

Occasionally, Arslan's writing-style becomes prolix and repetitive, reflecting the book's origins as a doctoral thesis. Nonetheless, I believe that *Cinema in Turkey* is a groundbreaking work, the first of its kind in English that looks in detail at the con-

ditions of production and exhibition that shaped Yeşilçam's product over nearly five decades. It deserves to become a seminal text in Turkish film history.

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## Headscarf Politics in Turkey, A Postcolonial Reading

By *Merve Kavakci Islam*

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The distressing photo on the cover effectively represents the content of this book. The photo depicts a junior high school student amidst male and female police officers who tear up her headscarf at the entrance of a school in 2001. We do not see the girl's face, but we can imagine her shame and fury for the act and the injustice of the ban. Author of the book under review, Merve Kavakci Islam was an activist for the Muslim women's right to wear the headscarf during her term with the Virtue Party. When elected to Ankara's Parliament in 1999, she was prevented from swearing into office, first, by an astonishing media campaign and, then, by the opposition of the leading party in the assembly. Later, she was stripped of her parliamentary immunity and of her Turkish citizenship by the Constitutional Court, which also closed her party for alleged threats to the state. Those were the aftermaths of the 28 February Process previous to the advent of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), a period when the secularist wing was attempting to reinstate the most severe form of laicism in the country.

Even if *Headscarf Politics in Turkey* is centred on this event, the book is a study of

the headscarf ban in Turkey and is divided into six chapters. The first one is dedicated to the introduction and to the author's theoretical framework of the interpretation of the headscarf ban employing the concepts of "Orientalism" and "Postcolonialism." Orientalism is used to delineate the image given by the secular elite of the '*başörtülü kadınlar*' (a term left in the original by the author to indicate the veiled yet educated women), women repressed awaiting liberation by their Orientalist saviour. Moreover, "the Orientalist bias does not ask women what they need or what they want or *if* they want. The state renders itself omnipotent. It claims the right to know what its female citizens want, or rather should want." (p.40) Moreover, despite the fact that Turkey never lived under colonization, the author argues, "the leadership of the Turkish Republic intellectually embraced an attitude of westernization that was colonial-like in their relationship with the majority of the population." (p.7) However, this interpretation risks being overly simplistic. Indeed, describing the secular elites in Turkey as an "Orientalized Oriental" alienated from the rest of the country and his culture (p.111) would prevent us from understanding the

fact that, though strongly committed to the 'Western' lifestyle, these elites adopted Ottoman methods of authoritarian reform from above and emerged from local institutions and from critical moments for the country when its existence was under threat. It is not by chance that the first to stress on the symbolism of fashion is probably Mahmud II. Moreover, today, their opposition is probably strengthened by the will to preserve their economic and social prerogatives rather than ideological commitment.

Chapter two and three are dedicated to a history of the ban and the regime's image of women first in the period from the National Struggle to the death of Mustafa Kemal in 1938 and then from İnönü's presidency to the 2000s. Here, wider space is dedicated to remember the "Kavakci Affair" (pp.75-79) that is representative of the stand of secular elites that, though a minority, have been capable of enforcing the ban on the headscarf from Turkish public spaces. In chapter four, the author analyses the social and political implications of the ban emphasizing how that prevented women from accessing universities or becoming public servants (just the opposite results expected from a policy of gender emancipation).

Chapter five is more dedicated to the prospects of the ban. Here, there is more than a hint of ungenerous critique of the JDP. According to the author, the JDP, under pressure from the Kemalists, chose to ignore the ban and to not address it. Such policy and attitudes corroborated and justified the system as well as it "contributed to new introductions of the ban and the entrenchment thereof." (p.138) A few pages earlier, the author criticizes the Gülen community—"a religious sect" (sic!)—for demonstrating a similar attitude of evasion

from frontal confrontation with the secular elite. For instance, the newly elected President Abdullah Gül tolerated members of the Armed Forces that left the protocol or official ceremonies to avoid the veiled First lady; the religious community enforced the headscarf ban at its schools throughout the country "to impress upon the state that he was working in accordance with the regime to secure his movement." (p.120) The disillusionment for the JDP is furthermore emphasised in the sixth chapter, which represents also the conclusions of the book.

The book may appear as repetitive to the long-time student of Turkish politics, who may probably prefer *Başörtüsüz Demokrasi* (İstanbul, Timaş, 2004) by the same author. This last book presents more biographical information and memories of the political campaign as well as notes from the aftermaths of her election to the Assembly, with interesting details on the already existing split in the Islamist movement that will lead two years later to the emergence of the JDP. Furthermore, in *Headscarf Politics in Turkey*, the author uses second hand sources for the historical background and for statistical material, sometimes making mistakes. For instance, Şeyhülislam Mustafa Sabri Efendi becomes "the last religious authority of the Ottoman Empire," (p.32) yet after him, the office was held by Medeni Mehmet Nuri for two years (1920-22). Another example is where the author refers to Turkish civil servants as "federal employee(s)" (p.80-82), whereas Turkey is a highly centralized state. The Turkish spelling is inconsistent in the text and in the footnotes. Moreover, it is an understandable choice to keep the Turkish expression '*başörtülü kadınlar*' throughout the text, even if tiring to the non-Turkish reader, because there is a particular dis-

inction between terms like *tesettür* or *türban* difficult to express in English. However, names of institutions like *Danıştay* or *Yargıtay* can be used in their English equivalents of Council of State and High Court of Appeals.

Overall, this book is recommended to the neophytes of Turkish politics because it

shows an unpleasant aspect of secularism in Turkey and the tribulation of ‘*başörtülü kadınlar*.’ Usually the academic literature on the subject fails to explain the duress of the ban in full, but Kavakci Islam does it competently.

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## Turkey in the 1960’s and 1970’s Through the Reports of American Diplomats

By *Rifat Bali*

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Rifat N. Bali has done us a great service by publishing reports of American diplomats about Turkey in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The book consists of 35 reports and cables prepared by American consulates in Istanbul, Adana Izmir, and the American Embassy in Ankara. Bali has organized the classified reports into five categories: the “political and social situation in Turkey,” “the situation after the May 27, 1960 Coup,” “the Turkish general staffs ultimatum of March 12, 1971,” “the Kurdish issue” and finally reports concerning minorities. It should be noted here that these reports did not exactly represent the views of the US government, but the views of serving American diplomats. Failure to distinguish between these two categories might lead to unwarranted conclusions.

It has always been interesting to hear the views of foreigners. The observations of an external actor, who does not belong to the local national culture and who can free himself/herself from the inevitable limitations on the perceptive abilities of a native citizen, can be highly informa-

tive. For example, *Democracy in America*, written by a visiting French man Alexis de Tocqueville, became an indispensable classic and a unique source in understanding America since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In a country like Turkey, which gives great weight to what the Westerners’ think about it, what would look like a curiosity gains further impetus. These reports are significant for other reasons. They provide insights into what the Americans expected from Turkey, how they gathered information, and why they perceived Turkish affairs in the way they did.

An interesting report dated May 20, 1963, notes “...the conscious effort of educated Turks to avoid discussion of basic human values, of the ‘good life’ of the place of a man in the universe, i.e., of ‘religious’ questions.” It notes that “attempts to discuss such subjects in an open, academic way with the ‘enlightened’ Turks often produce suspicion that the questioner is a secret reactionary. Or a conservative is likely to retreat to orthodox Islam; yes we should build more mosques.” (p.66) Another re-