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## (Un)building social contracts

Material imaginations of class and gender in late Ottoman writings on decorum

In late Ottoman women's media, performing decorum represented a symbolic struggle over respectability as manifested tacitly in luxury display via goods, décor and interior configurations in private dwellings. While these distinctions provided upper-class women with a public status within their social circles, they also entailed outsourcing domestic labor and concealing the laborers' presence from the public's gaze. The status hierarchy embedded in decorum was discernible in the architectural fragments: the qualities of the ostentatious salon and dining room, which reflected the prestige of the housewife, contrasted and overshadowed the rear rooms and internal divisions reserved for the housemaids. This essay exposes intra-household tensions reflected in domestic arrangements by concentrating on etiquette manuals (Ottoman: *adab* literature) addressing women — in women's periodicals, home economics, and etiquette books — along with plans and photographs from the early twentieth century. Its objective is to extrapolate from this historical moment and interpret decorum as a social contract whose norms become contested and whose meaning becomes variable for actors of different classes and genders.

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## 1. Class and gender codes in Ottoman houses

A dwelling represents one of the most important symbolic capitals through which a person conveys social status, by its spatial configuration or various types of luxuries filling the interior.<sup>1</sup> What is considered "luxury" at any particular time serves as a sign of status and a means of self-expression for the members of a class (or group) that are rich, powerful and well-connected enough to acquire the signs of wealth and high-rank.<sup>2</sup> Ottoman houses also embodied signs of distinction that reflected the owner's class to its visitors. The power of architecture to communicate prestige was manifested extensively in the various etiquette manuals named *adab* literature. Commonly shared in Turkish, Arab, and Persian worlds, *adab* single-handedly connotated etiquette, education, manners and conformity to an ideal of ethics and morals.<sup>3</sup> Its prescriptive sources traditionally molded the spaces of domestic hospitality and the way people interacted at highly esteemed informal gatherings.<sup>4</sup>

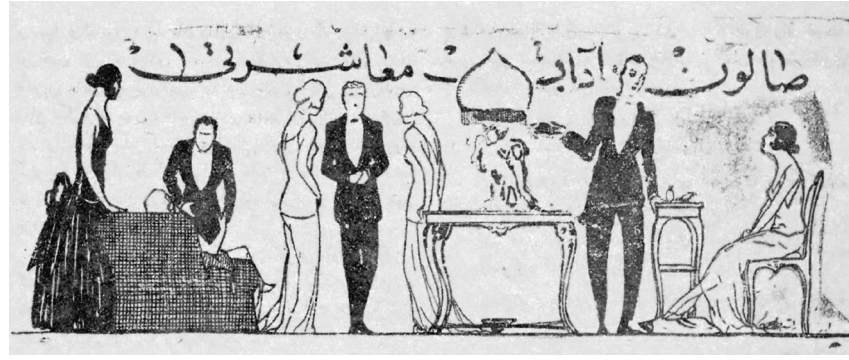
Building on this semantic life, *adab* was subsequently defined at the turn of the twentieth century as practicing "elegance in words and action in treating others";<sup>5</sup> it constituted the art of both eloquence and paralanguage, and of composing spaces of self-representation for exhibiting decorum. However, decorum also acquired novel meanings as the barriers to social life became more porous and inclusive for women in major Eastern urban centres. The revolt against traditional gender roles, according to some scholars, was closely tied to an contemporary embracing of European everyday culture, a phenomenon that in turn made homes the first venue for shattering Muslim society's strict gender segregation.<sup>6</sup> Others, on the other hand, claimed that the impact of capitalism on domestic commodities and consumption patterns was equally significant.<sup>7</sup> In analogy to the developments in Istanbul, upper- to middle-class women in other cities, such as Beirut and Cairo, were able to break free from a conventional understanding of womanhood by administering the material aspects of their homes and the objects within them. Either way, the emerging domestic salons were predestined to host a

display of decorum. The more the fad of mixed-gender sociabilities at salons solidified as norm, the more women felt seen and found opportunities to construct themselves as equals to men. Additionally, exhibiting luxury through goods, interior configurations, or activities in the salons, and exhibiting it properly in terms of decorum, became the status emblem of a middle-class Ottoman woman. A hierarchy dominated by women, according to Fatma Tunç Yaşar, became the most fundamental parameter that determined the physical arrangement and social behaviour in these households.<sup>8</sup>

