all nationalities had been welcome to apply even from the early years of the company. She particularly stressed that Muslim women dominated the company after 1926, as Christian employees were forced to quit their jobs and their positions were given to new Turkish employees.³⁵¹ According to Mayston's account, all nationalities had been accepted to the company; but in the last two years' only Turks were employed.³⁵² Yet Yavuz Selim Karakışla, in his book entitled *Osmanlı Kadın Telefon Memureleri (1913–1923)* [the title could be translated as Ottoman Women Telephone Operators] showed that Muslim women had had a hard time finding employment in the first years of the company. When Bedra Osman Hanım and her friends wanted to apply, Sürenyan Efendi, an Armenian translator working there did not even process their applications, and during that time, there were not any Turkish women working for the company. Bedra Osman Hanım and her friends also alleged that Sürenyan Efendi humiliated them in addition to discouraging from applying. When they

³⁵⁰ E. B. Mayston, Report on Vocational Training and Guidance, Constantinople, February 1928, pp.1–4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁵¹ Elizabeth B. Mayston, Business Secretary, Report on Vocational Training and Guidance, Constantinople, February, 1928, p.4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁵² Ibid.

insisted on applying to the position, they were rejected due to their lack of knowledge of other languages. Bedra and her friends brought this issue to the attention of magazine *Kadınlar Dünyası*, a popular journal known for addressing women's issues and it sparked a strong reaction among writers of the journal. The ministry of Communication was also informed about the issue. The Telephone Company, concerned about future reactions, then began employing Muslim women. Despite this, out of 200 Muslim women who applied, only seven were hired. This caused further anger from figures such as Ulviye Mevlan Hanım who saw it as further confirmation that Muslim women were being discriminated against by the company.³⁵³ As it could be seen from the business secretary Depanian's letter though, after 1923, there was reduction in the number of Christian workers working in the Telephone Company and the Tramway Company, giving privilege to Muslim workers:

In certain public institutions such as the Telephone Company, the Tramway Company and other big concerns, the Turkish government does not allow Christian women to work, and besides requires so many documents and other information in Turkish that business men have to employ Turkish women. Of course this opens new opportunities toward the newly acquired freedom of Turkish women who are now beginning to be initiated into business. On the other hand, Christian girls are on this account thrown out of work. In other private firms, business men have to employ at least three Turkish men or women; this naturally causes a reduction of staff and again a discharge of more Christian employees. Most of these women try to earn a living by giving private lessons in French, English or German, which brings a very meager return.³⁵⁴

³⁵³ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Osmanlı Kadın Telefon Memureleri (1913–1923)* (Akıl Fikir Yayınları: İstanbul, 2014), 1–85.

³⁵⁴ Maro M. Depanian to Jean Grigsby Paxton, "Conditions of Business Girls in Constantinople," December 31, 1924, p. 1, Box 63, Folder 11, Series V. Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Reports, Interim, 1921–1928, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

From the perspective of the YWCA staff, there was not any discrimination against non-Turks in 1929 in Istanbul, but finding a position in an office job was nevertheless becoming more difficult as more employers looked for Turkish translations in their business and thus gave Turkish candidates an advantage over non-Turkish ones. Non-Turkish women workers had to accept low wages due to the language issue. Yet, the YWCA maintained that explicit discrimination based on ethnicity was not present in companies, in fact, "... certain firms (Turkish firms among the number) even prefer to employ them, as they have done office work longer than Turkish girls and have more experience."³⁵⁵ In 1928, Mayston classified jobs such as tailors, embroidery makers, workers in restaurants and domestic service as ones which "uneducated class" had a chance for employment. For Mayston, dressmaking was not difficult for women living in Turkey since many women already knew how to use the sewing needle. But women who made their living in dressmaking had low salaries and poor working conditions. Mayston emphasized that "this employment has been sought and is [was] still largely representative of non-Moslem women." Another field dominated by non-Muslim female workers, according to her analysis, was servants in restaurants. Both men and women worked in restaurants. The workers would be dependent on the boss of the restaurant for their income and working conditions. She emphasized that domestic servants and restaurant workers earned low incomes. In her opinion, the position of domestic servants was categorized as the least popular job opportunity among women.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.45, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁵⁶ Elizabeth B. Mayston, Business Secretary, Report on Vocational Training and Guidance, Constantinople, February, 1928, pp.1-5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

Discrimination between men and women was also mentioned by the YWCA staff as they took an interest in an article by Sabiha Zekeriya Sertel. Sertel and her two female friends wanted to start a publishing company. They had enough financial resources but needed to get government permit before opening for business. Their application was approved by the Department of Commerce but the Department of Justice required the husband's consent to start the business. Sertel was thus disappointed by the attitude of the State towards women. Husbands determined married women's careers and even decided whether married women could work or not. "If our husbands possess the right of stopping our business activities, it means that our entrance into life is an illusion," Sertel wrote in her article. Women would not be able to benefit from the rights the state granted them if women were expected to be "mere consumers" rather than to "become producers." As she remarked, "the history of Swedish feminism, that of English and American feminism and all the sociologists agree that women will never be able to employ the freedom which society gives to them until the chains of economic slavery are broken." In her view, women's social circle, that is the close people around them, had failed to protect the rights of women. Men in particular ignored what working meant for women, especially that working meant gaining self-respect. The new Turkish Civil Code did grant women rights and freedom, and Sertel stressed that it was because of the civil code that women were not seen as property or "parasites" anymore. Nevertheless, a man being the ultimate decision-maker in a woman's business affairs meant their freedom was illusory and was against the spirit of the civil code that aimed to uplift and empower women. The state, by not supporting women's rights in business, thus encouraged women to only be consumers. Sertel advocated for married woman's "economic

independence” because having economic independence would open the door to total freedom.³⁵⁷

Ruth Woodsmall observed that although “modern education and western ideas” had spread in Turkey and women’s participation in social and working life had increased in the new Republic, girls in Muslim homes, which were not affected by Westernization and modern education, were still not seen as individuals from an early age: “The boy is treated as free individual even from boyhood. The mother often does not even pretend to control him. The girl however is restricted in her activities and from an early age is expected to share in the work of the house.” She noted that this attitude was dominant in Anatolia among the uneducated classes and despite its decline compared to previous years it still persisted.³⁵⁸ Concerned with the attitude of men towards the economic independence of women, Woodsmall observed that “The idea of women fitting themselves to be economically independent is [was] steadily becoming more generally accepted,” in 1926. She drew attention to economic necessity as a main cause behind a transformation “from the old idea of girls being kept entirely in the home.” Yet women nevertheless had to gradually acclimatize their conservative parents to the possibility they might achieve “economic independence” and become “self-supportive” step by step. One of the young women Woodsmall depicted as experiencing this gradualism started only for “a few hours teaching per day” so that

³⁵⁷In capital letters, she made her message stronger, “THE UNITY OF THE FAMILY REQUIRES THAT BOTH THE HUSBAND AND THE WIFE HAVE EQUAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITH EQUAL PRIVILEGES.” “Translation Extracts from the Current Turkish Press No:8, ‘Does a woman possess the right to work?’ A Second Study on the WOMAN QUESTION by Sabiha Zekariya Hanum, *Resimli Ay*, September, 1927,” pp.1–2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁵⁸ Ruth Woodsmall, “Social Conditions in Turkey,” October, 1926, p.26, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. Another title she added for this report was “Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey.” While I am referencing the report, I will reference to the former title.

her father would not disrespect. Gradually, she switched to working full time and her father, who had once sent her to Germany for to gain journalistic experience, resisted her teaching. Woodsmall added, “Turkish girls of the better class are now free to enter practically any position. One popular field in America however is still not regarded as a women’s field in Turkey.” She was referring to a group of college students who all experienced “a decided prejudice against women taking up tea-room or hotel management.”³⁵⁹ It could thus be a struggle for a young woman to pursue a job that she wanted and make her own decisions about her professional career due to the pressure exerted by her parents and the roles imposed on her by society.

5.3. Training

The YWCA personnel gave special importance to the Commercial Department of the Association because the training program it offered helped young women to learn the skills needed for obtaining job positions.³⁶⁰ The YWCA offered Business English in a commercial course.³⁶¹ Business girls also attended literature classes at night.³⁶² As well as English and French, one could learn Turkish at the YWCA as it was increasingly required for business positions.³⁶³ Trying to reach more members

³⁵⁹ Ruth Woodsmall, “Social Conditions in Turkey,” October, 1926, pp.8–9, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁶⁰ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.69, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁶¹ “Report of Margaret B. White to the Foreign and Overseas Department,” (March 1921), p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁶² “Report of Miss Jane Brewern, Education Secretary to Constantinople Y.W.C.A., from October-December 1923,” microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁶³ “Report of Margaret B. White to the Foreign and Overseas Department, March 1921,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

through the leaflets they prepared, the YWCA claimed that the course they taught on business was “the only thing of its kind in Constantinople.” According to the leaflets, they provided “training for typing and stenographic positions, and taught not only technical efficiency but professional standards,” as well as “new idea of health standard and the need for physical exercise.”³⁶⁴

The number of typists and secretaries employed by the Turkish government (in the departments of the State, bureaus and offices) increased linked to the recent change of the Turkish language from the Ottoman script to the Latin alphabet; typewriters quickly became fundamental office technology.³⁶⁵

According to Mayston, one could be considered for the position of typists or stenographers once registered for and took a commercial course. For people who did not or could not register as students, there were limited available options for alternative forms of training.³⁶⁶ Emergent business positions revealed the need for such training, however only some schools offered typewriting, or Turkish and French stenography courses. For women who wanted to learn typewriting in the short term, there were some limited options, as indicated by the YWCA staff. There were at least five commercial typewriting agencies in Istanbul which had courses for beginners, but the YWCA staff were not satisfied with the education offered by these agencies because it did not go beyond teaching “practice[ing] periods.” Among them, only one even taught stenography. The French Catholic School provided typewriting classes for free in summertime, but in their program, stenography training was not offered. The YMCA had “typewriting, stenography,

³⁶⁴ “The Y.W.C.A. in Turkey,” *Membership Leaflets*, Nos. 39–40, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁶⁵ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.22, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁶⁶ Mayston, *Report on Vocational Training and Guidance*, Constantinople, February 1928, pp.1–4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

book-keeping, commercial arithmetic, commercial correspondence ...” courses. All of these were mandatory for finishing the YMCA business school. Among these institutions, “the YWCA for six years has given special short term courses of 3 months periods in typewriting and business English, and 9 months courses in Stenography.”³⁶⁷ Mayston presented the YWCA as a chance for a city girl who was looking to develop herself in this field, as well as learning basics skills of business and correspondence.³⁶⁸

The secretaries helped young women prepare for business life. They also trained young women to handle some tests. “The typing girls” were to put on an exhibit at least once a year, showing what type of tests they could possibly face in business life. It was like a show for the audience, watching young women type very fast in a foreign language while blindfolded. One could also see the differences between women who had newly started the program and those who had advanced their level.³⁶⁹

In the late 1920s, young women who were students of commercial courses were usually fluent in English. They had often graduated from English and American schools and then attended the YWCA to learn to improve their typewriting and shorthand as well as other business skills. They took their works and training at the YWCA seriously.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Ruth F. Woodsmall, “Survey of the Social Agencies in the Near East,” August 1925, p.82–3. The title was strikethrough text “Survey of the Social Agencies in Turkey,” Box 63, Folder 7–11, Series V.

³⁶⁸ Mayston, Report on Vocational Training and Guidance, Constantinople, February 1928, pp.1–4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁶⁹ “Report of Miss Clara L. Bissell, April 1st of June 30th, 1927,” [received September 1, 1927], p.6, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁷⁰ H. Kalaydjoglou, “Report January 1930,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. In the late 1920s, the majority of attendees of commercial course were students and graduates of Gedik Pasha American School, the English High School, and the Scottish British Mission. The rest of students were from Constantinople’s Woman’s College, Greek and Armenian schools. “Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930,” 70, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

To be an office woman, one needed to improve one's office skills, have discipline and put in hard work, as highlighted by the YWCA staff. The YWCA offered typewriting classes every day.³⁷¹ Stenography classes were held "three times a week at noon fee 2 liras per month, or 5 liras for term of three months" in 1919.³⁷² In 1930, the biweekly courses on stenography were more limited compared to typewriting courses.³⁷³ The YWCA usually held typewriting classes in the morning, and practice hours were then held in the afternoon. Young women received grades for the courses in which they had participated. Most attended the classes regularly and were generally eager to complete the tasks given by their teachers. The YWCA secretaries tolerated only two mistakes per typewritten paper and thus their work had to be close to perfection. The YWCA staff also did not allow young women to use erasers, recommending that using erasers would not help them advance their skills in typewriting. Any erased sentence would be noticed by the secretaries and underlined in red ink.³⁷⁴ On some occasions the secretaries would find an eraser which the girls had hidden from them. Despite the strict rules, at one time, one of the secretaries heard the name Mary quite often in the class. Later she realized that young women in the class had given the eraser the name Mary, which they then shared with each other. She was surprised that they named it by giving a person's name rather than simply saying eraser in their own language. After the secretary confiscated the eraser, some young women in her class approached her, desiring to take their "Mary" back. They told her that Mary

³⁷¹ H. Kalaydjoglou, "Report January 1930," p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁷² "Report of General Secretary for December, 1919. Service Center, Y.W.C.A.," January 8, 1928, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁷³ H. Kalaydjoglou, "Report January 1930," p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.1-2.

had saved them from making mistakes. Although they insisted on getting Mary back as a Christmas present, her fate was to be kept in a drawer.³⁷⁵

Typewriting training usually lasted six months whereas shorthand training was nine months long.³⁷⁶ The YWCA's typewriting training³⁷⁷ was longer than three months because the YWCA staff claimed that if one wanted to be a professional typist, a three-month-education would not be sufficient.³⁷⁸ The YWCA, from the start of their typewriting and stenography training, expected girls to devote their time and energy to the education they offered. "Our plan is to keep the standards high; to admit only those girls who will register for the entire three months and are serious in their desire to study," said White.³⁷⁹ One would be ready to search for job positions after completing the YWCA program. The YWCA staff provided letters of recommendation if requests came from their registrants. For those who completed the commercial training program, the YWCA staff actively sought job positions. Having typing training did not guarantee getting a job in Istanbul, but Kalaydjoglou noted in 1930 that "although business is not very flourishing in our country, quite a few of our graduates have been able to find good posts."³⁸⁰ In the late 1920s, the graduates of the YWCA commercial program usually were employed in typist positions rather than stenography positions. Many office workplaces, excepting foreign ones, did not require them to have a

³⁷⁵ Helen Kalaydjoglou, "Report January 1930," [handwritten information and date on the top of the report is The Commercial Department 1929, Turkey] pp.1-2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.2.

³⁷⁷ In January 1930, each three months students had to pay 12 liras to learn typewriting at the YWCA Istanbul. In addition to typewriting courses, there were practice hours for typewriting. See "Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930," p.71, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁷⁸ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.71, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁷⁹ "Report of General Secretary for December, 1919. Service Center, Y.W.C.A.," January 8, 1928, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁸⁰ H. Kalaydjoglou, "Report January 1930," p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

stenography background. Nevertheless, knowing stenography was an asset for them when they applied for job positions.³⁸¹

The YWCA was also facilitated women who wanted to pursue careers in teaching physical education, since the staff initiated recreational education on a large scale in Turkey. In this field, the YWCA claimed that they helped “a new profession” emerge in Turkey:

Three years ago, there was not a single local woman physical director. Today, fifteen trained recreation leaders, under the direction of the one American Y.W.C.A. director of health education, are reaching 4,000 girls in refugee camps, schools and orphanages.³⁸²

Training for recreation supervisors included teaching women a variety of subjects including dancing, singing, gym practices, first aid, and information on health.

