4 Veiled Agents

Islamic Feminism, Similitude, and the Limits of Solidarity

Before the Iranian revolution, Empress Farah Pahlavi had personified Iran for the rest of the world. Comparative judgments based on dominant and ascendant ideologies, from modernization theory to *gharbzadegi*, converged on her image. As the Iranian people's revolution coalesced into a theocracy, it became clear that women would, once again, be enlisted for nation-branding – whether they wished to or not. In fact, the first Pahlavi-era law the interim government rescinded was the Family Protection Law of 1967. With the country still under revolutionary fervor and uncertainty, the meager improvements the Pahlavi regime had made to Iranian marriage, divorce, and custody laws in the name of modernization were scrapped.[1] Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers then brushed aside the women's uprising of March 1979, and used the US embassy takeover and hostage crisis (November 1979–May 1980) to consolidate power. Despite the liberatory promises of Khomeini's revolutionary rhetoric and women's active participation in overthrowing the shah, the new regime imposed a series of gender-discriminatory laws based on "*shari'a* as interpreted by the ruling class."[2] Among these was a severe requirement for Islamic "modesty": forced hijab.

Khomeini's Revolutionary Council and, later, the pro-Khomeini Iranian Parliament followed a strategic process reminiscent of Reza Shah's *kashf-i hijāb* (hijab ban) policy to set the ground for mandatory veiling. From his pulpit, the revolutionary Ayatollah gave speeches insulting unveiled women as "naked" and "painted-up" dolls and urged Muslim women to cover up, even as other leading figures offered appeasing statements.[3] The regime implemented restrictive clothing rules for government employees first and employed propaganda measures to

[1] Ṣurayyā Ṣadr Dānish, "Zanān rā farāmūsh nakunīm," *Kiyhān*, 13 Isfand 1357/March 4, 1979, front page, https://online.fliphtml5.com/dfks/eqdw/#p=1.

[2] Mehrangiz Kar, "Iranian Law and Women's Rights," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 4, no. 1 (2007): 1–13, 3.

[3] Amīr Ḥusiyn Mujīrī, "Ḥijāb, ijbārī yā ikhtīyārī," *Nashrīyi Farhangī Dānishjūyi-i Imdād* (1389/2010), excerpted in *Virgool*, https://vrgl.ir/yJRHt.

normalize its vision.[4] Across regime-aligned media, unveiled women were accused of serving the West and the deposed monarchy; they faced threats, street violence, and denial of service with the regime's clear approval.[5] Then, in 1983, the new Islamic Penal Code officialized mandatory veiling: For women, appearing in public without Islamic hijab – interpreted as covering one's hair and most of the body – became legally punishable.[6] With these changes, the name Iran became nearly synonymous with the stereotype of the chador-clad woman in the international sphere. A riveting US narrative called *Not Without My Daughter*, which depicted the entrapment of an American woman and her daughter in postrevolutionary Iran, played a crucial role in entrenching this personification worldwide, including in Iran's neighbor and common comparand, Türkiye.

According to the 1987 book memoir and the 1991 movie by the same name, Michigan homemaker Betty Mahmoody agreed to visit Iran in 1984 for a short vacation on the assurances of her doctor husband, a native of Iran whom she had married in the United States. Once in the Islamic Republic, however, Dr. Mahmoody forced her and their four-year-old daughter Mahtob to stay in the country. She was allowed to get a divorce and leave; however, Iranian custody laws meant she would have had to leave Mahtob behind.[7] She refused: "Not without my daughter." After a year and a half of intense surveillance and physical and mental abuse at the hands of Dr. Mahmoody and his relatives, Betty and Mahtob managed to escape across the mountains into Türkiye with the help of smugglers. Finding refuge in the US embassy in Ankara, the two traveled back to the United States, where Betty Mahmoody became a household name, giving TV interviews, publishing her best-selling memoir, and offering her expertise to the State Department as a consultant.

A first-person narrative about intercultural marriage, border crossings, and linguistic struggles, *Not Without My Daughter* transcended national and linguistic boundaries. As a memoir and a Hollywood movie, the

[4] Arash Azizi, *What Iranians Want: Women, Life, Freedom* (London: Oneworld, 2024), 24.
[5] Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 124–30.
[6] Nasrin Sotoudeh, *Women, Life, Freedom: Our Fight for Human Rights and Equality in Iran*, trans. Parisa Saranj (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023), 17.
[7] The Iranian Civil Code, based on a dominant interpretation of Shari'a, has long differentiated between *hizanat* (the right to care for the child) and *vilayat* (guardianship over the child). The right to *vilayat* has always rested with the father and the father's family – remaining unchanged even under the Pahlavis. The courts preferred to give *hizanat* to the mother of a daughter under the age of seven, as Mahtob was. However, the law would not have allowed Betty Mahmoody to take her daughter out of the country without the father's permission. Seyed Nasrollah Ebrahimi, "Child Custody (Hizanat) under Iranian Law: An Analytical Discussion," *Family Law Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 459–76, 466, fn.41.

story met with both praise and criticism, not just in the United States but also in Europe and Australia, as has been well documented, including by Betty Mahmoody herself in the sequel book, *For the Love of a Child*.[8] Its negative reception in Iran as yet another bit of "Zionist propaganda" appears predictable and was reflected in the 2002 documentary *Without My Daughter*, which aimed to tell Dr. Mahmoody's side of the story.[9]

This research constitutes the first scholarly attempt to investigate the text's reception in Türkiye, which bridged Betty Mahmoody's escape from Iran to the United States. Here, the book became an immediate bestseller, and the movie was screened repeatedly on TV as one of the most-watched foreign movies of the era. As I explain in depth, Turks' experience with a similar, anti-Turkish Hollywood film, *Midnight Express* (1978), complicated the movie's reception but did not halt its popularity. In fact, *Not Without My Daughter* became such a significant motif in the Turkish public sphere that it soon came to suffuse national debates about the country's post-1980 headscarf ban, its attempts to join the European Union (EU), and Türkiye–Iran relations. The United States played a critical role in these discussions as the champion of a "dual containment" strategy against Iran and Iraq, the exporter of military technology and intelligence to Türkiye, and a high-profile advocate for the country's European aspirations.[10] Equally important, however, was its ideological role as an agenda-setter in international debates around "women's rights" and "religious freedom," and as the world's leading exporter of cultural products, such as *Not Without My Daughter*.

The first three chapters of this book have touched upon several visions of solidarity coalescing and disintegrating around Iran–Türkiye relations in triangulation with Europe and the United States. The authoritarian nationalist solidarity symbolized by the "brotherhood" of Reza Shah and Atatürk was troubled by comparative racial figurations of Turks and Iranians (Chapter 1). The competitive comparativism of modernization theory belied the pro-US, anti-Communist solidarity Iran and Türkiye institutionalized during the Cold War (Chapter 2). The

[8] Betty De Hart, "Not Without My Daughter: On Parental Abduction, Orientalism and Maternal Melodrama," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 8, no. 1 (2001): 51–65; Betty Mahmoody with Arnold D. Dunchock, *For the Love of a Child* (New York: St Martins, 1992).

[9] *Without My Daughter*, directed by Kari Tervo and Alexis Kouros (Helsinki: Dream Catcher, 2002), DVD; Nacim Pak-Shiraz, *Shi'i Islam in Iranian Cinema: Religion and Spirituality in Film* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 1–2.

[10] Robert Olson, *Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979–2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, Coups and Geopolitics* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2004). For "dual containment," see Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars and the Policy of Dual Containment* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

antiracist, anti-imperialist Muslim solidarity, which hinged on a rejection of westoxication (*gharbzadegi*), sidelined gender justice in countering aspirational whiteness (Chapter 3). This chapter brings the question of solidarity and its intersections with comparison to the foreground. Specifically, I investigate how Iran–Türkiye comparisons influenced the work of Turkish and Iranian women's activists who sought to expand Muslim women's political participation and reform repressive clothing codes in the 1980s and 1990s.

A normative commitment to solidarity underlines feminism as "a movement to end sexist oppression."[11] Building on the intellectual heritage of transnational feminist cultural studies, I have organized this chapter around two instances of unrealized solidarity, one seemingly "cultural" and the other more obviously "political."[12] First, I explain the reasons for the popularity of *Not Without My Daughter* in 1990s Türkiye despite the country's own harrowing experience with Hollywood's *Midnight Express* (1978). Second, I analyze a moment of failed outreach from Iranian woman reformists to a devout, US-educated Turkish woman politician called Merve Kavakçı, who was denied her seat in parliament because of her headscarf in 1999. The so-called Kavakçı affair became a cause célèbre to multiple contingencies within Iran, with regime hardliners using the crisis to malign Turkish secularism (also known as laicism) and reformists insinuating similarities between the two states' repression of women's civic presence. As the laicist Turkish press accused Kavakçı of being an Iranian asset, Kavakçı herself rejected the outreach of Iranian women, appealing instead to Europe and the United States for support. The strategic use of comparison and the dominant transnational ideologies of the era, depicting Iran and Muslim women in totalizing ways, linked these two events.

The intertextual, political resonances established around *Not Without My Daughter* in Türkiye offer a compelling case study for exploring the limits and complications inherent in counter-hegemonic responses to Orientalism when the depictions target other, even neighboring, countries.[13] Do local contestations of dominant US categorizations of "the

[11] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 18.

[12] Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); and Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 2, no. 2 (1994): 430–45.

[13] See Chapters 1 and 3. For a history of these discursive developments, see Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–96; Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The

Middle East" stop at nation-state boundaries? Can exported American narratives, even in modification, get mobilized against neighboring countries and percolate US political influence in previously unnoticed ways? This chapter's interdisciplinary, multilingual examination of the discursive triangulations between the United States, Türkiye, and Iran around *Not Without My Daughter* and the Kavakçı affair demonstrates that the assumptions of similitude that undergird Orientalism can have multiple domestic and international edges of mobilization.

It is significant that *Not Without My Daughter*'s success in Türkiye occurred during what Mirgün Cabas has called the last years of "Old Turkey," that is, the last point at which the country's laicist elite held the reins of power in the military, judiciary, and the government.[14] Shaped by the coups of 1980 and 1997, this era saw the implementation of Türkiye's first nationwide headscarf ban in spaces associated with the state. The ban was highly controversial: It sparked mass protests, arrests, and counterprotests. This chapter demonstrates how laicist arguments upholding the ban as a measure against radical Islamism built on US mass media such as *Not Without My Daughter*, but also adjusted American figurations of Iran through a logic of imminent contagion. This strategic emphasis on similarity between Iranian and Turkish Islamism helped cast the regime's trampling of the political, educational, and occupational rights of headscarf-wearing women as part of its forward-looking defense of those rights: part of a plan to prevent Türkiye from "becoming Iran."

Making a Difference: Türkiye and the Iranian Revolution

With the Iranian revolution, US-led comparativism between Türkiye and Iran came to hinge heavily on religion. Worries regarding the "export" of Islamist revolutionary fervor from next door constituted one of three central foreign policy concerns for Turkish policymakers in the wake of the revolution, alongside concerns about militant Kurdish separatism and a potential Iranian slide toward the Soviet side in the Cold War.[15] However, they thoroughly shaped the oft-repeated question, "Will Turkey become another Iran?" This imagined possibility cut through

Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 311–42; Sabri Ateş, "Oryantalism ve Bizim Doğumuz," *doğudan* (September–October 2007): 38–56; Edhem Eldem, "Ottoman and Turkish Orientalism," *Architectural Design* 80, no. 1 (2010): 26–31; Mohammed S. H. Alsulami, *Iranian Orientalism: Notions of the Other in Modern Iranian Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[14] Mirgün Cabas, *2001: Eski Türkiye'nin Son Yılı* (Istanbul: Can, 2017).

[15] Olson, *Turkey-Iran Relations*, 1.

several intersecting and overlapping points of similitude: Türkiye and Iran had shared experiences of authoritarian modernization; Türkiye and Iran were (or had been) Cold War US allies; and Türkiye and Iran were both Muslim-majority nation-states. These pre-established lines of comparability allowed opinion leaders, scholars, and politicians to emphasize selected differences in line with their political agendas.

Newly accented differences between Iranian Islamism and Turkish laicism, or supposedly "radical" Shia Islam and "quietist" Sunnism, formed two critical lines of comparison hinging on religion. (A third theological comparison – between Iranian "fundamentalism" and Turkish "Sufism" – constitutes the focus of Chapter 5.) While some thinkers highlighted religious discrepancies to argue Türkiye could never have an Islamist revolution, others emphasized similarity and plausibility. All of these comparisons were strategic and goal-oriented political constructs.

An opinion piece by famous Turkish journalist Haluk Şahin published in 1979 in the *New York Times* addressed how the lenses of comparison impacted its outcomes. Titled "Turkey is not Iran," Şahin's piece categorically rejected the possibility of Türkiye becoming "another Iran" while critiquing the grounds of comparison.[16] "Because the West rediscovered Turkey while fixing its gaze on Iran," he wrote, "one notes a tendency to seek and find parallels between the two countries." Tracing the Orientalist legacy in this mode of thinking, which collapsed widely different Muslim-majority societies together, Şahin instead used a materialist analysis to explain Türkiye's contemporary maladies. His analysis shone in so far as it drew parallels between the woes of capitalism impacting both the United States and Türkiye, foregrounding connections between the so-called West and East instead of letting the United States stay in the background as a normative foil. He argued that "Turkey has faithfully followed Western prescriptions for economic development for more than 30 years. What Turkey is suffering from is not a recurrence of the "old Eastern disease," but a very acute case of the common Western syndrome whose symptoms are well-known: runaway inflation (60 percent), unemployment (25 percent), oil dependence (80 percent), and foreign debts ($17.7 billion)."