However, the hierarchy set in the *adab* literature addressed only a certain class of women while subordinating others. The definition of luxury in the same set of writings explicitly involved hiring housemaids, who worked like 'surrogate housewives' to allow the house owner to indulge in leisure pursuits.<sup>9</sup> According to this view, establishing a respectable salon, where a middle-class housewife could be present and represented, also involved the management of a housemaid's duties, working conditions, and daily living spaces behind the scenes. As Beverly Skeggs argued, the cult of domesticity was crucial to the middle classes's self-fashioning and yet the labour involved in its production was made invisible by the use of downstairs servants.<sup>10</sup> The conception of the expert 'housewife' – managing household duties such as cooking, cleaning, and parenting – or the respectable 'salon hostess' – concocting social gatherings through serving, decorating, hosting, and entertaining – relied on domestic labour, a fact that has often been overlooked in architectural historiography. The domestic social hierarchy was often reflected in the plan of Ottoman houses: an ostentatious salon and dining room behind the facade manifested the house owner's prestige, and the rear garden accommodated corridors, secondary rooms, and quarters for the domestic workers. Similar to the housewife's dependence on her servants, the salon's capacity to beguile visitors depended on the support of service areas.

This article investigates how distinct social tensions in Ottoman homes were challenged and negotiated within the

Fig 1. Numerous etiquette manuals were published in Ottoman women's media. One of the most comprehensive of them was written by Şehriyar Fiham in a serialized column titled "Salon adab-ı muaşeret-i" (Salon etiquette) that appeared in *Süs Magazine* between 1923 and 1924. Source: Şehriyar Fiham: "Salon adab-ı muaşeret-i." In: *Süs Magazine* 32 (1924), p. 11. Atatürk Library, İBB Kütüphane ve Müzeler Müdürlüğü Collection.



adab writings on decorum, and how their domestic arrangements reflected newly established hierarchies. It focuses primarily on a set of adab writings scattered in Ottoman-Turkish print culture and, more specifically, pays particular attention to etiquette manuals, home economics books, and women's journals from the 1900s to 1928, all of which feature women as authors or addressees. While traditional adab writings relegated women to subsidiary roles, these sources revolve around various female figures in a household and thus allow us to examine the accepted norms and categories of luxury through the lens of class and gender (fig. 1). By the turn of the twentieth century, women were notably more vocal and visible in the growing amount of publications about and tailored towards them.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, by looking at the printed media addressing female readers, this paper aims to valorise and highlight the unheard voices not only of women, but also of overlooked protagonists, the domestic workers. In addition, plans and photographs will allow us to uncover hidden facets of luxury in architectural materiality by juxtaposing textual and visual material.

Despite its focus on a precisely defined historical moment, the broader aim of this article is to discuss decorum as a social contract, within which norms become contested and subject to differing perspectives. Concentrating on scattered writings dispersed in varying sources brings forth this concept not only as the topic of heated debates around proper usages of luxury, or luxury in general, but also frames it conceptually as a process of negotiation in a given society. Extrapolating from this moment in the early twentieth century, this paper questions whether we can conceive the theme as still relevant today by reformulating it as a shared dis-

cussion among actors of various classes and genders. Therefore, by deconstructing the apparent stability and completeness of decorum norms, this article poses the question: How can we complicate authorship and readership of decorum and utilize it as a contemporary and critical tool for reading residential architecture?

