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### Posing for the Republic

*Making the modern Turkish citizen in vernacular photographs from the 1920s and 1930s*

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#### Publication date

2020

#### Document Version

Other version

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#### Citation for published version (APA):

Baykan Calafato, Ö. (2020). *Posing for the Republic: Making the modern Turkish citizen in vernacular photographs from the 1920s and 1930s*. [Thesis, externally prepared, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

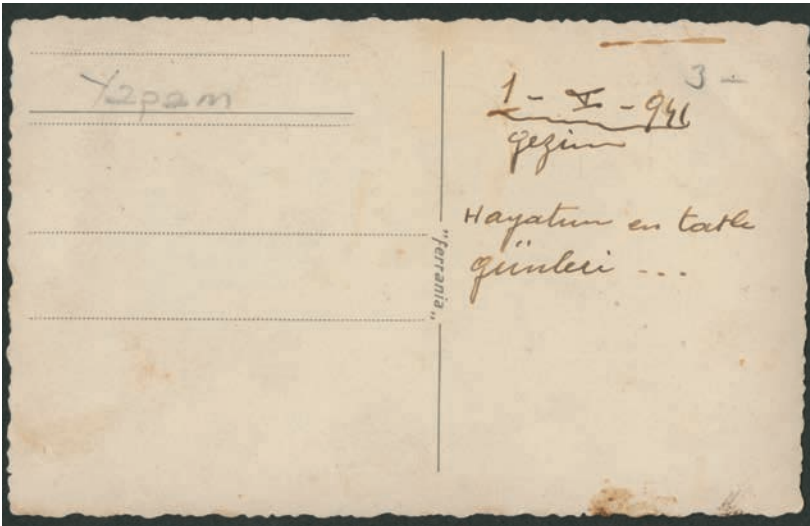
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## INTRODUCTION



**Figures 0.1 & 0.2** (recto & verso) A couple posing in a hall, 1 May 1941.  
8.5 x 13.3 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.

Everything started with this photograph. I found it in an antique shop opposite the historical Kızlarağası Han in central Izmir and had the immediate urge to purchase it from the shop owner, who, with a look of arrogance, nearly refused to sell it to me. He had bought it at an auction and wanted to make sure I was worthy of becoming its future owner. My fascination with the image stopped me from arguing any further. This was the

only item I bought from him that day; little did I know that this transaction would initiate a long journey of serendipitous discoveries and academic challenges.

I was attracted by the naïve, shy smile of the young man holding the hand of a young woman who looks slightly embarrassed; the delicate smile on the woman's face as she looks off camera; an audience consisting of four young ladies in the background; an empty hall decorated with colored glass; a sunny garden outside; and the gaze of the photographer, trying to center the two in such a way as to create the perfect composition. But what really drew me into this photograph was not what it revealed but rather the succinct handwritten note on the reverse that read: "The sweetest days of life." Printed as a Ferrania postcard, a commonly used print brand at the time, the photograph is dated 1 May 1941, with an additional note (Figure 0.2) saying "My trip."<sup>1</sup>

Decades after it was taken, I am now looking at this image, capturing the "sweetest" time in the life of this person. This image was not meant for me; I was certainly not given permission to see it. I am a well-intentioned intruder, an unvetted bystander. As I inspect the photograph, I catch myself making assumptions, about its protagonists, their lives, and the message that inscribes them. I assume that the "sweetest days" are those of the young man as he is right in the center, looking into the camera/at the photographer, carefully posing for the occasion, like a movie star. The young woman, on the other hand, is either too shy to look into the camera or fully aware of her staged artistic posture. This does not rule out, however, that she could be the one who scribbled these words, identifying the sweetest time of her life.

What is the relationship between this man and woman? There's a shiny spot on the young man's left ring finger, which could be a wedding ring. Are they a couple, perhaps newlyweds, on a trip? The photograph could have been taken outside Izmir or somewhere in the city. Looking at the tables outside, the setting is possibly a tea garden. The small stage on the right could indicate that there is occasionally live music. Is this a gazebo at one of the Ottoman kiosks? Or are they in a private club?

It is striking that the note refers to "life" rather than "our life," and to "my trip" rather than "our trip." Similarly, unlike many portraits of the era that are addressed to other family members, particularly in-laws, the note on this photograph is a stand-alone statement, almost a "note to self," a private memory. What defines a moment as the "sweetest time" of one's life? What makes one describe a photographed moment as such, and for whom? I ask myself who was supposed to see this image, and wonder about the path through space and time that brought it to an antique shop in Izmir. Three years after I purchased it, this image became the impetus for my dissertation. The motivations behind this were not very different from why I was drawn to the image in the first place: I chose the photograph both for its aesthetic appeal, but also for the unique historical moment that it evokes.

Dated from the year 1941, the photograph resonates with many of the tensions of the social and political context of the time. Three years after the death of Mustafa Kemal

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<sup>1</sup> In Turkish: "1 May 1941, gezim Hayatın en tatlı günleri..." The word on the left that reads as *Yaşam* (life) was added by the vendor, who categorized this image under "lifestyle" pictures. The "3" on the top left refers to a previous price of the photograph, 3 TRY (Turkish lira), which the current vendor had already increased to 20 TRY by the time I purchased it.

Atatürk, Turkey continued to be run by a one-party regime under the RPP, the Republican People's Party (CHP, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi). Under İsmet İnönü's presidency, Turkey, which remained neutral until the last stages of World War II, was under strong political and economic pressure, trying to safeguard Kemalist reforms from earlier decades while pushing against growing opposition in the country. Despite these tensions, Kemalist ideology continued to nevertheless permeate the political agenda, focusing on the promotion of Westernization, secularism, science and modern education.

From their fashionable suits and long pearl necklaces to their exquisite hairdos, the women in Figure 0.1 demonstrate the modern look the Kemalists strived for. The emancipation of women was deemed particularly important for the Kemalist revolution, which aimed to raise the nation above "the level of contemporary civilizations" (*muasır medeniyetler seviyesi*) following the popular motto of the early years of the Republic. For the regime, the emancipation of women meant their participation in the public sphere, which required "taking off the veil, establishing compensatory coeducation, granting women's suffrage, and the social mixing of men and women" (Göle 1996: 86).



**Figure 0.3** Atatürk dancing the tango with his adoptive daughter Nibile at her wedding in Ankara Palas, 27 February 1929, *Milliyet*, Istanbul University Libraries.

The ballroom dancing pose of the couple in Figure 0.1 reminded me, indeed, of the iconic photograph of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk dancing the tango with his adoptive daughter

Nebile (Bayyurt) at her wedding at Ankara Palas in 1929 (Figure 0.3).<sup>2</sup> In the early Republican era, ballroom dancing stood as a marker of modernity, civility and social progress. As mixed-gender socialization and entertainment became more common, participation in Republic balls (*Cumhuriyet Baloları*) and dance parties became a status symbol for the emerging middle classes (Mahir 2005; Yılmaz 2013).

What might have inspired the dancing pose in Figure 0.1? The photograph appears to have been taken in a city setting, providing a glimpse into the social life of a nascent Turkish urban middle class. The people in the photograph may only be emulating this encouraged European lifestyle without having the means to afford it, but even so, they are posing for a still image that complies with the ideals that the new Republic wanted to uphold. With its modern urban décor and its showcasing of novel modes and mores of social life, as well as shifting gender roles, this single image can be seen in many ways as a stage for the performance of modernity *and* happiness, the latter being a state that the elites of the Republic believed could only be achieved in a Westernized society in which the visibility of men and women was equally important.