Given the lingering effects of the 1970s oil crisis, Şahin's precise materialist analysis connected capitalism and dependency on non-renewable resources and drew parallels between the United States and Türkiye. In addition, it highlighted the international power hierarchies that had contributed to Türkiye's economic woes in the form of "Western prescriptions": capitalist modernization theory, now repackaged as "development."

[16] Haluk Şahin, "Turkey Is Not Iran," *New York Times*, July 10, 1979, 15.

Despite its commendable focus on world systems, Şahin's op-ed also threatened to move toward a type of Turkish exceptionalism with Orientalist undertones in its disavowal of Iran. Drawing attention to Atatürk's legacy in enforcing "one of the most rigorous and extensive secularization campaigns of this century," Şahin dismissed the possibility of the triumph of political Islam in Türkiye. Thus, he not only cast Islam as an unwelcome pollutant to the public sphere but also ignored the role non-devout Iranians had played in the Iranian revolution. In addition, he misidentified how Islamist movements that emphasize racial and class justice, such as those explored in Chapter 3, could hold transnational appeal as a potential cure against the economic ravages he had just identified.

If comparisons that highlighted the exceptional aspects of Kemalist modernization offered one way of dismissing the possibility of Türkiye becoming Iran, another way was to renew emphasis on the sectarian Shia–Sunni difference.[17] After all, had not Türkiye once been the Ottoman Empire, the seat of the caliph and a Sunni force to rival Iran's Shia Safavid empire? Türkiye's anti-Shia Islamists, for example, regularly mobilized such sectarian readings, arguing that the Iranian revolution was not properly Islamic and instead represented Soviet-induced chaos in the Muslim world.[18]

Within the liberal Turkish public sphere, journalist Taha Akyol's *Türkiye ve İran'da Mezhep ve Devlet* [Sect and Government in Türkiye and Iran] epitomized the use of Shia–Sunni comparativism.[19] In his writings, Akyol claimed that the Shia–Sunni contrast demonstrated the fears of an Iran-style Islamic revolution in Türkiye were overblown because, unlike hierarchical Shiism with clerics holding immense sway, Sunnism lacked structures of top-down influence.

Of course, as befits comparison, the newly sharpened difference between "hierarchical" Shiism and power-diffuse Sunnism was too simplistic. It underplayed the considerable flexibility and pluralism inherent to Iranian Shiism and ignored the authoritarian elements of state-sponsored Turkish Sunnism. Shia individuals and families, after all, were free to choose any senior ulema they wished to follow as a source of emulation (*marjaʿ*).[20] There was perhaps more truth to the claim

[17] Hazır, "Comparing," 8; Dankwart A. Rustow, "Turkey's Travails," *Foreign Affairs* 58, no. 1 (1979): 98–99.

[18] More on this line of comparison in Chapter 5. Nail Elhan, "İran Devrimi'ni Okumak: Türkiye'de Basılan İran Devrimi Konulu Kitaplar Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme," *Mülkiye Dergisi* 43, no. 4 (2019): 707–30.

[19] Hazır, "Comparing," 9–10; Taha Akyol, *Türkiye ve İran'da Mezhep ve Devlet* (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1998).

[20] Vali Nasr, *Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 72.

that, due to Ottoman and Kemalist restructuring, senior Sunni clergy had long been co-opted by the Turkish state. The state Directorate of Religion (Diyanet) held immense influence in Türkiye, promoting quietist interpretations of proregime Islam through the nation's mosques. However, this did not prevent multiple Turkish Sunni movements from finding their leaders and organizing parallel hierarchies.

West Asian ethnoreligious diversity also troubled the binary between "Sunni Turkey" and "Shia Iran." Of course, opinion leaders were well aware that Turkish Alevis practised a form of Islam similar to Shiism in its veneration of Imam Ali. However, they noted that Alevis had long been supporters of Kemalist secularism as well as victims of Islamist mobs and were unlikely to support Iran-style clericalism.[21] A 1978 report from the US Embassy in Ankara to the Secretary of State argued Alevism lacked a hierarchical structure due to its mystical tendencies. "Alevism" was "inextricably associated with Sufi mysticism, while the Shia clergy in Iran has long waged a battle against Sufism."[22] Such comparisons associated Türkiye with Sufism in contrast to Iranian "fundamentalism," ignoring Khomeini's significant grounding in Islamic mysticism.[23]

Opposing liberal and Islamist readings of Turkish–Iranian difference were groups of Iran-friendly Islamists who figured their next-door neighbor could serve as inspiration and ally. Idealizing Khomeini as the defender of the oppressed masses, these devout political thinkers underplayed differences between Shiism and Sunnism, casting the revolution as properly Islamic.[24] This was not much of a stretch as Khomeini had also de-emphasized sectarian distinctions in his universalist, antiracist appeals (Chapter 3). Osman Tunç, whose publications praising the Islamic revolution were advertised in the newspaper aligned with Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist "National Outlook" movement, *Milli Gazete*, popularized this line of thinking. According to Tunç, the Iranian revolution represented "a triumph of Islam" (not of one sect) against the forces of imperialism and exploitation.[25]

As noted in Chapter 3, Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation Party (MSP) party had gained a position in a government coalition in 1974, overseeing outreach to America's Black Muslims and the larger "Muslim

[21] Rustow, "Turkey's Travails," 99.
[22] Amembassy Ankara to US State Department, "Political Violence in Turkey: Background on the Alevi-Sunni Factor," electronic telegram, December 26, 1978, Central Foreign Policy Files, created 7/1/1973–12/31/1979, documenting the period ca. 1973–12/31/1979 – Record Group 59, NARA.
[23] See Chapter 5 for more on this.
[24] Elhan, "İran Devrimi'nin Türkiye'de Yansımaları," 28–57.
[25] Osman Tunç, *Çağın Olayı: İran'da İslam'ın Zaferi* (Istanbul: Piran, 1979).

world" to gain support for the country's controversial invasion of Cyprus. Although "the Cyprus Peace Operation" and the attendant recalibration of Turkish foreign policy had broad non-partisan support in the country, the Kemalist military considered Erbakan's brand of Islamism too radical. On September 12, 1980, a military junta took control over the country, banning all current political parties as well as some labor unions and momentarily halting electoral Islam's rise. The coup leaders, led by General Kenan Evren, focused most extensively on punishing the left; however, scholars have argued the coup was also partially initiated to contain revolutionary Islamism given the turmoil in neighboring Iran.[26]

The repressive strain of Turkish laicism, which sought to deter populist Islam and its public manifestations, had long operated alongside a "productive" strain constructing acceptable pieties. Throughout the early 1980s, as Iran transitioned into a new system based on Ayatollah Khomeini's theorization of "the rule of jurists," the Turkish coup leader General Evren pushed for a renewed synthesis of Turkism and Sunni Islam: a "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" (TIS).[27] Initially conceptualized in the 1960s and 1970s by a group of devout anti-Communist intellectuals, the ideology of the Turkish–Islamic synthesis seemed tailor-made for the era with its message of a supposedly exceptional Turkish Islam that prioritized obedience to the state and embodied religious "moderation."[28] With the junta's regime, TIS became state policy.

In keeping with the laicist assertion of the modern nation-state's right to determine the parameters of civic religiosity, the very generals who highlighted Islam as an essential aspect of Turkishness also initiated Türkiye's first official nationwide ban on headscarves at government institutions. General Evren originated the ban through the National Security Council, and various circulars and decrees appeared, banning the headscarf for students, teachers, government workers, and university students between 1980 and 1982.[29] The new law explicitly prevented women with headscarves from attending universities, working at government offices, or serving in the parliament.

[26] Süleyman Elik, *Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979–2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion and Security in Middle-Power States* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 37.

[27] Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' in Modern Turkish Political Thought," *Muslim World* 89, no. 3–4 (1999): 350–76; Banu Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 93–118.

[28] Nail Elhan and Başar Şirin, "Reconsidering the Turkish–Islamic Synthesis: Emergence of Iran and Shi'ism as the Rivals of the Turkish–Islamic Identity," *Iran and the Caucasus* 27, no. 3 (2023): 303–18; Elisabeth Özdalga, "The Hidden Arab: A Critical Reading of the Notion of 'Turkish Islam,'" *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (2006): 551–70.

[29] Cihan Aktaş, *Türbanın Yeniden İcadı* (Istanbul: Kapı, 2006), 82–89.

The civic governments that followed the junta prevaricated on the ban, but when a 1997 military memorandum halted another Islamist electoral victory, laicists secured their hold onto key loci of power, including the military, judiciary, and the presidency. Utilizing the giant proregime, centrist press cartels, including the high-circulation newspapers *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, and *Milliyet*, they generated a moral panic around the headscarf as the symbol of an impending Iranian revolution-style state takeover. Thus, perhaps ironically, they strategically emphasized similitude and linkages between Turkish Islamists and Iranian revolutionaries, underplaying key differences and disconnects. The United States's *Not Without My Daughter* became a significant tool in their rhetorical arsenal despite its similarities and connections with the anti-Turkish movie *Midnight Express*. The following section explores the formation of these two American narratives and their reception in Iran, Türkiye, and the United States, linking them to laicist comparativism around the headscarf ban.

Iran's Midnight Express

A young, naive American gets stuck in a barbarous country where people look, sound, and even smell different. Their food, their toilet habits, and their daily customs are all strange and revolting. The protagonist suffers physical and gendered/sexualized violence in this foreign land; they are stripped of agency, dehumanized, and humiliated. Finally, the American escapes using his or her superior intelligence and bravery, with a little help from luck. The escape scene involves putting on the clothes of the oppressor and "passing" as the native Other to cross the border to safety. The hero then shares the story with compatriots to warn them about the dangers that lurk abroad. This is the plot of *Midnight Express* (1978). It is also the plot of *Not Without My Daughter* (1991). Despite real connections to actual events and their focus on two different countries, the plotlines of these texts are so similar and familiar because they belong to the same literary genre: the captivity narrative.[30]

Most vividly associated with the British colonization of North America, captivity narratives had their origins in fantastic European tales of religious wars and enslavement at the hands of Muslim enemies. As Timothy Marr notes, these "old world patterns of disdaining 'others' were imported into new world spaces," helping settler colonialists

[30] Hossein Nazari, "Not Without My Daughter: Resurrecting the American Captivity Narrative," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 34, no. 1 (2016): 23–48.

make sense of new forms of cultural difference and political violence.[31] Twentieth-century movies about American captivity in Muslim-majority countries, such as *Midnight Express* and *Not Without My Daughter*, therefore, represent a sort of return to the scene of originary difference, to what Edward Said called some of the "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" to be found in European and North American cultural production.[32]

In addition to the captivity plot, the tropes of rape and costume change connect these texts to the long lineage of Orientalist fantasy in the West and, as if by compulsion, appear in the movies even when they are absent in the source text. Based on the memoirs of Billy Hayes and a screenplay by Oliver Stone, *Midnight Express* depicted the nightmarish travails of a young college dropout who got caught attempting to smuggle hashish and was imprisoned in early 1970s Türkiye. Directed by Alan Parker, *Midnight Express* won two Oscars (one for its screenplay and the other for its music) and boosted the notorious "Turkish prison" trope that still thrives in US popular culture.[33]

In the movie, Hayes escapes prison in a moment of righteous rage by murdering a prison guard who is attempting to rape him. He puts on the guard's clothes and simply walks out of prison. Hayes's memoirs by the same name, on the other hand, contain no instances of rape by the prison authorities; instead, Hayes notes rape among local inmates is punished severely. There is also no stealing of clothes and identities. The escape scene in Hayes' original account differs drastically from Hollywood's fantasy: Instead of murdering to protect his bodily integrity, Hayes gets transferred to a lower-security island prison and escapes by stealing a dinghy one stormy night. *Not Without My Daughter*'s Betty Mahmoody does escape by putting on Iranian (and later, Kurdish) clothes in both the book and the movie; however, unlike the memoir, this movie also adds an attempted rape scene before the border crossing.

Midnight Express operates as an immediate predecessor and intertextual key to *Not Without My Daughter* because, in addition to paralleling each other in plot and repeating key Orientalist tropes, the source materials had a direct connection. William Hoffer, the co-author of Billy Hayes's memoir *Midnight Express* (1977) also co-wrote Betty Mahmoody's memoirs. Moreover, this connection between the two texts was no coincidence, as Betty Mahmoody highlights in *For the Love of a Child*:

[31] Marr, *Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 3.
[32] Said, *Orientalism*, 1.
[33] *Midnight Express*, directed by Alan Parker (1978; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2008), DVD; Kent F. Schull, *Prisons in the Late Ottoman Empire: Microcosms of Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 3.