Lasting more than seven months, the focus of the training was giving the basics of supervising to young women rather than a comprehensive gymnastics.³⁸³

For women who wanted to become tailors, the YWCA provided training in cutting, sewing and using needles. It was not a certificate program due to the concerns of legal restrictions and standardization.³⁸⁴ Still, the YWCA provided an

³⁸¹ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.70, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁸² “The Y.W.C.A. in Turkey,” *Membership Leaflets*, Nos. 39–40, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁸³ Woodsmall, “Survey of the Social Agencies in the Near East,” August 1925, 82, Box 63, Folder 7–11, Series V. Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Reports, Interim, 1921–1928, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

³⁸⁴ The importance of giving certificates to the graduates of the commercial and dressing departments were discussed by the YWCA. However, there were legal barriers as well as the concerns of “standardization:” “A certificate of some sort is very vital to the girl who needs to work, for girls in possession of certificates are always likely to be given preference. It would be possible, while remaining a private school, to obtain a permit for the issuing certificates. But in order that these certificates be recognized by the proper authorities the quality of the work would have to be standardized. This is considered a useful measure when the commercial and dressmaking departments are taken into view, there are approved standards. But certain members of the Committee feel that the language courses if subjected to a method of standardization would lose their purpose, which is to serve those individuals who been unable to cope with the regular school program. Naki[y]e Hanum pointed out that the Turk Ojak [sic] and the Kadın Birligi [sic] offered such courses without a certificate and that these courses are nevertheless popular.” See “Report of

official letter to those who completed the program. After completing the course, young women could apply for job positions as dressmakers.³⁸⁵ In 1929, the YWCA secretaries noticed that young women were not conscious of the seriousness of their labor at home because of the way they responded to the occupation section of the survey form. For women “sewing, dress making and the like” were not defined as jobs.³⁸⁶ However, the YWCA regarded sewing as valuable work in the training programs they offered.³⁸⁷

Mayston claimed that in Turkey saleswomen lacked proper training in their respective fields of employment and consequently earned low wages. As a result, she wanted to create a course to help provide them with training. Claiming that the YWCA could start courses in sales, she hoped she hoped that not only quality of sales education would improve but also the efficiency of trades in Istanbul.³⁸⁸

The YWCA staff indicated that there was a need for research on new jobs available to women, as well as on vocational training and professions for women. Besides greater need of research for professions, another concern the YWCA secretary raised was the lack of guidance in vocational training in the city; and since there were not any agencies offering guidance to urban women in this field, the YWCA could use the opportunity to “to be a pioneer” in the city. Women did not know what to do with their degree because they lacked guidance. The YWCA secretary thought that they could fill a gap in the city in this field as well. Mayston

the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.156, Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁸⁵ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.69, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁸⁶ “Constantinople Service Centers Rules and Regulations for Board of Directors Adopted,” 15 May 1929, p. 25, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁸⁷ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.69, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

³⁸⁸ Mayston, Report on Vocational Training and Guidance, Constantinople, February 1928, pp.1–5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

did not provide a detailed description of how this service should be provided by the YWCA. In her report, she simply stated that this service should meet business employee needs such as providing young women who wanted to pursue a career in the business world with training on techniques and skills in recording, accounting, filing, language and other necessary qualifications, as well offering opportunities to visit different business agencies in Istanbul.³⁸⁹ In same year, 1928, Ruth Woodsmall's recommendation to the YWCA was to "extend business courses to include Turkish typewriting, book-keeping and business methods and give special attention to vocational guidance and employment problems." Another recommendation which was included in the future policy of the YWCA was the creation of "social consciousness" in "Special Social and Industrial Problems," "Women in Employment and General Industrial Conditions" as well as in their civic duties and their position globally.³⁹⁰

The YWCA provided training aimed at the attainment of a lifelong profession rather than merely acquiring temporary work. At a time when most Employment Bureaus directed women to handicrafts and embroidery, the YWCA not only provided office training and business language courses, but also raised gymnastics teachers from the core and contributed to the employment of women in the sports sector, which made it unique in terms of the range of training it offered. Equally as importantly, in all of this work, the YWCA provided training aimed at women's attainment of a lifelong professional and social purpose rather than

³⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.1–5.

³⁹⁰ Appendix G Future Policy, "Recommendation for the YWCA (Part of report by R. F. Woodsmall) January, 1928," p. 53–4 in "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

merely the capacity for temporary work, focusing on both shifting attitudes as well as skills training.

5.4. Career-oriented Women

The YWCA encouraged young women to appreciate the domestic jobs they obtained. The YWCA helped an orphan girl, “all alone in the world,” to learn to swim so that she “passed the life-saving test” in one of the camps that they organized. Her name was inscribed on a swimming cup due to her success in sports.³⁹¹ White stated that “this youngster has had to face going into service as a maid, and this is not an easy thing to do in this country, where the whole attitude of the country is to consider such employment as degrading.”³⁹²

The YWCA’s encouragement of female financial and personal independence disturbed the conservative male press in Istanbul. Anxieties about the organization’s challenge to gender roles, women’s commitment to nationalism, as well the perceived Christian propaganda of the organization were commonly expressed in this journalism. While the *Greek Ottoman* newspaper *Proodos* in September 1921 provided information that the YWCA offered typing and stenography courses as well as language training,³⁹³ a writer in Islamist journal *Sebilürreşad*, referencing the newspaper *the Orient*, informed its readers that the YWCA offered various clubs and training such as gymnastics, typing as well as

³⁹¹ “Report of Miss Margaret B. White, General Secretary to Constantinople Y.W.C.A., Summer months, 1925,” p.5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p.5.

³⁹³ “American Ladies at the Greek Patriarchate in Constantinople,”[translated], *Proodos*, September n.d., 1921.

language courses. Yet, this writer likened the YWCA to the “plague” and was shocked how Turkish women attended a Christian organization, arguing that Christians had waged wars against Muslims and killed the innocents during the war time and this organization was not any different from any other Christian organizations in spreading its ideology.³⁹⁴ Conservative Islamist newspapers reflected their disapproval of the work of the YWCA, largely because they perceived the YWCA’s work as a threat to traditional ideas of motherhood. In 1923, an Islamist newspaper *Tevhid-i Efkar*, disturbed by the activities of the YWCA, accused the YWCA of “Poisoning [the] Future Motherhood of Islam.” *Tevhid-i Efkar* called on the state and parents to take action to stop the activities of the YWCA centers because they claimed that it was corrupting the women of Turkey, and harming moral norms and values.³⁹⁵ Although the YWCA taught women about their civic duties and what they should be,³⁹⁶ one of the Turkish magazines accused the YWCA of corrupting young women’s minds by destroying their national values and characteristics. In order to make this argument, the magazine showed evidence from the YWCA’s activities in China.³⁹⁷ “[Christian] Propaganda” was a common phrase newspapers used to describe the YWCA’s activities. The daily newspaper *Akşam* warned its readers in these words, “Lately the Y.W.C.A. has opened its branches in the most Muslim quarters of Constantinople and started enrolling Muslim ladies, attracting them with language courses, lectures and excursions all free of charge. Thus it is extending its

³⁹⁴ “Young Christian Associations and their activities,” [translated], *Sebilürreşad*, March 27, 1922, Vol. 20, no.495.

³⁹⁵ “TURKS ASSAIL Y.M.C.A.: ALSO ACCUSE Y.W.C.A. OF “POISONING FUTURE MOTHERHOOD OF ISLAM,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1923, 8.

³⁹⁶ “Annual Report, Confidential, Part II, Genevieve Lowry, General Secretary of Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey, From September 1929–1930,” p.12, reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

³⁹⁷ “Lowry, Annual Report [...] From September 1929 -September 1930,” p.1.

propaganda area.” The writer was concerned that the YWCA would lead to the degradation of moral and national values. The alternative was the opening of a Muslim association which would be a rival to the YWCA.³⁹⁸ *Tevhid-i Efkar*, using the word “propaganda” frequently to describe the YWCA’s programs in 1922, in one piece called on editors of other newspapers not to publish the advertisements of the YWCA anywhere, claiming that the YWCA deceived young women. “It is a great pity and even more it is a calamity for our young girls who are candidates for the holy duty of future motherhood to be in contact with Christianity and allow their national and religious habits to be killed and to perish,” stated the writer, and warned the members of the YWCA that they should be not proud; they were not like the “Anatolian women [who had fought] in the same rank with their fighting sons” while they were busy learning dancing. While the newspaper honored motherhood, the piece ended with a note, “Finally, we invite the future mothers to feel their holy duty in this matter.”³⁹⁹ *Tevhid-i Efkar*’s conclusion was the main reason the YWCA attracted young women was its language courses; however “In return of the few words of English which they [the YWCA] [taught] them, they [were] going to cool our girls’ feelings toward their parents and will poison their ideas of religion.” While the piece also called on parents and the nation to take action in this matter, an Armenian Ottoman newspaper *Joğovurti* [*Joghovourti*] *Tsayn* published the article of *Tevhid-i Efkar* on the YWCA and called attention to its claim that the police would persecute all Muslim women who attended there often. *Joğovurti Tsayn* was suspicious of alleged claims of *Tevhid-i Efkar*. If there was anything like this, this should be investigated,” he concluded.⁴⁰⁰ The Greek

³⁹⁸ “A society,” [translated], *Akşam*, January 1, 1922.

³⁹⁹ “Who is responsible,” *Tevhid-i Efkar*, April 11, 1922.

⁴⁰⁰ “To the Young [wo]Men’s Christian Association,” *Joghovourti Tsayn*, January 25 and February

Ottoman newspaper *Tachydromos* also reflected on the allegations of *Tevhid-i Efkar* in its January 1923 issue.⁴⁰¹ A nationalist newspaper *İleri* also wrote that Istanbul was affected by epidemic diseases but that there was one disease affecting the youth for which there seemed to be no cure; in his opinion Americans in Turkey exploited youth with their programs in 1922. Their programs put the concept of motherhood under attack and destroyed familial values.⁴⁰² Naturally, all the writers who speculated about the YWCA were males. Only *Cumhuriyet*, closer to the Kemalist state in the 1920s, reflected the activities of the YWCA such as camping as a positive development for young women's health and happiness.⁴⁰³ Both *Tevhid-i Efkar* and *Sebilürreşad* would be closed by the government in 1925, by the *Takrîr-i Sükûn*, the Law for Maintenance of Order, as a state security measure.

While the work of the YWCA was not praised by Islamist magazines, the Istanbul YWCA, in a discussion group of the YWCA, made young women read about the story of two women's lives and discussed what goals they had accomplished in their lives. Notable female role models, such as Helen Keller and Florence Nightingale, could influence the YWCA members by encouraging them to have careers.⁴⁰⁴

Marriages were also an accepted option for securing future economic well-being of women and to a partial extent for their parents as well. However, young women also had other options, such as working, which was itself a new concept and created tension in the traditional family setting. The YWCA staff found themselves

9, 1923.

⁴⁰¹ "The American Associations in Turkey," *Tachydromos*, January 24, 1923.

⁴⁰² [the American Associations] *İleri*, April 26, 1922, no. 152.

⁴⁰³ "An Organization Giving Life, Health and Happiness," *Cumhuriyet*, September 15, 1924.

⁴⁰⁴ "Report of Miss Clara Bissell, Secretary of the Stamboul Service Center, May 1 to December 1, 1921," microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

responding to the experiences of members at the branches. In a report in 1923 written by Jane Brewern, the Education Secretary of the Istanbul YWCA, “the most striking” case was a “sunny, bright girl” who suddenly acted very unhappy due to a psychological conflict she had with her mother. Her mother’s solution to the financial problems of the family was to insist that her daughter marry a wealthy man that she introduced to the daughter; the man could then look after all the family members. “For the welfare of the whole family,” the mother “begged her” daughter to accept the man’s offer. However, the girl was not in love with this man who her mother strongly wished her to marry. Approaching Brewern, she consulted her about her problem and asked her what she should do. She asked the secretary whether it would be “selfish if she refused” the offer because although she could work instead of getting married, this would not provide her mother the same fortune that the man could provide. Brewern, after thinking about the situation for a while, responded her that “she had no right to sacrifice her happiness to [and] deceive the man, having in view a problematic comfort her mother.”⁴⁰⁵ The YWCA secretary thus encouraged the young woman to pursue her own career and happiness rather than follow her mother’s desires.

Examples such as this were part of a wider argument marshalled at the YWCA about the necessity of women’s independence –spiritual as well as financial –regardless of marital status. Arranged marriages were common in the 1920s, as mentioned by the scholars Duben and Behar, though marriages for love had increased compared with previous years.⁴⁰⁶ Unlike Istanbul, in the United

⁴⁰⁵“Report of Miss Jane Brewern, Education Secretary to Constantinople YWCA, from October-December 1923,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁰⁶ Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *Istanbul Households; Marriage, Family and Fertility, 1880–1940*, 96.

States, from the 1830s to the beginning of the 20th century, middle-class couples believed in developing romantic relationships and “intense, spiritual love” was necessary before getting married.⁴⁰⁷ In Istanbul, by contrast, conservative parents still had authority over their daughters’ decisions such as marriage, and romantic or spiritual considerations were of no significance. The YWCA’s mainly American staff position in this issue was to support love-based marriages instead of arranged marriages.⁴⁰⁸ In Istanbul, “A marriage however without reference to the parents or contrary to the parents’ wishes would be most exceptional,” as the YWCA’s General Secretary Ruth Woodsmall underlined despite the progress away from arranged marriage; “There is as yet not the same degree of independence as in the West as the marriage is still usually planned by the families.” As well as urging socializing with men, she urged women to stand on their own feet financially, because together these would give them full liberty and the opportunity to make their own decisions about marriage regardless of their parents and social pressure. “The complete independence of choice in marriage will be realized for young women only when economic independence is more assured,” Woodsmall underlined in her report in 1926.⁴⁰⁹

To encourage reflection upon women’s gendered position in relation to work and the family, the YWCA staff asked members to write essays on the

⁴⁰⁷Peter Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: NYU Press, 1994), 80–1.

⁴⁰⁸ “Clara L. Bissell, “Constantinople Service Centers. January, 1928,” pp.14–5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. “A male relative taking the place of her deceased father took her down from her throne and put a silver girdle about her waist in conformance with a very old custom. It is supposed to signify the lifting of her long robe so that she will be able to do the work required of a good housewife.” In the opinion of Clara L. Bissell, the YWCA secretary, love relations would be stronger and longer lasting when compared to arranged ones.