The photograph discovered in the antique shop emblemizes the subject of this dissertation, which studies the self-representation of the developing Turkish urban middle classes through vernacular photography in the 1920s and 1930s. In particular, I examine the relationship between photography, nation-building and identity formation, focusing specifically on the evolution of photographic representations and their relation to the Turkish modernization project in the early Republican years. This study aims to scrutinize the role of middle-class representations in the making of the modern Turkish citizen, in order to demonstrate the classed and gendered nature of the emerging new and Republican Turkish identity. I intend to show how urban middle-class men and women used photography to construct a modern identity, and how this identity was negotiated in relation to the desired citizen image propagated by the Kemalist state. Recognizing *gender, body, space and language* as four focal points for the construction of the modern Turkish citizen, I look at how the relationship between photography, gender (Chapters One and Two), body (Chapters Three and Four), space (Chapter Five) and language (Chapter Six) contributed in important ways to the making of the new Turkish nation. By identifying the common genres, patterns and practices that emerged in vernacular portraiture and its circulation (Chapter Six), I furthermore attempt to draw attention to some of the key components that made up the dynamic photographic culture of those decades. Finally, throughout my chapters, I show how photographic practices evolved in

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<sup>2</sup> Consistency with regard to the use of Turkish names and surnames has proven to be challenging, given the 1934 surname law that required all citizens to adopt hereditary Turkish surnames. Until the surname law, people were often referred to with titles such as *Pasha* (for high-ranking government and military officials), *Hoca* (teacher), *Hanım* (madam), *Bey* (sir), or *Efendi* (sir). Following the surname law, citizens at times took surnames that were “invented” and proposed by the regime. Mustafa Kemal himself was given the surname “Atatürk” (Father of the Turks) in 1934. Today, prominent figures of the late Ottoman years such as author Halide Edib Adıvar are often referred to with their first name, sometimes also including their social title (i.e. Halide Edib or Halide Edib *Hanım*) in books and the press, in line with how they were widely known at the time. In this study I have followed this convention, typically adding the surnames in brackets. In the case of the photographs I study, if there is no surname in the signature, I use the first name as it appears on the print.

the context of wider global sociopolitical changes in the 1920s and 1930s in order to probe how these broader shifts also contributed to the shaping of modern Turkish identity.

In influential studies of Turkey's political, economic and social history, the early Republic period features prominently.<sup>3</sup> However, there is still a lack of research focusing on the relationship between photography, social memory and visual culture in this period. On the one hand, popular newspapers of the time such as *Cumhuriyet*, *Akşam*, *Son Posta* and *Milliyet*, which promoted the state's discourses on modernization and Westernization, give a rather distinct image of Turkish society, mostly confined to the ruling elites.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the Turkish cinema industry, known as *Yeşilçam*, would not start to flourish until the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>5</sup> In this context, vernacular photography, which remains a niche area of academic research in Turkey, provides a different, more quotidian and less institutional perspective on the modernization processes of the early Republic.

The wealth of vernacular material from those years available in antique markets and in collections offers a fascinating lens into the world of "ordinary" people in the young Turkish Republic. The "ordinariness" of these images, which were part of people's everyday lives, is what makes them a great resource for rethinking not only the history of Turkish modernity but also the history of photography in Turkey. Yet, for extensive periods of time, no great value was attributed to these photographs, so much so that they were thrown away and ended up circulating in the market for low prices. Indeed, it is only recently that they have started to evoke the interest of collectors and researchers. The timing of this study therefore corresponds also to a rising interest in vernacular photography, particularly in Turkey. Nevertheless, this interdisciplinary research, drawing on a range of fields, including photography theory, gender studies, cultural studies, visual anthropology and urban studies, constitutes one of the first attempts to present a cultural analysis of vernacular photography from the early Turkish Republic. It supplements existing scholarship by discussing Turkish vernacular portraiture through the notions of performativity and worldmaking, while also placing a strong emphasis on the materiality of the photographs themselves.

Almost a century after the foundation of the Republic, Turkish modernity and Kemalism remain widely debated subjects in politics, academic scholarship and media accounts. Different interpretations of Kemalism continue to cause friction among political

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the influential works that shaped the historiography of the early Republican era in the past few decades include: Ahmad 1993, 2003; Berkes 1998 [1964]; Bozdoğan and Kasaba 1997; Göçek 2011; İnalçık 1995; Karpat 2000; Kazancıgil and Özbudun 1981; Lewis 1968; Mardin 2006 [1962]; Üstel 2004; Yıldız 2001; and Zürcher 2004, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Given the low literacy rates, the circulation of newspapers was limited. According to the 1927 census, the population of Turkey was 13,648,270. In 1935, this figure increased to 16,158,018 (Accessed August 16, 2020. [tuik.gov.tr](http://tuik.gov.tr)). In comparison, in 1931, unofficial circulation numbers for some of the leading newspapers included: *Cumhuriyet*: 14,375, *Hakimiyeti Milliye* (later *Ulus*): 5,500, *Akşam*: 12,900, *Vakir*: 6,125 and *Milliyet*: 8,375. Newspapers critical of the government like *Son Posta* (circulation: 9,125) and *Yarın* (circulation: 6,000) were eventually forced to shut down (*Yarın*) or support the government (*Son Posta*) (Üstün 2008: 109).

<sup>5</sup> As Enis Dinç (2016) has shown in *Performing Modernity: Atatürk on Film (1919–1938)*, even though the Turkish cinema industry did not become a force until later, film was already used as an effective tool for the the visualization of Kemalist modernity by Atatürk and the Kemalists in the 1920s and 1930s, serving a specific political agenda.

parties and various segments of Turkish society. Moreover, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Republican era reforms have increasingly been discussed within the context of a renewed political and cultural interest in the Ottoman Empire, particularly since the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or the Justice and Development Party) under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took power in 2002. With the spread of digital platforms, there is now more visual material available than ever before, both relating to the Ottoman era and the early Republican one, scattered across social media platforms, recycled and recontextualized according to ideological biases and often without proper references or copyright information. My research speaks also in part to this proliferation, and to the continuing resonance of late Ottoman and early Republican imagery, offering the first systematic study of vernacular photography from the 1920s and 1930s. In doing so, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the construction of modern Turkish identity as a process that straddled official, commercial and everyday spheres. In addition, by including detailed lists of references in my footnotes, I intend to provide a substantial literature review on photography from the late Ottoman and early Republican periods.

At the same time, I aim to contribute not only to the study of the making of Turkish modernity specifically, but also to the history of vernacular photography more broadly, by investigating frequently photographed events, such as sports activities and circumcision ceremonies (Chapter Four), and distinct photographic representations pertinent to the Turkish context, such as the transition from fezes to European style hats (Chapter Two). Early Republican era vernacular photographs demonstrate a great diversity of representations that are absent from the official imagery of the regime disseminated through the press and in propaganda films. Looking at this diversity will contribute to reaching a broader understanding of the impact of ongoing political and social changes on the lives of the middle classes, and of how they saw and wanted to present themselves, privately and publicly.

The main set of photographs I analyze is sourced from the Turkey Collection, which I built for the Akkasah Center for Photography at the New York University in Abu Dhabi between 2014 and 2018.<sup>6</sup> The collection includes more than 17,000 images from the late Ottoman era and the modern Turkish Republic (from the 1910s to the 1990s). It is primarily composed of individual and group portraits taken by studio and itinerant photographers, as well as amateur snapshots taken in a wide range of social settings. After buying these photographs from second hand booksellers and antique dealers, I was also involved in cataloguing them. This study builds its argument around the detailed analysis of 64 photographs from the Akkasah collection. In the *Corpus Selection and Approach* section of this introduction, I will explain how I made the selection and reflect on my dual role as collector and researcher, addressing some of the major challenges of working with a self-assembled collection. The final section of this introduction explains the study's theoretical framework and how it is positioned in relation to existing scholarship.

First, however, it is necessary to establish a sociopolitical framework for the photographs produced in the 1920s and 1930s by discussing some of the key components of Kemalism, which emerged as the dominant ideology of the time and produced

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<sup>6</sup> This collection was renamed the Özge Calafato Collection in February 2020.

transformative political and social change. Accordingly, I begin by exploring how the modern Turkish identity was imagined in the newly established Kemalist nation state. Next, I discuss the role of the urban middle class in the formation of this new national identity. Finally, I examine the key dynamics of the emerging photographic culture in the late Ottoman era and the early Republic in order to better situate the role of photography in the construction of middle-class identity.

### **Identity and Nation-Building in the Early Republican Era**

The early Republican period has been defined and redefined in scholarly works, and is typically seen as starting in 1923, the year the Republic was established, and running through the 1930s until the end of the single-party period (1923–1945) or the end of RPP rule (1923–1950).<sup>7</sup> The period between 1923 and 1950 was marked by the Kemalist ideology and policies of the RPP until it lost in elections to the right-wing Democrat Party in 1950. Having abolished the Caliphate in 1924, the RPP introduced a series of reforms, including the Turkish civil code in 1926, the adoption of the Latin script in 1928 and full universal suffrage for women in 1934.

Serpil Sancar (2017) calls the era from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century the “early modernization” period, marked by constant tensions between the modern (*asrîlik*) and the national (*millîlik*), which would evolve into a period of conservative modernization in the 1940s and 1950s. Studying the formation of Turkish national identity in the Kemalist era, Ahmet Yıldız (1998) divides the period between 1919 and 1938 into three parts and shows that, in the first period (1919–1924), Turkish national identity predominantly showed a religious character. The second period (1924–1929) demonstrated a radical rupture from the religious definition with the adoption of Republicanism and was concerned with achieving unity in “language, culture and ideal” (Yıldız 1998: 377). In the third period (1929–1938), Kemalism adopted an “ethnicist” approach with racial motives, emphasizing the importance of unity in “language, culture and blood” (Yıldız 1998: 418).