It was time to choose a collaborator for my book. I knew whom I wanted: Bill Hoffer, the co-author of *Midnight Express*, the dramatic account of an American drug smuggler's escape from a Turkish prison. While in Tehran, I'd heard about street demonstrations against *Midnight Express*, though the book and the movie based on it were banned there. I wanted to write with the person who'd had such a profound effect on ordinary people in Iran – the people who'd had such a total control over my own life.

"You know," said my agent, "Bill Hoffer is a pretty big author. Maybe he'll say no."

But I persisted. If this writer could move the Iranian fundamentalists so strongly in absentia, I thought he must be very effective. Perhaps he would say no, but I had to try. Those protestors in Iran would never know just how much they influenced my decision.[34]

This section is worth quoting at length because of how easily Mahmoody conflates Iran, the scene of her captivity, and Türkiye, the neighboring Muslim-majority country she used to bridge her escape. In response, it is necessary to question her claim that massive protests against *Midnight Express* occurred in Iran during her stay. Despite research involving multiple Iranian and Turkish newspaper archives, neither my research assistant for this chapter, Parisa Akbari, nor I could find evidence of such protests. It is also not clear why any such protest would have happened in 1984–1986 when Betty Mahmoody was in Iran instead of the late 1970s when the movie came out. Indeed, Iran was rocked by protests in 1978–1979, but they did not pertain to *Midnight Express*.

Similarly, it is unlikely that Iranians would have focused too much on protesting a dated movie about Türkiye in the mid-1980s when the country was putting all its energy and resources into fighting Iraq. Of course, the movie would have been banned in postrevolutionary Iran, but that was true for many Hollywood films, not to mention a risqué one like *Midnight Express*, which resembled "a porno fantasy about the sacrifice of a virgin" in the memorable words of Pauline Kael.[35] It is more likely that Iranians did not care all that much about *Midnight Express*; the film was not significant there, at least not until after William Hoffer's second infamous output, *Not Without My Daughter*, appeared.

In the United States, the fact that William Hoffer had a hand in both projects was used to market *Not Without My Daughter*, beginning with the cover of the first edition, which announced: "*Not Without My Daughter*. A True Story. By Betty Mahmoody with William Hoffer. Co-author of *Midnight Express*." For Iranian observers, on the other hand, the connection operated as a significant political clue. In the

[34] Mahmoody, *For the Love of a Child*, 21.
[35] Pauline Kael, "Midnight Express," *The New Yorker*, November 27, 1978, 182.

documentary *Without My Daughter*, which focuses on Dr. Mahmoody's life after the "abduction" of his daughter Mathob, we see the doctor lecturing to an audience of university students. In response to a question about the author of the book, he uses the links between *Midnight Express* and *Not Without My Daughter* to cut off any connection the text had with the real Iran, referring to Hoffer as a "Zionist writer" who "has taken mine and Betty's story and used it to attack Iran and Islam." He attests that this tactic mirrored Hoffer's previous work in *Midnight Express*, a film in which a "smuggler's story" was used to "attack Turkey."[36] Similarly, Alexis Kuros, the Iranian-Finnish director of *Without My Daughter*, highlighted the connection between the two films in a 2003 interview to reduce the specificity of the Iranian context: "Such things could be written about any nation, just as they have been written about the Turks."[37]

William Hoffer, who co-wrote these books with significant help from his spouse Marilyn, has claimed political themes are not central to their work, "First and foremost, we're entertainers. Our intention is to spin a yarn."[38] These entertaining yarns, however, were steeped in the dominant ideologies of US imperialism, including Orientalism, and used the established plot devices of mainstream American literature, specifically the captivity narrative.

The popular resonance of neither text was an accident. Each took place in a country with which the United States was experiencing political difficulties at the time of the book's release. As noted in Chapter 3, in the 1970s, US–Türkiye relations were tense because of disagreements over the opium trade and the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus; at this point, Congress had even imposed an arms embargo against this NATO ally. By the early 1980s, these difficulties with Türkiye had been mostly resolved, partially in response to the loss of another key US ally with the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis.[39] Therefore, it is not that surprising that the first movie takes place in Türkiye in the 1970s and the other one in Iran in the 1980s. Of course, each movie was filmed mainly outside the country it claimed to depict, and neither contained leading actors from that country, as the accents reveal.

[36] Tervo and Kouros, *Without My Daughter*.

[37] Ḥusiyn Qurbān-Zādi, "Chirāgh-quvih-yī bi samt-i sharq, guft u gū bā Alexis Kouros, kārgardān-i fīlm-i bidūn-i dukhtaram hargiz," *Sūri-yi Andishi*, no. 1 (1382/2003): 53–55, 53.

[38] Loraine Page, "Not Without Each Other," *Writer's Digest* 74, no. 11 (November 1994): 50.

[39] Tülümen, *İran Devrimi Anıları*, 13; Ömer Faruk Görçün, *1979 İran İslam Devrimi Sonrası Türkiye-İran İlişkileri* (Istanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat, 2005), 127.

As foreign relations shift, so do the settings of US bestsellers and blockbusters. Moreover, these cultural products travel, taking their warped accents, costumes, and sets across continents. *Not Without My Daughter* first appeared in Türkiye as a book in the summer of 1991, that is, months after the movie opened in the United States.[40] It quickly became a bestseller; by December 1991, it ranked third on the best-selling list, following two books by Turkish authors.[41] On November 20, 1994, the movie was shown on the subscription-based private channel CINE 5.[42] In early October 1995, a screening on the private TV channel Show TV was canceled at the request of the Iranian government; however, at the end of the same month, Show TV ended up broadcasting the movie anyway.[43] After that point, Show TV repeatedly screened the movie, and it became one of the most-watched foreign movies of the decade.[44] In May 1997, Betty Mahmoody visited Türkiye and was a guest on the prestigious talk show *Durum*.[45]

I remember watching the dubbed movie as a teenager sometime in the late 1990s at my grandparents' house, with my cousins. But that hardly captures the extent of my memory of this film. Just as Iran's glamorous queens had once captured our parents' imagination (Chapter 2), *Not Without My Daughter* bizarrely saturated the Turkish popular culture of my youth. Translated as "*Kızım Olmadan Asla*" [lit. Never without My Daughter], the title came to operate as a proverbial expression. Mainstream newspapers printed various unrelated stories with headlines using the formula: "Never without my son," "Never without my cat," "Never without high heels," and so on.[46] The movie's title was fair play in any game of charades we played.

Given the similarities and connections between the two narratives, it is not surprising that Iranian critiques have often emphasized the overlap between *Midnight Express* and *Not Without My Daughter* or examined the movie alongside other anti-Iranian and Islamophobic Hollywood movies to reduce the story's connections to Iran as well as to reality.[47] What about

[40] Betty Mahmudi, "Kızım Olmadan Asla," Book Ad, *Cumhuriyet*, July 25, 1991, 13.
[41] "Zirvedekiler," *Milliyet*, December 29, 1991, 10.
[42] CINE 5, *Milliyet*, November 20, 1992, 8.
[43] "Bu Kez Yayınlanıyor," *Milliyet*, October 30, 1995, 28.
[44] "1995'de En Çok İzlenen Yabancı Filmlerde Yine Star Önde," Ad, *Milliyet*, January 17, 1996, 14.
[45] "Büyük Buluşma," *Hürriyet*, May 11, 1997, 24.
[46] "Oğlum Olmadan Asla," *Milliyet*, April 1, 1994, 28; "Kedim Olmadan Asla," *Sabah*, May 14, 1997, 23; "Yüksek Ökçe Olmadan Asla!" *Sabah*, November 11, 2006, http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/11/11/cp/gnc103-20061111-101.html.
[47] For example, ʿAlī Fallāḥī, "Sīnamā-yi hālīvūd va ʿamalīyāt-i ravānī ʿalayh-i Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī-yi Irān," *Muṭāliʿāt-i ʿAmalīyāt-i Ravānī*, no. 21 (1388/2009): 106–33; Mahsā Māh-Pīshānīyān, "Silāḥhā-yi risānī-yī-yi āmrīkā dar jang-i narm bā Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī-yi Irān,"

Turks? Were they aware of the similarities and profound connections between the two texts as well? The popular print publications of the era demonstrate that the answer to this question was a resounding "yes."

Since 1991, when the film first came out in the United States and the book's Turkish translation appeared, newspapers and magazines in Türkiye introduced this new text with references to *Midnight Express*. The book section of *Cumhuriyet*, the country's newspaper of record, introduced the movie as "Iran's Midnight Express."[48] A week later, Türkiye's best-selling current affairs magazine *Aktüel* used the same expression: "The Midnight Express is now in Iran." *Aktüel*'s write-up even mentioned William Hoffer, describing him as an excellent choice as a co-author because he had proven his expertise at "telling the tale of 'a poor Westerner who finds himself in a third world country.'"[49] *Aktüel*, a deeply laicist magazine, admitted that the film was one-sided. However, it claimed this one-sidedness was "not exaggerated," and the image presented was close to the Iranian regime's self-depiction.

Of course, not every Turkish reviewer thought the film's one-sidedness lacked exaggeration or saw such depictions as harmless. After Show TV halted *Not Without My Daughter*'s initial screening, Can Dündar, one of Türkiye's most famous journalists, wrote an op-ed denouncing the film as a "cheap piece of American propaganda and racism up to the neck." He recalled that he had experienced similar feelings while watching *Midnight Express* for the first time in a Paris theater. That film's "intense, sludgy (*vıcık vıcık*) racism" had led him to exit the cinema in fear once the lights came on, worrying he might be lynched if his Turkish identity became known. "Now Iranians, too, got a *Midnight Express*," he wrote, validating Iranian concerns.[50]

As a left-leaning journalist, Dündar confessed no love for either the Iranian regime or the Turkish prison system. His visceral description of watching *Not Without My Daughter* about Iran after having seen *Midnight Express* as a Turk was, therefore, even more remarkable for its capacious

Muṭāliʿāt-i ʿAmalīyāt-i Ravānī, no. 27 (1389/2010): 173–83; Rubina Ramji and Amīr Yazdīyān, "Bāznamāyī-yi musalmānān dar hālīvūd," *Taṣvīrnāmi*, no. 3 (2012): 69–91; ʿAbdullāh Bīcharānlū, *Bāznamāyī-yi Irān va Islām dar hālīvūd* (Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh-i Farhang va Hunar va Irtibāṭāt, 1391/2012); Siyyid Ḥusiyn Sharafiddīn and Siyyid Mahdī Ganjīyānī, "Hālīvūd va tuṭiʿī-yi Islām-harāsī bā shigird-i nufūẕ dar nākhudāgāh," *Maʿrifat-i Farhangī Ijtimāʿī*, no. 16 (2013): 99–124; Sīyāvash Ṣalavātīyān and Siyyid Muḥammad Riżā Siyyidī, "Tadvīn-i Rāhburdhā-yi sāzmān-i ṣidā va sīmā-yi Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī-yi Īrān dar jang-i narm (Muṭāliʿī-yi muridī-yi ḥowzi-yi maḥṣūlāt-i namāyish-i khārijī)," *Faṣlnāmi-yi ʿIlmī-yi Risānihā-yi Dīdārī va Shinīdārī*, no. 27 (1394/2015): 118–23.

[48] "Batılı bir Ana-Kız," *Cumhuriyet*, August 1, 1991, 5.

[49] "İran'da bir Amerikalı," *Aktüel*, no.3 (August 6–14, 1999), 89.

[50] Can Dündar, "Kızım Olmadan Asla," October 5, 1995; repr. *Büyülü Fener* (Istanbul: Nadir, 2012), 80.

empathy with Iranians in the face of filmic vilification. His liberal political stance manifested in his argument that, despite all this, the film should be screened due to the principle of the freedom of the press, perhaps with some balancing discussion afterward. "Otherwise," he claimed with a pun on the movie's Turkish title, "we would be in the situation of never without permission."

Midnight Express had damaged more than nationalist pride. Operating as one of the most immediate links with the name "Turkey" in the American consciousness, it especially hurt the country's tourism sector.[51] Journalist Haluk Şahin called it a "cursed Hollywood passport" and discussed how every Turk abroad had to deal with the impressions the film had created on Westerners.[52] However, interestingly, the immediate associations with *Midnight Express* did not prevent *Not Without My Daughter* from becoming popular in Türkiye. Dündar's empathy for the maligned Iran was rarely repeated in other mainstream venues. This largely positive reception was shaped by the privatized, sensational media environment of the 1990s, critical differences between the two texts, and the contingencies of national politics.

First, as the advertising campaigns demonstrate, the parallels and connections with *Midnight Express* worked as a kind of commercial for *Not Without My Daughter*. *Midnight Express* was banned in Türkiye, despite intense curiosity and constant discourse around it. For the Turkish population, who were prevented from watching its antecedent, *Not Without My Daughter* provided an opportunity to see what Hollywood had to say about a similar situation in a neighboring country. Newspapers at the time utilized these censorship threats and various polemics around the movie to increase the buzz around the TV screenings. For example, the centrist newspapers *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet* both used negative reactions to the movie to draw in viewers: "The film based on Betty Mahmudi's book attempts to come to screens once again"; "This time it will be broadcast!"; "The sensational film is on screen again! In addition to those who have liked and praised the film, others have protested it with hatred. Now it is your turn to decide."[53] In 1993, that is, between the years

[51] Pınar Yanmaz, "The Role of Cinema in Presentation of Tourism," *Gümüşhane Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Elektronik Dergisi* no. 1–2 (2014): 112–39; Dilek Kaya-Mutlu, "The Midnight Express (1978) Phenomenon and the Image of Turkey," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25, no. 3 (2005): 475–96.