⁴⁰⁹ Woodsmall, “Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey,” October, 1926, pp.2–30, reel 64, YWCA SSC. 21–3.

changing status of Muslim women which considered the themes of women's rights and equal opportunity. A favoured essay subject was women's financial independence. The limitations of arranged marriage, motherhood, and staying-at home were revealed by a 17 year old girl in Istanbul, in her essay entitled "My mother at my age." Her mother, who was from Anatolia, wanted to go to school but everyone around her strongly disapproved of this. Lacking any support, and despite the social and familial pressure, her mother was able to pursue her studies until the age of 14, when her family married her off to a Turkish military officer without her consent. Her mother had been only 14 years old when she was forced to marry a 35 year old military officer. It was not until the wedding night that they even met each other. Without having fallen in love, or ever even liking him, she had to spend the rest of her life with him without following her ambitions, and thus she fell into depression. While her husband was out, she stayed at home doing nothing but occupying her time playing with dolls. At the age of fifteen, she gave birth to a baby; however, for her, the baby was nothing more than a doll she played with. Losing her husband in a battle in the same year, she never thought to remarry despite the proposals she received, as she did not like the idea of marriage at all. When she was 17, she had a desire to work, yet it was impossible for her to follow her ambition as her baby was only two years old and required her care. She suffered mentally for that reason. The author of this essay was Nebile Hüseyin, a college girl, attending the YWCA programs in Istanbul. In the beginning of her essay, "The social life of women in Turkey is changing every year. Women are becoming more powerful as the years pass by," she noted. Nebile concluded her essay by saying that she was now at the same age, 17, that her mother had been while now her mother was 35, and "she was a widow with a child on her breast. But I, myself, am

a child yet.”⁴¹⁰ Another essay written by the YWCA’s Armenian registrant Y. Haidostian, entitled “Freedom of Women,” highlighted the meaning attached to work: “A very great need, if not the greatest, is the need of attaching value to labor, so that it will be considered honorable for any women to support herself if she desires to do so.” She continued arguing that for both Christian and Muslim communities, financial independence for women would help to sort out one main issue which was “[...] the subtle and complex problems which result from inconvenient marriages. Because very often women marry men whom they do not love, but simply to avoid the disgrace of being ‘left at home’ or ‘self-supporting.’ ”

⁴¹¹ It was no coincidence that the YWCA’s American staff encouraged young women to write about the expansion of freedom they would obtain once women started to support themselves financially and independently. Simultaneously, women’s decision making power on marital status would increase, which could be seen in essays written by Muslim women not only in Istanbul but as far away as India. In answer to an essay question about whether women should be prepared for economic independence regardless of marriage, the YWCA’s participant wrote “Indian girls and women should be prepared for economic independence regardless of marriage. Because, marriage is not so necessary as is the means of living.” She also critiqued the idea that women were assigned with the heavy task of motherhood rather than being able to pursue a job which usually was associated with a man’s expertise. Directing young women to write on the topic and grading them based on its context, these essays all received “excellent” or “very good” as

⁴¹⁰ Nebile Hussein [Hüseyin], “My Mother at my age,” Box 24 Folder:1–2, Series IV, “Student Essays on Moslem Women,” 1929, n.d., Ruth F. Woodsmall papers, YWCA-SSC.

⁴¹¹ Y. Haidostian, “Freedom of Women,” Box 24 Folder:1–2, Series IV, YWCA-SSC.

grades.⁴¹² All of these essays prioritized one thing; women's financial independence over marriage. Economic independence was a step towards individuality, allowing the opportunity to use one's skills, taking control of one's life and enhance one's role in decision-making process. The YWCA's American staff was successful in terms of instilling the idea that pursuing a profession not only emancipated women but also empowered them to have more control of their lives in terms of more decision-making in their lives.

A factor with regard to the increase in the number of women in the labor force was the related with the idea of patriotic duty and nationalism, as helping the nation during wartime was the main concern in the Turkish State. Women too felt that they had a responsibility to their country.⁴¹³ Belkıs Halim Vassaf, who graduated from Philosophy Department of Istanbul University, interacted with the Istanbul YWCA by attending its camp at Hüseyin Avni Paşa mansion in Caddebostan in 1924 in order to learn a foreign language before she started working at the YWCA. She shared her anecdote with a YWCA secretary on a topic related to working. The secretary encouraged her to be an individual by following her own desire for work rather than to do things in the name of the motherland:

One day when I was talking to the American director of the camp, I said that 'It is my mission and patriotic duty to go to Anatolia, the remotest part of Turkey for work, or go anywhere where my motherland assigns me to'. She was astonished by what I said. She said 'No' to me. 'There is not anything called duty. If a person likes the job, s/he does it, if s/he does not, s/he does not'. However, because we are always raised for the purpose of duty, it is very strange for me and hard to understand that people should work based on their preference rather than duty at that moment.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² "Chief Hindrances regarding Social Changes," Box 24 Folder:1-2, Series IV, YWCA-SSC.

⁴¹³ Yavuz S. Karakışla, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Savaş Yılları ve Çalışan Kadınlar: Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyeti (1916-1923)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015), 60.

⁴¹⁴ Gündüz Vassaf, *Annem Belkıs* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), pp.116-120. "my translation."

Later, through her YWCA connection, Belkıs would be granted a scholarship to study at the Smith College. Regarding her career goals, the decision to go to the USA shocked her social circle. “Erdem’s staying at Turkey worried everyone and some of them reproached me. We were newly married and I was going to the USA for education and to advance my career. I was leaving my husband of two years [in Istanbul]. Everyone found it weird.” After arranging a prestigious job in the USA at a drug company later, Belkıs and her husband Ethem would go there together to pursue their professional dreams.⁴¹⁵

Educating young women on labor and career issues included organizing conferences and talks. In one of the conferences, the YWCA had a speaker discussing “Social and Industrial Problems and how to awaken interest among women of Constantinople in these problems.” Women were attracted to this subject, Bissell noted.⁴¹⁶ In 1925, the Business Girls’ Group Program offered an opportunity to discuss business in Istanbul. Mr. Bernard Tumini, a wealthy businessman from an Italian background whose family had done business since the nineteenth century in the Ottoman state, gave a talk on business conditions in the “efficient city” and “the efficient business girl.” The program for the meeting mentioned the types of help the YWCA could offer to aspiring businesswomen and how to finance their careers. For this, they agreed to fundraise by holding social gatherings and taking photographs.⁴¹⁷ The YWCA’s Program for Girl Reserves⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ Vassaf, *Annem Belkıs*, 116–120, “my translation.”

⁴¹⁶ “Report of Miss Clara L. Bissell, General Secretary to Constantinople Service Centers, April May-June 1928,” [Received 1929], p.3, microfilm no 63, YWCA-SSC. During these conferences, the YWCA secretaries also touched upon the difficulties women encountered in the workplace.

⁴¹⁷ “Business Girls Group Program. October-December 1925,” p.1, reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴¹⁸ According to the YWCA secretary Irma E. Finley, the Girl reserve programs helped girls develop their character and individuality. What Finley liked about the program was in her words, it “skillfully administered that the degree of discipline and self-development which it achieves is one of the most remarkable and encouraging results.” She witnessed the success of the education they offered to the young women; their “unmistakable growth and transformation taking place in

included a talk entitled “Occupations open to women in Turkey” in 1926.⁴¹⁹ It was not surprising that even the mothers of participants were sometimes involved in the YWCA, and sought advice from the secretaries as to which profession their sons also should pursue.⁴²⁰

The Istanbul YWCA advanced explicitly the model of the career-oriented women. The YWCA staff showing young women leading female figures who did not give up in their careers despite the challenging conditions they faced was a part of this. Nakiye Elgün was one such. She worked in the Center Committee of the YWCA. She was one of the women who was elected to the Council from the Republican People’s Party. For YWCA purposes, she prepared training materials on subjects related to citizenship such as casting the ballot and “the responsibility of the individual girl.”⁴²¹ The article published in *Resimli Ay*, a pictorial monthly, regarding Nakiye, who was a proponent of education reform in Turkey, was important for the YWCA. Despite the challenges she faced in her career, she relentlessly focused on her goals and did not give up, unafraid to speak her mind in defense of what she believed in.

Nakiye had work experience in different schools and in one of in her classes wanted to have tablecloths and modern amenities such as electricity, but the directors of the school rejected her suggestion. She was in favor of using the best teaching methods with students, in addition to supplying them with the best technology. Being against corporal punishment in schools, she advocated the idea that teachers should favor non-physical and non-violent corrective measures to

individual girls” was evident. See “International Radiogram YWCA, from Irma E. Finley, Constantinople, 1927,” pp.2–3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴¹⁹ “Program of Girl Reserves. October-December 1926,” pp.1–3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴²⁰ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.79, p.84, p.153

⁴²¹ C. L. Bissell, “Annual Report, Jan. 1, 1931,” pp.1–6, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

instill discipline. For her, authority in one's classroom was not best established by fear, which was harmful as it prevented students from being self-expressive and developing a healthy mind. From time to time, she came up against the directorates of schools though in the end they acknowledged that her ideas were correct.⁴²² The YWCA presented her as a role model for young women as she had focused on her career goals. For her, a profession was not a short-term goal but a life-long achievement. She did not quit her job when she met with difficulties. Rather, she fought for what she thought was right.

Another story, published in *Resimli Ay*, on which the YWCA focused was that of Safiye Ali.⁴²³ Her career story the difficulties she overcame were an example for the association. Safiye Ali was a key figure for the YWCA. She not only gave a series of talks on health and hygiene for young women at the Istanbul YWCA,⁴²⁴ but also examined the girls for free at the same service center.⁴²⁵

Safiye Ali, who had received private lessons at home, also went to the American College in Istanbul. She pointed out that the American education that she received at the school had inspired her to earn her independent living. Even when she was a child, she was motivated to do things for herself. Sometimes this caused conflicts at home with her family.⁴²⁶ She was from one of the most prominent and wealthy families. Her father, Ali Kırat Paşa was the aide-de-camp to sultans

⁴²² [Margaret White's notes] *Resimli Ay*, February 1928, pp.1–4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴²³ "Successful Turkish Women: The First Woman Doctor, Doctor Safie Ali Hanum," *Resimli Ay* January 1928, pp. 1–3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴²⁴ C. L. Bissell, "Report of Stamboul Service Center, Constantinople, September 1921," pp.1–2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴²⁵ "Report of Health Education Department, Mary Em. Fisler, October-December 1924," p.5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴²⁶ "Successful Turkish Women: The First Woman Doctor, Doctor Safie Ali Hanum," pp.1–3.

Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid II. Her grandfather from her mother's side had been the Sheikh-al-Islam in Mecca.⁴²⁷

For studying medicine, she went to Germany at a time when women did not have the chance to study and practice in that field in Turkey. World War I broke out while she was studying abroad. Still she continued her education, "when almost everybody thought of higher education as a luxury ..." She enjoyed living in Germany because she was impressed by the participation of women in social life. In addition to this, her perception of gender roles changed when she lived in Germany. As she put it, "I saw men and women treat each other as equals and friends with perfect freedom toward each other." She was influenced by the concern of physicians for public health as they protected and improved the health of families.⁴²⁸

When she came back to Turkey, her diploma was approved officially, and she became the country's first female doctor. Safiye Ali addressed the gender prejudices that she faced at work. Working with a large number of women, she experienced sex discrimination as some of her female patients treated her as if she was not competent enough because she was not a male doctor. They did not trust her judgement or follow her recommendations, thinking that she did not have enough knowledge as a female doctor. Although those patients were educated, they still claimed that women differed from men in mental capacity. They also rejected the possibility that other women could surpass their own educational level, or men's educational level. Uneducated female patients with low-income were in fact more receptive to her treatment and her recommendations because, in her words, "it

⁴²⁷ Ibid., pp.1–3.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., pp.1–3.

did not matter in the least to them whether it was a man or woman who knew more than they ...” These patients told her that they easily opened up to her more easily because she was a woman doctor. There were medical issues women could not bring themselves to discuss with male doctors. They shared things with her that even close members of their families would not know. There was of course one problem she sometimes faced with those patients, the problem of equal payment. In her words: “Some people thought, ‘Well, she is a woman, it does not matter if we give her less.’ I had to fight with this idea.” Although she was in favor of providing low-income patients “free care,” if the money was not an issue for them, she preferred her patients to pay her the same amount as they would have paid a male doctor. The payment gap endemic to all fields was larger among doctors.⁴²⁹

Another challenge she faced in her profession was the attitude of most male doctors towards her. However, she was thankful to Bessim Ömer Pasha for his help as he manifested a better attitude towards her. She had difficulty in fitting into the traditionally male workplace. Most male doctors did not trust her skills and women in medicine were not given the respect they deserved by their male colleagues. Figuring out that their attitude towards her was owed partly to “professional jealousy,” she did not care what they thought of her. Despite the difficulties she encountered due to gender attitudes, through her own personal efforts and determination, she did not give up her career. She was involved in medical volunteer projects regarding children’s health and nutrition at associations such as Himaye-i Etfal Cemiyeti (Society for Protection of Children), and Süt Damlası (Drop of Milk). She was also a member of the Turkish Women’s Union and in

⁴²⁹ Ibid., pp.1–3.

charge of the union's health branch.⁴³⁰ Woodsmall was concerned with the gendered bias in professional work. Women doctors in Turkey were not great in number in 1926. She emphasized that with the increase in the number of female doctors in the coming decade, the YWCA would get a better picture of the discrimination between male and female doctors, because in 1926 there were only 4 female doctors by her own account. The low number of female doctors meant that there would be little to no direct competition between men and women. She reported that there were few examples of men at the same time mentioning that women should not work because they would steal their spots, mentioning one man overheard in a ferry, saying that "Why should Turkish girls study law. There are not enough places for men. Why should women take any of them?"⁴³¹

Another career-oriented woman whom the YWCA translated from *Resimli Ay* and the YWCA was interested in was Behire Hakkı Hanım. She was the founder of a tailoring school named Bıçkı Yurdu. She started working for two reasons. The first one was the dominance of foreign tailors in Istanbul. Their products in the market were so expensive that most people could not afford them. The second reason she had begun was her reaction against the lifestyle Turkish women generally followed, which she described as lazy and inactive. She stated that women could support themselves without the help of others. In her interview, she revealed that she was motivated by these reasons; thus, she wanted to start her own sewing business. From her childhood, she was fond of sewing, but to learn about professional sewing methods and turn her hobby into a career, she had courses from Osman Zeki Bey who had earned his tailoring degree from Académie Nationale in

⁴³⁰ Ibid., pp.1-3.

⁴³¹ Ruth Woodsmall, "Social Conditions in Turkey," October, 1926, pp. 8-9, microfilm reel 64, YWCA-SSC.

France. She sent her portfolio to the Academy in Paris, and was accepted, later opening her own school.⁴³²

She had to overcome many challenges and obstacles before achieving the success she enjoyed. She overcame difficulties through her own “personal effort.” It was hard for her to keep her school running as tuition was free for all students at a time when Istanbul was involved in World War I. She had financial difficulties such as paying the increasing rent and cost of school supplies. The number of students dropping out increased as the school started to charge a small fee to meet its rising expenses.⁴³³

Yet one of major obstacles she had to overcome was a psychological one. Her friends, who came from wealthy families, were critical of her decision to be a tailor, because they claimed that a woman from high society would not sew her own clothes; rather they would have someone else do that trivial job. They blamed her for not having any self-respect. Behire Hakkı turned a deaf ear to the comments they made, because they were to her just “empty mannequins” which one dresses and undresses and should not take them seriously. She decided that it was not even worth explaining herself to them or demonstrating to them how their thinking was wrong. She only focused on accomplishing her own goals and dreams. She trained the future tailors of the country and became famous by doing great work in her field.⁴³⁴

Another story which interested the YWCA was “Makboule Hanoum’s [sic].” Her father was Ahmet Vefik Pasha, a former governor of Salonika.

⁴³² “Turkish Women that have succeeded in life,” *Resimli Ay*, November 1927, pp.1-4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴³³ Ibid., pp.1-4.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., pp.1-4.

Although she came from a wealthy family, she too wanted to start her own business. Some of her friends from her wealthy circle were critical of her career goals, insisting that she was “doing something that was almost a disgrace for a Pasha’s daughter...” She believed that for people in her circle “working outside means a loss of self-respect.” She did not use her family’s financial resources or help. With her own effort, she maintained her business despite the challenges she faced.⁴³⁵

Makboule [Makbule] had also received a home education as was common among wealthy families. She became involved in social work in Himaye-i Etfal Cemiyeti (Society for Protection of Children) and also worked at the Women’s Labor Society. She always had a strong desire to earn her own money and achieve financial freedom. Thinking about starting a tailor shop, she shared her idea of the project with her friend Nazire Hanım, the daughter of Kazım Pasha. With a limited budget and struggling financially, they started the business. The clothes they sold were not enough to cover the shop’s expenses. Makboule had difficulties making money for a long time. Her business partner wanted to quit, and so she had to return her capital. She went on a business trip to Europe to find new models for clothing. During her trip, she was in a bad state of health, suffering from kidney disease and it was impossible to continue her trip without the morphine injections that she had with her. When she returned to Istanbul, she changed a piece of equipment which did not work properly. After struggling to maintain her business, Makboule made a major strategic decision to change the location of her shop. She moved her business to Pera, which was busier and livelier in trade. The fame of her shop soon spread

⁴³⁵ “Turkish Women that have succeeded in life,” *Resimli Ay*, [the month is unclear] 1928, pp.1–4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC. In the primary source, it was written as “Refik [sic].”

throughout the city. Foreigners were also interested in the clothes that she sold. Increasing the profit margin of her shop for the first time, she was able to cover the expenses of her shop and begin to turn a profit from her business.⁴³⁶

The YWCA needed these female role models to inspire career in young women. The YWCA's interest in Nakiye Elgün, Safiye Ali, Behire Hakkı Hanım, Makbule Hanım by means of pictorial *Resimli Ay* depicted these role models as career-oriented and self-sufficient individuals. Being prominent figures in their fields, they worked hard to get ideas accepted in their areas. They overcame obstacles and achieved their career goals. The YWCA, by focusing on figures like the aforementioned, was interested in inspiring young women to pursue their career goals and gain their financial independence.

