WOMEN AS BOUNDARY MARKERS BETWEEN ISLAM AND SECULARISM IN JULIA KRISTEVA'S *MURDER IN BYZANTIUM* (2004) AND ELIF ŞAFAK'S *THE BASTARD OF ISTANBUL* (2006)[1]

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The Bulgarian-French writer Julia Kristeva's *Murder in Byzantium* (2004) and Turkish novelist Elif Şafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) show how both secular and veiled women become the ground upon which Turkey and France build their national identities. Anne McClintock writes that "[a]ll nationalisms are gendered; all are invented;"[2] Deniz Kandiyoti too argues that women often "serve as boundary markers between different national, ethnic and religious collectivities."[3] Sırma Bilge also writes that the main clash "between the West and Islam is not about democracy but gender equality and sexual liberalisation;"[4] both novels portray how secular Turkish and French nationalisms are imagined vis-à-vis Turkish femininities. In *Murder*, the two narrators—the French journalist, Stephanie Delacour, and the unnamed narrator—define secularism as "the epitome of the modern, the urban, the rational, and the progressive" and associate Islam with backwardness, violence, and gender inequality.[5] A financially independent world traveler, Stephanie constructs her identity as a foil to the allegedly subservient headscarved Turkish women and fears that French women's freedom might be endangered by the arrival of Muslim immigrants. Şafak's novel, on the other hand, portrays Turkish female identity not as singular but complex, as the two sisters—the headscarved Banu and Zeliha wearing a miniskirt—live under the same roof. Şafak also portrays Turkish women's ambivalent position as the markers of modernity and tradition as the ma-

triarch Gülsüm Kazancı criticizes Banu for defying secularism and Zeliha for her seductive clothes. Whereas Kristeva's narrators set French national identity in opposition to Islam and Turkish women, Şafak's novel challenges the flattened conception of Turkish femininity by depicting the hybridity of women's dress codes and religious practices.

Kristeva's French journalist narrator, Stephanie Delacour, travels to the imaginary city of Santa Varvara to help Detective Rilsky resolve a crime case; the novel diverges from the detective fiction genre as she investigates her cultural roots rather than the serial killer. She reads the crime suspect Prof. Sebastian Chrest-Jones's unfinished novel based on the Byzantine princess Anna Comnena (1083-1148), who recorded her father Alexius I Comnenus's rule in *The Alexiad*. His novel reminds her of her Russian Orthodox grandparents, who, right before the revolution, left their hometown, Moscow, and moved to Paris. While tracing her Russian origins to Byzantium, Stephanie defines cultural differences between Istanbul, which she compares to "some fatal Arabia," and its refined Byzantine past with respect to women.[6] For Stephanie, the uneducated and covered Turkish women cannot be the descendants of Anna, the first female historian, who ironically is "the good noble wife" (119) in her arranged marriage with Nicephorus Byrennius. She believes that her mother Christine, a science teacher, who, like Anna, was indeed a dutiful housewife, resembles not the meek Turkish women but the Greek figures on urns. The shared Greek Orthodox heritage between Anna and Christine helps Stephanie construct her own Western secular identity that might be at stake due to France's increasing Muslim population. She fears that as the elegant Byzantium was destroyed by the Ottomans, France's Western Christian identity will too fall apart due to the arrival of Muslims, who she perceives as "a bloody degeneration that only thrived on yatagan fights and throat cutting" (177). For Stephanie, women's rights can only be preserved in a European Union without Islamic influences. The novel, however, does not support her Orientalist distinctions between Western and Turkish women as Anna and Christine, whom she adores as the icons of independent and enlightened Western femininity, are both imprisoned in marriage.

Kristeva's multilayered novel, then, does not let the French journalist "establish [her] authority on the backs of non-Western women,"who presumably lack the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and independence.[7] The novel questions her narrative authority as a reliable journalist as her supervisor at the *Événement de Paris* warns Stephanie of her responsibility to write the facts not a novel. Stephanie undermines her own objectivity by noting that her writing is not an impartial account of the criminal case but

wanders between truth-telling and storytelling. The unnamed narrator too discredits Stephanie's point of view by representing her as a silly cartoon character, whose sudden interest in Byzantium seems awkward and absurd. The journalist does not seem so different from the childish Turkish women she despises as the unnamed narrator mocks "the sweet little Stephanie" (106), who is "overly influenced by melodramatic reality shows" (62). The novel then does not claim the superiority of French over Turkish women; neither the "morbid" (78) journalist nor her obedient mother seem reasonable or independent. Although the idea of free Western femininity seems to be the fantasy of the unreliable journalist, the novel supports her Islamophobia as the unnamed narrator blames Islam for all the acts of violence, such as the suicide bombings, across the globe. Indeed, the novel's title implies the horrors of Islam by suggesting the Ottoman Turks' *murder* of the sophisticated Byzantine Empire.