These social and political developments under single party rule constitute the historical framework within which I study vernacular photography. Considering the looming political and economic anxiety on the eve of World War II, which altered the regime’s priorities with regard to the nation-building process, as well as the rapidly changing trends in photographic technologies and practices, I limit the focus of this research to the period from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s, with a few excursions to later periods, such as in my discussion of Figure 0.1 from 1941 and of photographs from the 1950s in Chapter Three, to better demonstrate some of the particularities of Turkish family photography.

In *Becoming Turkish*, which looks at how nationalist reforms were negotiated in the society of the early Republic, Hale Yılmaz (2013: 181) points out that for the nationalist leadership that established modern Turkey there was a strong desire to break with the

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<sup>7</sup> The RPP initially declared itself as the People’s Party on 9 September 1923. On 10 November 1924, it was renamed the Republican People’s Party.



Ottoman past and Ottoman identity in order to be able “to create a new secular nation and state with its own legitimating ideology, traditions, and institutions.” A “collective amnesia” (Anderson 1991) was necessary for the regime to be able to build a collective memory that would tie modern Turkish citizens to their new nation. The efforts to achieve such a collective amnesia were aided by the traumatic impact of the war, which provided a shared social and psychological context for citizens to be “more receptive to state-initiated changes than would otherwise have been the case” (Yılmaz 2013: 169).

Since the 1960s, however, revisionist scholars such as Erik-Jan Zürcher (1991, 1992, 2004, 2008, 2010), Feroz Ahmad (1993, 2003), Şükrü Hanioglu (1995) and Şerif Mardin (1991, 2000 [1962]) have increasingly emphasized the continuities between late Ottoman era reforms and the Kemalist revolution. In *The Ottoman Legacy of the Turkish Republic: An Attempt at a New Periodization*, Zürcher (1992) draws strong parallels between the Young Turks era (1908–1918) and the early history of “new” Turkey, which he defines as the period between 1918 and 1945. Similar to the Young Turks, he argues, the Kemalist elites were primarily concerned with “saving the state,” finding the solution in the modernization and secularization of society through the power of education. They believed in the active role of the state as a catalyst for modernization and progress (Zürcher 1992). In line with Zürcher’s approach, my study underlines the continuities between the Westernization and modernization reforms in the late Ottoman era and the policies of the Kemalist elites, rather than seeing the Turkish Republic as an absolute rupture from the Ottoman past.

Correspondingly, the character of the Kemalist state has become a major point of academic debate in the past few decades. Revisionist scholars have increasingly adopted the term “reform” over “revolution” with regard to the various sociopolitical and cultural changes implemented by the Kemalist regime. Zürcher (1992: 16), for instance, argues that there never was “a Kemalist revolution (at least not a social revolution), only an attempt by the ruling military/bureaucratic elite to reshape society from above, according to a limited nineteenth-century concept of modernization.” As Yılmaz (2013) points out, in Turkish the word *inkılâp* was used for both reform and (nonviolent) revolution by the Kemalists. The Kemalist leadership distinguished between the terms *ihtilâl*, used for the French and Russian Revolutions, and *inkılâp*, used for the Turkish experience (Zürcher 2001 in Yılmaz 2013: 5–6). The new Turkish word for revolution, *devrim*, on the other hand, referred to both the Turkish experience and social revolutions elsewhere, merging *ihtilâl* and *inkılâp* in one word. In recognition of the continuities between the Young Turk and Kemalist regimes, and in an effort to avoid terminological ambiguities, I predominantly use the term “reforms” in this study. Unlike Zürcher (1992), however, I do recognize the revolutionary aspect of Kemalism in the sense that it did construct a new Turkish nation-state with a mission to transform society as a whole after the abolition of the Sultanate and Caliphate.

Given my focus on photographic representations of the Turkish middle classes, understanding the Republic’s efforts to create a new “indigenous Turkish bourgeoisie” following the disappearance of the predominantly Christian bourgeoisie of the Ottoman Empire (Zürcher 1992: 251) and to eliminate the urban–rural divide is important for my study. As Akcan and Coşkun (2015: 9–11) explain, in the early years of the Republic, “the

statist policies in economic terms went hand in hand with the discourse of creating a classless society,” which was incorporated into the principle of “populism,” one of the fundamental pillars of Kemalism. Scholars like Şerif Mardin (2003), Kemal Karpaz (2010) and Nezih Neyzi (1973) have critiqued the discourse of classlessness, and discussed the role of the middle class in the making of the new Turkish nation, as the reforms predominantly affected the already modernized portion of society living in cities.

In the early Republican era, a large segment of the middle class consisted of government bureaucrats, including army officials and civil servants such as teachers, lawyers and doctors, as the state remained the principal employer. Along with newly educated young professionals, the cadres of the late Ottoman bureaucracy also became part of the new Republican middle class. The well-educated Westernized bureaucracy that formed the middle class cemented the close connection between the construction of modernity and that of social class and gender identity (Yılmaz 2013). In principle, both men and women were encouraged to participate in the public sector. However, in reality, only a small portion of professions, such as that of teacher or nurse, was deemed appropriate for women. As a result, men continued to dominate the Turkish bureaucracy throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

In the early twentieth century, the rural areas, where 80% of the population lived, primarily consisted of peasants and craftsmen, who were culturally conservative and religious, and largely resentful of the Young Turks’ secularist policies (Zürcher 1992). In order for the new regime to be successful, the RPP had to build a nation-wide middle-class network to spread its ideology and reforms in the countryside as well as in the cities. The regime’s efforts to respond to the socioeconomic discrepancies between urban and rural Turkey intensified in the 1940s with the establishment of Village Institutes (Köy Enstitüleri) across Anatolia. Young men and women from rural areas were trained as elementary school teachers in these boarding schools with the expectation that, upon graduating, they would return to their village and spread the concepts and discoveries of modern science, technology and progressive politics that they had been taught, in order to contribute to the social transformation of Turkey. The Institutes graduated over 25,000 people, including some 17,000 teachers, until they were shut down in 1954 due to pressure from the opposition, which labeled them “anti-Islamic” and “Communist” organizations (Dündar 2015).

Mardin (1984: 217 in Yıldız 1998: 463) argues that, upon adopting the nineteenth-century Orientalist worldview of Europe that attributed the “decline” of the Ottoman Empire to Islam, Kemalist secularism aimed to liberate the individual “from the ‘oppressive’ constraints of Islam-as-culture.” The Kemalist definition of Turkishness denied both ethnic and socioeconomic differences, and confined religious life “to the privacy of the individual consciousness” (Yıldız 1998: 463). As a result, ethno-secularism emerged as “the bedrock of Kemalist nationalism” (Yıldız 1998: 465). The “ethno-secular Turkish man” was defined as “the one who embraced the cause of the Republican ideal, devoted to Westernized Turkish culture, spoke Turkish and descended from Turkish

origin.”<sup>8</sup> Still, Yıldız (1998: 470) argues, “Kemalist elites envisaged an ethno-secular society melted in Turkishness, not a society based on ethnic stratification, at the top of which being Turks.” Despite the confinement of religious life to the private sphere, the secularization efforts primarily targeted the Muslim population, a policy crystallized in the reforms designed to unveil women. With this in mind, my study of vernacular photography adopts the ethno-secular definition of Turkishness, while recognizing the position of the Muslim population as the primary target of Kemalist secularization.

A key concern of this study lies also with how economic, technological, political and social developments in the early Republican Period informed the formation of a new vernacular photographic culture. Similar to my acknowledgment of the continuities between the Young Turks and Kemalists in the political realm, I examine the photographic culture of the early Republican era in relation to the emergent Ottoman photography scene in the final decades of the Empire. The early Republican era corresponds to a period when well-established studio practices, which had been largely reserved for the elites in the Ottoman Empire, rapidly spread among the middle classes. Concurrently, amateur photography was becoming popular among middle-class households, enabling a wider variety of representations of Turkishness outside the studio setting.

Photography arrived in the Ottoman Empire almost immediately after its invention in 1839 and was welcomed by the ruling elites, who were eager to showcase their Empire to Western audiences. Exploring the links between photography and modernity in the Ottoman Empire, in *Camera Ottomana* Eldem (2015: 113) notes that while “Western curiosity was most aroused by what were perceived as Orientalist or exotic elements in the Ottoman Empire,” from an Ottoman perspective, “what mattered most was to show to Western detractors that the empire was modernizing rapidly and inexorably.” This was the reason behind Sultan Abdülhamid’s commissioning of photographers such as Abdullah Frères to document the Empire. Photography in the Ottoman Empire soon became an indispensable part of everyday life, press and the state. From images used in newspapers to postcards sent out to family members, from studio portraits that were given to friends and acquaintances as souvenirs to pictures of employees and convicts, photography was rapidly integrated into the public and private sphere (Çelik and Eldem 2015).