[52] Haluk Şahin, "Midnight Express 20 Years Later: A Turkish Nightmare," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 15, no. 5 (1998): 21–22, 21. See also, Dilek Kaya-Mutlu, *The Midnight Express Phenomenon: The International Reception of the Film Midnight Express, 1978–2004* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2005).

[53] *Hürriyet*, TV Guide, October 30, 1995, 24; *Milliyet*, October 30, 1995, 28; *Milliyet*, February 7, 1997, 24.

the Turkish translation of the book appeared and the first TV screening of the movie took place, a private TV channel also broadcast *Midnight Express* for the first time.[54] In other words, in the capitalist media landscape of the turn of the century, the preestablished similitude allowed the two films to become sensation-seeking ads for each other.

If similarity boosted attention, difference helped sustain it. The second reason why Turks did not dismiss *Not Without My Daughter* out of hand might have been that, between the 1970s and 1990s, Hollywood became smarter about concealing its anti-Muslim racism. In *Midnight Express*, every single Turkish character is unequivocally bad, including Billy Hayes's lawyer. As Aslıhan Onaran has written, the film does not have a single Turk who is not "barbaric, dirty, corrupt, and sexually and emotionally exploitative."[55] Oliver Stone's Oscar-winning screenplay confirms this wholesale condemnation of a people with an expletive-packed speech Hayes gives in court, in which he calls Turks "a nation of pigs." The movie's racism was so airtight that Billy Hayes, the author of the memoir, spoke out against it years later: "I loved the movie, but I wish they'd shown some good Turks. You don't see a single one in the movie, and there were a lot of them, even in the prison."[56]

Iranians fared better in *Not Without My Daughter* insofar as a couple were cast as kind and helpful human beings. In the movie, Betty Mahmoody calls Iran "a backward, primitive country" unfit for raising a child. The plot, the mise-en-scène, and the behavior of the main characters repeatedly corroborate these observations. However, given the long-standing strain of "romantic exoticism" in US narratives about "Persia," the movie also taps into the duality of Western Persophilia and Iranophobia, valorizing prerevolutionary Iran with references to its cultural heritage while condemning contemporary Iran by associating it with oppression, filth, and violence.[57] Thus, the film's "good" Iranians not only embody Western qualities, such as wearing ties and listening to classical music, but also wax poetic about Persian gardens and mystical poetry. In other words, *Not Without My Daughter* follows what Evelyn Alsultany has called a strategy of "simplified complex representations" in which negative stereotypes are both promoted and "balanced" through

[54] Mutlu, "The Midnight Express (1978) Phenomenon," 490.
[55] Aslıhan Tokgöz Onaran, "Öteki'ne Bakış: Batılı ve 'Öteki' Türk Kimlikleri Arasındaki İlişkinin Amerikan Sinemasında İmgelenmesi," in *Kimlikler Lütfen: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Kültürel Kimlik Arayışı ve Temsili*, ed. Gönül Pultar (Ankara: ODTÜ, 2009), 434–47, 435.
[56] John Flinn, "The Real Billy Hayes Regrets 'Midnight Express' Cast all Turks in a Bad Light," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, January 9, 2004, https://bit.ly/44nrQxV.
[57] For romantic exoticism, see Marr, *Roots of American Islamicism*, 13; Dabashi, *Persophilia*.

various strategies, such as positive representations of people from the same ethnic group.[58]

Of course, as Alsultany has demonstrated, the presence of sympathetic characters does not necessarily eliminate the problem of racial stereotyping. Instead, it can strengthen ideas about what "good" and "bad" Muslims are and obscure how such representations can boost unjust policies.[59] However, they do make for an easier defense for the producers. Despite pages and pages of negative generalizations about Iranian clothing, food, and toilet habits – not to mention gender and sexual relations – Betty Mahmoody rejected all accusations of racism by emphasizing the presence of the good Iranians in the source text and the movie. Unlike Billy Hayes, scenarist Oliver Stone, and even director Alan Parker, all of whom eventually expressed some regrets about the excesses of *Midnight Express* and emphasized the fictional nature of the ultimate story depicted, Mahmoody insisted on the direct link between her account and reality to the end: "My life with my husband and our daughter was exactly as I recount in my book. I stand by my story in every detail."[60] Thus, it is likely that the different approaches to racial stereotyping, operating alongside the public statements of the texts' creators, made Turkish audiences less inclined to dismiss *Not Without My Daughter* as a simplistic work of anti-Iranian propaganda.

Perhaps the largest difference explaining the popularity of *Not Without My Daughter* in Türkiye may be the fact that Billy Hayes escaped from Türkiye to Greece and Betty Mahmoody from Iran to Türkiye to get back to the United States. A closer look at the memoirs and the movie muddies the sharp Iran–Türkiye comparison the broad plotline of border-crossing initially seems to establish. Even though the snowy mountain crossing constitutes a climactic moment, in the book, the movie, and Betty Mahmoody's other accounts, Türkiye is not at all a special or nice place.[61] Its only key significance is that it shares a border with Iran and hosts a US embassy. In fact, Betty initially decides to escape through the Persian Gulf, but her plans change at the last minute due to unforeseen events.

The Türkiye scenes of the movie appear abrupt, and the capital Ankara – best known for its mid-century brutalist architecture – is made to look like a small, dilapidated village. Ultimately, the only difference between Ankara and Tehran is the presence of the Latin alphabet and

[58] Evelyn Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 21.
[59] Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims*, 28; Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*.
[60] Onaran, "Öteki'ne Bakış," 439; Mahmoody, *For the Love of a Child*, 268.
[61] Mahmoody, *Not Without My Daughter*, 399.

the fact that Betty Mahmoody can now walk around without a headscarf. The buildings are just like those in Tehran: old, dirty, and about to crumble. However, on the other side of the street stands the US embassy with its Eden-like garden – a visual reference to the beginning scenes of the movie when the family interacted peacefully in the beautiful, green garden of their riverfront home in Michigan.[62]

Betty Mahmoody herself highlighted the similarity between Türkiye and Iran as foils to the United States in some of her statements. The border between Türkiye and the US embassy was, at least to her, more important than the border between Iran and Türkiye. She noted that she lobbied to have the final scene with the US embassy and the American flag flapping in the wind included in the movie: "I countered that crossing the Iran-Turkish border was not our point of security, that we didn't feel safe until we could see a symbol of security, our flag."[63]

Despite Mahmoody's ambivalence about the Iran–Türkiye border, Hollywood depicting Türkiye as an "okay" place for the first time in recent memory probably made *Not Without My Daughter* much more attractive to Turkish viewers. Advertising materials underplayed the Orientalist conflations of the text, sometimes even stating Betty Mahmoody had escaped "to Türkiye" from Iran, even though her account made clear that she saw herself as escaping home to the United States (via Türkiye) from Iran.[64]

Even if Türkiye's mild goodness did not deliver, Iran's severe "badness" in the film definitely had special resonance for a significant portion of the Turkish public in the political context of the 1990s. The following section focuses on that context and explores how Türkiye's ruling elite modified and mobilized American visions of Iran against their fellow citizens.

The Headscarf Crisis and Weaponized Similitude

What makes Middle Easterners look at the West decked out in Eastern costumes and say, "This could be us"? In 1990s Türkiye, the answer to this question involved a specific item of clothing: the headscarf. In other words, the final reason *Not Without My Daughter* became so popular in

[62] Zahrā Āqājānī, "Taḥlīl-i nishāni-shināKhtī-yi fīlm-i bidūn-i dukhtaram hargiz," *Naqd-i Adabī* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1387/2008): 163–89, 171; *Not Without My Daughter*, directed by Brian Gilbert (Hollywood, CA, Pathé, 1991), DVD.

[63] Mahmoody, *For the Love of a Child*, 243. See also, Kari Hawkins, "American Flag Was 'Point of Safety' For Mother, Daughter Held Prisoner in Iran," *States News Service*, March 26, 2010, https://shorturl.at/pUtZ2.

[64] See, for example, "Kızım Olmadan Asla," *Hürriyet TV Guide*, October 30, 1995, 24.

Türkiye relates to the political climate of the era, specifically prevailing debates around laicism, the headscarf ban, and the country's attempts to join the EU.

As Leila Ahmad demonstrates, veiling saw a resurgence in visibility across West Asia and North Africa with the rise of political Islam in the 1970s.[65] More and more young women took up new forms of modest dress that "signaled at once both the modernity of its wearers and their Islamic commitment."[66] However, since the Kemalist image of modern Turkish womanhood prioritized European-style clothing, starting in the 1950s and 1960s, women who began to enter educational institutions and the professions with headscarves faced backlash and discrimination. Given the absence of any national laws targeting women's dress, these restrictions operated in a haphazard and localized manner. As noted, Türkiye's first nationwide headscarf ban arrived in the aftermath of the 1980 coup – a time during which the military was reasserting its authority over the political and civilian spheres through murder, torture, and intellectual revisionism.

Throughout the 1980s, as the regimes of Türkiye and Iran solidified new configurations between state and religion, they also experienced pushback and opposition, especially around issues related to women. During the Iran–Iraq War, with vast numbers of men engaged in combat, the need for reforms to the strict interpretations of Islamic law on family matters became undeniable. As a result, the 1980s and 1990s saw multiple reforms expanding women's rights in education, careers, and the domestic sphere. The Iranian women's press led the way in constructing what some have called "Islamic feminism," whereby theological arguments were utilized to expand women's choices and opportunities.[67] Contesting

[65] Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*, 68–116.

[66] Ibid., 83. Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

[67] Haleh Afshar, *Islam and Feminisms: An Iranian Case Study* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998). See also Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Stretching the Limits: A Feminist Reading of the Shari'a in Post Khomeini Iran," in *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Mai Yamani (London: University of London, 1996), 285–319; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Divorce, Veiling, and Feminism in Post-Khomeini Iran," in *Women and Politics in the Third World*, ed. Haleh Afshar (London: Routledge, 1996), 284–320; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Feminism in an Islamic Republic: Years of Hardship, Years of Growth," in *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (Oxford University Press, 1998), 59–84; Mirjam Künkler, "In the Language of the Islamic Sacred Texts: The Tripartite Struggle for Advocating Women's Rights in the Iran of the 1990s," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2004): 375–92; Fereshteh Ahmadi, "Islamic Feminism in Iran: Feminism in a New Islamic Context," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22, no. 2 (2006): 33–53.

forced veiling, however, remained taboo, even for the reformist press.[68] During this era, Iranian women's resistance to restrictive clothing laws functioned in an "apolitical," individualized manner, visible in uncoordinated practices of bad-covering. Activists working on expanding women's rights in the country did not focus on dress codes. Even the bold Iranian civic society campaign, One Million Signatures Against Gender Oppression, which was launched a decade later in 2006, contained no open demands regarding compulsory veiling.[69]

In Türkiye, however, clothing rose to the center of national politics after the 1980 ban. During this period, a newly energized feminist movement with laicist commitments challenged Kemalist paternalism and sexual puritanism.[70] At the same time, Muslim women activists demanded visibility and respect in the public sphere on different terms and regularly found themselves at odds with laicist feminists.[71] Along with protests supporting preacher-prayer leader (*imam-hatip*) schools, headscarf protests constituted the public face of Islamist activism in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1989, the elected government relaxed its position on the headscarf ban by delegating the issue to the universities.[72] This decree eased the way for some women but not others, and tensions continued to boil over.

In December 1995, Necmettin Erbakan's new Islamist party, Refah (Welfare), came out of the general elections with the largest percentage of votes (21.38%), followed closely by two center-right parties. Earlier that year, Türkiye had signed a Customs Union Agreement with the EU, and the rise of Refah with its anti-Western orientation, signified by its leaders' opposition to joining the EU, rattled the laicist elite. Using their political and media platforms, anti-Refah factions generated a moral panic around headscarves, specifically the modern forms of Islamic dress that included a tightly pinned headscarf. These, they argued, were different from the "traditional" headscarves worn apolitically by "mothers" and "grandmothers" and symbolized a dire threat to the republic.[73]

[68] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "The Conservative – Reformist Conflict over Women's Rights in Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16, no. 1 (2002): 37–53, 41.

[69] Nūshīn Aḥmadī Khurāsānī, *Junbish-i yik mīlīyūn imżā: rivāyatī az darūn* (self-pub., Tehran, 1386/2007), https://bit.ly/3RVP073.

[70] Sibel Erol, "Sexual Discourse in Turkish Fiction: Return of the Repressed Female Identity," *Edebiyat* 6, no. 2 (1995): 187–202.

[71] Yeşim Arat, *Rethinking Islam and Liberal Democracy: Islamist Women in Turkish Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey*, 78–83.

[72] Elisabeth Özdalga, *The Veiling Issue, Official Secularism and Popular Islam in Modern Turkey* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998), 46.

[73] Perin Gürel, "Good Headscarf, Bad Headscarf: Drawing the (Hair)lines of Turkishness," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 5, no. 2 (2018): 171–93.

