

Experiences of cultural discoveries and conflict make up the second theme that inspired several stories. My personal favorites were “Unpacking the *Pasar Arabasi*,” “Water Under the Bridge,” and “Hijacked.” In the former tale an American expat had to jettison her orientalist ideas of authentic Turkish culture, while in “Water Under the Bridge,” another American expat concedes how the lack of privacy in her new Turkish family had made her deeply resentful. Her bitterness, which ultimately is trumped by her cheerful disposition, reaches unparalleled heights as her mother-in-law sets out to clean the floor of the expat’s carefully designed living room by simply hosing it down. Finally, “Hijacked” tells the story of an American tourist who misunderstands the motivation of her bus driver who had veered off the scheduled route. She believes herself kidnapped and panics, although unbeknownst to her, he had only done so in order to take her to trusted family where she could spend the night under the protection of several women. On a more serious note, the naiveté of some narrators is truly astounding. For example, in “Hello, I Love You,” a seemingly well-educated American traveler gives her cell phone number, personal information as well as her travel plans to a complete stranger and is then genuinely surprised when he takes her openness as a signal of her sexual availability and starts harassing her.

As every book, *Tales From the Expat Harem* has some minor weaknesses. First, why the editors invoke the image of the harem, the secluded women’s quarters, in the title is unclear, especially since the themes underlying the book are women’s empowerment, agency and cultural discoveries. Second, none of the stories show any serious engagement with the sociopolitical challenges that shape Turkish life, such as the rise of Islamism, the ethnic conflict in Eastern Turkey or the constant threat of a military coup. Third, the stories only tangentially address the clear limits that Turkish culture, however Westernized, still sets for women’s behavior. Finally, but perhaps inevitably, most stories focus on the experiences of elite, upper-middle class Westernized families in the urban centers of Turkey.

Overall, though, *Tales from the Expat Harem* is a delightful tome and warmly recommended as optional reading in undergraduate level courses on women in the Middle East or contemporary women’s writing.

Sylvia Maier
New York University