Starting with non-Muslim photographers in commercial hubs like the Grand Rue de Pera in Istanbul and Frank Street in Izmir during the late Ottoman era, the profession became increasingly popular among Muslims, who opened studios across Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>9</sup> While mobile photographers managed to penetrate small towns and

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<sup>8</sup> See Yıldız (1998) for a detailed discussion of the complexities of defining Turkishness. As Yıldız (1998: 469) notes, “there has never been a one-to-one correspondence between Turkish citizenship and Turkish national identity.” A key argument considered all Anatolian peoples ethnically “Turk” at the cost of violating the Lausanne Treaty (1923), which guaranteed the rights of non-Muslims. The notion of “shared ancestry” was also used for the Turkification of non-Turkish Muslims (i.e. Arabs, Kurds and Circassians) and non-Muslim communities in ethno-secular terms. For non-Muslims, however, the acquisition of citizenship rights was linked to their embrace of Turkishness, deemed possible since religion was “excluded from the definition of Turkishness” (Yıldız 1998: 469).

<sup>9</sup> The dramatic decrease in the non-Muslim population in the early twentieth century meant that the population of the Turkish Republic was predominantly Muslim by the 1930s. Some of the key reasons for

villages, photography primarily remained reserved for the urban upper and middle classes until the late 1930s (Ak 2001). The obligation to include a photograph in all official documents such as identity cards, marriage certificates, passports and deeds of trust contributed to the mushrooming of new studios across cities. In the *Yarım* magazine dated 15 July 1937, journalist Niyazi Acun wrote that photography had already become a necessity for everyone (in Akçura 2020a). As studios multiplied and became more affordable, having one's photograph taken increasingly became an integral part of modern life.

The desire to enact and display modernity through photographs remained strong throughout the early Republican period as Turkey adopted the Young Turks' discourses on nationalism, secularism and positivism. Photography was utilized to endorse the RPP's Westernization reforms in the press, which perpetuated the image of a new republic that had successfully created a modern society with images of Atatürk, Prime Minister İsmet İnönü and other RPP leaders walking proudly in chic Western suits wearing fedora hats, or of unveiled women, including Atatürk's adopted daughters,<sup>10</sup> in stylish dresses standing next to men. The RPP, perceiving photography as a modern tool, promoted photography education in Community Centers (Halkevleri), which were launched across the country as part of a state sponsored "enlightenment" project in 1932 (Ervin 2006; Ak 2001).<sup>11</sup>

While the state relied on the power of photography to promote its political agenda, amateur photography progressively became a part of the everyday life of the urban elites. According to a survey by the prominent literary magazine *Servet-i Fünun*, there were already 150 amateur photographers in Istanbul in the 1890s (Çelik and Eldem 2015). The first photography association was founded in 1916 under the name "Ottoman Photographic Society" (Özends 2013). In 1896, *Servet-i Fünun* organized an amateur photography competition of which the first prize was a camera (Bölük 2014: 30). *Servet-i Fünun* also published photos of amateur photographers and answered questions regarding photography (Bölük 2014: 31). Bölük (2014: 31) writes that 82 people participated in a photo contest that the *Şehbal* magazine organized in 1909.

In a 1936 interview, Febüs Efendi (Bogos Tarkulyan, or Boghos Tarkoulıan), the famed owner of Photo Phébus (Foto Febüs), reminisced about the old days when studio photography was a lucrative business and "the photographer was a whimsical artist whose work was exquisite" (in Akçura 2020a). He noted that before the First Constitutional Era (1876–1878) there were only five studios in Istanbul, but "that number is now around 80." He also complained about the changing profile of his customers: "Nowadays my customers are primarily from the Turkish middle class. The rich do not come to the studio

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this demographic change include the mass killings of Armenians (1915), the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) and the Greek-Turkish population exchange (1923).

<sup>10</sup> The accounts regarding Atatürk's adopted daughters vary. His daughters include Sabiha (Gökçen), Ülki (Doğançay, later Adatepe), Ayşe Afet (İnan), Nebile (Bayyurt, later Nebile İrdelp), Zehra Aylın and Rukiye (Erkin). Some sources also list Afife and Fikriye. Atatürk also adopted a son, Mustafa (Demir), and had two children under his protection, Abdurrahim (Tuncak) and İhsan (Accessed August 16, 2020. <https://www.ktb.gov.tr/EN-103908/biography-of-ataturk.html>).

<sup>11</sup> Community Centers offered free courses in literature, drama, music, fine arts, speaking and writing, as well as in handicrafts and tailoring. By the time they were closed by the Democrat Party in 1951, there were 478 Community Centers across Turkey.

anymore: they either already have a camera, or, since they travel often, they have their pictures taken in Europe.” He added that the majority of his customers consisted of students and that the number of women customers was also increasing (in Akçura 2020a).



**Figure 0.4** An advertisement for Kodak claiming that a Kodak camera is the most desirable gift for Christmas and New Year’s Eve, 15 December 1929, *Cumhuriyet*. Istanbul University Libraries.



**Figure 0.5** A Kodak camera advertisement, published by the Sahibinin Sesi (His Master’s Voice) gramophone shop in Beyazıt, 29 July 1930, *Cumhuriyet*. Istanbul University Libraries.



**Figure 0.6** A Bioks toothpaste advertisement offering the chance to win a free Kodak camera with the purchase of a tube of the product, 17 August 1931, *Cumhuriyet*. Istanbul University Libraries.



**Figure 0.7** A Nori camera advertisement, 18 December 1934, *Cumhuriyet*. Istanbul University Libraries.



**Figure 0.8** A Zeiss Ikon camera advertisement, 27 June 1934, *Cumhuriyet*. Istanbul University Libraries.



**Figure 0.9** An advertisement for Exakta cameras, sold at Studio Foto İskender, Istanbul, 28 December 1937, *Cumhuriyet*. Istanbul University Libraries.

Febüs Efendi's interview sheds light on a period when portable consumer cameras were gaining popularity among middle-class families.<sup>12</sup> The increase in ads for brands such as Kodak, Nori, Zeiss Ikon and Exakta (Figures 0.4–0.9), published regularly in newspapers in the 1930s, suggests that cameras were becoming affordable as desirable consumer items for more and more urban households, similar to fridges, vacuum cleaners, gramophones, radios and automobiles. The camera ads also indicate that Western brands arrived in Istanbul as soon as they were released thanks to dealers based in Beyoğlu, Sirkeci and Beyazıt, which served as hubs for photography studios and photographic equipment. For instance, an advertisement in the *Cumhuriyet*<sup>13</sup> newspaper from 29 July 1930 invites people who are interested in buying a Kodak camera for 370 cents to come to the Sahibinin Sesi (His Master's Voice) gramophone store in Beyazıt, Istanbul (Figure 0.5), revealing the relatively reasonable prices for amateur cameras at the time.<sup>14</sup> The promotion of cameras as “valuable” (Figure 0.7), “astonishing” (Figure 0.8) and “desirable” (Figure 0.4) further indicates that cameras were seen as attractive consumer items suitable for gifting.

As was the case with the Village Institutes, the mission of Community Centers to ensure the success of Kemalist ideology and advance Turkey to “the level of a civilized country” resulted in the Centers' promotion of photography as an art form. In an effort to reinforce patriotism and national identity, young citizens were encouraged to document the country in an artistic way, which contributed to a fast acceptance of amateur photography in the 1930s.

Contests also helped increase the popularity of amateur photography among the middle classes. Figure 0.10 from 1931, for instance, announces a photography contest for amateurs organized by Kodak. The ad urges people to send their pictures in as soon as possible, asserting that “you will not lose anything if you submit a copy of every picture you have taken. On the contrary, you may win 23600 liras.” A few years later, Figure 0.11 shows the works of the winners of an amateur photography contest that the *Akşam*

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<sup>12</sup> The snapshot concept was largely introduced by Eastman Kodak through the Brownie box camera in 1900. In 1901 Kodak introduced the 120 medium film format, which remained very popular for both high-end and low-end cameras in the 1920s and 1930s, and was used by Brownie and folding cameras of various types and brands. These cameras were eventually replaced by the twin lens types, and later by the single lens reflex (SLR) cameras. Leica (Leitz camera) was the first company to develop a compact camera in 1913. The Leica I was launched in 1925 and became hugely popular. Contax (in 1932) and Kodak (in 1934) followed suit with their 35mm models although roll film remained the format of choice for mass-market cameras. This changed with the introduction of the Argus A in 1936 and the popular Argus C3 in 1939. A similar revolution in compact SLR cameras began in 1933 with the introduction of the Ihagee Exakta, which used 127 roll film. Kine Exakta followed three years later, becoming the first Western SLR to use 135 film (Peres 2007; Stroebel and Zakia 1993; Wade 1979).