Fighting the electoral success of Refah and hoping to keep the headscarf ban in place, the county's laicist elite escalated efforts to find similarities and links between Türkiye's Islamists and the Islamic Republic next door. Laicist slogans singled out Iran: "Türkiye will not become Iran!" "Mollas go to Iran!"[74] Laicist politicians promising they would not form a coalition with the Refah party exclaimed "Refah ile Asla" (Never with the Welfare Party), echoing *Not Without My Daughter*'s Turkish title "Kızım Olmadan Asla" (Never without My Daughter).[75]

The association established between Refah's electoral successes and women's forced veiling in Iran grew so strong that the women politicians of Refah felt the need to hold a press conference to publicly promise that they were not trying to "turn Türkiye into Iran" and that they would not force veiling onto Turkish women.[76] Such promises had little effect on the toxic political atmosphere, which highlighted similarity. After the formation of a coalition government between Refah and the center-right True Path party (DYP), Prime Minister Erbakan made his first overseas trip to Iran, further allowing laicists to complain that Türkiye was on the way to becoming "another Iran."

Even as Turkish laicists used *Not Without My Daughter*'s Iran as a comparative trope, Iran was changing. Taking office in 1989, President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani had initiated the country's postwar reconstruction period, prioritizing regional trade as part of a policy of economic liberalization.[77] He welcomed the Turkish PM's outreach in this spirit, unlike Libya's Col. Muammar Qaddafi, who used Erbakan's visit to his country as an excuse to go on a "fierce anti-Turkish tirade," attacking the country's pro-US and pro-Israel foreign policy.[78] Following Rafsanjani, the formation of a loose coalition of Islamist and secular intellectuals, activists, and aligned clergy fueled the 1997 election of reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami.[79] While gathering some positive press, the ascendance of the Iranian reform movement did little to assuage Turkish laicist rhetoric and policy. The same year Khatami was elected, on February 28, 1997, Refah was forced out of government in Türkiye by a military memorandum – labeled a "soft" or "postmodern" coup – and its leaders were banned from participating in politics.

[74] Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, 25.
[75] Merve Kavakçı Islam, *Headscarf Politics in Turkey: A Postcolonial Reading* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 67.
[76] Nilüfer Arat, "Refahlı Kadınlar: İran Olmayacağız," *Milliyet*, March 8, 1997, 26.
[77] Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1797*, 346–48.
[78] Stephen Kinzer, "Tirade by Qaddafi Stuns Turkey's Premier," *New York Times*, October 6, 1996, 6.
[79] Nikki R. Keddie, "Women in Iran since 1979," *Social Research* 67, no. 2 (2000): 411.

Writing next spring, the editorial team of the Iranian magazine *Naqd-i Sīnamā* blamed the fall of Refah squarely on *Not Without My Daughter*. Their editorial argued the movie had been "built simply with the aim of denigrating the people of Iran and their religious beliefs." As propaganda, it "was used to prevent the spread of Islamic and revolutionary thoughts among the region's people." The mission had been successful, as evinced, among other regional developments, by the fact that "in Türkiye, the Refah Party did not continue after a few months, and its leaders were taken to court."[80]

Of course, an American movie about Iran did not single handedly spark a coup in Türkiye. *Not Without My Daughter* was only one of many texts establishing connections between the rise of political Islam in Türkiye and the neighboring Islamic Republic. Internationally, the 1990s were marked by an increased focus on militant Islamism, as the end of the Cold War saw a redrawing of global power lines.[81] Türkiye saw a rise in separatist Kurdish militancy after the first Gulf War; unresolved assassinations of left-wing and laicist opinion leaders galvanized public opinion, with the media increasingly pointing fingers at Iran for both.[82] US and Israeli intelligence reports casting Iran as a leading exporter of terrorism only added fuel to the fire.

During this decade, corruption among the highest echelons of Türkiye's ruling class became evident; the 1996 Susurluk incident, in particular, revealed that the Turkish intelligence agency (MIT) had recruited the criminal underground and fascist militias to counter the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), sparking intense public discourse about "the deep state." Manufactured panic around laicism, however, helped shift the tone of the news cycle.[83] The rhetoric in state-aligned Turkish and Iranian newspapers soon escalated to what scholars have called a "symbolic Cold War" or the "press war," highlighting clashing political systems and iconographies.[84]

[80] Dasthā-yi pusht-i pardi (pīsh-gūyīhā-yi Nūstir Ādāmūs)," *Naqd-i Sīnamā*, no. 13 (1377/1998): 159–62, 162.

[81] Calabrese, "Turkey and Iran: Limits of a Stable Relationship," 75–94. The rise of "Clash of Civilizations" rhetoric epitomized this turn in the United States (see Chapter 5).

[82] Betül Özyılmaz, "Türkiye-İran İlişkilerinde Belirleyici Etmen Olarak Karşılıklı Algılar," in *İran: Değişen İç Dinamikler ve Türkiye-İran İlişkileri*, ed. Soyalp Tamçelik (Ankara: Gazi, 2014), 296–98; Bayram Sinkaya, "Türkiye – İran İlişkilerinde Çatışma Noktaları ve Analizi," in *4. Türkiye-İran İşkileri Sempozyumu* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2008), 51; Bülent Keneş, *İran: Tehdit mi, Fırsat Mı?* (Istanbul: TİMAŞ, 2012), 125–36.

[83] Baskın Oran, "'Derin Devlet' Tartışması," in *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, vol. 2: 1980–2001, ed. Baskın Oran (Istanbul: İletişim, 2013), 220.

[84] Süha Bölükbaşı, *Türkiye ve Yakınındaki Ortadoğu* (Ankara: Dış Politika Enstitüsü, 1992), 101–06; Keneş, *İran*, 105–06.

Still, Türkiye's political factions disagreed on the correct policy to follow with Iran. Elected governments alternated their approach from skeptical to warm along a spectrum of laicism–Islamism; the diplomatic corps pushed for stability and balance; and the military security council pursued a confrontational approach short of armed conflict.[85] With the 1997 "postmodern" coup, the military's perspective would become dominant, overlap with that of the laicist coalition government that had replaced Refah, and boost the hardline rhetoric emanating from the media cartels.

The generals who led the 1997 coup that ousted Refah from power initiated a neo-republican program called "the February 28 Process" aimed at suppressing populist Islam. Reinforcing the headscarf ban more strictly was a key point in their program. Military officials held meetings with laicist opinion leaders, informing them of the severity of the Islamist danger. The national security materials fed to the press by military sources increasingly included candid videos of religious orders, leaders, and groups considered reactionary (*irticacı*), coupled with Kurdish guerilla training camps.[86] The images of dark veils, robes, and long beards in these videos were intended to signify danger to the state and national unity, as did images of PKK fighters crouching with assault rifles.

The Turkish military council designated a new Higher Education Council president, who began to enforce the headscarf ban at all universities, investigating reluctant administrators. Students who refused to unveil were harassed and pressured in the notorious "persuasion chambers" established on campuses. As a college student in Istanbul in the 1999–2000 school year, I remember all too vividly the guards placed at university gates to prevent headscarved women from entering. Classmates with headscarves often wore wigs to hide their hair and changed their clothes in the bathrooms. My own punk-inspired clothing choices were probably on the opposite side of what the Turkish authorities considered proper, but once, a security guard even stopped me because I was wearing a beanie in the dead of a cold winter.

In this charged political atmosphere, the Fazilet (Virtue) Party, which had emerged as Refah's successor, began drawing suspicions of pushing for an Iranian-style Islamic Republic. In April 1999, tensions rose when

[85] Keneş, *İran, 142*.

[86] Cabas, *2001*, 17; Kavakçı Islam, *Headscarf Politics in Turkey*, 71. Also see F. Michael Wuthrich, "Commercial Media, the Military, and Society in Turkey during Failed and Successful Interventions," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 2 (2010): 217–34; Ümit Cizre-Sakallıoğlu and Menderes Çınar, "Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2–3 (2003): 309–32.

two women wearing headscarves were elected to the Turkish Parliament. When the representative for the right-wing nationalist party MHP agreed to remove her headscarf before entering the parliament, all eyes turned to Merve Kavakçı, the 31-year-old representative for Fazilet. On May 2, 1999, Merve Kavakçı entered the Turkish Parliament wearing a navy blue pantsuit and a headscarf. She was booed and prevented from taking her oath as the representatives of the laicist parties blocked her way to the podium.[87] The left-leaning Prime Minister Ecevit rose to the podium to condemn Kavakçı, exclaiming, "Please show this lady her place" (*haddini bildirin*).[88] That day, Kavakçı left the building without securing her oath to become a verified MP.

From his prestigious column in the best-selling *Hürriyet* newspaper, Ertuğrul Özkök argued that, in blocking Kavakçı, Ecevit had replicated the brave actions of the Spanish parliamentarians who had stopped a Francoist coup attempt in 1981.[89] Özkök thus likened a single, democratically elected female deputy attempting to take her seat to an armed attack on the republic. The severity of the situation, according to his column, even explained and justified the bullying of Kavakçı's daughters at their school.

Throughout the Kavakçı crisis, from the top levels of the Turkish government down to the people on the street, Iran-baiting became an important tool for supporters of the Turkish headscarf ban. President Süleyman Demirel stated that the path of Kavakçı, the "agent provocateur," risked turning the country into Iran.[90] Prime Minister Ecevit made a speech arguing Iran's attempts to export its ideology were behind the chaos unleashed by the headscarf crisis.[91] Laicist newspapers began publishing images of Iranian women in black chadors who had gathered to support Kavakçı (Figure 4.1). "Here are her friends!" exclaimed a front-page headline in *Sabah* under one such photo, counting on the black chadors and the photo of the bearded, turbaned Ayatollah Khamenei to make the point that Kavakçı's behavior had put her beyond the pale of Turkishness.[92] Provoked by the nationalist rhetoric, Turkish women and men came out in droves to protest Kavakçı, this time yelling, "Merves go to Iran!"

[87] Richard Peres, *The Day Turkey Stood Still: Merve Kavakçı's Walk into the Turkish Parliament* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2012).
[88] "Meclis Devlete Meydan Okunacak Yer Değildir," *Hürriyet*, May 3, 1999, first page.
[89] Ertuğrul Özkök, "Ecevit O Gece Neleri Kurtardı," *Hürriyet*, May 7, 1999, www.hurriyet.com.tr/ertugrul-ozkok-ecevit-o-gece-neleri-kurtardi-39077984.
[90] "Ajan Provokatörü Bilerek Söyledim," *Hürriyet*, May 5, 1999, 1.
[91] "İran Kendi İdeolojisini İhraç İçin Çalışıyor," *Hürriyet*, May 10, 1999, 24.
[92] "İşte Dostları," *Sabah*, May 9, 1999, front page.

Figure 4.1 "Support for Merve from Iran," *Hürriyet*, May 9, 1999, 28. This photograph of Iranian women in black chadors supporting Merve Kavakçı appeared in multiple laicist newspapers, including *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, and *Sabah*, on May 9, 1999.

Turkish feminists associated with KA.DER, a feminist non-profit organization that was founded to support women's political candidacies, marginalized Kavakçı during this entire process.[93] After Kavakçı was denied the oath, KA.DER released a statement in favor of regulations on women's dress at the parliament, asking for stipulations requiring "an uncovered head" to be made explicit.[94] KA.DER representatives also minimized Kavakçı's agency, calling her a "pawn" of Islamist men, such as Erbakan, working behind the scenes.[95] A year before, the organization had published a book about the electoral rights of women titled *Never Without Women* in allusion to the Turkish title of *Not Without My*

[93] Kavakçı Islam, *Headscarf Politics in Turkey*, 112.
[94] Ruhat Mengi, "KA.DER Niye Sessiz?," *Sabah*, May 14, 1999, 8.
[95] Stephen Kinzer, "Musings on Freedom, by Wearer of Muslim Scarf," *New York Times*, May 12, 1999, A4; "Bir Hocanın Inadi," *Hürriyet*, May 2, 1999, 26.

Daughter.[96] The collection did include an interview with another female member of Fazilet, Nazlı Ilıcak, who was not wearing a headscarf, which suggested KA.DER's stance against Kavakçı was directly focused on the candidate's appearance as opposed to her party's platform.[97] Thus, a Hollywood movie that claimed to advocate for women's rights in Iran was used to justify denying the first elected woman representative with a headscarf her seat in parliament in Türkiye.

Given the intensity of the rhetoric against Iran activated by the Kavakçı affair, Tehran called in the Turkish ambassador for an explanation.[98] On May 11, 1999, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs Kamal Kharazi asked the Turkish government to moderate its rhetoric against Iran: "The events unfolding in Türkiye are not related to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and we hope the Turkish state will evaluate its domestic problems with a realistic outlook and not attribute them to others."[99] The triangulated politics of representation between Iran, Türkiye, and the United States, however, did not only flow in one direction. As I explore in the next section, Iranians used Türkiye and its connections to the United States as a convenient domestic motif as well.

Islamic Feminism and the Limits of Solidarity

Already in a "symbolic cold war" with Türkiye's post-coup regime, conservative Iranian news outlets used the Kavakçı affair to condemn Turkish laicism, publishing multiple articles, opinion pieces, and editorial cartoons about the headscarf crisis every single day.[100] "In the one-way street of laicism, religion does not have the right to intervene in politics," observed an editorial in the semi-official *Keyhan* newspaper wryly, "however, politics can intervene in all religious affairs."[101] Türkiye was a useful foil to prop up Iran's own arrangement of religion and politics.

