Introduction

In a 1962 meeting at the White House, Iran's last shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, complained to US President John F. Kennedy that "America treats Turkey as a wife, and Iran as a concubine."[1] Türkiye and Iran, both bordering the USSR, were US allies in the Cold War. However, the shah felt that the military and economic resources allocated to each country did not reflect their relative importance to the so-called Free World. In his *Mission for My Country*, published in English a year before this meeting, the shah had presented a royal vision for Iran's modernization. The book demonstrated his awareness that Iran was often compared to its neighbor Türkiye in terms of development and geopolitical importance, usually to its disadvantage.[2] With his complaint to Kennedy, the shah proved ready to wield the rhetorical force of comparison himself to demand a better ranking and, therefore, stronger support.

Significantly, in order to get his point across, the shah used the libidinal analogy of a love triangle, representing international power hierarchies in gendered terms and emphasizing the triangulated nature of the relationship between Iran, the United States, and Türkiye. Here were two less powerful countries willing to serve the United States's cause in the Cold War, competing for attention, credit, and material dividends under conditions that subjected them to the hegemon's misguided, ill-informed comparisons. The shah's statement, however, fell short of critiquing the conditions of comparison, challenging merely the final rankings. In fact, his gendered analogy naturalized inequality and foreclosed a vision of solidarity between Iran and Türkiye in challenging US prerogatives.

Türkiye, Iran, and the Politics of Comparison takes the shah's protest as a critical starting point. Combining archival research with in-depth

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[1] Memorandum of Conversation, April 12, 1962, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1961–1963*, Vol. XVII: Near East, 1961–1962, ed. Nina J. Noring (Washington, DC, 1994), doc. 243.

[2] His Imperial Majesty Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, Shahanshah of Iran, *Mission for My Country* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 40.

analysis of official, scholarly, and popular texts in English, Turkish, and Persian, the book traces the international history of the comparisons made between Iran and Türkiye in an era of US hegemony. My research question hinges not on whether the relations between the United States, Türkiye, and Iran have truly resembled those between a stereotypical husband, wife, and concubine between the Cold War and the War on Terror but on the cultural and political work of comparison under uneven relations of power. I ask which political actors have mobilized comparative representations of Iran and Türkiye and through what categories. Which transnational connections did these comparisons highlight and/or obscure? And finally, what role did the vast power imbalance between the United States and its two interlocutors play in these often gendered and racialized constructions?

Comparison is a type of reasoning that identifies similarities and differences between at least two objects. My analysis of the comparative tropes that have defined Iran–US–Türkiye relations builds upon poststructuralist scholarship, demonstrating that comparison is not a value-free, neutral tool but one that is deeply dependent on historical context, structures of power, and the motives of the comparer. In the process of researching, I have become more and more wary of comparison itself as a reductive mode of relating to the world. However, the main focus of the book's critique is not the everyday practice of comparison, but its wielding as a tool for discipline, control, and resource allocation under conditions of inequality. I use the term "comparativism" to refer to the power-backed, institutionalized valorization and application of comparison.

The introduction, therefore, begins by tracing the historical ascent of comparativism, studying how comparison became a privileged tool of knowledge production in conjunction with imperialism.[3] I then examine the minute rhetorical operations and common tropes involved in Iran–Türkiye comparisons through an analysis of modern international scholarship on the *Shahnameh*, a classic verse epic associated with Iranian identity. A summary of the chapters follows. Ultimately, the introduction demonstrates the history and rhetorical patterns underlying comparativism in international studies, highlights the intellectual and political pitfalls associated with this mode of knowledge-making, and offers more ethical ways of approaching comparison.

This is a work of transnational cultural history, which juxtaposes dominant US-based comparisons of Iran and Türkiye with representations

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[3] I define "imperialism" broadly in line with Naoko Shibusawa's formulation: "when a stronger polity subjects a weaker polity to its own preferences." Naoko Shibusawa, "U.S. Empire and Racial Capitalist Modernity," *Diplomatic History* 45, no. 5 (2021): 855–84, 858.

originating from those countries. Bilingual research on the United States in the world has long demonstrated how peoples othered by US ideologies have anticipated, contested, and manipulated imperial knowledge practices through local cultural production and political strategizing.[4] Most of this scholarship, however, focuses on the power imbalances between "the center" (e.g., the United States) and a singular locus of dissent and adaptation, such as a single country or region in "the periphery." My first book, which examined how contradictory Turkish approaches to westernization influenced US–Türkiye relations, was also part of this wave.[5] However, as the shah's metaphor of the love triangle demonstrates, and as Walter D. Mignolo has observed, "comparing is minimally a triangular business," including at least two objects to be compared and a subject to perform the comparison.[6] This book, therefore, shifts the lenses of inquiry further away from the West versus East dichotomy – itself a linchpin of comparative politics. Instead, it tracks the triangulation of comparative discourses between Türkiye, Iran, and the United States. My goal is to examine how political language and knowledge-making practices promoted by a hegemonic power, such as the United States, can influence bilateral relations between two neighboring middle-power states, as well as those states' relations with the hegemon, offering a new vantage point on West Asian nationalisms.

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[4] See, for example, James G. Carrier, ed., *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Meltem Ahıska, "Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2–3 (2003): 351–79; Afsanah Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Brian T. Edwards, *After the American Century: The Ends of U.S. Culture in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Perin E. Gürel, *The Limits of Westernization: A Cultural History of America in Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). For overviews, see Ussama Makdisi, "After Said: The Limits and Possibilities of a Critical Scholarship of U.S.-Arab Relations," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 3 (2014): 657–84; and Perin E. Gürel, "Contested Encounters: Boundaries of American Studies and the Middle East," *American Literary History* 29, no. 3 (2017): 579–91.

[5] Gürel, *The Limits of Westernization*.

[6] Walter D. Mignolo, "On Comparison: Who Is Comparing What and Why?," in *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 99–119, 99.

Türkiye, Iran, and the Politics of Comparison demonstrates how, in the uneven political and discursive nexus between Türkiye, Iran, and the United States from the Cold War to the War on Terror, policymakers and opinion leaders used comparison strategically. The prevalent ideologies of each era informed the terms of comparison and manifested in several intersecting spheres: practices of knowledge generation, foreign policy dogmas, and popular representations. US-led comparativism mobilized gender, race, and class to code for hierarchy, personifying political concepts such as "modernization," "westernization," "Islamic fundamentalism," and "moderate Islam" with reference to stereotypical figures and prominent individuals. US diplomatic and intelligence reports, popular media, and mainstream scholarship largely agreed on the significance of these individuals, casting them alternately as model, copy, or foil figures in different ideological formations. Transnationally disseminated and contested, comparisons did not always benefit the most powerful state entity, but often operated in favor of rising political tides, signaling the increasing influence of ascendant ideologies in any given context.

Introduction to Comparativism: Hierarchies of Knowledge and Civilization

While comparison might be universal and built-in to human cognition and language processing, the institutionalization of comparative methodologies in Europe and its colonial outposts has a history closely linked to race, gender, and class hierarchies and justifications for colonialism.[7]

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[7] Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); George M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Slep Stuurman, "Francois Bernier and the Invention of Racial Classification," *History Workshop Journal* 1, no. 50 (2000): 1–22; Harry Harootunian, "Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem," *boundary 2* 32, no. 2 (2005): 23–52; Lisa Lowe, "Insufficient Difference," *Ethnicities* 5, no. 3 (2005): 409–14; Rey Chow, *The Age of The World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, Gilbert M. Joseph, and Emily S. Rosenberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 23–68; Aram A. Yengoyan, "Introduction: On the Issue of Comparison," in *Modes of Comparison: Theory and Practice*, ed. Aram Yengoyan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 1–2; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Rethinking Comparativism," *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (2009): 609–26; Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, "Why Compare?," *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (2009): 453–71; Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 14–16.