## 2. Decorum, as a field of negotiation

Gülru Necipoğlu posited that decorum functioned as a fragile form of social contract open to negotiation between the architects, patrons, and society in the absence of written treatises in classical Ottoman architecture, drawing inspiration from an adab book by Mustafa Ali, a sixteenth-century Ottoman bureaucrat and historian.<sup>12</sup> In this tacit agreement, she argued, the principles strictly sorted architectural propriety in relation to someone's rank, yet it was also not uncommon for them to be bargained, or challenged by different sections of the community. This regulatory practice, whose terms and conditions continued to be contested by different groups, was still present at the turn of nineteenth-century architectural culture. With the rebranding of "alla franca", decorum became increasingly prominent as the catalyst of reordering everyday life and living spaces, particularly among adab writers who aspired to respond to far-reaching changes both in the Ottoman and the global world.<sup>13</sup>

The negotiation signified yet another level of urgency for female writers, who were first-time contributors to adab literature. For them, the term signified an active arena to challenge the age-old traditions that restricted them from public life. Mesadet Bedirhan, a prolific writer who published a four-part article in 1913 in the women's journal *Kadınlar*

*Dünyası*, rejected any kind of gender inequality and underlined the importance of knowing manners for women:

*"In this century, it is impossible to live the life of five hundred years ago without breaking away from society in progress and advancement. If we do not rise to the level of our time, it is inevitable that we will be crushed, and in order to be accepted in a society it is essential to be knowledgeable and obedient of its benefits and decorum."*<sup>14</sup>

Ironical as it may seem, while decorum was boldly called "the most constant and severe restraint" by one of the most prominent Western feminists Mary Wollstonecraft,<sup>15</sup> for Bedirhan it represented a loophole for women's engagement in modern society. Performing decorum provided the means to construct the self-image of an accomplished individual in social life. This was a symbolic struggle: high-rank Ottoman women requested to "secure the position of respect she deserves" as Bedirhan had put it.<sup>16</sup> Equality, according to literate women like her, could only be achieved with increased visibility in society, and such improvement required an awareness of the elements that bind society together. Five years later, her peer from the same journal bridged sociability with the feminist cause even more directly by uttering the question, "can a woman who does not involve herself in social life have rights and status?"<sup>17</sup>

The rules of upper-class propriety laid out the paths along which women could carefully recode the traditional patterns that had excluded them beforehand and could validate the status they have yearned for. The domestic salon provided one of the most fertile grounds for rewriting propriety: within the Ottoman context, "salon" symbolised both a mixed-gender social space and a curatorial space of luxuries. Women capitalised on their new status by displaying a stylized domesticity expressed in its goods, configurations, and practices. According to Pierre Bourdieu, the space of lifestyles is a "balance sheet", at any given moment, of the symbolic struggles over the imposition of the legitimate lifestyle, which are most fully developed in the struggles for the monopoly of the emblems of "class" – luxury goods, legitimate cultural goods.<sup>18</sup> In

the Ottoman woman's case, the balance sheet was provided by a salon, where the housewife could claim her position in the legitimate language.

The centrality of the salon in this symbolic struggle was directly related to the people visiting it. For example, Bedirhan's definition of a salon was highly sensitive towards the rank of its visitors, "based on the personalities around them, (women) determine all of the elements – furniture, clothing, and daily wages."<sup>19</sup> As she phrased, expectations of propriety built a direct correlation between a social circle and the qualities of a salon. In other words, the home was instrumentalised in adab literature both as a possession and a medium for upper-class women: it provided a backdrop against which decorum knowledge was applied to an interior in order to appropriately situate housewives within the class dynamics of the time.

### **3. The front façade: salon and codes of luxury**

Another medium addressing women elaborated even more on how to exhibit luxury in residential architecture: the 1901 home economics book *Rehberi Umur-i Beytiyye*, written by Mehmet İzzet, categorised all housing typologies from basic to affluent, according to costliness, building construction, number of rooms and floors. It presented them in plan, elevation, and section, showcasing applications of decorum in built form. This extensive guide book, or "encyclopaedia of home" as its writer preferred to call it, elaborated on the degree of pomp in Ottoman dwellings according to an all-encompassing hierarchy based on the expectations of propriety, in regard to someone's rank and income. İzzet's definition of the house was captured in the material qualities that enabled a family life:

*"(Human beings) build homes in various sizes and dimensions according to their ability and power to accommodate and reside in them. (...) Family members can only establish sincere love, good social relations, and humane behaviour among themselves through such material connections, and therefore the value and importance of a house in the eyes of a family member cannot be measured by anything else."*<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 2. The price segments for various residential architecture qualities, as explained by Mehmet İzzet in *Rehber-i Umur-i Beytiyye*. Istanbul 1901. Table by the author.