Published two years after *Murder in Byzantium*, Şafak's novel shows that not only the West but also Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country, regards Islam as a threat to women's freedom. Indeed, the Turkish word for secularism (*laiklik*) derives from the French word (*laïcité*); the 1905 French law separated the church and state, and prohibited students in public schools from wearing religious clothing.[8] Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic (1923), believed that veiling was an uncivilized and primitive custom that had to be eliminated for the constitution of the secular Republic that looked up to Europe as the icon of modernity and progress. He banned women's covering in government facilities and promoted modern dress codes; only secular women could be university students and members of parliament. However, many covered women's collective call for their right to education and employment in the late 1980s shows that the headscarf does not simply indicate piety or submission to men but also a resistance to the Republic that denies them public visibility.[9] Atatürk associated modernization with Westernization and hence tried to diminish Islamic customs and traditions.

Şafak's novel, however, evades a simple equation between modernity and Westernization due to Istanbul's geographical position at the threshold between the Western and Islamic worlds, opting instead to celebrate the city's cosmopolitan character. Marshall Berman writes that "to be fully modern is to be anti-modern."[10] Şafak depicts Istanbul as a place where secular Turkish nationalism coexists with its antitheses, such as Islamic prayers and the headscarf. Şafak's novel serves as a critique of Turkish nationalism that did not abolish the ideals of feminine virtue by banning the headscarf. Indeed, Gülsüm Kazancı, a supporter of Atatürk's secular dress reforms, oppresses her religious and secular daughters equally. Ignorant of the fact

that Zeliha was raped by her own brother Mustafa, Gülsüm blames her for ruining the family reputation with her revealing dress and her illegitimate daughter. She also detests her elder daughter Banu for challenging secularism with her unexpected decision to cover her head and devote herself to Allah. In *Bastard*, attire does not indicate one's religiosity as Banu defies the Qur'an by encouraging her brother Mustafa to eat a poisonous dessert and pay for his sin of raping and impregnating his own sister Zeliha, and as the atheist Zeliha leaves the abortion clinic upon hearing the prayers coming from nearby mosques. By bringing the two sisters, wearing a short skirt or headscarf, under the same roof, the novel illustrates Zohreh Sullivan's argument that modernity and tradition coexist "in a dialectical (but not mutually exclusive) relationship with its alterity."[11] The Kazancı family's "slightly decrepit" Ottoman mansion that looks "out of place" between "tall modern apartment buildings" hints at the novel's conception of modernity that is not homogenously Western but one that connects Ottoman and Republican Istanbul.[12]

This article will be the first to discuss Elif Şafak's and Julia Kristeva's novels comparatively with respect to Turkish female identities. Like Kristeva's former three novels—*The Samurai* (1992), *The Old Man and the Wolves* (1994), *Possessions* (1998)—*Murder in Byzantium* has not received much critical attention despite its sociopolitical significance. Literary scholarship on *Murder* focuses primarily on Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory and her detective fiction,[13] and Byzantium and Anna Comnena,[14] and often dismisses Sara Ahmed's observation that "the figure of the Muslim woman…haunts Kristeva's more recent work."[15] Benigno Trigo writes about the critical reception of Kristeva's novels and briefly situates *Murder* within its historical framework, namely the destruction of New York's World Trade Center in 2001 and the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq. Although Bianca Laura Rus observes the clash between secular European identity and Islam in *Murder*, she does not specifically pay attention to how the Turkish Muslim woman is the oppositional vehicle through which the narrator builds her secular French identity. In the case of *The Bastard of Istanbul*, many academics write about representations of Turkish-Armenian history,[16] Turkish nationalism,[17] Turkish identity,[18] Istanbul,[19] and transnationalism and immigration.[20] However, critics often dismiss how Şafak tackles Western stereotypes of Turkish women (as seen in Kristeva's novel) as her multilayered female characters exceed easy categorizations of "modern" or "Islamic" identities. This article contributes to literary scholarship on comparative literature, contemporary fiction, and religious studies by examining how secular French and Turkish national identities are defined with respect to Turkish femininities.

Islam as a threat to Western Secular Female Identity in Murder in Byzantium

Stephanie Delacour's elevation of her Slavic mother Christine and Anna Comnena as secular and rational Western women stands for her dream of a French national identity without Islamic influences. She locates not Istanbul, with its predominantly Muslim population, but the Greek Orthodox Byzantium as the embodiment of her multiethnic identity as a French-Russian journalist: "A foreigner and a woman, I know that I come from Byzantium, a place that has never existed with any credible reality except in my soul" (64). She envisions a liminal identity like that of Byzantium as she identifies herself as "a journeywoman" (249) on the road: "I pass instead into the in-between…" she says (63). Contrary to what she claims, her character has a "deep center" (63) as she traces her identity back to the generation of Western Christian women, who she differentiates from the so-called oppressed Turkish women. The novel, however, does not support Stephanie's idealization of Western femininity by portraying both the Byzantine princess in an arranged marriage and Christine with a xenophobic French husband as submissive wives. Aihwa Ong writes, "[i]t bears remembering that all Great Religions—Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism—are heavily patriarchal, investing substantial weight in women's roles as wives and mothers."[21] The novel also represents Christian and Muslim women as victims of patriarchy. Although the novel dissolves differences between French, Byzantine, and Turkish women, it locates West as the center and even supports Stephanie's fear of Muslim immigrants or Turkey's acceptance into the European Union by attributing all acts of violence and terrorism to Islam.