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault traces a shift in Western knowledge production techniques from analogies emphasizing connection and similarity to hierarchies based on measurement and ranking. Beginning in early seventeenth-century Europe, he argues, comparison became essential to the construction of truth:

> From now on, every resemblance must be subjected to proof by comparison, that is, it will not be accepted until its identity and the series of its differences have been discovered by means of measurement with a common unit, or, more radically, by its position in an order.[8]

The ascendance of comparison to this exalted status as the premier mode of knowledge-making was no accident. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European "explorers" encountered new forms of difference while invading parts of the world that had previously been unknown to them. European scholars followed on their heels, forging the comparative methodologies we are familiar with today in order to define, understand, and manage these differences. The military and economic power gained through colonialism translated into discursive violence: Publications and popular expositions treated conquered lands and peoples as exhibits in an imagined hierarchy of human civilization.[9] As Lisa Lowe put it, comparison thus became essential to "the institutionalization of 'difference' as a modern apparatus for apprehending and disciplining otherness."[10]

Comparativism became the central epistemological tool of Euromodernity, justifying land, resource, and labor expropriation under racial capitalism. Scholars establishing comparative methodologies in anthropology did not do so through deep engagement with the cultures they were examining; instead, they projected Western criteria onto unknown lifeworlds, often with the outcome that the knowledge they produced made European hegemony appear natural and inevitable.[11] Comparative knowledge about what counts as "religion" justified genocidal crimes in Africa and the Americas.[12] In the nineteenth century and

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[8] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), 61.

[9] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1–34.

[10] Lowe, "Insufficient Difference," 410.

[11] Linda M. G. Zerilli, "Racial Regimes, Comparative Politics, and the Problem of Judgement," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 8 (2019): 1321–26.

[12] David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Janet R. Jakobsen, "Religion," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 215–17.

into the twentieth, the categorization of polities along a racialized "standard of civilization" determined whether a nation could expect international laws to apply or whether it would be subjected to colonization as part of Europe's "civilizing mission."[13] Comparative measurements of "cranial capacity" – that is, the measurements of skulls – were used to shore up the system of Jim Crow segregation in the United States. Discriminatory immigration laws hinged upon the classification and ranking of racial/national/ethnic groups.[14] Colonial administrators, including in the mandate system that was implemented across much of West Asia after World War I, mobilized comparativism to monitor and govern "radically different cultures."[15]

Although many colonial structures became formally discredited in the mid twentieth century, the postwar development of "the military-industrial-academic complex" continued to valorize comparison as a significant tool for managing foreign peoples.[16] In the United States, which secured its world power status after World War II, the rise and continuing popularity of the educational tool known as "Bloom's taxonomy" epitomized the common sense that comparison constituted a "higher" form of knowledge-making. Constructed by US educational psychologist Harold Bloom and his colleagues in a series of publications in the mid-1950s, Bloom's "taxonomy of educational objectives" proposed a hierarchy of thought with steps leading from knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, and synthesis to evaluation.[17] The taxonomy's hierarchy, often visualized as a pyramid, was "cumulative": "Higher" levels such as evaluation built on "lower" levels such as knowledge, and required what the authors believed were more taxing mental operations.[18] The original taxonomy listed "judging by external standards, the ability to

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[13] Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of 'Civilisation' in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

[14] Mae M. Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (1999): 67–92.

[15] Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 245–72.

[16] Henry A. Giroux, *University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2007).

[17] A Committee of College and University Examiners, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain*, ed. Benjamin S. Bloom (London: Longmans, 1956).

[18] Amelia E. Kreitzer and George R. Madaus, "Empirical Investigations of the Hierarchical Structure of the Taxonomy," in *Bloom's Taxonomy: A Forty-Year Retrospective*, ed. Lorin W. Anderson, Lauren A. Sosniak, Benjamin S. Bloom, National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago, IL: Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 1994), 66.

compare a work with the highest known standards in its field – especially with other works of recognized excellence" as the culminating intellectual operation.[19] Comparison was confirmed as the most essential tool of human learning.

Having undergone many revisions since 1956, Bloom's taxonomy remains popular in US teacher-training programs. While I have used the taxonomy in helping college-level students ask more fruitful and open-ended questions that go beyond summary, like many other educators, I have come to suspect its neat little formulas.[20] Separating, labeling, and hierarchizing human thought processes on a pyramid is tempting but ultimately misleading. Despite the taxonomy's apparent internal coherence, proving its validity appears impossible.[21] In addition, the general consensus around its usefulness obscures potential intellectual dangers. Specifically, the pyramid structure implicitly upholds judgment (with its dominant mechanics of comparing, ranking, and rating) as the ultimate goal of learning, underplaying the complexity of "lower-order" (or, in more generous formulations, "foundational") processes such as "knowledge" and "comprehension."

While the dangers of a simple prompt to "compare and contrast" may be minor in an elementary classroom setting, institutionally backed comparativism has often overstepped comprehension with deleterious results. The history of US–Türkiye–Iran comparativism examined in this book is a history of scholars and policymakers developing policy measures by comparing entities via sharply defined external rubrics, often shortchanging internal complexities and transnational processes. The risks are not merely theoretical. Comparative rankings of polities can operate as a new "standard of civilization," justifying violent policies – from imposed austerity to sanctions to invasion.

When taken as a product of its time as opposed to a universal guide, Bloom's taxonomy demonstrates the institutionalization of comparativism in the service of the US empire after World War II. On the one hand, the taxonomy pushed against older, eugenicist theories of learning that presupposed inborn differences between students would explain

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[19] Bloom et. al, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 207.

[20] Seyyed Mohammad Ali Soozandehfar, "A Critical Appraisal of Bloom's Taxonomy," *American Research Journal of English and Literature* (ARJEL) 2, no. 9 (2016): 1–10; Doug Lemov, "Bloom's Taxonomy – That Pyramid Is a Problem," *Doug Lemov's Field Notes*, March 4, 2017, https://teachlikeachampion.com/blog/blooms-taxonomy-pyramid-problem/.

[21] George Malcolm Seddon, "The Properties of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives for the Cognitive Domain," *Review of Educational Research* 48, no. 2 (1978): 321.

learning outcomes.[22] In highlighting step-by-step processes, Bloom's taxonomy had an equalizing effect: Theoretically, all students would be able to progress along the same pyramid given enough time and guidance. At the same time, the taxonomy's prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approach mimicked the chauvinism of US policymakers who set out to educate the world's peoples on the merits of capitalist modernity in the same era.[23] The 1950s and 1960s, after all, saw the rise of modernization theory, area studies, and comparative politics as loose networks of US-based scholars worked to make the entire world into a knowable domain to serve in the fight against Communism. Just as all students would be expected to ascend the pyramid of knowledge with the assistance of their teacher, all countries were expected to follow a set of steps to modernization under the guidance of the United States. As Cold War politics made comparison into a valued tool for understanding and managing newly independent nation-states, educational philosophy uplifted comparison and ranking to the top of a new application-oriented approach to learning.

The collective and the individual progress narratives paralleled each other: In Psychology, the newly invented "social comparison theory" and "the rank-order paradigm" suggested comparing oneself to others could help with upward mobility.[24] In each case, comparativism generated the idea of a model "of recognized excellence," which nations or individuals were to emulate, sharpened into relief by a foil or foils. From the Cold War into the War on Terror, the generation of policy-oriented rankings and the placement of different countries into model, copy, and foil configurations remained a defining feature of comparativism in US foreign relations. This comparativism, trained on Iran and Türkiye, justified the shifting policy measures explored throughout this book.

The countless "tyrannies of comparison" are well documented and have led to various methodological crises in self-reflexive disciplines saturated by comparativism, such as comparative literature, comparative religion, and anthropology.[25] Leading scholarship in these and other fields,

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[22] John Chambers, "Bloom's Taxonomy: Six Decades of Cognitive Domain," in *Curriculum Windows: What Curriculum Theorists of the 1950s Can Teach Us about Schools and Society Today*, ed. Thomas S. Poetter, Kelly Waldrop, and Syed Hassan Raza (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2019), 77–89.