Building category	Construction system	Order	Floor no.	Price per arşın
Economic buildings	timber		2 floors	80-120 <i>kuruş</i>
			3 floors	180 <i>kuruş</i>
	masonry	attached house	2 floors	1,5-2 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
			3 floors	2-3 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
		detached house	2 floors	2,5-3 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
			3 floors	3-4 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
Mid-range buildings	timber		2 floors	1-1,5 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
			3 floors	2-2,5 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
	masonry	attached house	2 floors	3-4 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
			3 floors	4-5 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
		detached house	2 floors	4-5 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
			3 floors	5-6 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
Pompous buildings	timber		2 floors	3-5 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
			3 floors	4-6/7 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
	masonry		2 floors	15-20 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
			3 floors	30-40 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>
	* Some very pompous ones can cost up to 50-100 <i>lira-i Osmani</i>			
	** Timber <i>yalıs</i> can cost 3-5 <i>lira</i> difference per arşın			

Fig 3. Exterior view and floor plans of a mid-segment house, as illustrated in Mehmet İzzet's book on home economics. The room marked by the author corresponds to the salon placed adjacent dining space on the ground floor. The salon measures around 24 square meters according to the given dimensions in the plan. Source: Mehmet İzzet: *Rehber-i Umur-i Beytiyye*. Istanbul 1901, p. 231. Atatürk Library, IBB Kütüphane ve Müzeler Müdürlüğü Collection.

Fig. 4. Front facade, floor plans and section of a pompous house, as illustrated in Mehmet İzzet's book on home economics. The room marked by the author indicates the salon next to the dining space with its own entrance from the front façade. Source: Mehmet İzzet: *Rehber-i Umur-i Beytiyye*. Istanbul 1901, p. 232. Atatürk Library, IBB Kütüphane ve Müzeler Müdürlüğü Collection.

Defining a house in terms of a family's influence ensured that the house's characteristics reflected the correct class distinction. As a result, İzzet's guidebook defined a "house" not as an individual type; instead, it encompassed numerous types according to size and location. Later on, İzzet expanded the correct nomenclature of Ottoman dwellings: those with more than ten rooms are referred to as "*konak*" (mansion); those located within vineyards, orchards, or on large infertile lands are referred to as "*köşk*" (kiosk); and those built by the waterside are referred to as "*yali*" (waterside mansion) or "*sahilhane*" (waterfront house).<sup>21</sup> These dwellings were also catalogued in price bands to better accommodate those of varying financial means: construction systems, orders, and floor numbers were associated with the economic, midrange, and pompous categories in residential buildings. Each choice, up to and including the most extravagant buildings, was given a price range per unit area that could be used by the reader in checking their financial capacity's translation into the segments of a dwelling (fig. 2).

The interiors conveyed the understanding of a second mode of distinction, with separate, purpose-built rooms, and carefully allocated reception areas that ignored the distinction between female and male spaces. The manual exemplified a mid-range dwelling in a three-floored house consisting of a salon, a dining room, four individual rooms, a kitchen and two toilets (fig. 3, 4). While this highly compartmenta-

lised composition reflected the potential influence of Western sources, it is nevertheless intriguing how it persistently appointed the salon's name tag and position regardless of any gender segregation. İzzet's manual certainly didn't stand for all dwellings; the salon was integrated in layouts with *haremlik* and *selamlık* divisions as well, making it im-

