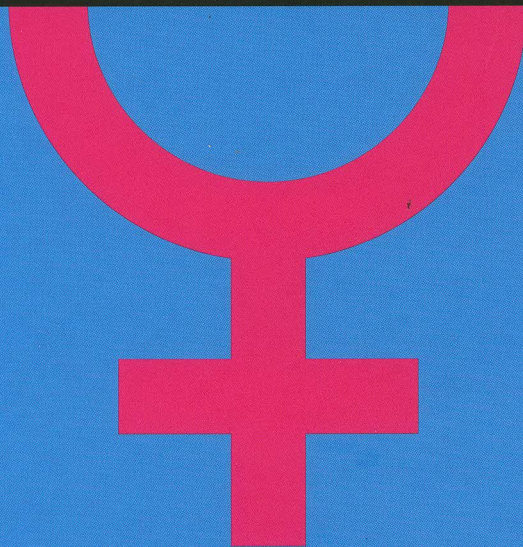




# **MEDIA, RELIGION AND GENDER IN EUROPE**

**Miriam Díez Bosch, Jordi Sánchez Torrents (eds.)**



**Blanquerna Observatory**  
on Media, Religion and Culture



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# The Multiethnic Slavery Institution through the Eyes of Western Women and ‘the real position of women in the religious system of Islam’

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Executive Group of the European Centre for Women and Technology (ECWT)

## INTRODUCTION

*‘Perhaps the sight of European women does them more harm than good’ (Emily Beaufort 1861)*

**T**hrough the eyes of western women of the 18th and 19th centuries, this paper discusses the Ottoman slavery institution and ‘the real position of women in the religious system of Islam’ (Garnett 1895: 61). Focusing on primary sources, first-hand accounts of European women travel writers, authors and journalists in Ottoman territories and principally in Asia Minor (Turkey), this article confirms that all the harem inmates were women of different nations and races: Islamized slaves, liberated slaves and descendants of slaves. Western women, in their intimate contacts with the harem inmates—free and slave—discuss the Ottoman dynasty’s reproductive politics, forced abortion, marriage, divorce, *veiling* or Muslim women’s attire, slave rights and social mobility, including requirements for slave liberation. This researcher concludes that the Multiethnic-Multiracial Harem Slavery Institution was the collective segregation, confinement or enslavement of the female gender in *one specific space* (household/harem), as *one collective identity* since all the women—slave and free—shared or legally belonged to *one man or master*: sultan, grand vizier, vizier, pacha, etc.

### 1. ‘THE HAREM SYSTEM IS BASED ON SLAVERY.’ (BLUNT 1878)

Women travel writers, authors, journalists and intellectuals from Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and Austria, including harem inmates like Melek Hanum (1872) and Adalet (1890, 1892) repeatedly confirm that an Ottoman harem was made up of women from different nations (Kamberidou 2015). In reexamining the writings of 18th and 19th century western women travellers in Ottoman territories, this paper contributes additional evidence on the multiethnic harem slavery institution, which distinguished Ottoman (Osmanli) society, so as to provide a bigger picture and inspire new discussions. It spotlights the female





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The gender question is more and more at the core of internal religious debates. It is not only about Femen demonstrations, feminist religious historical reviews or internal feminist demands within religious organizations. It is about how religions picture themselves in an evolving landscape where gender is not merely an appendix.

Gender carries resonances of a broader and much more complex aspect: identity. It is not surprising that for some religious traditions, gender is not an easy question to tackle. Expressions like “gender ideology” or “gender deviance” are never far from certain current religious discourses. Gender is troubling precisely because it deals with identity; and identity has to do with power.

In this book we aim to hear a range of voices that reflect the diverse and reflect the great plurality of cultural views on those aspects that lie at the crossroad between media, religion and gender.

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