[23] On the connections between imperialism and standard educational practice, see Naeem Inayatullah, *Pedagogy as Encounter: Beyond the Teaching Imperative* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 5.

[24] Leon Festinger, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," *Human Relations* 7, no. 2 (1954): 271–82; Ladd Wheeler, "A Brief History of Social Comparison Theory," in *Social Comparison: Contemporary Theory and Research*, ed. Jerry M. Suls and Thomas Ashby Wills (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 2–20.

[25] Sophia A. McClennen, "The Humanities, Human Rights, and the Comparative Imagination," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 9, no. 1 (2007): 2–19,

including my own field of American Studies, no longer pretends to be an objective space uncontaminated by power. Central to this reckoning was Edward Said's era-shaping book *Orientalism* (1979), which examined the intellectual history of European discourses that constructed "the East" as the comparative foil and inferior Other to "the West." Codification, ordering, and subduing went together in nineteenth-century European colonialism, as Said and others have shown.[26] Orientalist scholars and authors often pontificated openly on the supposed inferiority of the so-called East. Even when their assessments were more generous, the non-West's position as an object of Western scholarship implied subordination. Power relations predetermined the positions of the knowing subject and the knowable object and established the dominant categories by which countless communities in the global majority came to be known, judged, and planned upon. As Michael Hanchard put it, "hierarchy" was almost always "comparison's companion, usually lurking in the background, just a few steps or sentences behind."[27]

Bloom's taxonomy does not have enough dimensions to demonstrate how knowledge-making operates in the modern world system because it omits a view of power, positionality, and historical context. The pose of detached neutrality and objectivity that scholars often maintain obscures the hierarchical triangulation inherent in comparison. Given the complexly stratified world we live in, it matters who gets to compare and rate, and who and what become designated as the subjects of investigation, evaluation, and prescription. Benedict Anderson, who did comparison about as ethically as one could, suggested, in addition to going for unlikely comparisons that shock the mind out of preestablished schemata, one must "think about one's own circumstances, class position, gender, level and type of education, age, mother language, etc.," noting how one's positionality will influence questions, categories, and the outcome of comparison.[28]

While Anderson does not cite feminist standpoint theory in this discussion, the theory of situated knowledge developed by feminists of color, such as Patricia Hill Collins and Uma Narayan informs my critique of

https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1024; Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

26　Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 78.

27　Michael Hanchard, *The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 2.

28　Benedict Anderson, *A Life Beyond Boundaries: A Memoir* (New York: Verso, 2016), 131. Also consider Stoler's attention to "the breadth of comparison." Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties," 30.

comparativism.[29] I am also inspired by what Chandra Talpede Mohanty has termed "the *comparative feminist studies/feminist solidarity* model."[30] According to Mohanty, this type of scholarship traces the impact of world-shaping processes, avoids cultural relativism while examining local differences, and emphasizes "the interweaving of the histories" of different communities under asymmetrical relations of power.[31] Taking a transnational feminist approach means I emphasize "the directionality of power" in each chapter, reading up the power structure in order to examine the imbrications of the national, regional, and global without losing sight of agency.[32] It also means not obscuring my positionality. Therefore, my life's trajectory, growing up in Istanbul, Türkiye in the 1980s and 1990s, completing my education in the United States in the new century, specializing in transnational American Studies, doing multilingual, multi-sited research in Türkiye, Iran, and the United States, is inevitably a part of this story.

I was raised in a secularist family in an era when those around me worried about Türkiye turning into "another Iran" (Chapter 4). I knew that Iran's revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini had resided in Türkiye for a while (Chapter 3), and when a Turkish student praised him in comparison to modern Türkiye's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the secularist outrage was palpable.[33] No one measured up to Atatürk according to Turkish nationalist mythology, even if Reza Shah, the founder of Modern Iran and the father of Mohammad Reza Shah, may have been an imperfect copy (Chapter 1). I moved to the United States soon after 9/11 and found Iran and Türkiye mentioned in the comparative mode in relation to the ascendant categories "Islamic fundamentalism" and "moderate Islam" (Chapter 5). When I visited Iran for stints of research in 2017, my hosts told me semi-nostalgic tales of the late Pahlavi era,

[29] See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Uma Narayan, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist," in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Susan Bordo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 256–69; Uma Narayan, "Undoing the 'Package Picture' of Cultures," *Signs* 25, no. 4 (2000): 1083–86.

[30] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs* 28, no. 2 (2003): 499–535, 523, also published in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 221–51. Italics in original.

[31] Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited," 522.

[32] Ibid., 521; Perin Gürel, "Broken Solidarities: Retraining Transnational Feminist Critique on 'the Master's House,'" in *Religion and Broken Solidarities: Feminism, Race, and Transnationalism*, ed. Atalia Omer and Joshua Lupo (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), 17–44.

[33] "Humeyni'yi Seviyorum, Atatürk'ü Sevmiyorum," *T24*, June 11, 2008, https://t24.com.tr/haber/humeyniyi-seviyorum-ataturku-sevmiyorum, 261.

when Iran had supposedly surpassed Türkiye as a model of modernization (Chapter 2). These comparative visions asserting Iranian superiority existed alongside friendly questions about popular Turkish TV series and assertions of Turkish–Iranian similarity (Epilogue). Each of these narratives has a history at the intersection of knowledge production, international relations, and transcultural contact. This book is my attempt to untangle those threads, trace their history, and put them back together in order to understand and explain how comparativism has shaped Türkiye–Iran relations in triangulation with the United States from the Cold War to the War on Terror.

Same Difference: The Racial Mechanics of Comparing Iran and Türkiye

Comparing Iran and Türkiye is so commonplace that it appears almost prompted by reality. Yet, despite their appearance of inevitability and naturalness, all comparisons require certain preconditions and involve multiple rhetorical steps. Complex discursive genealogies forged through uneven power relations underlie Türkiye–Iran comparativism. This section details the minute operations involved in comparison and identifies the intellectual histories that have led to Türkiye and Iran coalescing into "common sense" comparands, not just in the United States, but also locally.

Comparison at its root necessitates the separation and the reduction of complex, intersecting, and sometimes overlapping peoples, lands, and histories into self-contained units: "Türkiye" and "Iran"; "Turks" and "Iranians." Underlying Iran and Türkiye's reified status as UN member states are histories of nation-state formation and recognition, with ancient lands and frontiers gaining new significance under a Western-designed political system of territorial order and sovereignty.[34] There was once a time when what scholars have dubbed "Turco-Persian culture" dominated West Asia, and a time of two rival empires, during which Turkic dynasties ruled Persia and Ottoman royals wrote Persian poetry. Even now, deep into the age of nation-states, the two countries have vast overlaps in literary and artistic heritage, folk customs, and

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[34] Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804–1946* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 9; Khodadad Rezakhani, "The Present in the Mind's Past: Imagining the Ancients in the Iranian Popularization of Pre-Islamic History," in *1001 Distortions: How (Not) to Narrate History of Science, Medicine, and Technology in Non-Western Cultures*, ed. Sonja Brentjes, Taner Edis, and Lutz Richter-Bernburg (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2016), 97–106.

everyday vocabulary. The movement of people, narratives, and objects across the Türkiye–Iran borderlands complicates the oft-cited trope that the 332-mile border constitutes the region's oldest, and supposedly most stable, nation-state boundary.[35] The severing of Iran and Türkiye into fixed comparands also casts transnational and intranational ethnic populations and religious minorities, such as Kurds, Alevis of Türkiye, Azeri Turks of Iran, and immigrants from each nation to the other, as "problems" or exceptions.