<sup>13</sup> The oldest up-market Turkish daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* was founded in 1924 in Istanbul by a group of journalists with close links to Atatürk and the RPP, and subscribed to a staunchly secular discourse. In the 1920s, it primarily circulated in Istanbul, selling 7,000 copies in a city of one million inhabitants. It was also mailed to other cities by subscription. *Cumhuriyet* started to publish images and advertisements in 1930. The circulation figures, which had plunged with the change of the alphabet in 1928, increased again in the 1940s. The newspaper organized a yearly beauty contest from 1928. When its 1932 winner Keriman Halis was selected as Miss World in 1932, the paper's popularity increased substantially. *Cumhuriyet* supported the RPP until World War II, after which it switched to the DP (Democrat Party) until the mid-1950s (Pektaş 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Ankara Commodity Exchange statistics show that, in 1930, one egg would cost 2.3 cents, feta cheese 47.5 cents, pasta 24 cents and a kilo of sheep meat 50 cents (Taş 2003).

newspaper had been organizing on a regular basis, with a 20 Lira first prize. Similarly, in 1939, the Ankara Community Center organized its first amateur photography contest, receiving 400 submissions from 50 participants (Ervin 2006).



**Figure 0.10** A Kodak advertisement for a photography competition, urging people to submit their pictures as soon as possible, 31 July 1931, *Cumhuriyet*. Istanbul University Libraries.



**Figure 0.11** The winners of the photography contest organized by the *Akşam* newspaper, 1 April 1938, *Akşam*. Istanbul University Libraries.



Besides photography competitions, photographs were solicited on various other occasions in the Turkish press in the 1920s and 1930s. In the early 1930s, the publication of photographs of the *Cumhuriyet* beauty contest applicants was a major attraction, which went on for months, generating various letter exchanges between the newspaper, the readers and the contestants (see Chapter One). In another campaign from 1929, *Son Saat* asked newlyweds as well as couples with newborns to submit their family pictures to be published in the newspaper “for free.” As part of this campaign, people were able to call a dedicated photographer paid by the newspaper to have their wedding ceremonies photographed.

In 1930, *Son Posta* launched a new campaign, this time inviting people to submit their passport pictures for a “character analysis.” In a dedicated column, the newspaper’s “expert” evaluated a person’s character based on the submitted image. The photographs and their evaluations would be published together, unless the reader requested to remain anonymous. The newspaper warned its readers that the pose in the submitted photograph needed to be “as natural as possible” to ensure the accuracy of the analysis.

On 15 June 1939, Nurullah Berk, a prominent art critic, wrote in the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper that “the modern photographer is no longer satisfied with the dominance of the camera and wants to prove their worldview as well as their feelings and personality,” referring to the need to perceive photography as an art form rather than just a technological tool to be used by craftsmen for documentation purposes. For Berk, it was time for photographers to develop their unique style, demonstrate their point of view in the photographs they took and recognize themselves as artists. It is unclear how many people shared Berk’s ideas on photography at the time; nevertheless, the popularity of photography only continued to grow, with new studios popping up in big cities, affordable cameras entering the market and ever more photography contests and exhibitions.

As this section has shown, the 1920s and 1930s, the focus of my study, correspond to a period when photography became a crucial part of the Turkish modern middle-class lifestyle, in contrast to the late Ottoman era when access to photography had been largely reserved for the elites. By the 1930s, studio photography predominantly appealed to the urban middle classes, who simultaneously adopted amateur photography as a fun activity, changing the ways in which public life was enjoyed and documented. These developments ensured that an unprecedented number of vernacular photographs were produced in the 1920s and 1930s, of which a significant proportion survives, not just in private homes but also in a lively market that serves public and private collectors. In the next section, I will elaborate on how the collection I draw on in this study was put together, and on my own role in doing so.

## Corpus Selection and Approach

On several trips to Turkey between 2014 and 2018, I purchased over 17,000 photographs from antique stores and secondhand booksellers in Istanbul and Izmir. Similar to Egypt, Turkey has an expansive market for photographs. One can find a great number of studio portraits and family snapshots in second-hand booksellers and antique stores for reasonable prices. As part of the process of building the collection, I purchased a large number of photographs from each shop I visited. I tried to ensure that I would get as many as possible from the same set, to accurately mirror the range of genres available on the market. While the selected photographs were collected in only two cities, they demonstrate a significant geographical diversity, reflecting the large-scale internal migration Turkey has witnessed from the 1950s onwards, from rural areas to major cities like Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. My selection reflects the changing social and political scenery of the country in the early Republican era, and provides insight into the newly modern Turkish secular public life that was taking shape through a host of social practices. I develop my arguments on the basis of an analysis of a selection of 64 photographs from the collection, featuring individual and group portraits taken on a variety of occasions, such as national holidays, weddings and family outings.

When fine-tuning the selection, I first identified some common types of portraiture from the 1920s and 1930s, such as individual portraits (Chapters One, Two, Three, Four and Six), group portraits including family groups, friends, classmates or sports teams (Chapters One, Two, Three, Four & Five) and portraits of couples (Chapter Two and Three). I then identified some of the common occasions portrayed in vernacular photography of the time, such as school portraits including graduations (Chapters One, Two, Four and Six), soldier/military portraits (Chapters Two and Three), sports photographs (Chapter Four) and photographs of circumcision ceremonies and childbeds (Chapter Four). In parallel, I determined the three main types of photography existing at the time, namely studio photography, itinerant (*alaminüt*, from the French *à la minute*) photography and amateur snapshots, all of which include examples of the previously mentioned categories. The final selection is evenly distributed among the three types of photography, which are central to my discussion, as they together make clear the reach of vernacular photography across different parts of Turkey, public and private spaces and occasions, and different classes. Studio photography is discussed throughout the chapters, while *alaminüt* photography is specifically addressed in Chapter Five, and amateur photography in Chapters Three and Five.

Within the categories I determined to be important for a comprehensive discussion of Turkish vernacular photography in the 1920s and 1930s, it was each individual photograph's visual appeal, historical relevance and material qualities that determined whether it would be included in the final selection. I adopted a multilayered approach in the sense that the stories of the people or places in the photographs, if they were identifiable, informed my selection but were not the determining factor. Indeed, in most cases, the stories only unfolded as I continued my research *after* I had selected a particular photograph, as in the case study of the Şükrü Bey series of photographs inscribed to a banker of this name in Chapter Six. Another important point regards the geographical

distribution of the photographs: while I recognize the Kemalist regime's efforts to build an administrative network that eventually spread representations of desirable modern Turkish selves across the country, my selection features an overrepresentation of photographs taken in large cities like Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara, in line with the classed and urban-centered nature of vernacular photography at the time, and partly as a result of the fact that the locations of some of the images were only revealed after I selected a photograph based on its relevance for my study in other respects than geography.

As discussed in the previous section, the use of the Turkish language was a core element of the Kemalist definition of Turkishness. Consequently, the language of the inscriptions on the prints, namely Ottoman Turkish and modern Turkish, also informed my selection of photographs. I intentionally left out photographs with inscriptions in other languages, such as Greek, Armenian or Ladino, in order to better demarcate my analysis of the negotiation of Turkish identity between the state and its citizens.<sup>15</sup>

Working with a self-assembled collection rather than an already established collection creates a number of challenges for research. While collectors like Engin Özendes and Bahattin Öztuncay have extensively written about their personal collections, my experience differs in the sense that I built the collection that I examine here for a research-driven academic institution that has the mandate to make its archive publicly accessible. Thus, a primary challenge was to address the kinds of limitations that the collected material may pose given the way in which the collection was built.

I tried to build a collection that is representative both of what is presently available on the market, and of what was produced at the time, in order to be able to offer as comprehensive a range of materials as possible for future research. All the while, I was limited in my purchases to what I was able to find in second-hand booksellers and antique stores. Navigating the layers of curation that shape the dynamics of the market also proved to be challenging. There are different ways in which vendors obtain family photographs. One common way is when a person's or family's entire belongings are sold once they have passed away and photographs end up in an antique store along with discarded furniture and other paraphernalia. Some vendors accept a whole lot when it comes to photographs, particularly if they do not have to pay per item. Others act as photography collectors and are not only selective in terms of the material they accept but also actively seek out photographs that they find of interest or think will create value for their business. Indeed, in some cases, I was limited to what the vendors wanted to sell from their personal collection because they needed money or were "bored" of seeing the same material.