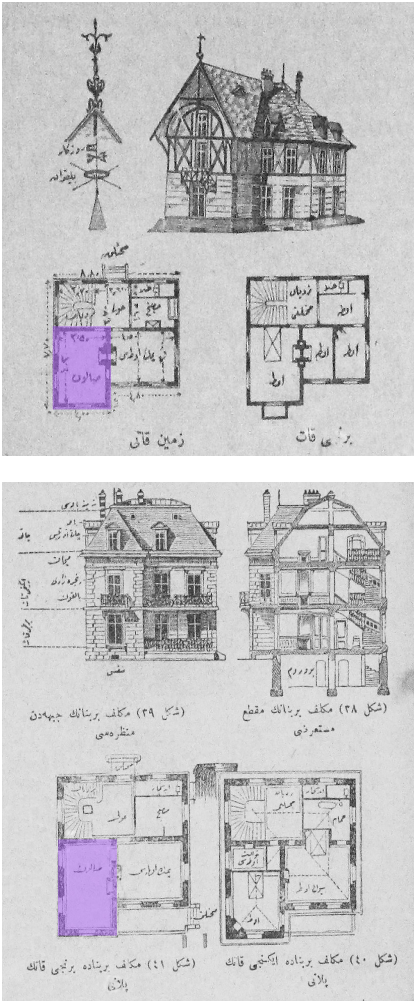
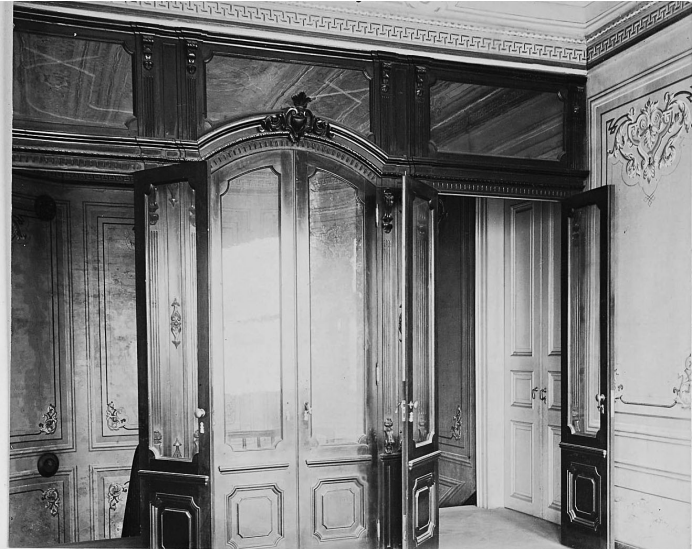


Fig 5. The front façade of the Süreyya Pasha Mansion. Source: Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection. 90647/25.



Fig 6. The entrance door and wall paintings of the salon in the *haremlik* section of Süreyya Pasha Mansion. Source: Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection. 90647/20.

Fig 7. The salon in the *selamlık* section of the Süreyya Pasha Mansion. As the focal point of the photo frame indicates, the chamber stood out by its exquisite wall and ceiling paintings. Source: Istanbul University Library, Rare Works Collection. 90647/21.



plausible to interpret its introduction as an entirely new phenomena in spatial planning (fig. 5–7). Nevertheless, its ubiquitous placement indicates, first of all, a deliberate step towards a functional differentiation that pushes gender-norm boundaries. Secondly, the guide's architectural plans show how a separate reception area functioned as a display of pomp even in the most moderate dwelling, since the number of rooms was closely tied to the financial potency of a house owner.

With the means available to host in a dedicated salon and dining room, or to allocate space for sociability purposes, house owners showcased their social rank, an idea emphasised by authors publishing in journals such as *Kadınlar Dünyası*. A separate room, a museum-like, locked-up quarter ready to welcome guests was considered obligatory to show the proper care of a housewife. According to Ferdane Emin, hospitality was not as simple of a task as it was assumed to be, "a hostess should always have a well-organised, appropriately decorated, and clean guest room according to her means."<sup>22</sup> To randomly place guests into a disarrayed room was considered "extremely impolite" in the journal, an observation that emphasises how the richly furnished, tastefully organised salons were central to the housewife's implementation of decorum.