5.5. Conclusion

In Istanbul, the YWCA's American staff interacted with young women who stayed at home, and thus developed an alternative strategy by first establishing the value of work as a practice for the development of selfhood. YWCA personnel disseminated the idea of pursuing a profession by guiding members through their Employment Bureau, offering professional training, organizing talks, and presenting career-oriented role models. The aim was to instill the value in young women of prioritizing career over marriage even if this meant individuals would end up in

⁴³⁶ "Turkish Women that have succeeded in life," *Resimli Ay*, [the month is unclear] 1928, pp.1–4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

familial and social conflicts. Financial independence was foregrounded as the means for young women to direct their personal choices, take control of their lives, and achieve liberation from oppressive structures.

The Istanbul YWCA was active in promoting employment for women in the city. In 1930, the Employment Bureau of the Istanbul YWCA formally ceased operations, but the YWCA continued to help young women with “securing [job] positions.”⁴³⁷ From time to time, young women, after securing their jobs, sometimes had to discontinue their participation in the activities of the YWCA for two reasons: “... as so many of them work long hours and it is still the custom of the country that girls do not go out alone in the evening, so most of our activities in the Centers close at 7:00 P.M.”⁴³⁸ The YWCA’s American secretaries were successful in bringing professional skills to the young women whom they were able to influence, enabling them to start a career-oriented life, and reminding them that marriage should not be the ultimate goal or personal aspiration. The Istanbul YWCA stressed the idea of working for one’s own self and focusing on one’s own career despite social and familial pressure since having a profession was a vital tool for attaining individual selfhood.

⁴³⁷ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.97, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴³⁸ Dorothy Southorn, “Education in the Y.W.C.A. Centers in Constantinople,” pp.5–6, Box 330, Series V. Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Constantinople, 1920, YWCA-SSC.

CHAPTER VI

SELF-CARE

In 1914, the number of doctors in Muslim hospitals was 87 in Istanbul.⁴³⁹ While women practiced midwifery and nursing in the 1910s, medical faculties only began to admit women in 1922.⁴⁴⁰ (In 1927, the total number of female doctor graduates would be only seven.⁴⁴¹) During World War I, tuberculosis was the disease that killed highest number of people and at the beginning of the 1920s, tuberculosis was still a major issue. Municipal health services treated 50,439 people for free in 1915 while in 1922, the number dropped to 34,361.⁴⁴² In the 1910s, the constant state of war led to high numbers of sick and wounded, dying soldiers, and diseases such as cholera, typhus, small-pox, along with unsanitary conditions, lack of supplies and malnutrition. In the 1920s, raising people's awareness of epidemic diseases such as syphilis, malaria would be a concern of the officials and statesmen. The government took action in various cities providing free medical treatment for syphilis. Regulations on epidemic diseases, cholera, venereal diseases, malaria and

⁴³⁹ Tefik Gran, *Resmi Istatistiklere Gre Osmanlı Toplum ve Ekonomisi* (Istanbul: Trkiye İř Bankası Yayınları, 2017), 82–6.

⁴⁴⁰ Elizabeth B. Mayston, Business Secretary, Report on Vocational Training and Guidance, Constantinople, February, 1928, pp.1–2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁴¹ Didem Konya, “Trkiye’nin İlk Kadın Doktoru Safiye Ali ve Çalıřmaları,” *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Researches* 19, no.42 (2018): 35-54.

⁴⁴² Tefik Gran, *Resmi Istatistiklere Gre Osmanlı Toplum ve Ekonomisi* (Istanbul: Trkiye İř Bankası Yayınları, 2017), 84–94.

laws on health administration, pharmacies, labs, professionals would be revised as well.⁴⁴³

The modern state's legitimatization of its authority could be revealed not only by gaining territory but through controlling populations through institutions such as hospitals, schools and prisons which are all part of control mechanisms of the state through their disciplinary and daily practices. Disciplining and controlling bodies becomes a form of power of the nation states.⁴⁴⁴ The CUP in 1913, as a part of its nationalistic policies, would form the Turkish Strength Association (Türk Gücü Cemiyeti) to encourage physical education and sports for males, and organized like a military education. Training strong bodies would lead to a strong Turkish nation and would win the battles against foreign intruders, according to the unionists. The ancient Turkish sports would also be revived to strengthen the idea of nationalism such as wrestling, archery, and horseback riding.⁴⁴⁵ In 1911–1912, the Teacher Training School for Girls included a course on calisthenics.⁴⁴⁶ Selim Sırrı Tarcan, an expert on physical education and sports who had received his training in Switzerland, was in favor of gymnastics being added to the curriculum for females. Printed culture promoted gymnastics in relation to beauty concerns and

⁴⁴³ Health Report, undated, Series IV. Writings: Changing Status of Moslem Women (Rockefeller Grant) Statistics, Articles, reports, notes and printed material, Turkey, 1923–1930, n.d., Ruth Woodsmall papers, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

⁴⁴⁵ Cüneyd Okay, "Sport and Nation Building: Gymnastics and Sport in the Ottoman State and the Committee of Union and Progress, 1908–18," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 20, no.1 (2003):152–6.

⁴⁴⁶ Mustafa Şanal, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kız Öğretmen Okulunda Görev Yapan Kadınİdareci ve Öğretmenler ile Okuttukları Dersler," *BELLETEN* 68 (2004): 649–70. In 1909, İnas İttihad-ı Osmanlı Mektebi in Bakırköy offered various courses ranging from sewing to gymnastics. Şefika Kurnaz, *Cumhuriyet Öncesinde Türk Kadını (1839–1923)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Aile Araştırma Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 1991), 22.

aesthetic purposes.⁴⁴⁷ In 1914 physical education courses for two hours a week became part of the curriculum of the girl lycée in Istanbul.⁴⁴⁸ In the Second Constitutional period, one topic that prominent intellectuals pointed out was that women were not physically strong because they lacked an active life. They needed to be strong because they had an important role as mothers. In this correlation, they defended that their resilience mattered because the raising of the next generations was in the hands of the mothers. While they put priority on women's lives due to the maternal roles assigned to her, they recommended that the only sports women should practice was the Swedish style of gymnastics.⁴⁴⁹ During this period, compared to men, women were quite passive in joining and organizing sports activities and clubs.⁴⁵⁰ It would only be in the early republican era that women would be encouraged to join sports.

In the nation-building process, Kemalist reformers, attaining themselves a superior position, saw the public as insufficient in knowledge and underdeveloped. The Kemalist state, aspiring to earn its place among western, civilized counterparts and compete with them, saw reforms as a necessity in the nation-building process. The person would be molded into a citizen through exposure of modern techniques in a nationalist rhetoric. The new Turk represented a rupture from the past and the old, in that respect. The Turk's image as presented in the civilized world was a

⁴⁴⁷ Osman Tolga Şinoforoğlu, "Selim Sırrı Tarcan ve İsveç Jimnastiği: Beden Eğitimde İsveç Modelinin II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi Türk Eğitim Sistemine Entegrasyonu" (PhD diss., Gazi Üniversitesi, 2015), 106.

⁴⁴⁸ Veli Onur Çelik and Nefise Bulgu, "Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Batılılaşma Ekseninde Beden Eğitimi ve Spor," *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 24, (2010): 137–147.

⁴⁴⁹ Osman Tolga Şinoforoğlu, "Selim Sırrı Tarcan ve İsveç Jimnastiği: Beden Eğitimde İsveç Modelinin II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi Türk Eğitim Sistemine Entegrasyonu" (PhD diss., Gazi Üniversitesi, 2015), 106–7.

⁴⁵⁰ Veli Onur Çelik and Nefise Bulgu, "Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Batılılaşma Ekseninde Beden Eğitimi ve Spor," *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 24, (2010): 137–147.

concern of the elites.⁴⁵¹ To be a Turk meant to be strong. The nation needed strong mothers physically, because they would build the future by giving birth to strong citizens.

Selim Sırrı Tarcan, one of the influential figures in spreading sports and physical education in the late Ottoman State and in the new Republic used reproduction as one of his reasons encouraging women to do sports. Strong bodies meant a higher rate of reproduction.⁴⁵² While “... the Kemalist state continued to employ a traditional definition of female roles and emphasized reproduction and child care as the primary functions of women,”⁴⁵³ Sertaç has stated that “Sport was a crucial tool in Atatürk’s nation-building project, and women’s involvement was essential. As future mothers of the next generation, women were expected to have healthy and strong bodies.”⁴⁵⁴ The founder, Atatürk, seeing health policies as a part of its reforms, stressed that it was the state’s duty to protect the health of its citizens.⁴⁵⁵ Education and nationalism were interwoven in 1923. Samih Rıfat, who worked at the Education Ministry, stressing that nationalism shaped the policies of education, revealed the policies under two headlines; “nationalized culture and modernized teaching.” “Our educational aims will be humanitarian, but at the same time very nationalistic,” he noted. Similarly, İsmail Safa, the Minister of Education of 1923, who said that “In education, the New Turkey has accepted the aims and

⁴⁵¹ Ayça Alemdaroğlu, “Politics of the Body and Eugenic Discourse in Early Republican Turkey,” *Body & Society* 11, no.3 (2005): 61–76.

⁴⁵² Gertrud Pfister and İlknur Hacısofuoğlu, “Women’s Sport as a Symbol of Modernity: A Case Study in Turkey,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no.13 (2016), 1470–82; Demet Lüküslü and Şakir Dinçşahin, “Shaping Bodies Shaping Minds: Selim Sırrı Tarcan and the Origins of Modern Physical Education in Turkey,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no.3 (2013): 195–209.

⁴⁵³ Zehra F. Arat, “Turkish Women and The Republican Reconstruction of Tradition,” 72.

⁴⁵⁴ Sertaç Sehlíkoglu, “Sports: Turkey” in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, vol.14, eds. Suad Joseph and Elora Shehabuddin (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

⁴⁵⁵ Erdem Aydın, “Türkiye’de Genel Sağlık Sigortası Girişimleri Tarihi,” *Kebikeç*, no.12 (2001): 161–8.

principles of nationalism through and through.” Safa drew attention to strength as the fundamental element of their policy, associating it with responsibility, having confidence in one’s powers, and protecting one’s rights, whereas “Weakness is the mother of all calamities ... We have enemies in the outside. We need to be unified with a national feeling in our country.”⁴⁵⁶ Rahmi Bey, who wrote an article on how education should be in the schools in the 1920s in Turkey, was in favor of schools “preparing them to life.” He supported the idea that health and hygiene education was a necessity in school education. In the 1920s, “protecting health was a national duty.”⁴⁵⁷

In the late Ottoman State, and the new Republic, health practices and recreation for females were encouraged by both nationalist and maternalist politics. This chapter specifically will focus on health dynamics and practices the YWCA Istanbul established. The YWCA’s American staff educated young women to be more conscious of their physical bodies and health practices, contributing to the spread of the idea of individuality by promoting recreational activities for one’s own self and empowerment; it was thus more a responsibility to one’s self rather than a maternal, patriotic and national duty. The emphasis was on fulfilling an individual necessity.

⁴⁵⁶ “The Modern Movements in Turkey and Their Bearing on Islam,” pp.5-6, Box 63, Folder 9, Series V, Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Reports, Interim, 1921–1928, n.d., Ruth F. Woodsmall papers, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁵⁷ Fatih Tuğluoğlu ve T. Tunç, “1926 İlköğretim Müfredatı ve Cumhuriyet Dönemi Eğitiminin Ekonomik Hedefleri,” *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 26, no.76 (2010): 55–98.

6.1. The Istanbul YWCA

Taking care of your body and mind was becoming popular at the beginning of the twentieth century in the USA. The progressive movement also aimed to improve the standards in social and work life. Women activists were engaged in solving social problems emerging with industrialization such as public health, safety, the working conditions, and the like, in a society in which mass production and mass consumption would reshape norms and traditions. There were also new anxieties concerning being overweight because of the fact that people were less tolerant to it. One extension of this was the rise in the number of people who did exercise.⁴⁵⁸ Warren Susman noted that it was common for people to use the word “character” in the nineteenth century. Character was related with morality during that era, which would eventually encourage people to how to develop “the self” and search for new ways to shape the character and society they interacted with. The definition of character thus had a strong relation with morality. Character was defined by words such as “honor, reputation, integrity, manners.” However, there was a shift to stressing personality in the first decade of twentieth century. The importance of personality was mentioned in literature including self-help books and novels, defined by words including “fascinating, stunning, or magnetic.” Personality was not only something one could work on but was also a tool of attraction in the

⁴⁵⁸ Foucault in his book, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, wrote that “Exercise is the technique by which one imposes on the body tasks that are both repetitive and different, but always graduated. By bending towards a terminal state, exercise makes possible a perpetual characterization of the individual...It thus assures, in the form of continuity and constraint, a growth, an observation, a qualification.” Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

twentieth century. It served the consumer society which was flourishing at the same time. Developing one's self could be learned from guidebooks which were about success and from books which taught exercise, healthy living, how to have good skin and dress well, and the like. Morality was now less significant than making yourself charming and pleasing to other people. How one presented oneself to others was thus more important.⁴⁵⁹ This emphasis on personality was reflected in the messages of the YWCA's on the global perspective as well. "Attain[ing a] healthy and ideal personality" was one of the goals of the YWCA.⁴⁶⁰

In the United States, the end of Victorian age marked new meanings attached to sport: "Self-restraint and self-sacrifice yielded to self-expression, personal taste, and the implicit sense that that the pursuit of happiness was the essence of liberty and the purpose of life." Sport became a means of self-expression and a way to develop good relationships by the late 1910s. Physical health started to be associated with positive emotions and joy, gaining more importance in the 1920s.⁴⁶¹ Sport was yet another tool to be pleased with oneself and the choices one had made. "Abundant life," "Camp of happiness" were among the mottos of the YWCA in Turkey while promoting their recreational activities for young women. The YWCA staff in Turkey promoted sports and physical health promising joy, pleasure, reflecting the spirit of the American experience; "Life in the Near East is cast too much in a minor strain. It needs the major note of pure joy in physical

⁴⁵⁹ Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 273–85.

⁴⁶⁰ Tsai Kuei and Lilly K. Haass "A Study of the Young Women's Christian Association of China: 1890–1930," *Chinese Studies in History* 11, no.1 (1977): 18–63.