Although regime-linked news outlets emphasized the spontaneous and voluntary nature of the Iranian support for Kavakçı, a great deal of agitation about Turkish laicism was led by political hardliners. Conservative woman MP Nayereh Akhavan-Bitaraf – a key figure in opposing the

[96] Yağmur Atsız, "Kadınlar Olmadan Asla," *Milliyet*, March 8, 1999.
[97] Zeynep Göğüş, ed., *Kadınlar Olmadan Asla* (Istanbul: Sabah, 1998), 194–97.
[98] "Safīr-i Turkīyi dar Tehran bi vizārat-i umūr-i khāriji iḥżār shud," *Hamshahrī*, 19 Urdībihisht 1378/May 9, 1999, 2.
[99] "Pāsukh-i Duktur Kharrāzī bi iẓhārāt-i bī-asās-i maqāmāt-i Turkīyi," *Iran*, 19 urdībihisht 1378/May 9, 1999, 14.
[100] Bölükbaşı, *Türkiye ve Yakınındaki Ortadoğu*, 101–06.
[101] Younes Shokrkhah, "Khīyābān-i yik tarafi-yi lāyīk-hā," *Kiyhān*, *19* Urdībihisht 1378/ May 9, 1999, 3.

gains made under Islamic feminism in the 1990s – delivered a speech supporting Kavakçı in the parliament in the name of all-female representatives.[102] The protest at Tehran University was headlined by another conservative woman MP, Dr. Marzieh Vahid-Dastjerdi.[103]

Just as Turkish visions of Iran was built on American popular culture exports, Iranians saw imperialist fingers behind Turkish laicism. During this period, Iranian media highlighted Türkiye's associations with both the United States and Israel, publicizing political ties and military collaborations alongside articles lionizing Kavakçı and maligning the Turkish state.[104] Although the United States figured as a negative element in Iranian depictions of Türkiye in such news, when groups within the United States criticized Türkiye's headscarf ban, the Iranian media was quick to publicize that as well.[105] Thus, the ruling elite in each country referenced the United States to critique the other's undemocratic structures and justify their own injustices.

For the laicist Turkish newspapers, the images of Iranian women in chadors supporting Kavakçı were enough to argue that Iran's hardliners were behind the chaos Kavakçı had unleashed. However, a significant portion of the support for Kavakçı in Iran came from women reformists, such as Faezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani and Dr. Zahra Rahnavard. These women were trailblazers in their own right. At the time, Rahnavard was the first woman to lead a university in Iran. She made a speech during the pro-Kavakçı protests at El Zahra University and wrote an open letter of support to Kavakçı, stating, "Sister Merve Kavakçı, you are victorious, and the nation that has produced you and chosen you will last forever."[106] For such statements, the laicist Turkish press accused her of "insolence" (*küstahlık*).[107]

Faezeh Hashemi, daughter of former president Rafsanjani and the founder of the reformist women's newspaper *Zan*, which was banned within a year of its founding, was serving in the Iranian Parliament when

[102] "Namāyandigān-i zan-i majlis, barkhurd-i dulat-i Turkīyi bā namāyandih-yi muḥajjabi-yi pārlimān-i īn kishvar rā bi shiddat maḥkūm kardand," *Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī*, 16 Urdībihisht 1378/May 6, 1999, 12.

[103] "Ḥimāyat-i zanān-i Irānī az Marvih Kāvākchī," *Zan-i Ruz*, no. 3, 20 Urdībihisht 1378/May 10, 1999, 7.

[104] Mahdī Guljān, "Lāyīkhā, ḥijāb va dastān-i Āmrīkā," *Kiyhān*, 26 Urdībihisht 1378/May 5, 1999, 16; "Turkīyi panjāh farvand hilīkūptir-i niẓāmī az Āmrīkā mīkharad," *Hamshahrī*, 28 Urdībihisht 1378/May 18, 1999, 15.

[105] "Salb-i tābi'īyat-i Kāvākchī, lakki-yi nangī dar tārīkh-i sīyāsī-yi Turkīyi ast," *Kiyhān*, 26 Urdībihisht 1378/May 16, 1999, 16.

[106] "Shakhṣīyathā, sāzmānhā va dafātir-i umūr-i zanān mukhālefat-i dulat-i Turkīyi bā vurūd-i yik namāyandi-yi muḥajjabih rā maḥkūm kardand," *Iran*, 16 Urdībihisht 1378/May 6, 1999, 4.

[107] "Çirkin Gösteri," *Sabah*, May 9, 1999, 26.

Kavakçı was ejected from the Turkish one. One of the top MPs in Tehran, she was a long-time advocate for women's rights, with a special focus on sports. As an editorial by the famous Iranian satirist Ebrahim Nabavi put it, Kavakçı's outside appearance was a problem for the Turkish Parliament, but not her political "contents," whereas the reverse had been true for Hashemi, whose reformist views exposed her to criticism, harassment, and, eventually, imprisonment.[108] On May 12, 1999, Hashemi addressed an open letter of support to Merve Kavakçı, asking her not to think of herself as alone in her struggle.[109] Kavakçı, however, rejected all Iranian offers of sisterhood and solidarity wholesale, declaring "there's nothing to be gained from support which comes from a state that curbs freedoms."[110]

In mentioning the rejected outreach, Robert Olson bemoans that these reformist Muslim women could not unite to battle sexist policies across nation-state boundaries.[111] The moment of broken solidarity is indeed jarring enough to generate some what-ifs. What would have allowed these women to "recognize" each other as sisters? What structural blocks foreclosed transnational Islamic feminist solidarity? The next few paragraphs delineate how individual, national, and international levels overlapped to foreclose meaningful connections and collaborations between Iranian and Turkish Muslim women activists, despite the similarities in the movements' goals.

The nation-state emerges as an apparent breaking point, impacting multiple factors. As Benedict Anderson has pointed out, the hyphen between "nation" and "state" signifies the imperfect overlap between the nation as an "imagined community" of individuals supposedly sharing ethnic, cultural, and religious traits, and the state as the internationally recognized political entity claiming the right to represent and rule this community.[112] The imperfect overlap of these two constructions ("nation" and "state") is apparent in the Turkish laicist outcry over Kavakçı's headscarf, in Kavakçı's retort to the laicists, and in her rejection of Iranian women's outreach.

[108] Ebrahim Nabavi, "Dah tafāvut-i asāsi-i Marvih Kāvākchī va Fā'izi Hāshimī," *Nishāṭ*, 25 Urdībihisht 1378/May 15, 1999, 3.

[109] "Fā'izi Hāshimī dar nāmi-yī khaṭāb bi namāyandi-yi bāḥijāb-i Turkīyi i'lām kard: "Mudāfi'ān-i ḥuqūq-i bashar dar barābar-i raftār-i ghiyr-i-insānī-yi lāyīkhā sukūt kardiand," *Īrān*, 22 Urdībihisht 1378/May 12, 1999, 3.

[110] "Turkey's Veiled MP Defends Herself Against Secularist Onslaught," *Mideast Mirror* 14, no. 96 (1999), accessed via Nexis Uni. See also, "Kavakçı İran'ı Reddetti," *Milliyet*, May 25, 1999, 17; Nayereh Tohidi, "Piyvand-i jahānī-yi junbish-i zanān-i Irān," *Guft u gū*, no. 38 (1382/2004): 25–50, 32.

[111] Olson, *Turkey-Iran Relations*, 50.

[112] Benedict Anderson, introduction to *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996), 1–16, 8.

In condemning Kavakçı as an agent provocateur, Türkiye's laicists promoted an overlap between the nation, the regime, and the state. This was apparent when Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit stated that the parliament "is no place to threaten the state" (devlet).[113] As a rebuttal, Kavakçı identified a disconnect between the prevailing regime and the people's will and, therefore, between the state and the nation. Pointing out that she campaigned and was democratically elected while wearing a headscarf, she argued that she was sent by the nation (*millet*) to serve in its name.[114] In this formulation, the laicist regime was guilty of severing the nation from the state by not allowing democratic representation in parliament.

Her Iranian supporters echoed Kavakçı's reasoning about the wishes of Türkiye's people and even used sympathetic Turkish nationalist language, as when Rahnavard stated in her outreach to Kavakçı, "You are victorious, and the nation that has produced you and chosen you will last forever." Yet, in Kavakçı's response to this outreach, we once again find a presumed overlap between the nation, the state, and the regime, in which all Iranian support emanates from "a state that curbs freedoms."

Certainly, Kavakçı's Turkish detractors, in associating her with the Iranian system of government, had made it very difficult for her to accept any type of positive outreach from that country. However, her published response further erased nuance. In a homogenizing move, her wording collapsed any difference between Iranian reformists and hard-liners, between the people and the regime. The rejection transferred the negative stereotypes her Turkish detractors imposed on her across the nation-state boundary.

It would be all too easy to end the story of failed solidarity here. Transnational feminist critique, however, is most useful when it can be structural and power-conscious instead of focusing inordinately on individual, low-power actors who may willingly or unwittingly further oppressive discourses.[115] Going a small step up the power grid would mean noting that the male leaders of Kavakçı's party, fearing for their political futures, did not come to her defense. Türkiye's current president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was then the past mayor of Istanbul and a rising political star. He remained silent about the crisis. Abdullah Gül, who would become president in 2007, reportedly suggested Kavakçı

[113] "Burası Devlete Meydan Okunacak Yer Değildir," *Nokta*, May 9–15, 1999, front cover.

[114] "Gönüllerin Vekili," *Yeni Şafak*, May 4, 1999, front page.

[115] Perin E. Gürel, "Broken Solidarities: Retraining Transnational Feminist Critique on 'the Master's House,'" in *Meditations on Religion and Broken Solidarities*, ed. Atalia Omer and Joshua Lupo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), 17–44.

change her style of headscarf to minimize the perceived offense to laicism.[116] Yet, at the time, their party (Fazilet) was under investigation and barely a year away from being shut down and banned. As a result, its leaders had little maneuvering room to take defiant stances on hot-button issues.

Even more powerful than Fazilet's leaders were the primary wielders of political rhetoric in Türkiye (President Süleyman Demirel, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, the generals, the legislative branch, and the media cartels). They followed a multipronged strategy combining nationalist, universalist, and religious language, further foreclosing avenues for transnational solidarity. The laicist media described Kavakçı's style of a tightly pinned headscarf as a foreign export and, therefore, as a political symbol demanding an Iran-style Islamist regime.[117] President Demirel condemned her actions as *fitne* (sedition), mobilizing this Qur'anic concept politically to defend laicism long before the Islamic Republic of Iran popularized its use against the leading figures of the Green movement (c. 2009).[118] Using religious language to defend a system of secularism helped construct Kavakçı's appearance as simultaneously constituting a politico-religious assault on Kemalism and failing to abide by the post-coup Turkish–Islamic synthesis. By this formulation, the democratically elected MP was beyond the pale of the state, the nation, the regime, *and* Islam.

Although I believe it was not the nation-state's sturdiness but its vulnerability as an imperfect construction that primarily contributed to the failure of transnational solidarity, nation-state boundaries also played a role in circumscribing the discursive field. In addition to having contrasting histories of secularist–Islamist feminist collaboration, domestic political reformists in Türkiye and Iran often mobilized different discursive frameworks. In her fieldwork based on the first decade of the twenty-first century, Mona Tajali has demonstrated how Iranian reformist women's arguments for the expansion of women's opportunities referenced sacred sources such as the Qur'an, in contrast to the statements of Turkish Islamist women, who often used the "secular" language of human rights.[119] Kavakçı was no exception to this: She exclusively used a liberal, human rights framing in arguing for her right to serve while

[116] Peres, *The Day Turkey Stood Still*, 63.
[117] Gürel, "Good Headscarf, Bad Headscarf."
[118] "Bu Hanım Ajandır," *Sabah*, May 3, 1999, 27.
[119] Mona Tajali, "Islamic Women's Groups and the Quest for Political Representation in Turkey and Iran," *Middle East Journal* 69, no. 4 (2015): 563–81. Tajali's work examines the first decade of the twentieth century, but her observations hold for this earlier era as well, especially regarding Kavakçı's foregrounding of human rights language.

wearing a headscarf, citing the US Civil Rights movement as precedent and inspiration.[120]

Prominent Iranian observers have suggested these different rhetorical frames contributed to the failed outreach. Writing in the reformist newspaper *Neshat*, progressive cleric Hassan Yusefi Eshkevari blamed Hashemi and Rahnavard for reaching out to Kavakçı through their shared Muslim identity and not on the basis of a universalist discourse of human rights. Calling Kavakçı's rejection an "important message" and a lesson for the Muslim women of Iran, Eshkevari argued, "In today's world, on a global or national level, religious beliefs, and moral values can only be defended through a single logic, and that logic is freedom and democracy and human rights."[121] In her writings, prominent Iranian feminist Nayereh Tohidi has echoed this assessment, suggesting that the lack of a solid commitment to freedom and democracy served as a critical determinant for the failure of Iranian Islamic feminist outreach abroad.[122]

The claim that Iran's Islamic feminists failed to properly mobilize a universal human rights framing can lead us another step further up the power grid to examine international human rights organizations. As discussed, Türkiye was attempting to join the EU at the time. A veiled woman representative would have clashed with the "Western" image its leaders sought to project. However, here it appears as if the Turkish elite misunderstood what the EU wanted from Türkiye: a series of human rights reforms and not crackdowns on devout women's public practices of piety. Indeed, in an interview, Merve Kavakçı herself referenced a BBC news piece that had found Türkiye's headscarf law incompatible with its application for membership in the EU.[123]

Although restricting Muslim women's rights was not a criterion of EU membership, the Kavakçı affair and the headscarf ban ultimately revealed a hidden subtext of articulated EU criteria. Türkiye did receive relatively robust criticism on human rights grounds from the EU, particularly in connection to the extensive anti-PKK military campaign it had been executing in the Southeast. However, no such objection appeared regarding the headscarf ban. When headscarf-wearing women who had suffered educational and career-based discrimination, including Kavakçı, sued the Turkish state at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR),

[120] "Headscarved Turkish Deputy Calls Incident Breach of Human Rights," *Tehran Times*, May 4, 1999, https://bit.ly/3XYt3rD; Kavakçı Islam, *Headscarf Politics in Turkey*, 123.