Although Anna Comnena was a submissive woman, who was exchanged between her father and husband to secure the succession of the Byzantine throne, the French journalist sets Turkish Muslim women as a foil to the intellectual princess trained in music, ancient civilizations, rhetoric, and geometry. Stephanie reads in Sebastian's novel on Anna that she had "the pride of a sovereign and the mind of an intellectual" (112) and "the quality of her mind stupefied the entire court" (114). She became the first female historian by completing her late husband Nicephorus Bryennius's chronicle on her father, Alexius I Comnenus. Although Anna was more talented and inspired than her husband, she remained in her domestic sphere and "did not begin to write until she was fifty-five, following the death of her husband" (113). Stephanie herself realizes that Anna, who could not dare to raise her voice in the public space during her husband's lifetime, is far from being

the epitome of "feminism" (121). Indeed, Anna was stuck in an arranged marriage at the age of fourteen and she never got over "the death of her beloved Constantine" (119). For Stephanie, it "is only normal" that Anna in her chronicle glorifies her late husband more than her first love: "she's a woman who has entered into the marriage contract and become the good noble wife" (119). She became a commodity as she married "the son of the conquered" to "assure the succession of the Byzantine throne": "How does the girl serve her father from birth? By submitting, like all women of her time…" (120), Stephanie comments. Even as Anna was a submissive daughter and a wife, Stephanie idealizes the princess as "a modern figure" (21), who questioned the objectivity of history and merged life writing with storytelling. The French journalist attempts to prove the superiority of Western women by showing how Anna, as early as the eleventh century, surpassed her domestic roles with her putatively male traits of astuteness, accuracy, and discipline and with her courage to challenge History (with a capital H).

Stephanie further elevates Western female identity by writing to Detective Rilsky after her mother Christine's funeral that her grave and peaceful mother in a coffin does not look like the so-called immature and subordinate Turkish women. Many Third World feminists like Leila Ahmed, Aihwa Ong, and Chandra T. Mohanty blame Western women writers for denying Muslim women agency by representing them as a homogenously victimized group; the French narrator too overlooks educational and economic differences among Turkish women and regards them all as illiterate and powerless. She claims her strong and intelligent mother's superiority over Turkish housewives with despotic husbands:

> Curiously, from the mixture of Slavic blond Ivan and the anthracite Semite Sarah, there came a daughter, Christine, who most resembled those proud Greek figures on urns…. Nor [Northrop], I'm giving you this last image of my mother; please hold on to it. The Greek beauty of Christine in her coffin. Grave, severe, at peace. None of that mushy, passive Oriental style that she liked to put on to seem like one of those Turkish women that a husband has no reason to fear. (184-185)

She endorses white supremacy by emphasizing her blonde mother's Slavic heritage and by comparing her to the beautiful and elegant Greek figures on urns. The classical Greek art, however, is not the epitome of Western civilization, as Stephanie assumes, due to its cultural appropriation from the Near East, especially Egypt, "in the 2nd millennium BC."[22] Ironically, she renders her mother as "passive" and "Oriental" as Turkish women by depicting her as a static work of art with "African and Asiatic influences."[23] The novel shows how Western women too can be oppressed in marriage

as Stephanie remembers that her idealized mother was indeed a passive housewife, who gave up her teaching career and even obeyed her French diplomat husband's order to forget her Russian cultural heritage. Christine seems as helpless and sentimental as "mushy" (185) Turkish women, who Stephanie despises, as her tyrannical husband throws away all her souvenirs from Russia: "Her dark eyes suddenly went blank.… Then she locked herself in her room and only came out twenty-four hours later with eyes red from crying" (186). Christine's will "to be incinerated and placed in an urn beside" (184) her husband implies that she was "the faithful wife right down to the cremation ashes" (185). Although Christine lacks the freedom and agency that Western women presumably have, Stephanie imagines herself as the daughter of a proud and "scientific" (186) woman, like Anna, superior to ignorant and subservient Turkish wives.