The prominence of the social spaces was also reflected in the interior layout, with



the salon occupying the finest position and expressing frontality in the house. In İzzet's guide, the advantageous location of the reception spaces was first highlighted by a meticulous orientation scheme that distributed the functions according to light, wind, and air quality. In accordance with Bedirhan's previous assessment of salon sociability, the spaces for hospitality inhabited the optimal microclimatic location within the residence. The salon was suggested to face south, and the dining room to face west with better sunlight and thus hygienic conditions, whereas the bedrooms should face east with less sunlight during the day.<sup>23</sup> So long as the number of floors was permissible, the salon should be located on the first floor, or if the home is larger, on the second floor, in order to have the best lighting and the least exposure to humidity.<sup>24</sup>

Rare interior photographs confirm the salon's central position in written sources and provide additional evidence regarding the lavishness of these quarters' ornamentation. Large Ottoman homes featured exquisite examples of woodwork, plasterwork, and painted wall decoration in the main chamber. Photographer Miralay Ali Sami's albums of bureaucratic elites' mansions, which recorded the detailing of the salons right after their construction, reveal the level of attention that went into their construction. One such example was the salons of Sureyya Pasha. Typical for a mansion of a high-rank bureaucrat, his selamlık area salon featured friezes and panel framings with floral motifs on the upper walls and geometric cartouches with baroque medallions framing landscape compositions on the ceiling. The amount of detail of the wall and ceiling paintings not only distinguished the salon with its exquisite details, but also produced a setting that conveyed wealth through decorative language.

#### **4. The back garden: housemaid's room and service zones**

Real-time salon sociabilities that would flesh out the abstract plans and staged photographs were facilitated by the housemaids. Against the backdrop of upper-class social life in the salon was the labour of paid domestic workers who helped the housewife with the ar-

duous task of receiving guests. As Yavuz Selim Karakışla argued, paid domestic employees gradually replaced previous institutions of slavery in the Ottoman Empire, such as *cariye* or *odalısqe*, while almost all upper-class families lived with servants by the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Not only was this a sign of social prestige but employing a housemaid had become one of the most significant criteria for leading an elite lifestyle.<sup>26</sup> Simultaneously, adab texts portrayed outsourcing manual housework as an integral part of class distinction for housewives. The authors addressed servants' silent presence in the salon along with their living conditions, which lacked the reception areas' ornamental sophistication, spaciousness, and hygienic standards. Their writings as a whole demonstrated the housewives' dependence on a housemaid as well as the salon's dependence on service spaces. The propriety norms for the home dictated that the housemaid's presence be minimized as much as possible in common areas, while also subordinating them to lower-quality accommodations concealed in service zones. This twofold erasure of paid female labour from spaces of representation resulted in a social and spatial duality within an Ottoman house, with the decorum standards revealing another stratum of intra-household hierarchies.

The line between classes of women in the household was rigidly drawn by the social hierarchy depicted in adab writings. Domestic helpers did not fully free housewives from housekeeping, yet it promoted them to a managerial position while leaving the manual work to paid labourers, and thus, provided the master with time and logistic support for leisure time activities, like salon gatherings. If housewives were the first figure ordering the house from an executive and supervisory position, according to Mehmed Nureddin writing in the journal *Kadın* in 1911, then:

*"servants are the second means to ensure the order and comfort of our homes and families. No matter how much of a homemaker a woman may be, she cannot achieve her goal without a servant. (...) Everyone decorates a salon, but it is impossible not to be amazed by the beauty and order of that salon when a woman*

*who has acquired and cultivated the taste for purity instinctively and refined it collaborates with a maid who works with the same passion.*"<sup>27</sup>

Despite his cringe-worthy framing of domestic labour as "a passion", Nurettin was one of the few writers of his time who recognised labour of servants in social spaces, whose aesthetic language and neat disposition commonly brought compliments to the employing housewife. Contrarily, for most of the adab writers, the main concern was to focus on the housemaid's set of duties in the salon to minimise the employee's presence whilst continuing to give constant service. The maids were ghosts opening doors, hanging jackets to the coat racks, accompanying guests to the reception, serving meals, or picking up the dropped fork from the ground. Despite their facilitator role and never-ending tasks, the guides of the proper demeanour reminded housewives of their maid's subjugated position. For example, Ahmed Cevdet, another adab author whose book *Mükemmel ve Resimli Adab-ı Muaşeret Rehberi* got published in 1927, advised housewives to: "demonstrate them that they are no longer slaves as they used to be and that they are individuals who possess rights under your authority. Your kindness should aim to make their tasks less laborious."<sup>28</sup>