[121] Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari, "Difāʿ az arzieshhā bā manṭiq-i dimukrāsī," *Nishāt*, 2 Khurdād 1378/May 23, 1999, 2.

[122] Nayereh Tohidi, "Jinsīyat, mudernīyat va dimukrāsī," *Jins-i Duvvum* 3 (Tehran, 1378/1999): 10–23; and Tohidi, "Piyvand-i jahānī-yi junbish-i zanān-i Īrān," 32.

[123] "Turkey's Veiled MP Defends Herself."

they not only ran into nationalist accusations that they were "traitors" betraying their country but also revealed breaking points in European human rights rhetoric.

The ECHR's role in the nation-state formation is itself germane to this discussion: Founded after World War II to protect citizens' rights against the states to which they belong, the court can be read as a threat to national and cultural sovereignty, especially when the country under investigation appears peripheral to Europe. However, in *Sahin v. Türkiye*, which focused on a medical student who was denied the right to take her final exams because of her headscarf, the ECHR ruled against the right to wear the headscarf in state institutions, agreeing with the Turkish regime.[124] In 2007, a chamber of seven ECHR judges also heard Kavakçı's case alongside those of other Fazilet party members. The court dismissed Kavakçı's claims that her rights to "freedom of thought, conscience, and religion" had been violated and chose not to consider her case concerning the principles of "anti-discrimination." The only one of her grievances it validated was the "right to free elections." On this principle, the court ruled that the Turkish state had not been wrong per se but had taken disproportionate measures. Going further, the court cast laicism as the necessary ingredient to Turkish democracy and claimed the ruling regime's actions – against both Kavakçı and the party she represented – were motivated by appropriate concerns: "ECHR notes that the temporary restrictions made to the complainant's political rights are ultimately intended to protect the secular character of the Turkish political regime. Considering the importance of that principle to Turkish democracy, ECHR believes the measure pursued legitimate aims regarding the preservation of the prevailing order and the protection of the rights and liberties of others."[125]

By what alchemy did this reference to laicism convert undemocratic measures curtailing Turkish women's rights to education and political participation into "the protection of the rights and liberties of others"? Gendered Islamophobia clearly provided a conceptual breaking point.

[124] See Angela Wu Howard, "Leveraging Legal Protection for Religious Liberty," in *The Future of Religious Freedom: Global Challenges*, ed. Allen D. Hertzke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), retrieved April 9, 2019, from https://academic.oup.com/book/25733/chapter/193244603; and Amélie Barras, "A Rights-Based Discourse to Contest the Boundaries of State Secularism? The Case of The Headscarf Bans in France and Turkey," *Democratization* 16, no. 6 (2009): 1237–60. See also Sahin v. Turkey, App. No. 44774/98 (Eur. Ct. H.R. June 29, 2004), *aff'd*, App. No. 44774/98 (Eur. Ct. H.R. November 10, 2005) and Kavakci v. Turkey, App. No. 71907/01 (Eur. Ct. H.R. April 5, 2007).

[125] Author's translation from Turkish. See "Kavakci v. Turkey; Silay v. Turkey; Ilicak v. Turkey," *Human Rights Case Digest*, 17, no. 4, 2006–2007, pp. 743–46.

Saba Mahmood has demonstrated how the principles of "public order" and rhetorical distinctions made between belief and outward manifestations of faith have been used to uphold majoritarian norms in cases involving issues of "religious freedom."[126] However, the Turkish headscarf ban was not a minority concern, given the fact that Türkiye boasted an approximately 99% Muslim population, and the headscarf was quite widespread in its various local manifestations. Moreover, it is essential to note that not all devout Turkish Muslims in the public and political spheres were penalized in the same way. Turkish laicism and the Western support for it punished Muslim women especially, even as it claimed to be freeing them specifically. In response to Muslim women's public piety (read as both a claim upon the state and on the conscience of others), democracy, women's rights, and even the discourse of individual "choice" – so essential to modern liberalism – could be suspended. These rhetorical conversions are even more striking because Kavakçı herself never once deflected from the liberal language of individual choice, democracy, and civil rights while making her claims.

With the headscarf ban, Turkish laicists, who held the organs of the state at the end of the twentieth century, were defending their right to determine the gendered parameters of the religion–state interaction. The ECHR, in turn, upheld the non-Islamic and patriarchal construction of "modern" civilization in the name of "public order and civil peace."[127] In the court of international law, these two endeavors overlapped to stack the deck against Türkiye's headscarf-wearing Muslim women. The nation-state, in other words, proved inseparable from the unequal world system and the civilizational assumptions that undergird it as a stumbling block for transnational feminist solidarity.

It is surprising that progressive Iranian commentators have been quick to blame reformist Iranian women's excess of Islamic language for the lost solidarity. This has meant assigning near omniscience to Kavakçı, implying she made the decision consciously after reviewing the outreach rhetoric in detail and finding it unsatisfactory on universalist grounds when there is no evidence that she was interested in the operations of Iranian reformism. Despite laicist allegations, Kavakçı did not have significant ties with Iran. Instead, she was a dual Turkish and US citizen who had completed her higher education in the United States.[128] Eventually, this strong connection to the West, not her purported ties to

[126] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).
[127] Nehal Bhuta, "Two Concepts of Religious Freedom in the European Court of Human Rights," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 1 (2014): 10–36, 23.
[128] Kavakçı Islam, *Headscarf Politics*, 123.

Iran, would lead to her downfall, allowing the courts to strip her Turkish citizenship through the selective application of a law governing dual citizenship. The critics also seem to expect the impossible from Hashemi Rafsanjani and Rahnavard, who had developed their mixed tactics in a local political context that tolerated only certain types of critique.

Finally, the argument that the Islamic framework was too estranged from universal human rights language to connect to Kavakçı's struggles falsely imagines "human rights" as a unique space free of religion and politics. Instead, as multiple scholars have demonstrated, hegemonic notions of Christianity and civilization are deeply embedded in the genealogy of human rights, shaping the normative secularism of Western institutions like the ECHR.[129] As noted, laicist Turkish nationalism itself did not involve the "separation" of religion and state. At its most perceptive, Iranian Islamic feminist discourse around the Turkish headscarf crisis came close to revealing these imbrications even as its proponents mobilized for Kavakçı's political rights.

Faezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani's open letter is a perfect example of the nuanced, multilevel perspective Iranian Islamic feminists brought to bear on the crisis. Highlighting the silence of committed defenders of human rights on the violation of Turkish Muslim women's rights under the headscarf ban, Hashemi noted, "Unfortunately, human rights are being used again as a tool for the continuation of Western imperialist oppression." Then, she continued, "Individuals who cannot tolerate Muslim women's advancement and rising consciousness are working to ensure that their presence in the political and social spheres does not progress beyond superficial and symbolic maneuvers."[130]

This reference could not have been to Türkiye alone, which sought to ban precisely the "symbols" of Muslim women's public presence. Instead, the discerning reader familiar with Iranian political doublespeak would have read these as comments about Iranian regime hardliners as well, who sought to contain reformist woman politicians like her. Iranian reformists thus built on the Kavakçı affair to advocate shifts

[129] Sam Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*; Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Michael J. Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Khaled Abou El Fadl, "The Human Rights Commitment in Modern Islam," *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions*, ed. Joseph Runzo and Nancy Martin (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), 301–64; Joseph Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[130] "Fāʾizi Hāshimī dar nāmi-yī khaṭāb bi namāyandi-yi bāḥijāb-i Turkīyi iʿlām kard: 'mudāfiʿān-i ḥuqūq-i bashar dar barābar-i raftār-i ghiyr-i-insāni-yi lāyīkhā sukūt kardiand," *Īrān*, no. 1229, 22 Urdībihisht 1378/May 12, 1999, 3.

in the local political imagination, even as they launched transnational critiques toward the Turkish regime and Western entities.[131] They advocated solidarity on a tactical vision of similitude, highlighting the similarity of political struggles. However, it would be incomplete to read Hashemi's words simply as underhanded "resistance" to the dominant national forces; her letter also affirms Islam's role in the public sphere and trains its most direct critique on "Western imperialist oppression."

The declaration of the Organization of Islamic University Students, quoted in the Islamic women's magazine *Zan-i Ruz*, similarly affirmed Merve's choice based on *deen* (religion), even as it called out human rights organizations in a universalist language. "It is astounding that monitors of human rights are ignoring this obvious violation of the rights of a Muslim person," declared the group with a discernable tone of sarcasm. "Have global organizations for the defense of women's rights eliminated the rights of Muslim women and those with headscarves from the foreground of their feminist lexicon?"[132]

The 1990s were indeed a time when President Bill Clinton and neoliberal Democratic cadres, in association with liberal feminist organizations, elevated concern for Muslim women's rights to a foreign policy priority. Scholars such as Karen Garner and Kelly Shannon have demonstrated that the Clinton administration was "historic" in its willingness to let women's rights concerns override more traditional policy imperatives, in denying recognition to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, for example.[133] Adopting a human rights frame emphasizing personal choice in her speeches, Kavakçı likely expected similar solidarity from the neoliberal West. In addition to referencing the US civil rights movement as an analogy, she declared she welcomed support from the United States in general, in contrast to the Iranian support she received and rejected wholesale.[134] However, the particular breach of Muslim women's rights under Türkiye's headscarf ban was not a foreign-policy deal breaker for the United States.

The Kavakçı crisis touched upon two ascendant US foreign policy concerns of the 1990s: "women's rights" and "religious freedom." Unlike the generally laudatory tone of the scholarship on the elevation of "women's rights as human rights" in the Clinton era, studies of the

[131] For another example of how print commentary on Kavakçı affair was used as indirect criticism of the Iranian regime, see S. H. Pūrḥusaynī, "Ānchi nabāyad ittifāq mīuftād: darbāri-yi Marvih Kāvākchī," *Ṣubh-i Imrūz*, 22 Urdībihisht 1378/May 19, 1999, 55.

[132] "Bayānīyi-yi jāmiʿi-yi islāmī-yi dānishjūyān nisbat bi mumāniʿat-i namāyandi-yi bāhijāb dar Turkīyi," *Zan-i Rūz*, n. 1702 (May 5, 1999): 55.

[133] Karen Garner, *Gender and Foreign Policy in the Clinton Administration* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2013); Kelly J. Shannon, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Muslim Women's Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 15.

[134] "Turkey's Veiled MP Defends Herself."

institutionalization of "religious freedom" as a foreign policy tool during the same period via the 1998 US International Freedom Act (IRFA) register skepticism about the role of the religious right in directing foreign policy. They also raise questions about the post-Cold War expansion of US power, and highlight contested definitions of the secular.[135] Any distinction between the largely liberal-driven push for "women's rights" and largely conservative instrumentalization of "religious freedom" in US foreign policy, however, disappears when we compare the similar outcomes the two platforms generated concerning Türkiye's headscarf ban.

The response to the headscarf crisis from both the Republican-controlled US Congress and the Democratic president who had just survived impeachment (albeit with improved approval ratings) was muted. Kavakçı's plight spurred scattered protests from US-based non-governmental groups and earned a word of condemnation from Robert Seiple, America's first ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, during a speech he gave at the Los Angeles Islamic Center.[136] The State Department's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom noted the controversy in one paragraph. However, Türkiye was not mentioned even once in the Congressional hearings that followed.[137]

The 1999 Country Report on Human Rights allocated a few paragraphs to the human rights abuses associated with the Turkish state's campaign against Islamic "reactionaries." Relating Kavakçı's plight in one paragraph under the "Freedom of Religion" section, the document authors registered something akin to relief that Kavakçı's dual citizenship had nullified the larger debate over the right to wear a headscarf in the Turkish national assembly. The document described the issue as "the personal controversy over Kavakçı's right to wear a headscarf

[135] For example, Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Praying for the Persecuted Church: US Christian Activism in the Global Arena," *Journal of Human Rights* 4, no. 3 (2005): 321–51; Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 37–65; Anna Su, *Exporting Freedom: Religious Liberty and American Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, 91–99; Melani McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 159–92; Gregorio Bettiza, *Finding Faith in Foreign Policy: Religion and American Diplomacy in a Postsecular World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Allen D. Hertzke offers a more optimistic account in *Freeing God's Children: The Unlikely Alliance for Global Human Rights* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

[136] Larry B. Stammer, "An Envoy for All Faiths," *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1999, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1999-jun-12-me-45670-story.html.