Considering herself as the descendent of her Slavic mother and the Byzantine princess, Stephanie claims a secular identity as a foil to headscarved Turkish women, who she believes to be oppressed by Islamic traditions. The covered Turkish women become the ground upon which she distinguishes the so-called enlightened Europe from "backward" Turkey. She envisions a uniformly secular European Union as she opposes Turkey's membership "as a woman with no Islamic headscarf":

> …my wanderings have taken me today to another European era, nine centuries before the problematic "Union" of the present day that still hesitates to extend its reach from the Atlantic to the Black Sea, with or without Turkey—perhaps without, in my view as a woman with no Islamic headscarf. (80)

Islamic attire is the oppositional vehicle through which Stephanie claims her secular identity as an educated and financially independent French journalist. The headscarf, however, ceases to be a fault line between Byzantium and Istanbul, and Christianity and Islam as Homa Hoodfar writes: "Historically, veiling,…was a sign of status and was practised by the élite in the ancient Greco-Roman, pre-Islamic Iranian and Byzantine empires."[24] The practice of women's covering in the Byzantine Empire hints at the continuity between Istanbul's Byzantine past and Republican present. Regarding history as a movement forward in time, Stephanie dismisses the similarities between Turkish and Byzantine women's attire and regards the headscarf as the symbol of female repression in Turkey, whose European Union membership might threaten secular Western female identity.

Stephanie's denial of Byzantine women's covering also clashes with her idealization of Byzantium as a cosmopolitan place that exceeds geographical, religious, and cultural categories. She imagines Byzantium as an "unnameable" (69) and liminal space that embodies her multi-ethnic and

multi-lingual identity as a French-Russian woman:

> No, don't look for me on the map, my Byzantium is a matter of time, the very question that time asks itself when it doesn't want to choose between two places, two dogmas, two crises, two identities, two continents, two religions, two sexes, two plots. Byzantium leaves the question open and time as well. (88)

Located between Asia and Europe and "on the tingling skin of the Bosporus" (83), Byzantium becomes the epitome of a fluid and decentered space[25] that brings together diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural identities. Like Stephanie's idealized Byzantium that evades cultural dualisms, the headscarf too seems "unnameable" (69) due to its multiple definitions. Fatima Mernissi in *Women and Islam* writes that "the concept of the word *hijab* is three-dimensional," and its visual, spatial and ethical dimensions "often blend into one another."[26] The veil derives from the Arabic verb *hajaba*, which simultaneously means "to hide something from sight," "to mark a border, to establish a threshold," and "a forbidden space."[27] Mernissi represents the veil as an unstable and shifting signifier that refers to "a curtain" that "separates and protects" as well as "a disturbance, a disability" that "blocks knowledge of the divine."[28] Due to its multiple and even contrary meanings, the veil cannot be labeled simply as "a scrap of cloth that men have imposed on women."[29] Stephanie, however, dismisses how the multidimensionality of the word veil resonates with her imagined Byzantium that defies dichotomies.

Islam that allegedly victimizes women is also associated with violence as the unnamed narrator randomly connects the Ottoman invasion of Constantinople in 1453 with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the bombings in Russia, and the September eleventh attacks in New York. While endorsing the so-called "brutality of Turkish Islam" (177), the narrator controversially reflects that even AIDS or birth control methods cannot stop the growth of the Muslim population that presumably threatens Europe:

> All the while, not satisfied with having swallowed Byzantium, Islam continues to advance, and though stopped for a time at Poitiers or Venice, their suicide killers, their shahids are blowing themselves up today in New York and Jerusalem, in Moscow perhaps, and most certainly in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sure, the humiliated and offended have a right to make themselves heard, and no one, any more than the pill, condoms, or AIDS, can put a stop to the demographic growth of the poor if the faithful believe that God comes from numbers and that One God orders them to procreate and expand their numbers. (180)

The unnamed narrator laments that the Ottomans "swallowed" the refined West by invading Byzantium and later Greece, Hungary, and Bulgaria. In perceiving Islam as an increasing threat to the West, she does not distinguish Muslims from "Militant Islamists" who resort to "violent means to achieve

their goals."[30] She also disregards "the suicidal violence" of "non-Islamic militants" in non-Muslim countries, such as Sri Lanka and Japan,[31] as well as the Christian Arabs' resistance against Jerusalem.[32] Wittingly or not, the narrator admits that Muslims too are victims of terrorism as she refers to the attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, by using the terms suicide killer and *shahid*[33] (martyr) interchangeably, she fails to see that Palestinians identify the bomber not as a killer but *shahid*, "a victim who falls at the hands of oppressive occupation."[34] Whereas the narrator shares the Western definition of self-explosion as suicide, which is prohibited in Islam, Palestinians respect it as a heroic self-sacrifice for national freedom. Although she notes that the humiliated have the right to make themselves heard, her narrative does not give voice to the oppressed and their economic and political reasons for resistance, which she does not distinguish from terrorism.[35] Blaming Islam for all acts of violence across time and space enables the narrator to connect the fall of Constantinople with the recent terrorist attacks and hence to imagine a peaceful Byzantium that was destroyed by the barbaric invaders.