Another precondition of comparison is establishing similitude or "comparability." Rhetorical moves that signal comparability are necessary in a world where nothing is inherently comparable with anything else because everything is unique, yet everything is comparable with everything else on some external basis.[36] In everyday practice, comparisons can proceed through any number of criteria, including personal preference. Modern scholarship, however, demands explicit proof of comparability: The scholar must prove that two separate objects are similar enough to warrant comparison.[37]

Scholars comparing Türkiye and Iran enter several discursive arenas with preestablished lines of comparability, particularly if they wish to remain conversant with the Anglophone literature on the subject. As noted, Iran and Türkiye are comparable by virtue of having statehood and internationally recognized borders. The two countries also appear comparable due to the longstanding commonsense of Orientalism. While classical Orientalism set "the East" and "the West" apart in rather sharp terms, allowing only for contrast between the categories, it also constructed certain parts of Asia and Africa as inherently comparable. The idea of "the Muslim world" fuels this presupposition of similarity.[38] Since the early Cold War, the epistemological foundation of area studies – implicitly producing knowledge about a region even when the explicit focus is on a nation-state – has also boosted the comparability

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[35] Nail Elhan, "İran Devrimi'nin Türkiye'de Yansımaları: 'İrancılık' ve 'İrancı' İslamcılık," *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi* 3, no. 2 (2016): 31.

[36] Ralph Weber, "Comparative Philosophy and the Tertium: Comparing What with What, and in What Respect?" *Dao* 13, no. 2 (2014): 151–71, especially, 163–66.

[37] James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, "Comparative Historical Analysis: Achievements and Agendas," in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8; Jared Diamond and James Robinson, "Afterword: Using Comparative Methods in Studies of Human History," in *Natural Experiments of History*, ed. Jared Diamond and James Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 265.

[38] Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

of Iran and Türkiye.[39] Ultimately, comparability is what generates the common sense that one country can form a "model" for the other.

In addition to the comparands, the categories of comparison must be fixed as well. Here, too, history and power come into play. Normative scholarly conventions require scholars to define their categories of analysis ("modernization," "Islamism," "secularism," etc.) at the beginning of any written work. The abstract categories used for comparison in the humanities and social sciences are what sociologist Max Weber called "ideal types": Conceptual yardsticks for measuring reality.[40] Authors then employ signposting to link the categories of analysis to the foci of study throughout the text. Categories we use for comparing are transnationally disseminated, following intersecting lines of power across nationality, race, gender, and class. There is almost always some flexibility in how the scholarly categories and complex realities are matched; however, the yardstick (i.e., the ideal type) determines the parameters of comparison. As the book explains, in the case of Türkiye–Iran comparativism under US hegemony, US foreign policy dogmas have held outsized influence on the dominant categories of comparison, from "modernization" to "moderate Islam."

Of course, not all scholarship represents the fit between categories and objects of comparison as untroubled. As Rey Chow notes, a common scholarly move in postcolonial studies has been to demonstrate how and why the object of study (the subaltern, the non-Western, the marginal, etc.) evades modern Western categories of scholarly analysis.[41] Yet, almost all topics involving humans would cloud preestablished categories if one studies them long enough with discriminating lenses. Weber himself never claimed ideal types were real or corresponded perfectly to reality, only that they constitute a "schema into which it would be possible to fit reality."[42] The selection of categories has a history. So does the impulse to trouble them.

Comparisons hinge on identifying similarities and differences, but the common rhetorical use of comparison is to assign analytical power to difference. The principle of comparability suggests that if two objects

[39] Timothy Mitchell, "The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science," in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David L. Szanton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1–24; Harootunian, "Some Thoughts on Comparability," 30.

[40] Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. and trans. Edward A. Shils (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2011), 89–99.

[41] Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 72–78.

[42] Quoted in Christian Aspalter, "Back to the Origins: The Ideal-Type Methodology in Social Sciences as Developed by Max Weber," in *Ideal Types in Comparative Social Policy*, ed. Christian Aspalter (New York: Routledge, 2021), 95.

resemble each other in some "pertinent" respects, they are likely to resemble each other in additional respects as well.[43] Within comparative scholarship, the differences identified under presuppositions of similitude are marked as "telling": Either worthy of explanation or causally significant.[44] In choosing to compare "Türkiye" and "Iran," for example, a scholar might assume certain religious similarities (e.g., being Muslim-majority) that mean the sectarian differences (e.g., being Sunni- versus Shia-majority) will be significant. In fact, this is a common subfield in comparative scholarship focusing on Türkiye and Iran. In his review article on "Comparing Turkey and Iran," Agah Hazır labels it "Comparative Analyses of Cultures," and notes its ascendance after the Iranian revolution, as fears about the future of Turkish secularism increased.[45] The principle of comparability explains the regular outbursts of concern in mainstream Western media that Türkiye might slip from similitude toward sameness with Iran.[46] An emphasis on telling differences, in turn, allows those holding opposing views to counter such worries.

The mechanics of comparison predate any one scholar. Some mental operations involved occur barely above the surface of consciousness. Still, every step – demarcating the comparands, establishing comparability, fixing and/or nuancing the categories of analysis, and marking certain differences as significant – connects to the nexus of power/knowledge. These overlapping elements influence scholarship outcomes, with the comparer's motivation determining the strategic emphasis placed on difference/similarity. Through them, comparison reifies, recontextualizes, and makes useful sense of its subjects.

Comparison becomes particularly fraught when it involves living beings. As noted, historically, comparing groups of humans has meant setting up hierarchies along the intersecting and co-constituting structures of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, and so on.[47] The rest of

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[43] Richard M. Weaver, *A Rhetoric and Composition Handbook* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), 118, 142–43.

[44] Caroline W. Bynum, "Avoiding the Tyranny of Morphology; Or, Why Compare?," *History of Religions* 53, no. 4 (2014): 341–68, 368.

[45] Agah Hazır, "Comparing Turkey and Iran in Political Science and Historical Sociology: A Critical Review," *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 1, no. 2 (2015): 1–30. This line of comparison is the focus of Chapter 4.

[46] David Kushner, "Atatürk's Legacy: Westernism in Contemporary Turkey," in *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey*, ed. Jacob M. Landau (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1984), 240–41.

[47] By noting how these categories intersect and overlap, I am, of course, referring to the groundbreaking work on "intersectionality" by Kimberlé Crenshaw, specifically, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, no. 1 (1989): 139–67; and "Mapping the Margins:

this section delineates the connection between racialization and comparison by examining the interpretive history of Iran's "national epic," the *Shahnameh*. Racialized conceptions of "Persianness" and "Turkishness," informed by Western imperialism and local ethnonationalisms, have turned this classical verse narrative into an ur-text of Iran–Türkiye comparativism. The tropes established around this text – particularly that of the cultured Persian and the warlike Turk – have proven both potent and long lived.

Abu'l-Qâsem Ferdowsi Tusi composed the *Shahnameh* around AD 1010 in Tus, a province that, within his lifetime, passed from the rule of the Persianate Samanid Empire to the Perso-Turkic Ghaznavid Empire. The epic retells mythological stories and old legends about kings and heroes in a verse narrative that reaches from time immemorial to the seventh-century Arab conquest of Persia. While many of the stories had their origins in ancient texts, Ferdowsi also built on the literary precedent of the prominent Samanid poet Abu-Mansur Daqiqi.[48] In an age of multiethnic, multireligious empires, he gave these old myths and legends their most memorable shape. Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* did not gain fame during its author's lifetime; however, within a century, it came to be celebrated and reproduced across the Persian-speaking world and beyond.

The *Shahnameh* has found variant interpretations and uses since its appearance. Significantly for this book, some observers use it as evidence for an essential overlap between Turkishness and Iranianness, even as others view it as the ultimate confirmation of difference, separation, and conflict. According to dominant readings of the text, the origins of Turks, Iranians, and Arabs can be traced to the same patriarchal lineage, as the legendary king Fereydun divided his land between his sons. He gave the Western portions to Salm, "China and the land of the Turks" to Tur, and Persia to Iraj.[49] Despite the ambiguity inherent in Ferdowsi's retelling of this legend, in mainstream interpretations, Salm has come to represent Arabs, Tur, Turks, and Irij, Persians. Although the brothers share a father, throughout the legendary center of the *Shahnameh*, the main enemy of Iran comes from Turan. The Turanian king Afrasiab, the archnemesis of Iran, is a descendant of Tur. The Persian king Kavus describes him as both evil and formidable, connecting these qualities to his lineage:

Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1994): 1241–99.