These seemingly benevolent gestures, certainly beneficial to the employer and exploitative to the servant, devalued do-

mestic workers to the degree of rendering them "invisible" or "non-persons", as it was observed by Judith Rollins.<sup>29</sup> Even photographs captured this discrete presence in the reception spaces. A photograph, presumably taken during a family dinner in architect Vedat Tek's private residence, exemplifies servants' depiction as background figures in a fully functional household: they were captured walking, serving, and standing in the shadows. Their ambiguous presence concealed behind the dining table crowd suggests that they were a part of the display like the neatly decorated salon and its other objects, but their personhood was deemed invisible even to the eyes behind the cameras (fig. 8).

Perhaps to ensure a servant's invisibility, adab writings recommended providing servants with an adequate separate room. A similar rhetoric regarding the health and hygiene conditions of a salon was also applied to the servants' quarters, but for different reasons. A clean chamber was only required because the housemaids were the most valuable asset, due to the services they provided. It was recommended that house owners offer such a room to ensure the workforce of their servants was efficient, reproducible, and readily available. Therefore, if a housewife was hiring domestic employees, as Cevdet stated, she should be concerned with their rest and ensure their sleep was undisturbed. He specified the room's features further:



Fig 8. Photograph from Vedat Tek's house depicting his family gathered around a dinner table. In the background, the blurry figures possibly show two housemaids serving whereas the crowd awaits to be photographed. Source: Copyright Architecture Library Bodrum.

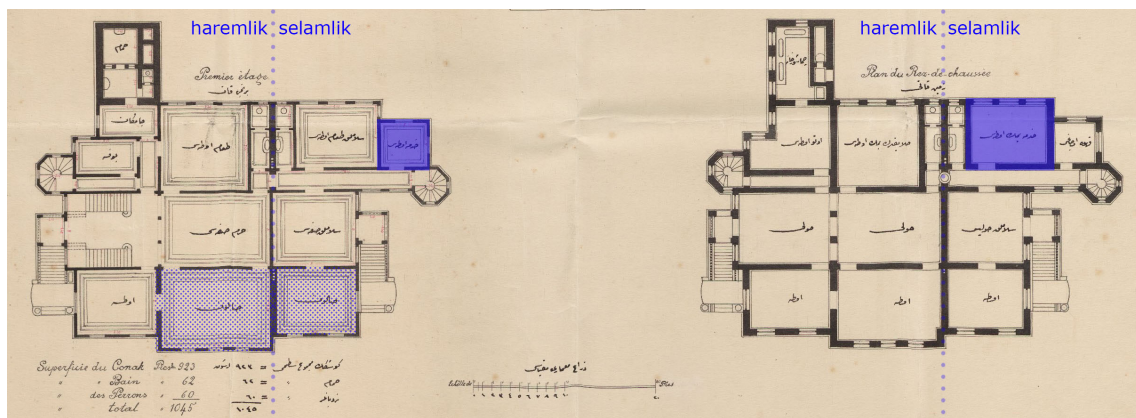


[illegible]

Despite the fact that architectural drawings cannot disclose ephemeral items such as beds and other furniture, they nevertheless demonstrate the disadvantages of employees' personal spaces in general (fig. 9, 10). In Süreyya Pasha's mansion, the servants' quarters, for instance, comprised of multiple interconnecting rooms. This individual volume had its own entrance and was located close to the wet rooms of the main dwelling. In contrast, an undated konak plan drawn by an architect named Faruk designated two accommodations for the housekeepers: a dining room on the ground floor with other service areas and a second room on the first floor within the selamlık area. These chambers were located on each floor adjacent to the stairs that connected the kitchen to the salon, indicating the centrality of servant labor within the reception areas. Both alternatives suggest that the servants' quarters in large mansions

**Fig 10. Undated plan of a large-scale mansion, signed by architect Faruk. The drawing shows that the architect has assigned a function to every chamber, including the two salons, along with hammam, toilets, and an ironing room within the service areas. The placement of the servants' quarters adjacent to the staircase and in the proximity of the salons, as marked by the author, suggests the constant presence of servants on the house owners' reception days. Source: Prime Ministry Ottoman State Archives (BOA), PLK.p. 2934.**

Although maids were allowed to utter demands, they themselves were deemed as a luxury in their objectified existence. Therefore, no extra effort for their well-being or investment to ameliorate their living standards was expected from the housewife, who worked like the mastermind behind the whole architectural layout.



were located in either a dedicated volume or along an axis with service areas like hammams, toilets, and kitchens.