For Stephanie, Istanbul's Muslim inhabitants, which she describes as "these usurpers, these impostors, these numskulls" (87), cannot be the descendants of Anna Comnena, the leading intellectual of her times. She laments that France, like Byzantium, will too be "turned Oriental" due to the increasing number of Muslim immigrants: "Byzantium did not last, and France itself is fading" (86). France is "fading" in the sense that it is losing its ostensibly Western Christian character because of the Turkish, Pakistani, and North African settlers. The novel, however, shatters her fantasy of a homogenously secular France as, at a dinner party, the French ambassador of Santa Varvara sarcastically asks Stephanie, "[i]sn't France the most advanced of Muslim countries?" (109). He questions Stephanie's cultural distinctions between Turkey and France by mentioning that, in the European Union, France has the largest Muslim population (approximately six million people).[36] Ironically, while identifying herself as a nomad without fixed cultural roots, she ignores the multi-ethnic population of France and endorses the prejudice against Muslims with her contempt for "the migrant pariahs who only want to fleece us" (86), in other words, who will destroy France with their "backward" Islamic traditions.

However, Stephanie acknowledges that her nostalgia for the elegant Byzantium, which stands for her fantasy of Europe without Islamic traditions, is fictitious, "a time that is reconstructed" (80). She mingles her role as a journalist and storyteller by interweaving a detective story with her fear that the French secular nationalism might fall apart due to the arrival of Muslim immigrants. She sarcastically undermines her preconceptions of Islam and

Turkish women with her confession at the end of the novel: "What I say is not what I think, my words describe an illusion that is the opposite of my sincere conviction" (243). In fact, her ideal of a refined Byzantine princess, the icon of intelligent and secular Western female identity, is textually constructed by the books she reads during a murder investigation: Anna's *The Alexiad* and the missing professor Sebastian's unfinished book on the princess. Stephanie undermines her own credibility as a narrator by self-reflexively commenting that her writing is "fueled by the imagination" (170); but her dream of a not "Koran-based" (84) Byzantium supports her fantasy of Western supremacy. She builds her own secular and liberated female identity by distinguishing Anna and her Russian mother from the allegedly oppressed Turkish women. Whether imaginative or not, her representations of Anna and her mother as free rational agents serve as a vehicle for the French journalist to dream of a Western Christian matrilineal heritage that is distinct from Islam.

The Headscarf and the Miniskirt in Elif Şafak's The Bastard of Istanbul

Şafak's novel counters Western stereotypes of headscarved and passive Turkish women by portraying the diversity of the Kazancı household of seven women with different lifestyles and dress codes. Gülsüm and her three daughters—the tattoo artist Zeliha with a nose piercing, the clairvoyant and headscarved Banu, the history teacher Cevriye, a supporter of secularism—live together despite their conflicting religious beliefs. By representing multiple and even contradictory Turkish female roles, the novel conceptualizes modernity not as Europeanization but a contact zone between the Islamic and the modern. Çağlar Keyder argues that many writers, like Şafak, "announce the death of the modernization project identified with the normative importation of Enlightenment ideals, and they celebrate the possibility of a local (and, some would argue, therefore authentic) appropriation of the modern."[37] The Kazancı family that brings together the local and the modern also defies monolithic images of Turkish women, who paradoxically have to conform to ideals of feminine virtue as well as secularism. Gülsüm, for example, equally detests her daughter Zeliha's promiscuous miniskirt and Banu's headscarf that counters Atatürk's dress reforms. The hybridity of Turkish female roles in the novel unsettles the Western prejudice that regards women's attire as a symbolic border between the secular and the religious and, hence, backward identities.[38]

The novel portrays Turkish women's problematic duty "to achieve a 'healthy' balance between" traditional female roles and "secular/Westernist nationalism"[39] as Zeliha, in her late thirties, is abhorred for wearing "mini-

skirts of glaring colors" and "tight-fitting blouses" that publicly display her long legs and "ample breasts" (3-4). She defies ideals of chastity and purity by walking in her skimpy outfit and high-heel shoes in the cobblestone streets and by loudly swearing at her harassers. Laura Mulvey writes that women "are being turned all the time into objects of display, to be looked at and gazed at and stared at by men";[40] Zeliha too seems to be on stage as men treat an unescorted woman with revealing clothing as a sexual object: "Can't a woman walk in peace in this city?," she complains, as a taxi driver says, "I'll have some of that!" (5); the street vendors "eye[d] her in amusement" (3); male pedestrians "stare[d] at her body with hunger" and regard her "shiny nose ring" as "the sign of her *lustfulness*" (3). Ironically, by shouting profanities at men, she becomes a madwoman who transgresses her female roles with her "proclivity to violence" and "frighteningly furious" behavior that breaks the "unwritten and unbreakable rules" (4-6) of silence and prudence. The narrator suggests that women cannot escape from being treated as commodities in male-dominated Istanbul by commenting that Zeliha holds her broken heel, which was stuck under a cobblestone, "tenderly and despondently as if she were carrying a dead bird" (7).