It is highly likely that a slice of genre-specific photographs, or ones deemed to have historical value, were no longer on the market when I built the collection because researchers or collectors had already purchased them. In the case that a vendor develops a liking for a particular genre or theme (e.g. people posing at dinner tables), they may

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<sup>15</sup> The languages of the inscriptions on the photographs in the collection include modern Turkish, Ottoman Turkish, Armenian, French, Greek, Ladino and Italian. While Armenian is the most common language among the material relating to Turkey's non-Muslim communities, there are hardly any photographs with Greek or Ladino text. Despite the alphabet change and the introduction of the modern Turkish script in November 1928, the use of the Ottoman script extends into the 1950s (see Chapter Six for a more detailed discussion of language politics of the time).

offer a large number of such images. Since the dealers and collectors have the potential to influence the circulation of material, making a certain genre more or less common on the open market, the sheer number of vernacular photographs available representing a certain type of portrait, activity or photographic material is not necessarily an indicator of its popularity at the time the photographs were taken.

These limitations were partially overcome by my ability to purchase a significant number of photographs. The resources provided by NYU allowed me to collect over 17,000 images, which include a wide range of representations that I know, also on the basis of available scholarship, to be reflective of the common photographic trends and practices of the time. My research, moreover, has shown that the patterns and genres I have identified across the Akkasah collection are in line with those present in other vernacular material I have looked at for a comparative analysis, including the collections of SALT Research and the Boğaziçi University Archives and Documentation Center, photographs sold by auction houses such as Pera Mezat, and on shopping websites such as *gittigidiyor.com*, as well as several family archives, including those of my own family and friends. Looking at other vernacular collections from the era was essential to gain a better understanding of the popularity of certain genres, themes, poses and props that may be underrepresented in the Akkasah collection, such as pictures of mothers posing in a childbed (Chapter Four) or toys used as studio props in children portraits (Chapter Three).

The study of a large body of material in a comparative approach helps to establish what was deemed worthy or appropriate with regard to documenting family lives and curating shared memories at the time, and thus to determine exceptions and absences in the images of the Akkasah collection. For instance, while festive occasions are ubiquitous in the Akkasah collection, there are hardly any photographs of deathbeds or funerals. Looked at in conjunction with other collections, this relative absence can be related to how specific religious norms with regard to burial and mourning shaped vernacular photography in Turkey. Also, the rarity of certain props across the Akkasah and other collections may provide clues about the overall socioeconomic structure of the country. For instance, pictures that feature cars are scarce, as I will show in Chapter Three, illustrating the limited penetration of cars as luxury items and the low purchasing power of Turkish society in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, the disappearance of certain poses, for instance the respectful *el pençe divan* pose of the Ottoman era, or props such as expensive furniture items from vernacular photographs, as I show in Chapter Three, offer insight into the social, cultural and economic transformations that Turkey went through in the 1920s and 1930s.

As has been outlined in this section, the methodology I used for the selection of my corpus was informed by both the visual and material properties of photographs. In the next section, I will explain how the theoretical framework I draw on in this study addresses these properties in order to examine the representations of Turkish modernity through vernacular photographs of the middle classes.

## Theoretical Framework

In *Each Wild Idea*, Geoffrey Batchen (2000: 58) defines vernacular photographs as “photography’s pareragon, the part of its history that has been pushed to the margins (or beyond them to oblivion) precisely in order to delimit what is and is not proper to this history’s enterprise.” For Batchen (2000: 59), vernacular photography is “the absent presence that determines its medium’s historical and physical identity; it is that thing that decides what proper photography is not.” Despite the emergent popularity of academic work on vernacular photography since the 2000s, theory concerning vernacular photography still remains a niche area for researchers (Sandbye 2014). This study aims to contribute to a shift in the understanding of vernacular photography from seeing it as an absent presence to treating it, rather, as a principal subject for academic research. I use the term vernacular photography in the sense of popular photography, in other words, photography of the everyday, produced in commercial studios, by itinerant photographers or in the home with hand-held consumer cameras.<sup>16</sup> By employing the term “vernacular” for the photographs I study, I aim to underline the popular nature of their production and to make a case for their specific significance for academic research.

In *The Image sans Orientalism*, Lucie Ryzova (2015a) identifies the three fundamental properties of vernacular photography as *indexicality*, *iconicity* and *performativity*. By tracing these three properties through my corpus of photographs, I will explore the various visual vocabularies that vernacular photographs present and how they interact with and negotiate the social and political conditions of the period in which they were taken.

Ryzova (2015a) describes indexicality as the perceived evidentiary function of photographs as truthful records of real events, or, as Edwards (2005: 323) puts it, “the sense of ‘it was there.’” Drawing on C.S. Peirce’s theory of the index as trace (in Price and Wells 2015), photography theorists like Batchen (2004), Barthes (1981) and Sontag (1977) have explored the photograph as a “physical trace” of its object as the referent, without which there can be no photograph. For Barthes (1981: 87), the photograph’s indexicality is created by the physical interaction between the sign (the photograph) and the referent (the object photographed) so that “every photograph is a certificate of presence” of “that-has-been.” However, Tagg (1993 [1988]: 3) warns that the indexical nature of the photograph, “the causative link between the pre-photographic referent and the sign,” is “highly complex, irreversible, and can guarantee nothing at the level of meaning.” Understanding the complexities of indexicality, I attempt to excavate the indexical properties of vernacular photographs as pointing to the fashions, family structures, traditions and daily habits of Turkish society of the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, I draw on the indexicality of the photographs to place them within the broader social and political context in which they were taken, while also unpacking the micro-histories and personal narratives around the photographs revealed in other visual and textual sources, and through oral histories.

The second aspect of vernacular photographs identified by Ryzova, iconicity, refers to the capacity of photographs to become symbolic, in other words, “to carry meanings wider

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the term “vernacular photography,” see Whalen 2009.

than those actually depicted, pointing not to the referent (the photographed) but to social values” (Ryzova 2015a: 164). In Peirce’s theory of signs, “iconic signs are held to work by resembling what they denote” (in Landau 2002: 10). For iconic photographs, “meaning transcends the specific circumstances of their making” as they become charged with new meanings according to particular ideologies or political attitudes (Price and Wells 2001: 34). Exploring the relationship between iconic photographs, public culture and liberal democracy, in *No Caption Needed*, Hariman and Lucaites (2007: 12) explain that photographs as icons achieve their effectiveness through their visual expressiveness and wide circulation. The iconic power of photographs is reinforced through “multiple appearances over the years, in many contexts and forms,” as I illustrate in my analysis of the symbolic power of photographs of Naşide Saffet, a Turkish beauty queen, in Chapter One, and my discussion of the studio portraits modeled on Hollywood in the “selfie” studio Foto Görçek in Chapter Three (Price and Wells 2001: 34).

Ryzova’s third aspect of vernacular photography, performativity, will be my primary focus in this research and points to how subjects are encouraged or urged to perform a certain self in front of the camera (Ryzova 2015a; Pinney 2008). To discuss the way performativity appears in my selected corpus, I primarily draw on Elizabeth Edwards’ notion of “theaters of the self” (2004), referring to photographs as a performative space through which people assert and negotiate their emerging positions as modern classed and gendered subjects. In this analogy, like theater, photography “confronts the viewer, opening a space for reflection, argument and the possibility of understanding” (Edwards 2001a: 19). As Edwards points out (2001a: 20):

Through the heightening nature of the medium and the theatricality within the photograph and its inscription, points of fracture become apparent. The incidental detail can give a compelling clarity, through which alternative histories might be articulated. The performance thus extends the possibilities of authorship of history through the interaction with precisely those points of fracture.

Examining the poses, postures and compositions in my corpus, I specify the kinds of portrayals that were performed (happily or not) by families and individuals, and promoted by photographers. This allows me to illuminate the role that family photographs, in their performative dimension, played in inventing and disseminating vernacular histories of Turkish modernity in and outside the studio. In addition, I study local and global cultural and political influences on these performative self-representations, from the new civil code to images of Western celebrities, as, for example, in my discussion of modern Turkish femininities in Chapter One. As Edwards (2001b: 18) argues, “photographs have a performativity, an affective tone, a relationship with the viewer, a phenomenology not of content as such, but as active social objects projecting and moving into other times and spaces.” Accordingly, I suggest that photographs may be seen as dynamically interacting with the viewer through their performativity, “as the past is projected actively into the present by the nature of the photograph itself and the act of looking at a photograph” (Edwards 2001b: 18).