[48] Mahmoud Omidsalar, *Iran's Epic and America's Empire: A Handbook for a Generation in Limbo* (Santa Monica, CA: Afshar, 2012), 119–24.

[49] Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin, 2016), 134.

> This Turk you're dealing with is sly and base,
> Malevolent, and of an evil race (*bad-nizhād*);
> He's powerful, imagining that soon
> He'll lift his head above the shining moon.[50]

It is important to note that "Turk" and "Iranian" clearly did not have the same meanings when Ferdowsi wrote these lines as they do now. His epic uses Turan and Turk interchangeably to refer to the Eastern and Northeastern neighbors of Iran, as Central Asian Turkic raids on Persian-speaking peoples become mixed up with the legendary wars between Iran and Turan. However, one can see how the text can lend itself easily to accusations of anti-Turkish bias.[51] In fact, the *Shahnameh* has not only gained the status of "identity papers" for most Iranians, but it has also become a popular reference point for Panturkists (or Turanists), who claim the ethnocentrism epitomized by Ferdowsi will always make Turkic-speakers second-class citizens in Iran.[52] (As I write this paragraph in September 2024, both Iran's current Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and the Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian, come from Turkic-speaking families, as do around a quarter of Iran's population.)

Because knowledge production does not happen in a vacuum, triangulation with Western scholars is an important part of the racialization of the *Shahnameh*. As Mahmoud Omidsalar has noted, in the nineteenth century, European Orientalists made a habit of comparing Ferdowsi to Homer, claiming the Greek poet was superior to the Persian one.[53] Omidsalar convincingly argues that this line of Eurocentric comparativism led to serious misreadings of the text and the context of its creation. The orality of Homer's much earlier historical context and the Western concept of "the Middle Ages," for example, led to scholars ignoring the importance of written literary precedents to Ferdowsi's work. Yet even as nineteenth-century Western scholars cast the *Shahnameh* as comparatively inferior to the *Iliad*, they nevertheless found pre-Islamic Persian culture to be comparatively superior to Arab and Turkish cultures, as well as to Muslim-majority Iran. In an era of European hegemony in

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[50] Ibid., 509–10. For the same verses in Persian, see Abu'l-Qasem Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh: The Book of Kings*, ed. Jalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, vol. 3 (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1992), 9.

[51] Ahmet Karadeniz, "Şehnâme'de Türk İmgesi," *Türk Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5, no. 2 (2020): 120–52.

[52] For "identity papers," see Azar Nafisi, Foreword to *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* by Abolqasem Ferdowsi, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin, 2016), x.

[53] Mahmoud Omidsalar, *Poetics and Politics of Iran's National Epic, the Shahnameh* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 11–33.

knowledge production, these comparisons influenced Iranians' own views of their "national epic." As Hamid Dabashi puts it in *Persophilia*, "The Europeans' discovery of the *Shahnameh*, which predated Matthew Arnold's poem and outlasted it, had an obvious impact on Iranians' reception of their own monumental epic, which in turn they began to appropriate for both monarchic and anticolonial nationalism – and thus Ferdowsi's epic became a contested site of Iranian nationalized identity."[54]

Influenced by European scholarship, the Pahlavi dynasty instrumentalized the epic to represent modern Iranian ethnonationalism. Royalist readings of the *Shahnameh* insisted that the book demonstrates, as Iran's last empress Farah Pahlavi put it, that "only the kings were legitimate rulers" of the country.[55] From the millennial celebrations of the epic under Reza Shah in 1934 to the 1971 lecture series organized under his son, the text was also used to code for the Persian "Aryan myth" of whiteness and greatness. The Aryan myth was built on a construction that equated philology with race and associated Persian's status as an Indo-European language (in comparison to a Semitic language like Arabic or a Turkic–Altaic language like Turkish) with whiteness.[56]

Anthropological theories about stages of civilization also bolstered racist comparativism, defining agriculturalist Iranians of the epic as "more civilized" than the nomadic Turks.[57] The equation of Turkic nomadism with lack of civilization is perhaps best epitomized by US ambassador Henry Morgenthau's claim in 1918 that Turks were "wild and marauding horsemen" who have "no art, no writing, no books, no poets" and thrived on plundering "people who were more civilized themselves."[58] Such comparisons, while not as strongly worded, also saturate Iranian scholarship around the *Shahnameh*.[59] A common chauvinist argument is that Persianate culture has remained superior to and has positively influenced Arab and Turkic cultures, even as Arabic- and Turkish-speaking

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[54] Hamid Dabashi, *Persophilia: Persian Culture on the Global Scene* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 148.

[55] Farah Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love* (New York: Miramax, 2004), 47.

[56] Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, "Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the 'Aryan' Discourse in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2011): 445–72; David Motadel, "Iran and the Aryan Myth," in *Perceptions of Iran: History, Myths and Nationalism from Medieval Persia to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Ali M. Ansari (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 119–46. The classification of the Turkish language remains contested; Altaic was the earlier scholarly consensus, and Turkic is the current one as of this writing.

[57] Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 87–88.

[58] Quoted in James F. Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo: Drugs, Ethnic Lobbies, and US Domestic Politics* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2020), 53.

[59] See, for example, Ḥusiyn Shahīdī Māzandarānī, *Marzhā-yi Īrān va Turān bar būnyād-i Shāhnāmih Firdawsī* (Tehran: Balkh, 1376/1997), 21.

communities dominated parts of Iran militarily and politically.[60] Of course, such claims tend to underplay the multilingual interplay of the area's inordinate cultures, ignoring the influence of Turkic languages on Persian, for example, but not vice versa. Based on this language-based, racialized construction, famous Iranian historians continue to claim that, even when Turkic dynasties ruled over Iran, they "naturally" (*tabʿan*) left the arenas of taste, literature, science, law, and education to Persian speakers.[61] This comparison of the cultured Persian with the warlike Turk has proven long lived in Western academia, as well.[62]

One should point out that not all Persian-language scholarship banks on these comparisons. For example, in a 2021 book, Sajjad Aydenlu rebuts Panturkist criticism against Ferdowsi, pointing to fabrications, spurious attributions, misinterpretations, and lines taken out of context.[63] Authors motivated by bad faith, he claims, highlight references to Afrasiab as "*bad- nizhād*" (of a bad race or lineage) without noting that *Shahnameh*'s protagonists use this insult against Iranian antagonists as well. In fact, Aydenlu argues that, within the text, *nizhād* references Afrasiab's mythological, inhuman roots, not his ethnicity.[64] He claims Ferdowsi demonstrates respect for Turanians and/or Turks throughout the *Shahnameh*, attributing them valuable qualities such as strength, wisdom, patriotism, and compassion, even within a context dominated by war.[65] According to Aydenlu, Turkish women especially have very important roles in the epic. Perso-centrist mythology claims Ferdowsi sought to preserve the Persian language in the context of Arab victories across West Asia.[66] Yet, Aydenlu demonstrates that he used Turkic vocabulary and even had some Iranian heroes speak Turkish.[67] Although exceptionally well fleshed out, Aydenlu's reading is not new. In the

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[60] Golnar Mehran, "The Presentation of the 'Self' and the 'Other' in Postrevolutionary Iranian School Textbooks," in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2002), 232–53, 247.

[61] Kāmrūz Khusravī Jāvid, *Ravābiṭ-i Farhangī-yi īrānīyān va turkān (Az dowrān-i bāstān tā saljūqīyān)* (Tehran: Hizār Kirmān, 1398/2020), 249.