As Zeliha violates the moral codes with her miniskirt, her sister Banu defies her secular upbringing by gradually leaving behind worldly interests, devoting herself to Allah, and wearing scarves instead of shawls. Although in rather different ways, both Banu's "dazzlingly red" and "eye-catching" (122) headscarf and Zeliha's miniskirt attract attention. Contrary to Mernissi's argument, the veil in this instance is not simply a "curtain" that escapes and "avoid[s] the gaze."[41] Banu's flamboyant and luminous headscarf provokes the gaze as much as Zeliha's revealing outfit. Ironically, Banu's headscarf that disguises her neck and hair also suggests sexual desire due to its seductive red color. Mary Ann Doane, in the context of film theory, draws attention to the ambivalence of the veil that both disguises the woman and "incite[s] desire": "…it simultaneously conceals and reveals, provoking the gaze. The question of whether the veil facilitates vision or blocks it can receive only a highly ambivalent answer inasmuch as the veil, in its translucence, both allows and disallows vision."[42] Banu's headscarf too seems both translucent and solid, like glass, as it simultaneously draws attention but disallows close reading. The novel highlights the ambivalence of the headscarf that both covers the female body and provokes the nationalist gaze.

Indeed, Banu's headscarf evokes the gaze of her nationalist mother Gülsüm and her sister Cevriye, who both despise covered women for defying Atatürk's dress reforms. The family's debate over Banu's new clothing portrays the role of female dress codes in the ideological battle between the

Islamists[43] and the secularists, who are prejudiced against the headscarf as a symbol of repressive Sharia laws.

> "What's that sorry thing on your head?" was the first reaction of Grandma Gülsüm….
> "From this moment on I am going to cover my head as my faith requires."
> "What kind of nonsense is that?" Grandma Gülsüm frowned. "Turkish women took off the veil ninety years ago. No daughter of mine is going to betray the rights the great commander-in-chief Atatürk bestowed on the women of this country."
> "Yeah, women were given the right to vote in 1934," Auntie Cevriye echoed. "In case you didn't know, history moves forward, not backward. Take that thing off immediately!" But Auntie Banu did not. (68)

Gülsüm and her daughter Cevriye, a history teacher, believe that Turkey's modernization is "singular, moving from one stage of development to another" and praise Atatürk, who replaced Islamic traditions with European civil law.[44] Cevriye blames her sister Banu for interrupting Turkey's progression on the scales of modernity by adopting an allegedly primitive and outdated custom. Ironically, like Kristeva's French journalist narrator, she is blind to the presence of Turkey's imperial past and to the plurality of Turkish female roles that often interweave secularism and Islam. The novel interrupts the Western concept of history as a linear movement forward in time by portraying a complex, unstable, and multidimensional Turkish femininity that brings together Atatürk's reforms and the headscarf.

Banu's insistence to live as a devoted Muslim in a matriarchal family of secular women unsettles the simple equation of Islam with male domination. Gülsüm's reference to Banu's headscarf as a "sorry thing" (68) on her head dehumanizes Banu as a submissive woman without agency. Banu, however, does not fit into Gülsüm's and Kristeva's French narrator's homogenization of covered women as passive and obedient wives. Indeed, Banu defies domestic ideology by living with her sisters rather than her "tenderhearted, good-natured" (30) husband, who she deserts after the loss of her twin baby boys and seeks "refuge in Allah" (173). She challenges the marriage institution by defying her wifely and domestic duties and by visiting her husband "like a concerned stranger" not as "a loving spouse" (31). Her headscarf then is not a symbol of female repression but of her self-assertion "to withdraw from everything material and mundane, and to dedicate herself totally to the service of God" (66).

The novel challenges the misconception of the headscarf as a symbol of subjugation by showing how the secular dress has not liberated Turkish women from their traditional roles of modesty and chastity. Indeed,

Mustafa justifies his rape of his nineteen-year-old sister Zeliha by blaming her for dressing up like a whore. Mustafa assumes the role of the patriarch after his father's death and aims to preserve the family reputation by asking Zeliha not to show off her legs in the neighborhood. He feels humiliated as Zeliha refuses to listen to his orders; he pulls up her skirt and rapes his sister to restore his masculine authority. Zeliha is victimized by her own mother Gülsüm, who, ignorant of the sexual assault, blames her for ruining the family reputation by wearing seductive clothes: "Is it not enough that you always bring disgrace to this family? Look at that skirt you are wearing. The dish towels in the kitchen are longer than your skirts! You are a single mother, a divorcée. Hear me well! I have never seen a divorcée with a ring in her nose. You should be ashamed of yourself, Zeliha!" (258). Ironically, Gülsüm calls her never-married daughter a divorcée to render the birth of her granddaughter as legitimate. The sexual repression of Zeliha by her own mother and brother shows how secular dress is acceptable only if it preserves traditional female roles of chastity and sexual purity.