⁴⁶¹ Donald J. Mrozek, "From National Health to Personal Fulfillment, 1890–1940" in *Fitness in American Culture: Images of Health, Sport and the Body, 1830–1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 18–30.

relaxation,” was the assessment of Ruth F. Woodsmall regarding Turkey.⁴⁶² In the 1920s, Weaver Pangburn highlighted that spending time for leisure, sports and being physically active was a fundamental way of cultivating individuality which lead to self-development and self-empowerment.⁴⁶³

The YWCA’s recreational program at the Pera and Stamboul Centers offered young women gymnastics, outdoor and indoor recreation, games, dramatics, dancing, hiking, sight-seeing, city extension programs of recreation, training of recreational supervisors and playground supervisors, and summer camps that taught swimming and life-saving.⁴⁶⁴ With the equipment available, volleyball, basketball, tennis, baseball, gymnastics, calisthenics, Swedish drill, and swimming were among the recreation promoted by the YWCA.⁴⁶⁵ In 1921, in Istanbul, more than 95 girls were eager to learn tennis at the association. Social dancing was also on the program of the YWCA in the early 1920s.⁴⁶⁶ The YWCA organized basketball and volleyball tournament, as well as health carnivals and talks, and posture contests.⁴⁶⁷

Ismet Rauf Hanım, who was Istanbul Health Secretary, claimed that the YWCA was the only facility which provided gym classes when girls left the school. Girls “can find no health institution, no gymnasium, no field suitable for sports and other activities through which she can express herself. This is where the YWCA

⁴⁶² Ruth F. Woodsmall, “Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey,” October 1926, p.70

⁴⁶³ Weaver Pangburn, “The Worker's Leisure and His Individuality,” *American Journal of Sociology* 27, no. 4 (1922): 433–41.

⁴⁶⁴ Ruth F. Woodsmall, “Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey,” October 1926, p.68

⁴⁶⁵ Anna Welles Brown, “Orphanages In Constantinople,” in *Constantinople To-Day; or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople; a Study in Oriental Social Life*, ed. C. R. Johnson, (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 283–4.

⁴⁶⁶ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.73, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁶⁷ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.76, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

service centers step in...” Mary Em Fisler, who served as the Director of Health Education in Istanbul between 1922 and 1925, summarized in three articles what “the outstanding needs of the girls of this country which health education department can meet.” Young women’s posture, hygiene, creating recreational activities, and cleanliness were among the concerns of the Health department of the YWCA.⁴⁶⁸

6.2. Dancing:

The YWCA’s mainly American staff were active participant of dancing in deed in the years the new Republic was not founded. In Istanbul a number of the YWCA staff attended dance parties of the YMCA in 1919 and 1920. Staff from the American armed services and the Near East Relief also participated in these social gatherings. The YWCA staff not only participated in dance events but also in lunch and swimming gatherings as well. The international staff, both men and women, socialized together, played ball and swam together in the late 1910s. This was at a time when Muslim women’s social interaction with men was more reserved and limited compared to the interaction among international staff in Istanbul.⁴⁶⁹ Only in the new Republic were the curtains in trams which separated the sexes lifted,⁴⁷⁰ and harem (private sphere) and selamlık (reception room where male had his guests) areas of the house would transform into guest rooms where both sexes could be

⁴⁶⁸ “Report of Mary Em Fisler, Department of Health Education,” [date is unreadable], p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁶⁹ “Appendix B: Selected notes of James Daniel ‘Jimmie’ Miller 1919–1920,” Box 1, Folder 4, Turkey, 1919–1920, Hazel Vernon Miller papers, YWCA-SCC.

⁴⁷⁰ Nermin Abadan-Unat, *Women in Turkish Society* (Leiden : Brill, 1981), 12–3.

hosted.⁴⁷¹ These patriarchal codes were challenged at the same time by associations like the YWCA in the 1910s, since they encouraged recreation and socialization with both sexes at leisure, which was a more western concept.

National and international dances were taught in the association. In the mid-1920s, the YWCA also offered clogging in their program.⁴⁷² The YWCA staff not only encouraged young women to dance but also trained them in various types of dance and sent young women to orphanages, local schools, workrooms, and refugee camps to disseminate demonstrations of dance. Young women wearing European clothes and big white wigs, some of them impersonating men, dancing in French style, not only contributed to the spread of Western modernity but also promoted dance as both a sport and also a part of leisure. In annual Health demonstrations, it became normal to see young women dancing as English country dancers, dressed in historical clothes.⁴⁷³

While the YWCA staff interpreted dancing as an activity of self-expression one could be proud of and encouraged young women to practice and spread dancing, the Islamist press attacked the YWCA. Both *Sebilürreşad* and *Tevhid-i Efkar* claimed that the YWCA deceived young women with their programs; dancing being one of them. *Tevhid-i Efkar* warned the members of the YWCA that they should be not proud; they were not like the “Anatolian women [who had fought] in the same rank with their fighting sons” while they were busy learning

⁴⁷¹ Ayşe Durakbaşı, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Modern Kadın ve Erkek Kimliklerinin Oluşumu: Kemalist Kadın Kimliği ve ‘Münevver Erkekler’,” in *75 yılda kadınlar ve erkekler*, ed. Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu (Istanbul : Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 29–50.

⁴⁷² “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.73, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁷³ Photographs with captions, Box 81, Folder 9, Series VII. Photographs: Subjects, Countries, Turkey, Smyrna, n.d., Ruth F. Woodsmall papers, YWCA-SCC.

dancing.⁴⁷⁴ By the male writers of the conservative press, dancing was a threat to motherhood.

Ataturk favored in promoting the idea that women attended balls and dances in the new western State⁴⁷⁵, which symbolically represented Turkey's new national image to the world. The image of women in ballroom dancing was one of the representations the Kemalist state wanted to sell to the world as a civilized nation, because it empowered the image of the state among the western ones. Arat says that "the [the Kemalist state] treat[ed] women as symbols and as tools of modernization and Westernization, rather than as the equal and full partners of men."⁴⁷⁶ Dance was an extension of this. However, it was not easy to make people dance in a country when both sexes did not get close in the public sphere. In one case, Ataturk had to hire actresses to dance in one of the earliest balls he organized because the number of female participants was so low. In one of the early balls, Atatürk insisted and commanded a soldier to dance when he rejected the request to dance with a woman: "I do not believe that a single woman would exist on earth that would turn down the dance offer of a Turkish soldier in uniform. Now I command! Disband to the saloon! Forward march! Dance!"⁴⁷⁷

Sight-seeing outings, parties, games, and picnics were among the entertainment activities the YWCA organized. Halloween and the Valentine's Day parties were thrown at the association along with groups demonstrating dances and

⁴⁷⁴ "Who is responsible," *Tevhid-i Efkar*, April 11, 1922.

⁴⁷⁵ Cihan Aktaş, *Tanzimat'tan 12 Mart'a Kılık Kıyafet ve İktidar* (İstanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2006), 154-5.

⁴⁷⁶ Zehra F. Arat, "Turkish Women and The Republican Reconstruction of Tradition," in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, eds. Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 72.

⁴⁷⁷ Aktaş, *Tanzimat'tan 12 Mart'a Kılık Kıyafet ve İktidar*, 155.

concerts. The YWCA staff found parties useful for the girl who interacted with Stamboul Center because;

Parties form an important part of the program, for (this is especially true at Stamboul) they are the only form of amusement open to many of the girls who come from conservative families. Planning for and entertaining at these parties helps the girls to acquire the social manners of the western world, which are being introduced into their own home lives, and makes the period of transition a little less difficult to deal with.⁴⁷⁸

Elizabeth Clarahan, the administrator of the Preparatory School at the American College for Girls, Istanbul, was dismissed from her job in the 1930, for having problems with the faculty. She wrote a letter to Genevieve Lowry, the secretary of the YWCA in the 1930, on what she would recommend women members of the YWCA read. According to Clarahan: "May I remind you of Jane Addams' discussion of the character values of such work in *The Spirit of Youth*?"⁴⁷⁹ Jane Addams, depicted consumer culture in her book as affecting the leisure time of young men and women in a negative way. In modern life, young men and women who worked in shops and factories found the freedom and had time to socialize at night by going to dance halls. They thus drifted into futile relationships as a result of consuming alcohol and spending too much time at dance halls. In her book, she offered alternative, more beneficial, models for youth to spend their leisure time. However, the YWCA promoted dancing and socializing even at night and continued to put on shows related to dance. The Sports Club of the YWCA Pera Center had set up a show which included Swedish gymnastics and different types of dances such as "the Minuet, Scotch dance, Sailor's dance, Oriental dance, Polish,

⁴⁷⁸ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.79-83, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁷⁹ Elizabeth Clarahan's letter to Miss Genevieve Lowry, October 18, 1930, p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC; "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.155, Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

flirtation, Esmeralda, etc.” A Greek journalist was very surprised by their good performance and by the participation. Before the show, he had expected to be disappointed because gym demonstrations were something new and largely unknown in the society of the time. Also, he heard that some mothers were unwilling to send their daughters to the training sessions for these dances. In his view, the dance would not have been included in the normal program. The association included it for public concerns, fearing that the audience might get bored at watching a one-hour long gymnastic demonstration.⁴⁸⁰ One of the girls defined the YWCA as “the only honorable place” for dancing.⁴⁸¹ Even supervised recreation took time to be accepted by the parents. There was also the idea of perceiving recreation “as a luxury.”⁴⁸² In the late 1920s, conservative intellectuals questioned in the newspapers whether the new way of life would corrupt young women and weaken the family relations. A writer from *Sevimli Ay* worried whether a small number of women would be a bad influence for the majority by going to public places such as dance halls, not taking care of their children, and neglecting their responsibilities. As indicated by Duben and Behar, “ ‘the woman issue’ struck deep chords in sexually restrictive Ottoman society.”⁴⁸³

⁴⁸⁰ T. K. K., “From a Gym Demonstration,” *Apogevmatini* (Greek Newspaper), June 14, 1926, Constantinople, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁸¹ “Report of Miss Dorothy E. Brown, Pera Secretary, October-December 1925, Istanbul,” p.3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁸² “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.74, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁸³ Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family, and Fertility, 1880–1940*, 196–8.

6.3. Camps and Sports

Camps were another form of social activity. The YWCA's camp of 1921 in Istanbul was claimed by the YWCA to be "the only camp opened to all girls." In the late 1920s, few schools would arrange camps, and only for their own students.⁴⁸⁴

Organizations that promoted camping activities were scarce compared to those in the West although the YWCA staff observed that young women were quite interested into these: "Camps and excursions [were] both new to the country but the response of the youth of all nationalities shown in the YMCA and YWCA Summer Camps for the past five years, prove that the camp appeal and outing instinct is quite as strong in the youth of the East as the West." Although they were not widespread in Turkey, the YWCA staff was also active in bringing women together through their camping activities as well as their recreational programs.⁴⁸⁵

One of the main purpose of the YWCA was to promote individual growth in addition to progress made as a group.⁴⁸⁶ Through these camps the secretaries aimed to enable young women to be self-sufficient, self-governing and take on their own responsibilities. Belkıs Halim Vassaf, after her graduation from teacher's training college, attended one of the camps the YWCA organized as a participant as her brother had arranged it for her. Years later she would work at the YWCA, but first she attended the camp so that she could learn English. In her account, the camp's "cosmopolitan nature" was dominant; Greeks, Armenians, Americans, Russians as well as Turks participated in the camp and each individual was responsible for her

⁴⁸⁴ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930," p.84, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁸⁵ Ruth F. Woodsmall, "Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey," October 1926, pp. 65-75.

⁴⁸⁶ "E. Akdjeoglou, Report of the Group Conference, May 31- June 2, 1926, Istanbul," p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

daily chores such as washing the dishes and the clothes, cooking, and the like. In addition to learning to do their own daily chores, they were busy with sports activities such as swimming and baseball, and leisure activities such as evening theatrical presentations or bonfire nights. “We saw [learned] baseball at the camp for the first time, we learned swimming. I played basketball a lot.” The camp, in her words, was “so planned that we [they] jumped from one activity and task from another.” The YWCA secretaries kept them so busy that they did not have a minute to do other things such as “gossiping” or being idle.⁴⁸⁷ As well as swimming and basketball, volleyball, folk-dancing, hand-work, pottery class, water sports and lifeguard training were regular components of the camps of the YWCA, with masquerades at night.⁴⁸⁸ In the camps, they embraced responsibility and self-empowerment and not being dependent on anyone but on one’s own.

In the new Republic, the National Federation of Sports Clubs was established, having two main federated sections namely football and athletics. Turkey also participated in the Olympic Games in 1924 for the first time. While Turkish sports clubs proliferated compared to the previous decade, mixed Turkish sports clubs allowed men and women to do recreational activities together for the first times such as swimming, running, rowing, basketball and the like. The number of Armenian sports club was 11; Greek sports club numbered 21 whereas there was one Central Jewish sports club. Generally, the sports clubs which had women participants were more informal disunited organizations, located in various parts of

⁴⁸⁷Gündüz Vassaf, *Annem Belkıs* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları), 2000), 116–26.

⁴⁸⁸ Scrap book, “Camp Happiness: Sea of Marmara,” Box 81, Folder 9–10, Ruth Woodsmall papers, YWCA-SCC.

Istanbul. Other than these sports clubs, general organizations included recreational programs such as the Turkish Hearths and the YMCA.⁴⁸⁹

The YWCA staff claimed that “athletics for girls over school-age are practically unknown except in the YWCA and American College.”⁴⁹⁰ The YWCA was not satisfied with the number of public parks, playgrounds, private clubs and tennis courts in Istanbul.⁴⁹¹ According to the YWCA staff, physical culture had been quite neglected by the state previously, it started to show progress in the mid 1920s as training for teachers of physical culture increased as well as the state’s engagement of instructors from the Royal Swedish Gymnastic Institute. “Courses of advanced training, lasting one year, and intended for teachers of physical culture, were organized in the early part of 1927, and were attended by 60 teachers, of whom 24 were women.”

Selim Sirri Tarcan, writing an article on musical gymnastics in the Young American Christian Associations, was impressed by how music guided the movements in gymnastics; the usage of music in gymnastics could also help children who had learning problems since with the rhythm of music, they could easily follow the movements. While the usage of music in the American style of calisthenics had psychological benefits in his view, he also highlighted that Swedish gymnastics put more muscles to work since the music created the risk of skipping some movements. Since Americans were teaching this in Turkey and bringing their own style with them, Tarcan was in favor of evaluating this

⁴⁸⁹ Ruth F. Woodsmall, “Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey,” October 1926, pp. 65–75, Box 63, Folder 9, Series V. Professional Activities, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁹⁰ “Report of Miss Dorothy E. Brown, April-June 1926, Pera Service Center,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁹¹ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.72, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

American type of gymnastics from physiological, psychological, and educational perspectives.⁴⁹² Tarcan was invited to provide background information to the works he had done regarding the history of physical education in Turkey because he had extensive experience in the field at that time because he was “the inspector of [physical] education for all Turkey.”⁴⁹³ Hoping to reach young working people from that channel as well, the YWCA hoped that the number of members in Health Workers’ Club would also increase and develop into an extensive structure.