[62] For one relatively recent example, see the racialized discussion on "Arabs, Turks, and Persians" between Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami produced by the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa, August 7, 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5yLnyQbODE.

[63] Sajjād Āydinlū, *Āzarbāyjān va shāhnāmih* (Tehrān: Sokhan, 1399/2021), 561.

[64] Sajjād Āydinlū, "Nishānihhā-yi sirisht-i asāṭīrī-yi afrāsīyāb dar Shāhnāmih," *Faṣlnāmi-yi Pazhūhishhāyi Adabī*, no. 2 (1382/2003): 7–36, 8.

[65] Āydinlū, *Āzarbāyjān va shāhnāmih*, 103–44.

[66] Omidsalar, *Iran's Epic and America's Empire*, 77–103. For "Perso-centrism," see Khodadad Rezakhani, "Pārsgarāyī va buḥrān-i huvīyat dar Īrān," *Farhang* (pāyīz 1382/Fall 2003): 15–22, available at https://shorturl.at/cYuUY.

[67] Āydinlū, *Āzarbāyjān va shāhnāmih*, 145–46.

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same era Reza Shah was promoting the epic for the purposes of Iranian ethnonationalism, Türkiye's leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk used the text to symbolize Turkish–Iranian brotherhood, as detailed in Chapter 1.

How can the *Shahnameh* contain so many contradictory meanings? In his book on the epic, Hamid Dabashi argues this multivalence is inherent in the complex and overlapping worlds constructed by the *Shahnameh*, its "inherently tragic disposition" and basis on "moral paradox."[68] Within the humanities, theories of deconstruction argue that semiotic lability and "différance" is inherent in the construction of all texts.[69] This would be especially true for an epic poem that merges mythology, legend, and history. Cognitive science, on the other hand, traces varying interpretations to the mind of the reader, citing "attribution bias," that is, the tendency of humans to emphasize data that supports their goals and preconceptions.[70] Unfortunately, the term "bias" implies there is a possibility for pure objectivity. However, between the text, context, and the interpreter, all scholarship comes down to questions of attribution: How much weight do we give to each bit of data? The hypothesis, formed in response to prevailing categories and methods of scholarship, influences the attribution of weight, not to mention what counts as "data." All this makes it possible to read Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* as a story of brotherhood or bloodshed, evidence of a shared culture, or as a symbol of pre-Islamic Persian-speaking peoples' comparative superiority to Turks and Arabs and to the later generation of Muslim Iranians who intermixed with them.

While the comparisons themselves seem to hinge on the categories of Iranianness and Turkishness, the history of European and Anglo-American domination in knowledge production means local *Shahnameh* scholarship is inevitably triangulated through other centers of power. In his book on the epic, Dabashi recounts the material history of the famous Shah Tahmasp *Shahnameh* manuscript to highlight how the meanings and uses of the text shifted in the era of Western supremacy. This superbly illustrated manuscript was crafted in the first capital of the Safavid Empire, Tabriz, sometime around the 1530s. The Safavid ruler Shah Ismail sent the opulent manuscript as a gift to the Ottoman emperor Sultan Selim II on the occasion of his ascendance to the throne in 1568, both as a mark of goodwill and a display of the shah's

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[68] Hamid Dabashi, *The Shahnameh: The Persian Epic as World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 174.

[69] Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3–27.

[70] Philip E. Tetlock and Ariel Levi, "Attribution Bias: On the Inconclusiveness of the Cognition-motivation Debate," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 18, no. 1 (1982): 68–88.

illustrious lineage. The Ottomans, in turn, recorded the gift-giving procession in a way that represented their own sultan's superior status.[71] Marking this battle for supremacy between the two empires, Tabriz, the city where the manuscript was born, switched hands between the Ottomans and the Safavids multiple times between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

After the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century, the Shah Tahmasp *Shahnameh* passed to the Rothschild family's private collection through unknown circumstances.[72] Prominent US businessman Arthur Houghton II then purchased the manuscript in the 1960s. During this period, Iranian art was becoming increasingly popular in international circles, fueled partly by Empress Farah Pahlavi's collection and promotion efforts (she is the subject of Chapter 2). The empress herself refused to buy the manuscript from Houghton II when he offered it to her at an exorbitant price.[73] Houghton II still made a tidy profit by dismantling the manuscript and selling it piece by piece to different bidders. Various parts of the manuscript entered private collections; Houghton II donated other segments to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, eventually earning a spot on the museum's board. Shah Tahmasp *Shahnameh*, a passive–aggressive gift from Safavid Iran to the Ottoman Empire, was thus eventually sacrificed at the altar of US capitalism.

The story epitomizes the profit principle underlying "racial capitalist imperialism": An American businessman dismembers a revered West Asian text for financial and social gain.[74] It also serves as a poignant metaphor. Dabashi interprets the manuscript's destiny as another example of the "manhandling" of the text by people espousing diverse ideologies.[75] Not all of those ideologies, of course, had the same power. Shah Tahmasp *Shahnameh*'s history maps onto a specific trajectory of imperialism, the rise of Western military, political, economic, and cultural influence over both Iran and Türkiye. From the Cold War to the War on Terror, strategic comparativism between Iran, Türkiye, and their diverse peoples similarly operated under the shadow of the US empire, influencing local perceptions and policies.

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[71] Burzine Waghmar, "An Annotated Micro-history and Bibliography of the Houghton Shahnama," in *Firdawsii Millennium Indicum: Proceedings of the Shahnama Millenary Seminar*, ed. Sunil Sharma and Burzine Waghmar (Mumbai, India: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 2016), 144–80, 145.

[72] Francesca Leoni, "The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp," *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, June 2008, www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shnm/hd_shnm.htm.

[73] Bob Colacello, "Interview with Farah Pahlavi," *Interview*, January 8, 2014, www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/farah-pahlavi.

[74] Shibusawa, "U.S. Empire and Racial Capitalist Modernity," 881.

[75] Dabashi, *Shahnameh*, 163.

Ideologies Personified: A Summary of the Chapters

This book offers an interdisciplinary, transnational cultural history of Türkiye–Iran comparisons from the Cold War to the War on Terror. The chapters are organized chronologically around the key ideologies impacting Iran–US–Türkiye relations and the leading political and cultural figures associated with them. I use Michael Hunt's definition of ideology, itself influenced by cultural anthropology and poststructuralist theory: "An interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality."[76] Ideologies, in other words, offer humans a way to interpret and respond to a chaotic, ever-changing world in a strategic and normative manner. Not surprisingly, comparison, with its multiple mechanics of abstraction, has been essential to the maintenance and revision of multiple ideological rubrics in modern foreign relations. Throughout the book, I define ideologies promulgated by individuals and institutions with the utmost economic, military, and political power as "dominant." I label ideologies that generate renewed discourse in the public sphere and occasion revised rubrics for comparativism as "ascending."

In order to reduce "a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms," ideological formations often employ personification alongside comparison. The shah's metaphor of marriage and concubinage, which forms the book's title, might have been striking, but his use of gender and sexuality to code for and contest relations of power is not unique.[77] Personification, often merging real-life and fictional or historical figures, lends emotional and persuasive force to comparativism. In this way, for example, Afrasiab of the *Shahnameh* could stand for "Turks" – a subject that would otherwise be difficult to pin down given the diversity and intermixing of the region's peoples.

As the book shows, in the increasingly image-based twentieth century, personification gained an important visual dimension. Türkiye–Iran comparativism came to center around real-world individuals believed to embody the dominant and ascendant ideologies of each era. US scholars and policymakers used comparison and personification to fit Iran and Türkiye into different model/copy/foil configurations based on US

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[76] Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), xii.

[77] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75.

foreign policy goals. While backed by the considerable military, political, economic, and cultural power of the US empire, these constructions were not immune to challenge by representatives of the target countries and non-state groups. Comparison, whether reinforcing US hegemony or challenging it, was always strategic.