While highlighting Turkish women's paradoxical duty to be both modern and virtuous, the novel also unsettles the role of attire as an indicator of religious and secular identities as Banu poisons her rapist brother and the atheist Zeliha decides not to have an abortion upon hearing the Friday prayers. While lying half unconscious at an abortion clinic, Zeliha changes her mind due to her internal dialogue with Allah:

> "[…] But then just when I am about to go unconscious on that operating table, I hear the afternoon prayer from a nearby mosque… The prayer is soft, like a piece of velvet. It envelops my whole body. Then, as soon as the prayer is over, I hear a murmur as if somebody is whispering in my ear. 'Thou shall not kill this child!'"[…] "And then…" Zeliha carried on with her story, "this mysterious voice commands: 'Oooo Zeliha! Oooo you the culprit of the righteous Kazancı family! Let this child live!'" (28)

Istanbul's celestial sounds that encourage her to keep her baby suggest that not Islam but Turkish nationalist and patriarchal discourses punish single pregnant women by labeling their children as illegitimate. Zeliha becomes "the black sheep" (174) of her allegedly modern and progressive family by giving birth to her bastard child. At the abortion clinic, she observes how Turkish bureaucracy is "less keen to rescue babies born out of wedlock": "A fatherless baby in Istanbul was just another bastard, and a bastard just another sagging tooth in the city's jaw, ready to fall out at any time," the narrator comments (12). Zeliha, however, defies the nuclear family unit by bringing up her daughter with her mother and sisters. A nonbelieving woman's internal dialogue with Allah and her description of the Islamic

prayers as being soft and soothing show how Turkish female roles do not fit into easy categorizations of secular and religious.

Ironically, not the atheist Zeliha but the pious Banu commits murder prohibited in the Qur'an: "slay not the life which Allah has made sacred."[45] Banu violates the "symbolic function" of female modesty in Islam, which for Mernissi, "refers to the need for the believer to curb his initiative and critical judgement," by taking the initiative to kill Mustafa.[46] She acts as a judge by deciding that upon his first visit to Istanbul from the United States, Mustafa should be punished for sexually assaulting Zeliha. "I wish I didn't know the things I know" (336), Banu says to Mustafa, and leaves a bowl of his favorite dessert mixed with potassium cyanide on his nightstand. Although he has a new life with his American wife and stepdaughter in the US, Mustafa cannot overcome his shame and remorse, and he understands Banu's intention in bringing him the dessert right before bedtime. "The choice belonged to him" (336) the narrator says, and instead of repenting for his sins, he commits the crime of suicide in Islam by eating the poisonous dessert. Banu too violates Islamic laws by causing her own brother to die for his crime: "Allah will never forgive me. I am ostracized forever from the world of the virtuous. I will never go to heaven. I will be thrown directly to the flames of hell. But Allah knows there is little regret in my heart" (355). Her headscarf ceases to be a symbol of piety as she believes herself to be banished from heaven because she has violated Islamic teachings about forgiveness and mercy. The novel shows how dress may not be a marker of one's religiosity as the Qur'anic verse that prohibits murder prompts the atheist Zeliha to keep her baby but does not stop Banu from poisoning Mustafa. The matriarchal Kazancı family problematizes categories of "secular," "modern," and "Islamic" and illustrates how seemingly different political discourses coexist in the multifaceted Istanbul that connects East and West.

Conclusion

This article sets these two novels in dialogue as Kristeva's narrator Stephanie defines her secular French identity in opposition to allegedly repressed Turkish women and Şafak's novel subverts such stereotypes by portraying Turkish women's multiple dress codes and religious beliefs. The difference between the novels' treatment of Turkish femininity also reveals diverse conceptions of modernity: one that is strictly associated with Westernization in *Murder in Byzantium* and one associated with cultural hybridity in *The Bastard of Istanbul*. Whereas Kristeva's French narrator loathes Muslims, who once destroyed Byzantium and now allegedly threaten French secularism,

Şafak's narrator celebrates the heterogeneity of Turkish female roles that bring together Atatürk's secular democracy with Islam. Despite the differences in their representations of Turkish women and modernity, both novels portray how women across time and space have been oppressed in male-dominated societies. Kristeva's non-linear novel questions the progress in gender equality by representing both the eleventh-century princess and Stephanie's mother as obedient housewives. Stephanie's construction of her enlightened identity as a foil to the so-called immature headscarved women also falls apart as the unnamed narrator mocks her sudden obsession with Byzantium. The contact of Anna Comnena, Christine, and Stephanie in the novel shatters the journalist's assumption that Western women are superior to their Turkish counterparts. In Şafak's novel, on the other hand, the headscarf is not a sign of female repression as Banu deserts her husband and even assumes the male role of a lawgiver by avenging Mustafa's rape of his sister. Indeed, both Banu and Zeliha suffer as they challenge the state regulation of female dress codes: Zeliha is marked as a fallen woman due to her revealing outfit, while Banu is blamed for disrespecting secularism. The two novels show how Turkish and French national identities are constructed in relation to female roles.