6.4. Health and fitness

The YWCA did not create a “fitness elite”⁴⁹⁴ in the 1910s and 1920s in Turkey. The YWCA Turkey was rather able to reach a variety of women coming from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Some of them had reasonable income from their families while some of them suffered financially and lacked health resources which consequently affected their wellbeing. While the people the Istanbul YWCA reached were mostly women who stayed at home, the rest included teachers, students, cooks, clerks, business secretarial work, telephone operators, saleswomen, nurses, house keepers, painters, stenographers, social workers, tailors, maids, domestic workers, governesses and the like. There were also significant

⁴⁹² Selim Sırrı, “Musical gymnastics in the Young People’s Christian Associations,” *Cumhuriyet*, February 6, 1926 in Series V, Box 63, Folder 9–11, Series V. Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Reports, Interim, 1921–1928, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

⁴⁹³ “International YWCA Radiogram, Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education Director, Constantinople Service Centers, Health Education in Constantinople, January 1- March 31, 1926,” p.4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁹⁴ I borrowed the term from Salcedo who wrote on the Portland YWCA. Marissa Salcedo, “The Best of Intentions: Upbuilding Through Health at the Portland YWCA, 1908–1959,” *Journal of Women's History* 15, no.3 (2003):183–189.

number of girls who attended Turkish and foreign colleges, as well as the lycées.⁴⁹⁵ The YWCA staff was eager to enter the homes of young women so that they could see what they needed concerning health education. Another reason was to reach more people during their visits and attract more people to the association. The YWCA staff, by reaching mothers of registrants, gained approval from their mothers to visit their homes.⁴⁹⁶ “To link the homes more closely with the Centers through visitations” was one of the goals of the YWCA Istanbul.⁴⁹⁷ From the mid 1920s onward, the YWCA committee advised that “the home should be brought to the Center rather than the Center to the home.” Also, sometimes visiting homes might be uncomfortable to people due to their living conditions,⁴⁹⁸ though a number of YWCA secretaries not only visited the homes of young women but also kept a cross-sectional study, revealing these conditions:

Of the fifty Stamboul [Istanbul] girls whose homes were visited, many were found to live in ramshackle dilapidated houses, where the whole family occupies two rooms, or even only one. Toilets are unsanitary and difficult to keep clean. The water supply is often cut off at night. This type of house is hardly ever provided with a bathroom, and there is not a single warm place where serious ablutions might be performed with comfort.⁴⁹⁹

The YWCA staff were aware of the fact that this fact did not reflect the whole city in terms of home circumstances in Istanbul. Young women of the middle class had better conditions, at least three or four rooms in their homes although they lacked private bedrooms, while girls of richer families had a number of bedrooms. The

⁴⁹⁵ “Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929-June 1930,” p.61, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁹⁶ “Annual Report, Confidential, Part II, Genevieve Lowry, General Secretary of Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey, From September 1929–1930,” pp.4–13, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁹⁷ Annual Report, January 1, 1931, Clara L. Bissell, not for publication, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁹⁸ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey, November, 1929-June 1930,” p.152, Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁴⁹⁹ “Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930,” p.62.

number of well-to-do women at the YWCA was only 8 out of 75 at the Pera Center while in the Stamboul center it was six out of 50. The concept of public bath houses or hamams was new to the YWCA secretaries. Young women who did not have bathrooms usually used public bath houses.⁵⁰⁰ A well-equipped gymnasium was on the top floor of Pera Center which included shower baths that were also open to use for young women. The only disadvantage of the gymnasium was it did not have a dressing room. The gymnasium at Stamboul center had no shower baths or dressing rooms.⁵⁰¹

The YWCA initiated health campaigns, health weeks, a series of talks on health, physical examinations for all their registrants, and directions on posture and cleanliness. Nakiye Elgün's observation as stated in the report was: "Young girls do not want to be dirty," said Elgün, "they are dirty if dire necessity compels them to it. We know from an examination of the home backgrounds of the girls that many of them are deprived of bathing facilities." The YWCA staff perceived that self-responsibility was also related with how you took care of yourself; it was a necessity for improving one self.⁵⁰² The cleanliness of girls who came to the YWCA centers was not satisfactory, according to the report of the Service Centers in Istanbul (1929–1930). Girls wearing the same clothes, including underwear, and their "not taking pride in their personal appearance" were noticeable and the "need for a strongly emphasized health program" was a must. To encourage girls' to be

⁵⁰⁰ Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930," p.62 Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁰¹ "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June 1930," p.72, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁰² "Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June 1930," p.150, Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

interested in their personal hygiene, one of the activities they included was visiting the Constantinople Woman's College for "a health week."⁵⁰³

Professional athletes' routines were also applied, including health examinations and muscular assessments.⁵⁰⁴ For thorough body examination, Fisler was in cooperation with a Greek doctor and a nurse from the American hospital. The recommendations of doctors were thoroughly followed by the YWCA, such as "remov[ing] tonsils, eyes needing treatment and examination, etc."⁵⁰⁵ Treating them like certified players who needed to pass some check-up routines, not to endanger their members physical health, as a safety measure, a doctor doing health check based on women's medical records and a complete physical examination. The YWCA Istanbul specifically bought scales for height and weight which could enable them to measure not only these characteristics but also "muscular strength, posture, feet."⁵⁰⁶

The YWCA's mainly American staff and a child specialist in Turkey they interviewed with were both critical of the fatalistic attitude towards medical care among the uneducated people. The child specialist stated: "The greatest obstacle to better health conditions is the spirit of fatalism which controls that everyday life of nine-tenths of the people in Turkey." To the doctors's words, the YWCA staff added; "The belief that all things come from God even disease and that preventing

⁵⁰³ "Report of the Service Centers Istanbul, Turkey, November 1929- June 1930," p.63, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁰⁴ "Report of Health Education Department, Mary Em. Fisler, October-December 1924," pp.1-5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁰⁵ "Report of Health Education Department, Mary Em. Fisler, October-December 1924," pp.1-5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁰⁶ "Report of Health Education Department, Mary Em. Fisler, October-December 1924," pp.1-5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

disease means thwarting God's will, is very common ... The value of having a doctor is questioned. 'What can one doctor do if fate has already decided?' ”⁵⁰⁷

Forging agreements with good doctors to work for free was another goal of the YWCA. Safiye Ali, who was influenced by Mary Mills Patrick to become a physician while studying at the American College, was one of the Turkish women doctors who examined girls for free.⁵⁰⁸ Another concern was working with male doctors. In 1925, when Dr. Hadjisavas was to examine the girls, the YWCA secretary Dorothy Rutherford stated that although they were quite glad to have Dr Hadjisavas (affiliated with the American Hospital), “the ideal is to have a women doctor for girls, but he was the next possible.”⁵⁰⁹ In one instance, the YWCA was especially happy to find Dr. Ataoullah in 1926. She was a Turkish female physician, who had had medical experience working in England⁵¹⁰ and was quite curious about the work the YWCA was doing in Istanbul. The idea of being examined was something new for the girls who attended the YWCA. Some of them were uncomfortable with these processes,⁵¹¹ while some had a more positive reaction. Some of girls were in fact curious to learn about their health status.⁵¹² The

⁵⁰⁷ Ruth F. Woodsmall, “Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey,” October 1926, pp.24–5.

⁵⁰⁸ “Report of Health Education Department, Mary Em. Fisler, October-December 1924,” p. 5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁰⁹ “Report of Miss Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education Director, September-December 1925,” p.4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵¹⁰ Nuran Yildirim, in *A History of Healthcare in Istanbul* provided a detailed account of the hospitals and doctors in Ottoman State. Women seeking training or medical education abroad was common. In 1917, Ferit [Talay] Bey who was the Health Director was critical of the fact that Turkish women studied abroad for being doctor while foreign doctors could easily practice being doctor in Turkey. Nuran Yildirim, *A History of Healthcare in Istanbul: Health Organizations, Epidemics, Infections and Disease Control, Preventive Health Institutions, Hospitals, Medical Education* (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2010; European Capital of Culture, 2010).

⁵¹¹ “International YWCA Radiogram, Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education Director, Constantinople Service Centers, Health Education in Constantinople, January 1- March 31, 1926,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵¹² “International YWCA Radiogram, Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education Director, Constantinople Service Centers, Health Education in Constantinople, January 1- March 31, 1926,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

YWCA Istanbul through these examinations was able to detect many kinds of diseases but they were also trying to change the young women's health routines. Dorothy Rutherford, the Health Education Director in Constantinople Service centers, in a radiogram revealed the details of the examination process and which policies applied afterwards. One of the common "faults" detected was posture, according to Rutherford. What young women needed was discussed after these check-ups, varying from body mass to circulation:

Out of the twenty-eight girls examined we found no serious defects but we found good material for an individual health class. We can, without a doubt, correct uneven shoulders, heads forward, flat chests, relaxed abdomens, poor circulation, toes turned out, and several cases of overweight and underweight. The girls, especially Girl Reserves, are keenly interested in posture and health habits.⁵¹³

The YWCA was also influential in terms of directing girls to attain a "healthy" life through regulating their eating and drinking habits. On "food values," her recommendation to one of the groups was "the little item of drinking water before breakfast," and drinking 8 glasses of water a day. One of the girls who was very keen on developing "healthy rules" proudly told her that "I am drinking eight glasses of water right now." All girls needed to pay more attention to "health rules."⁵¹⁴ Making women conscious in their weight and bodies, the YWCA was defining what was and was not ideal healthiness. The YWCA Istanbul represented these messages with visuals, presenting ideal role models. Healthy and unhealthy representations made their message more strong and powerful. Thinness, having a

⁵¹³ "International YWCA Radiogram, Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education Director, Constantinople Service Centers, Health Education in Constantinople, January 1- March 31, 1926," pp. 2-3, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵¹⁴ "International YWCA Radiogram, Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education Director, Constantinople Service Centers, Health Education in Constantinople, January 1- March 31, 1926," p. 2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

fragile outlook, and wearing high heels might all have been associated with the concept of attractiveness of the time; the YWCA was eager to break those stereotypes of women, who did not wear high heels, but looked strong and healthy:

In another corner a screen was removed and we had on one side the thin frail girl, slumped down in a chair, holding her head with aspirin and pills before her, the fat girl with her candy and sweets, the girl who insisted on paint from the outside to brighten up her face while her feet were almost crying out for relief and her shoulders needed material comfort while on the other side the very attractive, animated looking girl in sensible shoes, middie and skirt was a delightful contrast. The crowd fell back and several girls in middie and bloomers represented the Recreation side of our Health program with two clog dances followed by the folk and interpretive type of dances.⁵¹⁵

There is not a statistic record of the exact number of people living in Turkey in 1923 but it was estimated to be around twelve million.⁵¹⁶ In 1927,⁵¹⁷ the population had increased to 13,648,270.⁵¹⁸ The percentage of people who lived in the villages was quite high, being 75.78% whereas people who lived in the cities was 24.22%.⁵¹⁹ In this mostly peasant society, the number of illiterate people was more than eighty percent. In 1923, the number of lycées was still very low, being only 23 whereas the number of students who attended lycées was 1,241 and the number of teachers who worked at those lycée was 513. Only 0.01 percent of the total population in 1923 attended a lycée.⁵²⁰ Furthermore, health education was not a specific course taught in schools in 1926. Instead, under the name of Hayat Bilgisi [Knowledge of Life or which could be interpreted as Home Economics], a course in

⁵¹⁵ “Report of the Health Carnival, Constantinople Y.W.C.A., March 4, 1926,” microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵¹⁶ Necdet Sakaoğlu, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Eğitim Tarihi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992), 30–37.

⁵¹⁷ The first census in the Early Republic was taken in 1927. In the Ottoman State, the census which included for the first time the number of women, was held in 1880s.

⁵¹⁸ Rüya Kasarcı, “Türkiye’de Nüfus Gelişimi,” *Türkiye Coğrafyası Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, no.5 (1996): 248–66.

⁵¹⁹ Abidin Temizer and M. Selçuk Özkan, “Köy Enstitülerini Sözlü Tarih ve Yazılı Tarih Üzerinden Anlamak (Kars Cılavuz Köy Enstitüsü),” *Journal Of Oral History* 1, no.1(2018): 21–39.

⁵²⁰ Sakaoğlu, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Eğitim Tarihi*, 30–7.

elementary schools included subjects such as keeping clothes clean and the importance of vaccination.

In a booklet which described the YWCA Turkey, under the title of Health Education, the transformation in Turkey was underlined. The YWCA stressed in the booklet that the YWCA had a role which in a way offered a method for the new regime to be effective:

The emancipation of women shown in dress, social reform, opening of new professions, the making of polygamy illegal, and the recognized influence of women makes an insistent demand on the YWCA to expand its program. The Health Education classes are one of the most effective means of preparing girls for this new freedom.⁵²¹

Even small steps like inspiring the girls to adopt a habit of brushing their teeth daily was a goal in the health education of the YWCA Istanbul. In an example Rutherford presented, the YWCA provided a girl with a toothbrush out of their special fund because the girl did not already have one due to her financial situation. The girl's response when questioned about how she brushed her teeth and what she used was "fingers and soap." Another example of insufficient knowledge of dental care that Rutherford gave, was with regard to one of the girls who was 14 years old. She was asked the last time she had brushed her teeth. She answered, "The dentist told me not to touch my teeth till I was sixteen." The last time she had brushed her teeth had been one year prior when she was thirteen.⁵²² The YWCA staff, by providing knowledge on health, corrected misinformation regarding the girls' self-care routines.

⁵²¹ Booklet of the YWCA, [Health Section], microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵²² "International YWCA Radiogram, Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education Director, Constantinople Service Centers, Health Education in Constantinople, January 1- March 31, 1926," p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

A number of them had problems with clothing in winter; “I marveled every time I asked a girl to remove her middy: you could hardly believe so much could be clothes and so little actually the girl herself.”⁵²³ According to Fisler, Turkish girls were “greatly handicapped” because “they have so recently come into any freedom of action, thought or dress, and consequently have had no opportunity to participate in games, dances, etc.”⁵²⁴ Mary Em Fisler claimed the YWCA helped girls wear healthier clothes and transformed their fashion; “Middies and bloomers and full skirts are now essential parts of most girls’ wardrobe and have come to be almost a regulation uniform for the younger girls. Freedom of movement for even the Turkish girls is being enjoyed now as never before.”⁵²⁵ They encouraged them to have a more comfortable outlook, develop small healthy daily routines, and adopt more recreational lifestyle:

Through health talks, posters, individual conferences with girls, and personal example, a gradual change has taken place in the clothing of the girls. Comfortable shoes, middies, bloomers, and full skirts have become a part of a girl’s wardrobe. Some habits of living in regard to bathing, sleeping with windows open etc. have changed. The Center program has created an interest in recreational activities, particularly in more out-of-door living, and play is no longer considered a waste of time.⁵²⁶

“The influence of the department is noticeable in the clothing of the girls, even those who are not gym girls. This has been particularly noticeable in the case of shoes.” Mary Em Fisler, the Health Director, at the beginning of 1920s was quite surprised at “the shoes worn by all ages of girls.” High heels, which were common

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ “Summary Report of Mary Em. Fisler to Constantinople Y.W.C.A., Health education Secretary, 1922–1925,” p.4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵²⁵ “Summary Report of Mary Em. Fisler to Constantinople Y.W.C.A., Health education Secretary, 1922–1925,” p. 4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵²⁶ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.73, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

among the young women, did not offer any support while walking, according to Fisler. As the streets were full of “cobbled roads,” the French heeled shoes preferred by the girls would be very problematic, being “poorly made,” and “worse fitting shoes” than low-heeled shoes. The Health department especially recommended comfortable, low-heeled shoes.⁵²⁷ The high number of girls wearing French shoes was a sign of imitating western norms and the desire to be more fashionable by replacing their old traditional shoes. On the other hand, the secretaries were critical of the practicality of those fashionable trends offered, disregarding the popular beauty concerns of 1920s:

Araxie, inclined over the toe of a huge shoe, made it plain why our feet objected to wearing the high-heeled pointed toe shoe, still so often seen on the streets of Constantinople, and the shoes on display, from the extreme painful looking shoe down to the comfortable sensible looking one now so generally worn by our center girls, spoke for themselves. The foot games were very popular and appreciated by all. Sona walked stocking with the toes; she explained later she had never worn shoes and stockings till ten in her village life. The Glee Club in the meantime burst forth with their songs about good feet and good shoes, bad habit-good habit etc.⁵²⁸

Activities in the Istanbul Centers including health talks and posters as well as gymnastic shows and general examinations “stimulated increasing interest in the health question.” The curiosity to learn more about health-related issues was obvious. According to the secretary, that could be seen in the increasing number of members in different health education classes.⁵²⁹ The YWCA organized many health talks in Istanbul on subjects including “feet, posture and health rules.”⁵³⁰

⁵²⁷ “Summary Report of Miss Mary Em Fisler, Health Education Secretary, 1922–1925,” pp. 4–5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵²⁸ “Report of the Health Carnival, Constantinople Y.W.C.A., March 4, 1926,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵²⁹ “Report of Health Education Department, Mary Em. Fisler, October-December 1924,” pp.4–5, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

Rutherford in her 1925 report stressed that the sign that a high number of girls were interested in health education was that they asked a lot of questions regarding the subject.⁵³¹