Comparing the founders of modern Iran and Türkiye, Reza Shah (1878–1944) and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), constitutes the linchpin of contemporary Türkiye–Iran comparativism and is, therefore, the subject of my first chapter. Chapter 1, "Daddy Issues: Reza Shah, Atatürk, and Comparison as Personification," examines the historiography of the comparisons made between Reza Shah and Atatürk in scholarship published in the three main languages connected to the United States (English), Türkiye (Turkish), and Iran (Persian). At its center is Reza Shah's monthlong trip to Türkiye in 1934 and its outcomes in terms of clothing reform, most vividly, the banning of the veil (*kashf-i hijāb*) in Iran in 1936. English-language scholarship has largely constructed Atatürk as the model for modernizing leadership and Reza Shah as a failed copy. Such proof by personification and comparison, I demonstrate, assigns too much agency to the founding fathers, undermines transnational connections that escape bilateral comparison, and naturalizes the categories of comparison, erasing the role of the comparer. Power differentials in knowledge creation and dissemination also manifest in uneven citational practices.

Although comparativism focused on Atatürk and Reza Shah remains relevant to Türkiye–Iran–US relations to this day, conceptualizing Türkiye as "America's wife" and Iran as "America's concubine" only became possible during the early Cold War. Soon after World War II, the claim that Iran/Reza Shah had "failed" at proper modernization in comparison to Türkiye/Atatürk gained a boost when Türkiye became a multiparty democracy with the 1950 elections, and the populist, pro-US Democrat Party (DP) replaced the Atatürk-founded Republican People's Party (CHP).[78] Around the same time, the country transformed its neutralist foreign policy, aligning closely with the United States in response to Soviet designs on its territory. It became a beneficiary of the Truman Doctrine (1949), sent troops to the Korean War (1950–1953), and joined NATO (1952).

Yet, even as the United States welcomed the flourishing of democracy in Türkiye, it toppled Iran's own fledgling democracy with a coup

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[78] Nathan J. Citino, "The Ottoman Legacy in Cold War Modernization," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, no. 4 (2008): 579–97, 586.

organized alongside British secret intelligence in 1953.[79] During World War II, Iran was occupied by the USSR and Great Britain, which forced the abdication of Reza Shah in favor of his son Mohammad Reza Shah. After the withdrawal, Iran operated as a constitutional monarchy for a while, with an active parliament and boisterous party politics. In March 1951, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and his National Front party drew the ire of Britain by overseeing the nationalization of Iran's oil industry. Although US policymakers considered themselves anti-imperialists, President Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and his brother, CIA director Allan Dulles used the pretext of anti-Communism to work with Britain and remove Mossadegh from power.[80] As a result, Mohammad Reza Shah came to operate as the country's sole leader, taking the parliament under control, and aligning Iran closely with the United States.

Under the shah's leadership, Iran joined the Baghdad Pact alongside Britain, Iraq, Türkiye, and Pakistan as a Middle Eastern analog to NATO. The Pact was renamed the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) after a 1958 coup took Iraq out of the US orbit. Iran and Türkiye thus came to share the precarious position of being the only two Muslim-majority US allies in West Asia, both bordering the USSR. This all but guaranteed comparisons that set the pro-Western Türkiye and Iran, along with Pakistan in South Asia, against Arab-majority nations, which were either officially "neutral" in the Cold War or drifting to the Soviet side. The United States did forge alliances with Saudi Arabia and various Islamist groups in order to undermine the socialist model of Arab nationalism epitomized by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, but Türkiye, Iran, and Pakistan were fully integrated into its Cold War defense networks.

While the US Cold War security apparatus linked these countries, scholars of modernization theory compared and ranked them against each other.[81] By the 1960s, the triangulation between Türkiye, Iran, and the United States had led to a competition between Turkish and Iranian leaders regarding who was most deserving of the "Western" label and

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[79] Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations* (New York: New Press, 2013).

[80] Stephan Kinzer, *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 2013), 130; Anthony Lucey, "Iranian Ulama and the CIA: The Key Alliance Behind the 1953 Iranian Coup D'état," *History in the Making* 12, Article 8 (2019), https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol12/iss1/8; Abrahamian, *The Coup*; Ali Rahnema, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 127.

[81] Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 5.

US aid and support. The shah's complaint, "America treats Turkey as a wife, and Iran as a concubine," reflected this triangulation and contested its terms.

Chapter 2, "A Modern Empress: Modernization Theory and the Politics of Beauty," examines how Iran's last empress, Farah Diba Pahlavi, came to personify Iran's relative place in Pax Americana. In the mainstream Western press, diplomatic reports, and CIA analyses, the empress was linked to the shah's ambitious authoritarian development project, "the White Revolution," as both a symbol and agent of Iran's modernization. In the 1960s, Iran transitioned from being a client state to near-partner status in the Gulf for the United States, and Empress Farah Pahlavi, regularly compared to other world-famous women such as the United States's First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy in terms of style and beauty, came to personify Iran's growing international profile. However, as the political tides turned against the Pahlavi monarchy, regime opponents successfully disseminated an image of the empress as "a painted doll" – an extravagant contrast to and a distraction from the failures of the White Revolution. Mainstream Turkish newspapers and magazines largely echoed this reframing of the empress, mobilizing the gendered discourse of *gharbzadegi* (lit. west-struckness) or over-westernization. Once a model for emulation in modernization theory, Iran and Empress Farah thus became foils for the ascendant ideology of Third Worldism.

Chapter 3, "Aspirational Whiteness and Honorary Blackness: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Defiance" takes a closer look at the oppositional ideologies that damaged the empress's public image, this time centering the intersections of race and religion. Specifically, it examines Islamically worded critiques of Turkish and Iranian aspirations to whiteness and Westernness alongside Turkish and Iranian Islamists' connections with the influential Black American Muslim organization, the Nation of Islam.

In the 1960s and 1970s, transnational revisionism around one of Prophet Muhammad's renowned companions, Bilal ibn Rabah (580–640), also known as Hz. Bilal or Bilal al-Habashi, helped fuel the ideology of a defiant, muscular, non-white Islam opposing "the West." A once-enslaved Abyssinian, Hz. Bilal was already well known and respected among the world's Muslims as the first person to formulate and perform the call to prayer (*adhan*). Yet his image gained new political meanings during this period, merging with West Asian perceptions of the Black liberation struggle.

This chapter considers the influence of charismatic, masculine Black Muslim celebrities, who merged racial, cultural, and religious defiance in

broadening Iranian and Turkish perceptions of Islam's racial politics. My primary documents are dissident Persian and Turkish print sources and their (often overlapping) representations of Hz. Bilal, Malcolm X, and Muhammad Ali. Among other key events, I focus on Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's year of exile in Türkiye (1964–1965), which shaped the cleric's comparative critique of Iranian and Turkish modernizations, and the popular antiracist writings of Kurdish Islamist scholar Said Nursi (1878–1960). Dissident Iranian intellectuals such as Ali Shariati and activist clerics such as Khomeini and Morteza Motahhari symbolically revised Hz. Bilal's legacy to push against the official "Aryan myth" of Iranian whiteness and pre-Islamic Persian supremacy. Around the same time, Türkiye's rising Islamist magazine sector resurrected Ottoman-era polemics against racism, also placing renewed emphasis on Hz. Bilal. These reconstructions emerged in an international discursive atmosphere that increasingly politicized and racialized Islam as an oppositional force against US imperialism.

The transnational personification of confrontational religion, merging Hz. Bilal and Black Power, had significant foreign policy components. It paved the way for Turkish Islamist outreach to Black American Muslims during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus (1974) and subsequent US arms embargo (1975–1978). The outreach culminated in Muhammad Ali's 1976 visit to Türkiye, during which he met and prayed with deputy prime minister Necmettin Erbakan of the Islamist coalition party. During the Iranian hostage crisis (1979), the vision of antiracist Islam justified Ayatollah Khomeini's command that Black American hostages be freed alongside women hostages. Postrevolutionary Iran even became the first state to issue an honorary stamp in Malcolm X's name, visually merging Hz. Bilal and Malcolm X in the commemorative stamp designed for the 1984 "Universal Day of Struggle Against Race Discrimination."