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NOTES

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2. McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven,'" 89.

3. Kandiyoti, "Identity and Its Discontents," 382.

4. Bilge, "Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance," 10.

5. Çınar, "Subversion and Subjugation," 902.

6. Kristeva, *Murder in Byzantium*, 83. Hereafter cited by page number.

7. Ong, "Colonialism and Modernity," 80.

8. For further information about the headscarf debate in France, see Aarøe, "Tolerance of Religion;" Osman, "Legislative Prohibitions;" Croucher, "French-Muslims and the Hijab;" and Baubérot, "'*Laïcité.*'"

9. Çınar, "Subversion and Subjugation;" Yeğenoğlu, "Clash of Secularity and Religiosity."

10. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 14.

11. Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern?", 215.

12. Şafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, 22. Hereafter cited by page number.

13. Margaroni, "Recent Work on and by Julia Kristeva;" Davis, "Psychoanalysis, Detec-

tion and Fiction;" Trigo, "On Kristeva's Fiction."

14. Quandahl, "Afterlives of Anna Komnene."

15. Ahmed, "Skin of the Community," 96.

16. Adams, "Bastard of Istanbul;" Freely, "Writers on Trial;" Anadolu-Okur, "Transferring the Untransferable;" Özbaş, "Ramifications."

17. Kırımlı, "Elif Şafak."

18. Akbatur, "Power and Burden of Self-Translation."

19. Bulamur, *How Istanbul's Cultural Complexities Have Shaped Eight Contemporary Novelists*; Furlanetto, *Towards Turkish American Literature.*

20. Öğüt-Yazıcıoğlu, "Who Is the Other?"

21. Ong, "State Versus Islam," 187.

22. Bernal, *Black Athena*, 17.

23. Shohat and Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture," 39.

24. Hoodfar, "Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads," 251.

25. Here I am relying on Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet's concept of a deterritorialized sense of place where "there are multiplicities which constantly go beyond binary machines and do not let themselves be dichotomized" (*Dialogues II,* 26).

26. Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, 93.

27. Ibid., 93.

28. Ibid., 95-6.

29. Ibid., 95.

30. Ali and Post, "History and Evolution," 617.

31. Hafez, "Rationality, Culture, and Structure," 166.

32. Quer, "Israel and Zionism;" Patierno, "Palestinian Liberation Theology;" Bishara, "Palestinian Christian Networked Activism."

33. For further information on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the definitions of *shahid*, see Pedahzur, *Root Causes*; Frisch, "Motivation of Capabilities?;" Chen, "Exploration;" Hafez, "Rationality, Culture, and Structure;" Poland, "Suicide Bombers;" Ali and Post, "The History and Evolution;" Whitehead and Abufarha, "Suicide;" Lefkowitz, *Words and Stones*; Darweish and Rigby, *Popular Protest in Palestine*. Chen writes that Palestinians refer to suicide attacks as "martyrdom operation" ("Exploration," 107). Hafez, however, argues that religious framing is "not sufficient to explain suicide bombings" and the terrorist attacks of "nonreligious activists." He adds that "the culture of martyrdom" did not exist before 2000 "when most Palestinians rejected this form of extreme violence" ("Rationality, Culture, and Structure," 170).

34. Whitehead and Abufarha, "Suicide, Violence," 397.

35. In fact, Barbara Franz claims that Muslim immigrants' resentment of their political, social, and economic inferiority in Europe, where "integration policies have failed," results in terrorism ("Europe's Muslim Youth," 90). Chen, on the other hand, foregrounds "the national humiliation" of Palestinians living under the Israeli occupation and being harassed by Israeli soldiers, as well as the poverty of unemployed refugees ("Exploration," 114).

36. Franz, "Europe's Muslim Youth," 93.

37. Keyder, "Whither the Project of Modernity?", 38.

38. Kandiyoti, "Identity and Its Discontents;" Secor, "Veil and Urban Space."

39. Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 126–34.

40. Mulvey, *Visual*, 13.

41. Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, 94.

42. Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 49.

43. Nilüfer Göle defines Islamism as a struggle to "defend Islamic identity and indepen-

dence" in a secular nation and as "a desire to realize a systemic change, to create an Islamic society" in Turkey (*The Forbidden Modern*, 109–41).

44. Mitchell, "Stage of Modernity," 8.

45. *Holy Qur'an*, 6:151.

46. Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 113.

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