### 5. Conclusion: housewives, housemaids and social contracts

To return to the initial question of this paper: How can we approach the social contract of decorum if we examine it from class and gender perspectives? The Ottoman women's media points out that neither the contract's meaning nor its parties were fixed in time. First of all, writings on *adab* disclose that, despite their authors not being architects, for whoever was writing about daily life, a house contained numerous signs of distinction within its architecture. And these markers signified accomplishment and upward mobility in society, particularly for their female patrons. In addition to being authors in women's media, women also authored and exhibited their house layouts, thereby claiming their long-desired public status. In these houses, housewives shone through luxuriously curated socializing spaces, that made statements by their *décor*, physical layout, and domestic workers. As Erving Goffman has put it, all of these were scenic aspects of the "front", which served as expressive instruments for its performers.<sup>31</sup>

Second, reading these texts was a sign of social status, not only because of women's low literacy rates in the late Ottoman Empire,<sup>32</sup> but also because the corpus, having passed the filter of literacy, was specifically addressed to affluent women who were capable of hiring domestic staff. Emancipation of elite women in the Ottoman feminist movement rested on domestic workers' shoulders as an article by *Kadınlar Dünyası* stated: "Why should men work and women not? If a woman engages in work, the notion of her obligation to cook meals at home becomes unnecessary. For she can delegate that task to someone from another household, in return for compensation."<sup>33</sup>

For the housewives, housemaids constituted another facet of luxury in the household due to their subordinate roles to wives. Thereby decorum worked also as a contract establishing a unified system of things and people, in which housemaids were the subjects and not

the parties of the agreement. As evidenced by their tucked-away chambers in the back gardens or ambiguous presence in the salons, they were invisible but highly functional in reinforcing the status hierarchy, benefitting upper-class women. Female-to-female employer-employee relations were governed not only by an employment contract but also by these tacit rules of decorum. Bridget Anderson states that, "an employment contract cannot capture female relations to the extent that domestic work is about status and status reproduction, and hierarchies between women."<sup>34</sup>

When we consider such implicit and explicit inequalities in the modern household, we must acknowledge that this is not simply a historical issue. In her article "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working Class Perspective" Angela Davis defined the strategic goal of women's emancipation as the abolition of housework as a private responsibility of women.<sup>35</sup> Written in 1981, the future of industrialisation and the socialisation of housework may have appeared promising at the time, with the potential to render this drudgery a bygone relic of history. Looking at the present, however, we can undoubtedly conclude that neither family structures nor household appliances have put an end to it. On the contrary, it is still present and growing. The twenty-first century marks a new peak in domestic employment, as Rosie Cox has argued, and unlike in the past, today's "servant problem" is characterised by its globalised nature.<sup>36</sup> In neoliberal economies, the uneven distribution of wealth reinforces gender and class-based inequalities in society's most cellular form, the home. And we have to consider these metrics in order to comprehend what the social contract(s) of decorum render visible and invisible within residential architecture.

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## Notes:

- 1 Pierre Bourdieu explains symbolic capital as "the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability." Pierre Bourdieu: *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London, New York 2002, p. 291.
- 2 Cited in Uğur Tanyeli: "Norms of Domestic Comfort and Luxury in Ottoman Metropolises Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries." In: *The Illuminated Table, the Prosperous House Food and Shelter in Ottoman Material Culture*. Würzburg 2003, p. 302.
- 3 Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen: *Adab and Modernity: A "Civilising Process"? (Sixteenth-Twenty-First Century)*. Leiden 2020, p. 4.
- 4 Helen Pfeifer: *Empire of Salons: Conquest and Community in Early Modern Ottoman Lands*. Princeton 2022, pp. 107–115.
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