Physical self-care included following a healthy diet, getting enough nutrition, developing regular routines and getting exercise. In the health carnivals organized annually by the YWCA Istanbul, theater was used not only for entertainment but as education for health consciousness. Health Theater included two actors, one speaking Turkish and one English. “One (stunt) took place on shipboard where only healthy passengers were allowed to come aboard and the other on the train making various stops but refused passengers to Coffee Lane [sic] and Sleepless Village, etc.” In that carnival, a negative role model was presented by the YWCA class of Home Nursing showing a house in which a low-income family lived in terrible conditions, not following any “health rules.” “The girls appeared and showed how things should be done and kept.”⁵³² The health carnival also gave messages about what to eat or what to avoid by their booths named “Vegetable Greens” and “Potato Hills.”⁵³³ “The Health Theater” showed how they looked before the YWCA entered their lives and after, by performances of four girls who were “stout, very pepless with painful feet etc.” While “they represented the condition of girls before they had come to the gym,” the powerful transformation of them after they joined the YWCA was presented by their “do[ing] something

⁵³¹ “Report of Miss Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education Director, September- December 1925,” p.4, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵³² Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education in Constantinople, April 1- June 30, 1927, Constantinople, Turkey,” pp.1–2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵³³ “Dorothy Rutherford, Health Education in Constantinople, April 1- June 30, 1927, Constantinople, Turkey,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

energetic or healthful.”⁵³⁴ Using drama was thus one of the most powerful means to instill personal hygiene and increase leisure and recreation. “The Exercise and Diet Booth” gave the message to girls that they should follow personal gymnastics routines which fit their bodies. They showed “the overweight girl” doing a totally different exercise than “the underweight girl.” Each exercise was adapted to different body types.⁵³⁵ Another booth was designed for posture. Using songs and poems about posture (for instance one of the songs they sang was about the perfect posture being round)⁵³⁶ for attracting people and raising their consciousness was common in health carnivals. After hearing the instructive song, girls adjusted their posture and asked one another whether they were doing it correctly. Height and weight booths were provided for girls to learn the term “average weight” for the first time in their lives according to the staff.⁵³⁷ Office women wearing more professional outfits, comfortable clothes and low-heeled comfortable shoes, as well as good posture were shown in contrast to office women wearing dressy clothes, too much make-up, sitting with poor posture, and tottering in high-heeled shoes. Performers also talked about how to follow good health habits. It represented the YWCA as a “Health City” like “a magic box” where women could acquire these desirable habits in their lives.⁵³⁸

A Bundle of Letters to Busy Girls on Practical Matters, written by Grace H.

Dodge, who worked at the YWCA of the USA, was one of the books the YWCA

⁵³⁴ “Report of the Health Carnival, Constantinople Y.W.C.A., March 4, 1926,” pp.1–2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵³⁵ “Report of the Health Carnival, Constantinople Y.W.C.A., March 4, 1926,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵³⁶ “Report of the Health Carnival, Constantinople Y.W.C.A., March 4, 1926,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵³⁷ “Report of the Health Carnival, Constantinople Y.W.C.A., March 4, 1926,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵³⁸ “Report of the Health Carnival, Constantinople Y.W.C.A., March 4, 1926,” pp.1-2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

Istanbul assigned the young women who attended the Business Girls' Club. Phydalia Stephandias, who was the Club Assistant at YWCA Istanbul during that time, revealed the young women's opinions on the book;⁵³⁹ "they enjoy it immensely although they sometimes disagree with the author's opinion." The author of the book talked in detail how a woman should organize her day, at what time she would wake up, how much she should eat, and how much time should she sleep. The book, having a specific chapter on health, recommended also Victorian hygiene habits such as breathing fresh air and ventilating the room in an extensive way, i.e., opening the windows in the morning and at night. In cases where the bedroom did not have any windows, one should leave the door open according to the author. "If it seems too much of a draft, do as it is often done in a sick-room: a piece of flannel or open cloth is taken and nailed on the sash, and the window opened a foot or more."⁵⁴⁰ Information on what breakfast, lunch, dinner should include, which foods one should specifically avoid, at what time one should have a snack and how much food one should consume were provided in detail by the author. She recommended "eating slowly," drinking a lot of water, and avoiding caffeine. Dodge specifically wrote this book as practical advice for the working young woman who should nevertheless not forget to take care of herself during the day and even act as her own doctor at times:

Many of us suffer from constipation. We have appointments or are due at work seven, eight, or nine, and find it hard to allow time for attending to ourselves. We let it go for a day, then another, and so on. After a short time our system will not act as it should. A bad habit has been formed. Constipation is the result. Let us be careful of what pills or medicines we take. Use natural means as far as possible, or, if it is necessary to take

⁵³⁹ This book was recommended by the YWCA Istanbul in 1920s. However, it is hard to read the last number of the year in the primary source, suggesting that it was recommended either in 1923 or 1925.

⁵⁴⁰ Grace Hoadley Dodge, *A Bundle of Letters to Busy Girls on Practical Matters* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 16.

anything, let it be something we know all about, some licorice powder or other simple remedy. But prevention is better than cure, so let us try and care regularly for ourselves early in the morning. Then, while at work we must not feel that we can accustom our system to going without relieving itself in another way. Agonies have been suffered by some of you because you thought you could go without caring for yourselves, being ashamed to leave work or to go where you could find relief...⁵⁴¹

Caring for the self often included new habits and measures for the working women and these were also discussed among young women in the reading clubs. Leisure was among the issues speculated upon. In a Business Girls Club meeting, regarding business standards in Istanbul, members complained about insufficient recreational activities for business women; a comment like “no play for business women in this city; a dreary life, that of the business woman” revealed their discontent and disappointment at the same time.⁵⁴²

The YWCA’s American staff, while promoting leisure and recreation, at the same time, considering to teach “sex hygiene” to the young women. In 1928, Ruth Woodsmall was eager to “promote courses in health standards and teach sex hygiene if the right person can be found for this.” In addition to increasing gym classes for adults, she also recommended the translation of all YWCA sources on health and recreation from English to Turkish for young women.⁵⁴³ In 1930, in the Health Program, discussing the problems of the young employed girls was one of the points of focus of the YWCA Istanbul. In those discussions, the YWCA found

⁵⁴¹ Grace H. Dodge, *A Bundle of Letters to Busy Girls on Practical Matters*, 17.

⁵⁴² Maro M. Depanian to Jean Grigsby Paxton, “Conditions of Business Girls in Constantinople,” December 31, 1924, p. 1, Box 63, Folder 11, Series V. Professional Activities: YWCA, Post-WWI, Field Surveys, Near East, Reports, Interim, 1921–1928, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

⁵⁴³ Appendix G Future Policy, “Recommendation for the YWCA (Part of report by R. F. Woodsmall) January, 1928,” p. 53 in “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

out “what health problems have become more acute in the depression.” The YWCA offered an “individual service” in that program, as well.⁵⁴⁴

6.5. Training for health-related jobs

Amid the constant wars, the YWCA gave medical help to orphanages, young women in shelter homes, and even offered nursing classes at its centers. The YWCA Istanbul worked with relief workers, such as Dr. Graff, who managed nursing classes in the YWCA in 1919. The goal of this class was to train “visiting nurses” for different parts of Istanbul, which aimed not only to provide “relief work” but also to teach young women a “valued profession” which they could use in their lives. If they did not end up being nurses, according to the YWCA’s staff, White, they could still use what they learned from nursing classes in their daily lives which included “practical demonstrations.”⁵⁴⁵ As well as training nurses, the Istanbul YWCA sent a secretary to Harput to help young women in the Rescue Home.⁵⁴⁶ Many of these women were dislocated after the war. When the Spanish influenza hit the Rescue Home in 1920, only two girls died of the epidemic while 38 young women recovered with the aid of the YWCA secretary, Helen G. Jones. As the hospitals were full and there was not enough space for girls, she arranged for

⁵⁴⁴ [Health section], microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁴⁵ “Report of Margaret B. White for October, 1919, YWCA Service Center Constantinople Turkey, November 12, 1919,” p.1, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁴⁶ In Jones’ account, the Rescue Home was also a shelter to girls who were running away from “mounted men.” Helen G. Jones, Letter, April 7, 1920, Harpoot, pp.1–2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

nurses to check on their health condition. The total number of people who died due to the Spanish influenza was 12 out of 500 cases of flu.⁵⁴⁷

The Istanbul YWCA continued spreading health training to the Muslim and non-Muslim orphanages by their weekly visits. “The weekly visit of an American YWCA Secretary who teaches gymnastics and games, and an occasional lesson in folk dancing from an Armenian teacher, bring a little variety into the otherwise humdrum lives of the [orphanage] girls.” Another orphanage the YWCA provided regular recreation to was Asylon Asteghon Orphanage in Beşiktaş: “The children in this institution suffer chiefly from trachoma, which makes it impossible for them to do anything but play. The YWCA Physical Director visits this place and teaches the children drills and dances.” Dancing and recreational activities put a smile on children faces, as noted by one of the YWCA staff.⁵⁴⁸ Not only YWCA secretaries made regular weekly visits to the orphanages in Istanbul; young women who were members of the YWCA and had received training would also visit and teach young girls and boys some recreational activities. All the Armenian orphanages in Istanbul had one thing in common: “It is interesting to note that all the physical teachers in the girls’ orphanages which require compulsory recreational work. The majority of the older girls are in the Armenian Trade School where they are learning domestic science.” The YWCA encouraged its trainees to try dancing, singing, exercising, walking, and jumping rope. The YWCA’s work with Turkish orphanages such as those in Bebek, Ortaköy, Beykoz, and Pendik was not any different from their work with the Greek or Armenian ones. “The Physical Director of the Y.W.C.A. visits

⁵⁴⁷ Helen G. Jones, Letter, April 7, 1920, Harpoot, pp.1–2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁴⁸ Anna Welles Brown, “Orphanages in Constantinople” in *Constantinople To-Day; or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople; a Study in Oriental Social Life*, ed. C. R. Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 225–58.

the orphanages each week and instructs the teachers and demonstrates the work with the children. The girls are not as responsive as the boys and it is much harder to instill the free play spirit.”⁵⁴⁹ The number of boys, girls and children at Armenian orphanages in Istanbul numbered (“these statistics are [were] given in round numbers and are only roughly accurate” due to mobility) 3,827; 2,798 at Turkish orphanages; 1,548 at the Greek orphanages; 280 at Russian orphanages; 279 at Jewish orphanages. At orphanages in general, limited equipment, inadequate heat and ventilation, small playgrounds, an insufficient number of teachers as well as their often mechanical teaching methods and lack of enthusiasm were problematic for the YWCA and needed to be improved.⁵⁵⁰ Other than orphanages, one of the clubs of the Istanbul YWCA visited the American Tuberculosis Hospital regularly. They entertained the children in the hospital with activities they organized.⁵⁵¹

The recreation courses at the YWCA were spread to orphanages and refugee camps through the YWCA’s group leaders. They usually received this type of training of the YWCA which lasted for six months, including “four hours’ work a week, with six weeks’ practice work in schools.” Young women who had learned forms of recreation including games, folk dancing, gymnastics, and stunts at the YWCA were able to share those skills even in abroad. The YWCA sent eight girls who had completed the training to Greece in 1922. Those girls interacted with “the thousands of refugees” there. This training program of the YWCA continued until 1928 when the decrease in the numbers of refugee camps and orphanages, along with growing interest in physical education in Turkey, exemplified by a school

⁵⁴⁹ Anna Welles Brown, “Orphanages in Constantinople,” 225–58.

⁵⁵⁰ Anna Welles Brown, “Orphanages in Constantinople,” 225–58.

⁵⁵¹ “Report of Miss Margaret B. White, General Secretary, from January through November 1921,” p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.

focusing on physical education opening in 1926, showed that “there was less need of this work.” Also, the YWCA’s leadership training did not have an educational permit from the government. They needed to secure a special permit which very few of them obtained. The license issue was problematic: “Since the very drastic changes have come about in Constantinople only one phase of the work has been entirely discontinued; the recreational work for the city. Only the graduates of the Tchapa Normal School are allowed to direct such work where it exists.” In the late 1920s, some of these YWCA-trained girls would go to Greece, England, France and South America.⁵⁵²

The YWCA sent physical directors to the schools as well. A scarce number of Turkish schools had physical training program as compulsory whereas Greek, English, American, Italian, and French Schools all had it in their curricula; 16 Armenian schools had mandatory physical training. Usually schools that had higher budgets and more financial resources and therefore better equipment were foreign schools such as American, English, French and Italian ones. “The native schools are poor in equipment and teachers, and they put less –though an increasing— emphasis on physical culture.” The YWCA Girl Guides offered recreational activities for the Constantinople College for young women as well. The YWCA reached people both by spreading recreation into the public sphere as well as by emphasizing its importance to the young women in its centers.⁵⁵³

According to the YWCA staff, “The need for trained teachers of Gymnastics in the schools has been recognized by the Turkish Ministry of Public

⁵⁵² “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.74–6, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁵³ G. Gilbert Deaver, “Recreation” in *Constantinople To-Day; or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople; a Study in Oriental Social Life*, ed. C. R. Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 270-272.

Instruction, and a training school for teachers started.” Woodsmall further claimed, “the emphasis in this school however will be almost entirely on formal gymnastics and not on recreation.” Physical education teachers’ lack of education in some schools was still a concern to the YWCA staff; one of the recurring point they called attention to was that the concept of play in education was not encouraged in schools and orphanages; in their training the YWCA offered for raising supervisors of recreation, they specifically gave importance to instilling the concept of play in their trainees.⁵⁵⁴

There is not a record of the exact number of people living in Istanbul in 1926. However, as the first census of the new Republic was held in 1927, the number of Istanbul residents was 806,863 including the suburbs.⁵⁵⁵ The number of women living in Istanbul in the city boundaries was 340,432.⁵⁵⁶ In the same year, in Istanbul, the number people who lived in rural areas was 12.6%. In 1926, the number of women who participated in Health education Training course outside the YWCA Service Centers was high. With the help of 17 girls from the Health Education department, “100 girls in an embroidery workshop, 33 students in a hospital nurses training school, 600 children in 7 orphanages, 270 children in 4 refugee camps” and also 1526 participated in the health education program. In total, the number of people who attended the course outside the Service Centers and inside Centers was 2,559. The number of total registration for the Centers was 828 in the same year. Without including the number of girls who attended summer camp of the YWCA and the mothers of participants sometimes involved in the

⁵⁵⁴ Ruth F. Woodsmall, “Survey of Social Conditions in Turkey,” October 1926, pp. 65–75, Box 63, Folder 9, Series V. Professional Activities, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, YWCA-SSC.

⁵⁵⁵ *Sayılarla İstanbul* (Istanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2001). Without the suburbs, this number was around 690,000.

⁵⁵⁶ Mehmet Halid Bayri, “İstanbul’da Nüfus Sayımları,” *Yeni Tarih Dünyası*, no.14 (1954).

activities of the YWCA, the total number of people the YWCA reached was approximately 3,387.⁵⁵⁷ Mothers participated in weekly recreational programs of the YWCA which also included lectures, concerts, plays “in an increasing number, especially at Stamboul where other forms of entertainment are scarce” at the end of the 1920s.⁵⁵⁸ The YWCA out of an individual necessity and as a form of recreation was successful in terms of bringing recreational activities to its members.

6.6. Conclusion

In the late Ottoman State, men were more encouraged to pursue sports. Nationalism growing momentum was reflected in sports as well. Ancestral sports were brought to the forefront for males, and being a Turk was conceptualized as having a strong body. In the new Republican State, women were also encouraged to join sports, however, women’s primary roles as mothers were always emphasized. Women’s involvement with sports took place in a discourse that emphasized that women’s reproductive health would greatly benefit. The nation needed strong children which could only be borne and raised by strong mothers. The YWCA Istanbul offered a different approach to how women should take care of their bodies and minds. While the state constructed its health culture through maternal and nationalist politics, the YWCA’s American staff promoted an understanding of physical self-care and

⁵⁵⁷ Brochure, no title, 1926, [Miscellaneous Section], microfilm reel no 64. (The brochure starts with a photograph entitled “Along the Sea Wall at the Y.W.C.A. Summer Camp on the Sea of Marmara, Constantinople.”)