With the Iranian revolution of 1978–1979, the triangulated politics between Türkiye, Iran, and the United States shifted once again. US policymakers responded to the deteriorating situation in Iran in the comparative mode and rushed to improve relations with Türkiye.[82] The United States sought to bolster the country's faltering economy, worrying it may be "susceptible to the Iranian sickness."[83] The White House pressured Congress to repeal the arms embargo and supported the 1980 military coup in Türkiye. The coup paralyzed the left and resulted in a

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[82] Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo*, 126.

[83] "Summary of Conclusions of a Policy Committee Meeting," December 28, 1978, *FRUS 1977–1980*, Vol. XXI: Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, ed. David Zierler, fn.1 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2014), 397.

junta rule advocating a new "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" to counter Iran-style revolutionary Islamism. The junta and the subsequent center-right government recemented the country's alignment with Reagan's United States. Iran was now a "foil" state and Türkiye, once again, a good ally and a model for the "developing" world.

Bilateral relations, however, complicated such triangulated comparisons: Just as the shah had opposed the arms embargo, Türkiye refused to comply with US sanctions against Iran. The Turkish regime, transitioning from military to civil rule, maintained its neutrality throughout the Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988) and even improved trade with Iran throughout the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, Iran's perceived support for Kurdish separatism, the Turkish state's willingness to shelter Iranian dissidents, and the two country's opposing positions on military alliances with the United States and Israel regularly strained Türkiye–Iran relations.

Before the Iranian revolution, the world's capitalist mass media had focused on Empress Farah Pahlavi, depicting her as a model for modern Middle Eastern womanhood. After the revolution, the anti-Iranian movie *Not Without My Daughter* (1991) and the figure of the veiled woman epitomized popular understandings of Iran in the United States and elsewhere. The film became popular in Türkiye even though its source memoir had the same co-writer as the anti-Turkish cult hit *Midnight Express* (1978).

Chapter 4, "Veiled Agents: Islamic Feminism, Similitude, and the Limits of Solidarity," explains how and why Turks came to embrace Hollywood's personification of Iran in the figure of the oppressed, veiled woman despite opposing *Midnight Express*, which personified Türkiye in vicious prison guards. It highlights the strategic aspects of comparativism, demonstrating how Turkish policymakers and opinion leaders mobilized negative US depictions of Iran for local political purposes. Türkiye's laicist leaders, generals, and media cartels emphasized similarity between Iranian and Turkish Islamism through a logic of imminent contagion. The manufactured panic around Türkiye potentially "becoming" Iran helped justify their specific brand of secularism and its signature ban on headscarves. It also foreclosed collaboration between devout Iranian and Turkish women's activists working to transform each state's oppressive gender policies. Examining the failed outreach from reformist Iranian women such as Faezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani and Zahra Rahnavard to Merve Kavakçı, the MP who was denied a place in the Turkish Parliament due to her headscarf, the chapter demonstrates the complex relationship between claims to similitude and the practice of solidarity.

As middle-level powers, Türkiye and Iran have the potential to check superpower goals for the region and work toward a new international consensus. Still, they operate under a global regime in which US discourses about terror, democracy, and human rights dominate. Nation-branding necessarily works transnationally and with attention to dominant international ideologies. Chapter 5, "America's Coy Lovers: Claiming Mysticism and Dialogue from the Cold War to the War on Terror," examines how different Iranian and Turkish governments have used Islamic mysticism for nation-branding and public diplomacy. While both countries had legitimate claims to the shared heritage of Islamic mysticism, their nation-branding around religion was transnationally influenced and strategically comparativist. Traditionalist thinkers aligned with the late Pahlavi court cast Kemalist "westernization" as an inauthentic model for development. After the Iranian revolution, Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen and his followers promoted Türkiye's Sufi-inspired "moderate Islam" as a model and foil to Iranian Shia "fundamentalism." At the turn of the century, the reformist Iranian president Mohammad Khatami advocated a renewed "dialogue of civilizations," promoting Iran as the model democratic Islamic state. The rising interest in Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (known as Mevlânâ or Rumi) – a Sufi scholar and poet who lived and died in a thirteenth-century Turco-Persianate sultanate – in the United States boosted attention to these claims.

By 2000, dialogue discourse had become dominant, as the United Nations declared 2001 "The Year of Dialogue among Civilizations." The terrorist attacks of 9/11, however, boosted rhetoric around a potential "Clash of Civilizations," as the Bush administration launched a seemingly permanent "War on Terror," which appeared to make the entire world into a battlefield between "Islam" and "the West." With the 2003 election of Türkiye's then prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, interreligious dialogue and moderate Islam discourse found new personification. In the first decade of the new century, both Khatami and Erdoğan projected a moderate, calm Islamic manliness defined by "tolerance" (*hoşgörü*) as opposed to fiery ethnonationalism in their international appearances. However, the same Bush-Cheney administration that actively promoted "the Turkish model" with its so-called Greater Middle East Project cast Iran as part of an "axis of evil." While the United States praised Rumi's final home (Türkiye), it invaded his birthplace (modern-day Afghanistan), and maligned the land most associated with his native tongue (Iran).

Taken together, the book's five chapters delineate how the transition from the Cold War to the War on Terror found Türkiye and Iran

compared under different ideological formations, from Modernization Theory to Third Worldism to Islamism to Moderate Islam, alternating the roles of model, copy, and foil in an era of US hegemony.

Finally, the book's epilogue, "The Forbidden Lovers – Beyond the Triangulation?," considers the contemporary moment. Inspired by the title of a Turkish TV series beloved by Iranians (*Aşk-ı Memnu*, The Forbidden Love), I ask whether America's "estranged wife" Türkiye and "ex-concubine" Iran may be reaching a new understanding after the so-called American century.[84] As with all previous chapters, this concluding section combines cultural analysis with a transnational feminist reading of political events. I juxtapose the complexities of bilateral media consumption with the secret deals made between powerful Turkish and Iranian figures to violate US sanctions against Iran. I end on a series of open-ended questions and musings. How does the regional reception of cultural products build upon and veer from the earlier triangulation of representations via the United States? How have the dynamics of comparativism transformed in the early twenty-first century? What possibilities and dangers lie in the shifting Iran–Türkiye–US relations?

★★★

As I hope this book convincingly demonstrates, there is much reason to suspect "proof by comparison." From the Cold War to the War on Terror, US-led comparativism has proliferated and imposed problematic "models" on the world. Because the evaluations produced make sense within the boundaries set up by the intellectual exercise, comparison gives its practitioner undue confidence in their ability to discern, order, and ultimately judge. Given all this, Gayatri Spivak has argued "not-comparing can shelter something affirmative."[85] In refusing to compare, we may put ourselves in novel and deeper relations to our area of study.

At the same time, there is no denying that some practices of comparison are inescapable, inevitable, and even illuminating. As Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman argue, "acts of comparing are also crucial for registering inequalities and for struggles against the unjust distribution of resources."[86] When comparison highlights, historicizes, and challenges power differentials instead of obscuring and naturalizing them, helps us rethink supposedly universal categories instead of reifying them, and identifies deep connections and not just surface-level

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[84] Edwards, *After the American Century*.
[85] Spivak, "Rethinking Comparativism," 611.
[86] Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, introduction to *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, 2.

parallels between subjects, it can be on the right track. I believe this is what Mohanty recommends when she argues for feminist solidarity and action based on "common differences."[87] Of course, such uses of comparison are also strategic, as opposed to natural and inevitable, but they are more likely to operate in the service of justice and liberation. The transnational history of Türkiye–Iran comparativism chronicled in this book is context and prelude.

[87] Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited," 503–04.