[137] 2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Turkey, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, September 5, 2000. House Hearing, 106th Congress – State Department Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 2000, Committee on International Relations, Y 4.IN 8/16, September 7, 2000, Serial No. 106–178.

in Parliament." It noted that the question "became largely moot after Kavakçı was stripped of Turkish citizenship for failing to notify authorities that she had acquired a foreign nationality."[138]

Of course, the headscarf ban was hardly a "personal controversy" limited to Kavakçı's unique circumstances but a structural injustice impacting countless women and girls. However, given Kavakçı's personal circumstances, it is significant that neither report acknowledged that the "foreign nationality" Kavakçı had acquired was that of the United States, which would have made this an abuse of human rights experienced by an American citizen – paralleling Betty Mahmoody's story.

President Clinton did not make a public speech about the issue. With an ongoing NATO bombing campaign in Yugoslavia, the administration's "women's rights" plank during this period was the use of rape as a weapon of war in Kosovo – a concern the United States shared with its NATO ally, Türkiye.[139] On November 15, 1999, the president got an opportunity to give his first speech to the same Turkish Parliament that had kicked Kavakçı out. The speech did not contain a word on the headscarf crisis. Instead, Clinton commended the government on the "momentum" it had established toward "deepening democracy at home."[140]

Referencing the devastating earthquakes of that year, Clinton also praised the mutual aid efforts between Greece and Türkiye. In response, the laicist Turkish press lionized the US president as one of its own. "Like a Turk!" exclaimed a *Sabah* headline.[141] Whatever "Turkishness" Kavakçı had lost through her symbolic association with Iran and her actual ties with the United States, President Clinton seemed to have gained partially by not mentioning Kavakçı.

Official Western declarations underplaying or upholding the headscarf ban thus echoed Hollywood depictions that imagined violations of Muslim women's rights happened only under Islamic extremism or during times of sectarian violence. They legitimized Türkiye's own practice of denying millions of women their rights to education and political participation under the guise of protecting the same women from an Iran-like

[138] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Turkey," Country Reports on Human Rights Practices Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 1999, February 23, 2000, www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/1999/365.htm.

[139] "Transcript: Clinton Justifies U.S. Involvement in Kosovo," CNN.com, May 13, 1999, www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/05/13/clinton.kosovo/transcript.html; Garner, *Gender and Foreign Policy*, 242–44.

[140] "Remarks to the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara, November 15, 1999," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Washington: USGPO, vol. 35, no. 46, November 22, 1999, 2385.

[141] Marc Lacey, "In Turkey, Clinton is, for the Moment, the Hero Adored," *New York Times*, November 18, 1999.

future in which their rights would be trampled. Iran's Islamic feminists targeted these intersecting oppressions in their statements but lacked the platform to be effective against the era's dominant ideologies.[142]

On (Not) Becoming Iran

Media such as *Not Without My Daughter* tapped into real, structural injustices associated with the Iranian dress code and unequal divorce and custody laws, as well as widespread concerns regarding international child abduction cases. In fact, as a divorced mother of two, Kavakçı herself had been involved in a story similar to Betty Mahmoody's: She had spirited her daughters away from Texas to Türkiye and away from her Jordanian-American ex-husband in 1998.[143]

Despite all this, Türkiye's media cartels, the ruling elite, and feminists of various stripes could have certainly drawn a more nuanced picture of Iran than the one offered by Hollywood. As noted, the period between the entry of *Not Without My Daughter* into Türkiye and the expulsion of Merve Kavakçı from the parliament overlapped with the eras of "pragmatism" under President Rafsanjani (1989–1997) and reform under President Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005). In these years, Iranian women made significant gains in literacy, higher education, and employment levels, and their voices were increasingly heard in the press and the parliament, claiming rights to political and civil careers.[144] Contestation and reformation of family laws through pragmatic collaborations and Islamically grounded reinterpretations followed.[145] All this should have confirmed Iran was far from a Hollywood monolith.

The Turkish press acknowledged the significance of Khatami's election and selected reforms. Yet, the years that saw a softening of the

[142] On intersectionality, see Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" and "Mapping the Margins"; Jennifer Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Gürel, "Broken Solidarities," 17–44.

[143] For the laicist Turkish media, this incident constituted further evidence of Kavakçı's "duplicity." For conservative Iranian media, it suggested a conspiracy with US-based roots. Compare "Amerika'da Aranıyormuş," *Sabah*, May 5, 1999, 2 with "Campaign Against Kavakci: Neglect of Women's Rights," *Tehran Times*, May 10, 1999, https://bit.ly/4lBfwAw.

[144] Najmabadi, "Feminism in an Islamic Republic"; Keddie, "Women in Iran since 1979," 405–38; Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 76–84; Tara Povey, *Social Movements in Egypt and Iran* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 72–96.

[145] Mir-Hosseini, "Stretching the Limits," 285–319; Mir-Hosseini, "Divorce, Veiling, and Feminism," 284–320; Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*; Afshar, *Islam and Feminisms*; Künkler, "In the Language of the Islamic Sacred Texts," 375–92; Ahmadi, "Islamic Feminism in Iran," 33–53; Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 245–71.

Islamic Republic's hardline ideological orientation also witnessed the rise of the neo-republican February 28 Process in Türkiye, marked by the primacy of ideologically motivated politics under the shadow of the military. Operating at the intersection of international relations and local politics, turn-of-the-century Turkish Orientalism regularly sacrificed realpolitik with Iran for the maintenance of an unpopular version of laicism and its flagship ban on headscarves.

The localized Turkish Orientalism of the 1990s fed upon US media, such as *Not Without My Daughter*, but also differed from US Orientalisms due to its trope of immanent contagion. As Makdisi points out, in Said's formulation, the Orient represented the antithesis of the Western self; there was not and could not be any genuine overlap between the two.[146] However, just as Ottoman Orientalism had attempted to subdue "the Orient" within the self, late twentieth-century representations of Iran functioned not as complete antitheses to an imagined Turkish reality but as comments on a feared, "backward" Turkish future. Beginning with the first book ads for the Turkish translation, advertising campaigns for *Not Without My Daughter* emphasized the proximity of the events taking place ("neighbor country Iran") and positioned the tale as a "warning" (*ibret*) for Turks.[147] The common trope of "Will Türkiye become like Iran?" demonstrated this deep concern with the risk of metamorphosis through contagion.[148]

Kavakçı's ordeal occasioned indirect debates within the Iranian reformist press regarding whether veiling was a divine requirement or a recommendation and whether its reinforcement by worldly authority was justified.[149] The story also served as a reference point for Iranian women representatives who would soon begin lobbying for the right to wear headscarves and long coats instead of chadors under the sixth *majlis*, the 2000-2004 parliament.[150] However, newspaper images of Iranian women in chadors supporting Kavakçı confirmed the existence of a slippery slope of veiling operating in the opposite direction to many Turks. After all, Iranian women had "*lost* rights and freedoms" as the Iranian revolution had coalesced into an Islamic one.[151] Similarly, the small, loose headscarf Betty Mahmoody had put on as she disembarked

[146] Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 770.
[147] Ad published in *Cumhuriyet* Kitap Eki, July 25, 1991, 13.
[148] Özyılmaz, "Türkiye-İran ilişkilerinde Belirleyici Etmen," 294.
[149] Mir-Hosseini, "The Conservative – Reformist Conflict," 37–53.
[150] "Marżīyi Dabbāgh: Agar namāyandi-yī bidūn-i chādur vārid-i majlis shavad kutak mīkhurad," *Āftāb-i Imrūz*, 17 Isfand 1378/March 7, 2000, 1; Tohidi, "Piyvand-i jahānī-yi junbish-i zanān-i Irān," 31.
[151] Shannon, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Muslim Women's Human Rights*, 18. Italics in original.

from the plane in Tehran had transformed into an oversized black chador by the end of *Not Without My Daughter*. Unlike the American captive who could put on the clothes of the Easterner without any risk to his or her essential Western identity, the laicist Turkish public feared the clothes of the proximate other would confirm their own backwardness/Easternness at a time when they were seeking entry into the EU and enjoying a "golden age" in US-Türkiye relations.[152]

Despite such fears of "becoming" Iran, most Turks knew little about the neighboring country. The laicist media's approach remained as superficial as that of the US media, focused on images of women in chadors, bearded Ayatollahs, and the inscrutable script. Turkish newspapers regularly conflated Arab and Iranian support for Kavakçı; *Sabah* even reprinted a pro-Merve Kavakçı image and headline from an Iranian newspaper and attributed it to the "Arab" press.[153]

This inability to differentiate between Persian and Arabic was a direct result of Türkiye's alphabet reform of 1928 and the realignment of foreign language education toward French and German (and away from Persian and Arabic) under Atatürk in the early twentieth century.[154] The "threatening" script in the news about Merve Kavakçı would have been symbolic for the portion of the country that fretted about the illegal Qur'an schools teaching Arabic to young kids, deviating from the state-approved, Diyanet-disseminated version of Sunni Islam. Even though the newspaper's name, *Sabah* (Eng: morning), comes from Arabic and is cognate with the Persian word, the mistake highlighted how far Türkiye was from "becoming" Iran and how little its opinion leaders knew about the neighboring country with which Türkiye was so often compared and conflated.

***

In the final scene of *Not Without My Daughter*, a bus drops off Betty Mahmoody and her daughter in front of a run-down building in Ankara. A sign advertising a photography shop in capital letters features prominently on the building. Combining Turkish and English, the sign reads, "Gözde Color" (lit. Favorite Color). The presence of a European-looking umlaut (ö) and an English word spelled in the standardized American

[152] "The United States and Turkey: A Model Partnership: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Europe of the Committee on Foreign Affairs," House of Representatives, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, first session, May 14, 2009.

[153] "İran Tahrik Ediyor," *Sabah*, May 11, 1999, 20. The original headline, which translates as "The war of hijab in Türkiye has escalated," appeared on the front page of *Iran* newspaper on May 10, 1999.

[154] Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*.

format ("color") on top of the grimy, Middle Eastern-style building barely hides the implied "backwardness" of Türkiye, but it does signify the relative safety of the country for Americans. It affirms what *National Geographic* called "a less forbidding environment" to the Western eye in its celebratory coverage of Türkiye's alphabet reform.[155] Like the Latin alphabet, the ban on headscarves gave Turks something to mark their auxiliary status to Europe on basic visual terms. Many laicists were loath to lose this questionable privilege.

Of course, the fact that *Not Without My Daughter* became so popular in Türkiye does not mean that everyone who watched the movie believed the story was true and liked it. Or that the movie's fans were all laicists supportive of the headscarf ban. Perhaps many Turks could recall the similarities between *Midnight Express* and its Iranian cousin, watching the film out of interest without a commitment to its politics. Dündar's essay about watching *Not Without My Daughter* after *Midnight Express*, like the fact that Türkiye resisted sanctions against postrevolutionary Iran after experiencing its own brush with a punitive US embargo in the 1970s, demonstrated the potential for nuance and empathy.[156] Yet, Hollywood's *Not Without My Daughter* was undoubtedly one of the most readily available sources of "information" about Iran in the 1990s, made all the more potent by the intense emotions it could awaken as a captivity narrative. It operated intertextually to help Turks make sense of crucial political developments, including the electoral rise of Islamism, the headscarf ban, and their shaky prospects for EU membership. Hollywood's Iran became Türkiye's Iran, despite the still-fresh memories of *Midnight Express*, because this vision served the domestic policy goal of upholding laicism and the (often-overlapping) foreign policy goal of positioning Türkiye as "Western," in contrast to its "Islamic" neighbors.[157]

Türkiye–Iran comparativism at the turn of the century operated within a complex international atmosphere that made certain forms of solidarity difficult. Hollywood's captivity narratives about Türkiye and Iran and laicist discourse about Türkiye's potential for experiencing an Iran-style Islamic revolution both weaponized similitude. On the other hand, Iranian reformists' progressive articulations of strategic similarity,

[155] Maynard Owen Williams, "Turkey Goes to School," *National Geographic*, January 1929, www.turkishculture.org/literature/language/turkey-goes-to-821.htm?type=1.

[156] Süha Bölükbaşı, "Turkey Copes with Revolutionary Iran," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 13, no. 1 (1989): 94–109, 98.

[157] National polls exploring Turkish views on the EU during this period regularly set up an opposition between possible "Islamic" and "European" identifications for the country. See, Ali Çarkoğlu, "Who Wants Full Membership? Characteristics of Turkish Public Support for EU Membership," *Turkish Studies* 4, no. 1 (2003): 171–94.

which focused on the limitations placed on women's civic and political presence, were sidelined. The type of transnational feminist solidarity Iranian activists sought was precluded not just by the Turkish Muslim woman activist they approached and the laicist Turkish state but also by the ideology of liberal modernity promulgated by powerful Western entities such as the ECHR and the White House. However, as the next chapter demonstrates, US leaders proved more than willing to boost other manifestations and uses of political Islam, from the Cold War to the War on Terror.