⁵⁵⁸ “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.83, Box 329 Folder 7, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

sports as a part of responsibility for one's own self and happiness in the 1910s and 1920s.

In the late Ottoman State and in the early years of the Republic, at times when dance faced prejudice, the YWCA in Istanbul was successful in bringing dancing to women not only at its centers but also at orphanages, schools and playgrounds. Although the dancing activities of the YWCA received pushback from patriarchic culture, the YWCA increased the visibility of dance and made a significant contribution to women's freedom in this social context. The YWCA helped gymnastics and sports such as volleyball, tennis, basketball, swimming and baseball reach young women. The YWCA not only actively introduced sports and gymnastics to young women but also offered training in teaching physical education, demonstrating that women could turn sports into a profession. The YWCA advocated the spread of fitness centers for women. The Istanbul YWCA emphasized that women should do recreational activities for their personal happiness, and self-care was a part of this, as well. The Istanbul YWCA made women aware of healthy nutrition, hygiene and body practices, and trained them to take the time to care for their own bodies.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This study, by focusing on the period from 1913 to 1930, claims that the YWCA's mainly American staff contributed to the sense of individuality of young women with their labor and health politics in Istanbul. It reflects how the YWCA was able to penetrate into both the labor and social spheres of the late Ottoman State and Early Republican Turkey, a subject which has been neglected in the historiography. To understand Istanbul more comprehensively, their labor related activities in Anatolia were traced as well.

Due to the high number of working women in the United States, the rights of workers was one of the YWCA's leading issues at the turn of the twentieth century. A great number of women worked in the industrial sector, and bettering their wages and working hours, while also increasing their leisure hours were the main goals of the YWCA in the United States.⁵⁵⁹ This pattern also could be seen in Anatolia, since the YWCA was able to interact with women in the industrial sector there. In Anatolia, just as in the USA, the YWCA was able to touch upon issues

⁵⁵⁹ Sarah Heath, "Negotiating White Womanhood: The Cincinnati YWCA and White-Wage Earning Women, 1918–1929," in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, N. Mijagkij and M. Spratt, eds., (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 86–90.

like improving the working hours, salaries, and conditions as well as the leisure of working women in the late Ottoman State. The YWCA did not organize the workers to negotiate with the managers nor did they develop class consciousness among the female factory workers but rather YWCA secretaries themselves took the initiative to advocate the rights of female factory workers in Anatolia. For instance, in Shanghai the YWCA was able to raise solidarity and develop consciousness between workers in the 1940s because of the YWCA's long running political education of women.⁵⁶⁰

In Istanbul, the association had expected to interact with a higher number of working women in the industrial sector. They were disappointed by the number of working women they interacted with in Istanbul. Their policies thus underwent transformation based on the geography and type of members they reached. In Istanbul, where the YWCA interacted with a higher number of women who stayed at home, and thus the Istanbul case also offers an example of how the YWCA could push women towards pursuing a career.

Sarah Heath in her article entitled "Negotiating White Womanhood: The Cincinnati YWCA and White-Wage Earning Women, 1918–1929," wrote that in the Cincinnati YWCA, the YWCA staff expected women to have Victorian moral standards and she also stated, "They encouraged young women to meet prospective mates in a chaperoned setting and hoped that when women were married, they would be able to leave the workforce to bear and raise children." However, in the

⁵⁶⁰ For Shanghai, see Emily Honig, *Sister and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919–1949* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986). In her book *Sister and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919–1949*, Honig emphasized that although a high number of women worked in mills in Shanghai, they did not develop class consciousness because of coming from different social backgrounds, geographic locations, lack of communication and their having strong ties with their native lands. It would only be in the 1940s that they would develop consciousness with the efforts of the Chinese Communist Party and the YWCA.

1920s, the type of attendees of the Cincinnati YWCA program departed from the Victorian type of women since these working women stood on their own feet financially and socially, and broke social norms with their smoking, dancing or drinking in public. The YWCA staff in Cincinnati thus had to ease the “womanhood” standards they expected from their members.⁵⁶¹ As it could be seen from this example, it should be kept in mind that each YWCA center did not necessarily have to act in the same way. The Istanbul experience of the YWCA shows us that the YWCA’s mainly American staff in Istanbul ardently prioritized careers over marriage and motherhood. Their understanding of womanhood fitted into a type of self-sufficient individual who took care of herself financially and socially and had her own say in the matters. Financial independence was foregrounded as the means for young women to direct their personal choices, take control of their lives, and achieve liberation from oppressive structures. The YWCA’s mainly American staff observed that young women were suppressed by their parents or their social circle and lacked educational opportunities and encouragement from the family. These women were dependent on their mothers and fathers since they needed consent to go out or to work. That their decision-making was not totally independent can also be seen in the fact that arranged marriages were common in the 1910s and 1920s. The YWCA’s American staff interacted with a high number of the type of young women who sat at home passively and appeared to have no professional goals. Also, those women shared their problems with the secretaries and asked for help. “Personal help is given when

⁵⁶¹ Sarah Heath, “Negotiating White Womanhood: The Cincinnati YWCA and White-Wage Earning Women, 1918–1929,” in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, N. Mijagkij and M. Spratt, eds., (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 86–90.

asked for. The girls and sometimes their mothers come to the Center executives or to the secretaries with their problems and attempt is always made to deal with these problems as adequately as possible,” the YWCA staff reported.⁵⁶² The YWCA’s feminist identity can also be traced in the conversations they had with women. They saw that young women in Turkey did not really gain any power in their personal lives since they had familial and social authority preventing them from expressing themselves and developing their individuality. As a part of being individual, having a profession that one loved to do and leading an active, social, and healthy life would offer them more than staying at home passively, lacking their own power and authority. Prioritizing that a career mattered more than marital or maternal roles, the YWCA came up with a true feminist discourse in Istanbul. They were successful in terms of making some young women question the roles the society and family imposed on them. By making young women write essays on economic freedom, presenting career-oriented role models, offering a training program for typists, physical directors, stenographers, and finding employment and networking for young women, the YWCA came up with a long-term profession for young women, encouraging them to stand on their own feet because this would also allow them to make their choices independently. Compared to the other employment bureaus in Istanbul, the YWCA’s understanding of profession was feminist and for the long term; it was not for a short temporary work understanding they wanted to implement in women. To be career-minded was only one dimension of the YWCA’s American staff policies; self-empowerment also meant taking care of

⁵⁶² “Report of Miss Jane Brewern, Education Secretary to Constantinople YWCA, “ from October-December, 1923. Received February, 1924, p.2, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC, and Notes to Appendix, p.168 in “Report of the Service Centers, Istanbul, Turkey. November, 1929-June, 1930,” p.97, Part 2 Box 330 Folder 1, RG5, YWCA-SSC.

one's body and physical needs, as well attaining knowledge of the body. This was at a time the state promoted labor and sports for young women based on nationalism and motherhood. The YWCA's promoting these as out of individual necessity thus contrasted with the ideologies of regimes of the period.

The fact that the conservative press called on the government to close the YWCA is evidence not only that the YWCA's sphere of influence was wide enough that male journalists brought it into their columns, but also that the YWCA was seen as posing a major threat to the conservative press and its audience which reinforced patriarchal culture. However, the governments of the late Ottoman State and Early Republican state were not against the activities of the YWCA, unlike the conservative press. Ismet Pasha addressed to the Americans at Lausanne: "I hope above all things that Americans will not worry about the future of their educational and philanthropic institutions in Turkey. We want these institutions to stay and have no intention of adopting laws that will embarrass the continuation of the admirable American altruistic work among our people."⁵⁶³ The government did not challenge the YWCA since it secured an education permit and the YWCA did not try to convert people. The YWCA and the statesmen were in touch with each other as seen in the example of Selim Sirri Tarcan visiting the YWCA and observing their different techniques in gymnastics and dance. The early years of the Republican state certainly benefited from the YWCA's programs since it was hard to make people dance at a time when social codes were limiting people; the YWCA spread dance among the people they reached. The YWCA was thus a force serving Westernization with their dance, language and sports courses. Young women who

⁵⁶³ "Ismet Pasha's statement to the Americans at Lausanne," American Research Institute in Turkey, Istanbul Center Library, online in Digital Library for International Research Archive.

learned the Latin-based alphabet at the YWCA then went home and taught their mothers. The Kemalist state indirectly benefited from the actions of the YWCA since it was trying to spread western modernity among people. However, the Republican State's project on women was based on motherhood and nationalism, the point at which the YWCA separated from them. In the Early Republican State, the Turkish Civil Code legitimized men as breadwinners and decision-makers, and wives needing the consent of their husbands if they decided to work. During the CUP's rule as well, women's maternal roles were prioritized, since the association they established for women for employment expected women to quit their temporary jobs and marry men. While these two regimes failed to promote a professional identity out of a personal necessity, the YWCA's American secretaries were successful in bringing professional skills to the ones they were able to influence, enabling them to start a career-oriented life, and reminding them that marriage should not be the ultimate goal of a woman or regarded as a career plan. While up until 1930 the Republican state offered women freedom legally by banning polygamy, enabling compulsory elementary education, and granting equal rights to both sexes in a divorce, in its inner dynamics, women still had to maintain their domestic nature. Their role as mothers was designated to be the most important while legally they still needed to get the consent of the husband to work and they did not have suffrage rights. Suffrage feminists like Nezihe Muhiddin were also suppressed by the government up until 1930. The freedom the Kemalist state promoted for women was a project, as mentioned by many scholars. It never truly liberated women, as Arat has argued. However, the YWCA in Istanbul was able to engage with these dynamics, which were important for women's social and economic freedom. To the young women they interacted with, the YWCA's

American staff would advise to follow their own passion and create their own career goals so they could live the life they wanted without the shadow of a parent, husband, or a friend, because financial freedom offered true independence of choice. The YWCA's contribution to feminism in Istanbul did serve for outer dynamics as well. Nakiye Elgün, in the years voting rights were not granted to women, found a platform in the YWCA, spreading consciousness on women about their citizenship and voting rights in the 1920s. The YWCA, by picking up feminist women as members and Board members who fought for suffrage, also contributed to political feminism in Istanbul by giving full support to suffrage for women. The YWCA was a feminist group and did not care for nationality or religion; what mattered to them women's freedom.

Elaine Tyler May in her book, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, pointed out the women of the 1910s were represented as more innocent and fragile figures, i.e., Victorian, whereas in the 1920s women in visual culture were constructed based on love who ended up in marriages; the audience could therefore voyeuristically sneak into their private sphere of marriage. The 1930s departed yet again, focusing on the woman as a star; an independent single career-minded woman who was physically strong. The press wrote articles recommending actress Loretta Young transform her body to a fitter and stronger look; she needed more energy and strength in her image. Single strong women as individuals seeking ambitious careers, and having physical strength and liveliness were praised. This was a more individualistic presentation of women, career-oriented and physically robust and vigorous, whatever they put their mind to, they

would achieve.⁵⁶⁴ The YWCA's American staff, in the 1910s and 1920s, contributed to the spread of individuality even earlier than the visual culture's presentation of strong independent women, and contributed to feminism in the late Ottoman State and Early Republican Turkey at the same time. The YWCA, coming to the late Ottoman State during the constant state of wars, helping orphans, the sick, children, refugees like any voluntary women's association's agenda, was on their mind. Yet, the association was more than a charitable organization. The Istanbul YWCA reminded young women that they were in charge of themselves and their bodies. Standing on one's own feet financially and socially, and acquiring a profession that one loved to do were ways that gave young women control of their own lives and were indispensable for them to become true individuals.

⁵⁶⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 44-45.

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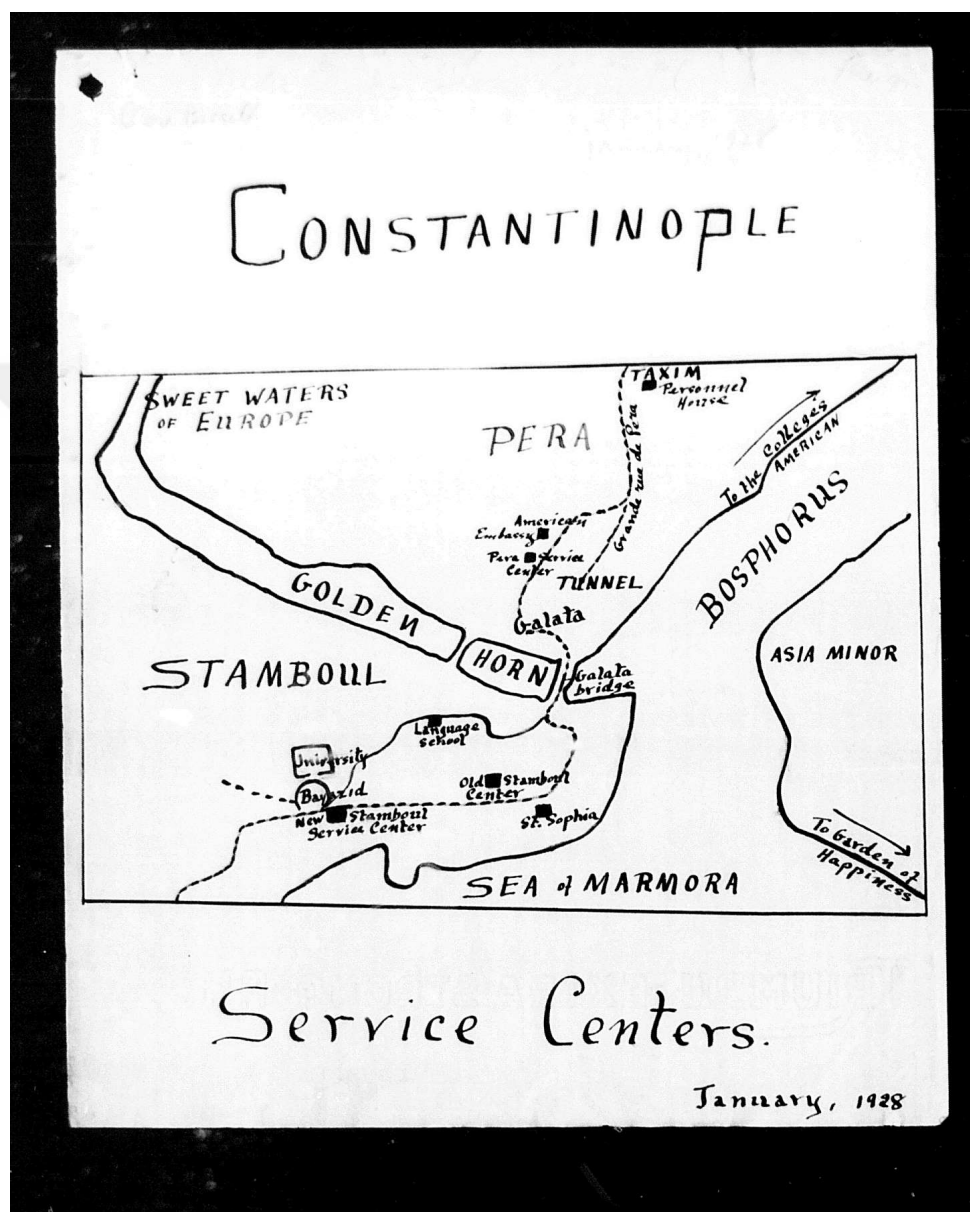
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: A map of YWCA centers in Istanbul in 1928⁵⁶⁵



⁵⁶⁵ Staff Correspondence and Reports, microfilm reel 63, YWCA-SSC.