In my study of photographic performances of a new modern Turkish identity that generated new normative femininities and masculinities, I also draw on Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity (2007 [1990]), which sees gender identity as constructed over time through repeated performances of social norms that, in retrospect, become defined as "natural." As Butler (2007 [1990]: 45) argues in *Gender Trouble*, "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being." Vernacular photography, I contend, is one of the social practices in which this repeated stylization of the female or male body is most deliberately present and also policed. I draw on Butler's theory of gender performativity to explore how gender is performed in photographic portraits from the early Turkish Republic within the framework of the strict gender-binary system that the Kemalist regime adhered to.

Importantly, this framework presented a significant departure from the equally rigid normative gender matrix espoused in the late Ottoman era. Looking at vernacular photography makes clear that the quick transition between these two normative models presented a challenge to the citizens of the early Republic, and underlines how certain citizens may not have been able or willing to perform in line with the new norms. Accordingly, I use the notion of gender performativity both to show the general eagerness with which the new gender norms were adopted, especially by the urban middle classes, and to examine the instability of gender performativity, which sometimes also makes it difficult to read gender in photographs of the time as either conforming to or resisting Kemalist norms, as I illustrate in Chapters One and Two by discussing a series of images that appear to point to gender fluidity in the early Turkish Republic.

Edwards (2004: 29), while not explicitly referring to Butler, makes a similar argument by linking the history of portraiture "to the parallel history of the concept of identity and, those aspects of identity which are deemed appropriate for portrayal at a given historical moment." The selves portrayed in photographs are "a form of projection of an ideal, which might be both personal and collective," while also "making visible the abstract norms, values and feelings that surround social life," such as happiness, sobriety, prosperity and congeniality (Edwards 2004: 30). Analyses of "the performances of idealized selves" in my corpus reveal how photographs mediate "the tension between the longed-for ideal and the ambivalence of lived experience" (Holland 1991: 4 in Edwards 2004: 30). The plurality of performances manifested in the photographs I look at speak to the kinds of desired representations in various types of portraiture. I examine how the performativity of an image negotiates self-expression, agency, memory, identity and nation-building. I also emphasize how the performative power of photography is not independent of the interventions of the photographer, the posing subject and the camera as an apparatus. I discuss the nature of such interventions and their contribution to redefining individual, family and national narratives, as well as their impact on the evolution of photographic practices.

As a counterpart to Butler's theory of gender performativity, which emphasizes the constrictions within which subjects shape their identities, I invoke Goodman's concept of "worldmaking" (1978), adopted by scholars such as Chalfen (1987), Ryzova (2015a) and Gürsel (2017) for their studies of photographic images. This concept offers a useful

framework for my understanding of vernacular photographs as also a potential site of empowerment for the portrayed subject. The notion of worldmaking refers to photography as a tool through which people make their worlds by enacting multiple selves (Ryzova 2015a: 217). Photographs, in this conception, serve as “visual statements” of constructed realities rather than as copies of reality (Worth 1976 in Chalfen 1987: 4–5). Using the notion of worldmaking in the context of early Republican era vernacular photographs, I examine the kinds of classed and gendered worlds that were made through these photographs by the urban middle classes and how these worlds spoke to the new world that the Kemalist regime was simultaneously constructing for its citizens. Notably, even though the concept of worldmaking has been integrated into the field vernacular photography (see Ryzova’s work on Egypt, for instance), an explicit theoretical discussion of the notion is often absent. In this study, I aim to offer such a theoretical discussion through the case of modern Turkey (see Chapter Three).

The materiality of photographs as performative social objects (Edwards 2005) is an integral part of my study. Edwards (2002: 68) explains that materiality takes two interrelated forms with which “photographs are inseparably enmeshed,” namely, “the plasticity of the image itself” (e.g. the print paper, the toning) and its “presentational forms” (e.g. cartes de visite, albums, mounts and frames). Combining these two forms, which each also include the marking of the physical traces of usage and time, “materiality translates the abstract and representational of ‘photography’ into ‘photographs’ which exist in time and space” (Edwards 2002: 67). The objecthood of photographs is closely linked to social biography and should be seen as part of “a continuing process of meaning, production, exchange and usage” (Edwards 2002: 68). Accordingly, I analyze how photographic prints, in their material dimensions, were produced and circulated (asking whom they might have been meant for and whom the inscriptions could have been addressed to) in order to better understand their significance in negotiating power relations in various social and familial networks. I also investigate how the materiality of photographs informs the way we interpret the photographic image and, hence, how this materiality contributes to the construction of meaning.

Returning to Figure 0.1, it is clear that both the young man and the young woman in this image perform a self as which they want to be remembered. The inscription on the back, moreover, suggests how a “sweet moment” could be defined in this particular setting in 1941: as being with a beloved one, on a trip, posing hand in hand, dancing in a space that is enjoyed together. What the photograph, at the levels of its indexicality, iconicity and performativity, and across the image and the inscription, reveals is a modern Turkish self that celebrates romance, love and happiness publicly. The image of the non-veiled secular woman is now an accepted part of the public sphere, yet also staged in such a way as to preserve the woman’s honor and virtue, a social expectation at the time, as is clear from her mid-height heels and the non-revealing skirt that prudently covers her knees. The photograph thus allows these two people to stage themselves as part of a particular desired reality, namely that of modern Turkey as imagined by the Kemalists.

For those who encounter this image decades later, its iconicity feeds off its indexical quality, off what it represents as a historical document. In this regard, what the image offers as a performative space tends to be seen as secondary: we often focus on *what*



people used to wear rather than on asking *why* they might have worn this particular dress for this particular picture. In focusing on the role of performativity, I aim to contribute to a multilayered reading of vernacular photographs, which goes beyond analyses based on indexicality, thus offering alternative ways in which to understand the functions and meanings of such photographs.

As Batchen (2000: 59) argues, “by reminding us of the differences within photography, vernaculars insist that there are many photographies, not just one, indicating a need for an equally variegated array of historical methods and rhetorics. In other words, vernacular photographies demand the invention of suitable vernacular histories.” Over the past few decades, an increasing number of scholars have contributed to the rethinking of visual histories in such a way as to accommodate a plethora of local vernacular practices, particularly outside the West.<sup>17</sup> In the wake of the pivotal works exploring the materiality of photographs by Sontag (1977), Barthes (1981), Berger (1992, 2008, 2013), Edwards (1992, 1999, 2001a, 2003, 2012), Batchen (1997, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2009a, b) and Pinney (1997, 2003b, 2005, 2008), scholars have increasingly written about the objecthood and circulation of vernacular photographs.<sup>18</sup> In addition, there has been a surge in studies of the functions and meanings of family photographs.<sup>19</sup> More broadly, vernacular photography has been discussed in the context of photographic archives, building upon earlier works by Derrida (1996, 2010) and Sekula (1986a, b),<sup>20</sup> and in relation to global cultural economies and heritage.<sup>21</sup>

While an expansive vernacular photographic culture has thrived in Turkey over the past century, scholarly research has typically focused on prominent photographers who worked in the late Ottoman era. This group includes Western photographers like Antonio Beato, Félix Bonfils, Francis Frith, James Robertson and Guillaume Berggren, who opened photography studios in Istanbul and sometimes settled in Ottoman lands; as well as Ottoman photographers that made a name for themselves with studios in metropolises like Istanbul, Aleppo, Damascus, Beirut, Cairo and Jerusalem, including Abdullah Frères, Basile Kargapoulo, Karakaş Brothers, Gülmez Brothers, Atelier Phébus/Phebüs (run by Bogos Tarkulyan, or Febüs Efendi), Sébah & Joaillier, Nicholas Andriomenos and

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<sup>17</sup> Among the most notable works discussing local vernacular practices in Asia, Africa and the Americas are: Behrend 2013; Buckley 2006; Coronado 2018; Edwards and Bhaumik 2008; Eldem 2018; Gartlan and Wue 2017; Hayes and Minkley 2019; Mahadevan 2013; Morris 2009; Nordström 1991; Parkinson Zamora and Watriss 1998; Pinney and Peterson 2003; Raby and Chauvin 2011; Scheiwiller and Ritter 2018; Strassler 2010; Vokes 2012; Vokes and Newbury 2018; and Wright 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Some important works exploring the materiality of photographs are: Edwards and Hart 2004; Ersoy 2016; Hannoosh 2016; Miller 1998; Poole 1997; and Sassoon 2004.

<sup>19</sup> For some of the most compelling discussions on family photographs, see Alesich 2007; Chambers 2003; Coe and Gates 2012; di Bello 2008, 2007, 2012; Hirsch 1981; Hirsch 1997, 1999; Holland 1991, 2015; Holland and Spence 1991; Hudgins 2010; Jacobs 1981; Kuhn 2002, 1991; Kuhn and McAllister 2006; Langford 2001; Larsen 2005; Linkman and Warhurst 1982; Pink 2011; Rose 2000, 2010, 2003, 2004, 2005; Ryzova 2015a, b; Shawn 1998; Slater 1995; Spence 1986, 1988; Stokes 1992; Walkerdine 1991; and Watney 1991.

<sup>20</sup> See Alphen 2015; Azoulay 2010, 2015, 2017; Camp 2012; Caraffa and Serena 2014; Merewether 2006; Morton and Newbury 2015; Ryzova 2014b, c, 2015c; and Schwartz and Cook 2002.

<sup>21</sup> For pertinent discussions of the relationship between photography, global cultural economies and heritage, see Frosh 2003; Ryzova 2012, 2015c, d; and Truyen and Waelde 2016.

Apollon (Aşıl Samancı).<sup>22</sup> Many scholars have explored the dynamics of Ottoman photography, particularly the relationship between photography, Orientalism and the Empire, producing studies of the photographed holy landscapes of the Levant, studio-staged local “types,” as well as cartes postales that catered to the demands of Europeans fascinated by the “Orient” and tourists looking for souvenirs to take home after their travels in the region.<sup>23</sup> In this context, scholarship on Iran stands out with a particularly large number of works, partly due to the attention that Qajar era photographs made under the rule of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1848–1896) have garnered.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, scholarship on vernacular photography in modern Turkey, particularly from the early Republican era, remains scarce. Studies that deal with studio portraits and amateur snapshots are limited, and among the existing texts, which include Seyit Ali Ak’s seminal book *Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Fotoğrafı* (2001) and Gülderen Bölük’s *Fotoğrafın Serüveni* (2014), works focusing on photography as a performative space and on photography’s interaction with the wider context of the time are particularly rare.<sup>25</sup> This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the various ways in which local photographic practices were developed in modern Turkey. To do this, I will draw on work by Eldem (2015, 2018), Ersoy (2016), Gürsel (2016, 2018), Ryzova (2012, 2014a, b, c, 2015a, b, c, d) and Sheehi (2007, 2015, 2016), who have all written about photographic practices in the Eastern Mediterranean.

This research is also highly relevant because photography archives and collections in Turkey tend not to fully acknowledge the significance of the vernacular. While there are several fascinating personal and state collections of photography in Turkey, such as the Ömer Koç Collection and collections at the Istanbul University Central Library, the Istanbul Research Institute (İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü), the Atatürk Library (İBB Atatürk Kitaplığı), the Koç University Suna & İnan Kırac Research Center for Mediterranean Civilizations (AKMED) and the Yıldız Palace Archive, these do not include many vernacular photographs.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, SALT Research and the Archives and Documentation Center at Boğaziçi University, and collectors such as Cengiz Kahraman (2015, 2017, 2019), Gülderen Bölük (2014) and Gökhan Akçura (2001, 2004,

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<sup>22</sup> There are strikingly fewer publications on the studios that followed the first generation of late Ottoman photographers. These studios, which opened in the first two decades of the twentieth century, include Resne, Kanzler, Weinberg, Ferit İbrahim, Turan Fotoğrafhanesi, Türk Hanımlar Fotoğrafhanesi and Foto Süreyya (Koçu 1971: 5824–25; Akçura 2020a).

<sup>23</sup> See Aker 2002; Allen 1984; Alloula 1986; Atasoy 2007; Atay 1997; Beaulieu and Roberts 2002; Behdad 2001; Behdad 2016, 2017; Behdad and Gartlan 2013; Çelik and Eldem 2015; Çizgen 1987, 1989; Erdoğan 1999, 2002; Ersoy 2012; Ertem 2011; Gavin 1982; Golia 2010; Graham-Brown 1988; Henisch and Henisch 1984; Işın 1995; Jacobson 2007; Khatib 2003; Khatib and Searight 2013; Köşlü and Köşlü 2018; Micklewright 2000, 2003, 2011; Nassar 1997, 2003, 2006; Özendes 1999, 2004, 2006, 2013; Öztuncay 1992, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2011; Perez 1988; Pinguet 2018; Roberts 2007; Shaw 2003, 2009, 2018; Tekinalp 2010; and Woodward 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Notable works on Iranian photography include Brusius 2015; Damandan 2004; Nameghi, Bonetti and Prandi 2013; Nameghi and Pérez González 2013; Pérez González 2012; Scheiwiller 2013, 2016; Sheikh 2013; and Tahmasbpour 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Other works that focus on the Republican era vernacular photography include Aytemiz 2013; Bölük 2009; Evren 1999; Ulu 2013; and Şen 2002a, b.

<sup>26</sup> Ironically, shopping and auction sites that sell old photographs, like *gittigidiyor.com*, *nadirkitap.com* and *fotokart.shop*, offer more material and metadata on vernacular photographs than a majority of the photographic archives in Turkey.

2006), boast a substantial vernacular photography collection and have produced some books and articles related to vernacular photographs.

Along with scholarly works, projects revealing the alternative narratives presented by various photographic vernacularities outside the West have risen in prominence in the past few decades. These projects include Susan Meiselas's *Kurdistan* (1997); Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives; Houshamadyan on Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire (Minassian 2014); the family archives published by the Levantine Heritage Foundation; the Nepal Picture Library in Kathmandu; Anusha Yadav's *Indian Memory Project*; *A Lebanese Archive: from the Collection of Diab Alkarssifi* (Dabrowska 2015); the *Kaddu Wasswa Archive* from Uganda (2010); and *Lest We Forget* (2015) on Emirati family photographs.

Furthermore, contemporary artists from the Middle East have shown a great deal of interest in everyday photography and local studio practices, discussing a myriad of issues related to the use of archives. In Lebanon, Akram Zaatari, co-founder of the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut, has been a pioneer in his work with local studio archives such as *Van Leo* in Cairo (1999) and Hashem el Madani's *Studio Shehrazade* in Saida (Zaatari and Feuvre 2005). This work was presented in various exhibitions, including *Van Leo* (2000), *Mapping Sitting on Portraiture and Photography* (Bassil, Maasri and Zaatari 2002), *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices* (2004) and, more recently, *Akram Zaatari: Against Photography: An Annotated History of the Arab Image Foundation* (2017; 2019–2020). The Arab Image Foundation itself has hosted a number of exhibitions of Arab vernacular photography since the late 1990s, including *Albums Marocains 1900–1960*, curated by Yto Barrada (1999), and *Arts et couleurs*, curated by Lara Baladi (2004).

In Turkey, Tayfun Serttaş's *Foto Galatasaray* project (2011) brought to light the complete professional archive of Armenian woman photographer Maryam Şahinyan (1911–1996), who worked at her studio in Galatasaray (Beyoğlu, Istanbul) from 1935 until 1985. The project consisted of the categorization, digitization and digital restoration of over 200,000 images from Şahinyan's archive with the help of the SALT Research team in Istanbul. Serttaş's previous project, *Stüdyo Osep* (2009), also dealt with self-representation through the archive of the late Osep Minasoğlu, who worked as a studio and set photographer for over 60 years. The books published based on these studio collections offer a wealth of material for research, yet their theoretical engagement with the photographs remains limited. In this study, I aim to offer a broader (covering a range of photographic practices and photographic genres) and more theoretically informed account of vernacular photography's role in building the new Turkish nation.

## Chapter Outline

The dissertation is divided into four parts, exploring the relationship between photography and gender (Chapter One and Two), photography and the body (Chapter Three and Four), photography and space (Chapter Five), and photography, materiality and language (Chapter Six). As I have argued above, visual representation emerged as a central element of the Kemalist nation-building process: accordingly, the parts of this study correspond to the key areas the Kemalists tackled when building a new visual vocabulary for the Turkish nation.

For the Republican elites, the representation of gender, particularly the visibility of women, stood at the heart of the Kemalist revolution, which they believed would put Turkey on the global political map as an advanced Westernized nation. Part I of this study explores the formation of modern gender identity, focusing on Turkish femininities in Chapter One and Turkish masculinities in Chapter Two. I compare vernacular photographs from the final years of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic to demonstrate how the desired images for women and men evolved following the secularist reforms by the Kemalist regime. More specifically, I discuss the political meanings of visual markers such as the veil (Chapter One), the mustache (Chapter Two) and the hat (Chapter Two) in the construction of modern gender identities. Chapters One and Two primarily draw on Judith Butler's (2007 [1990]) theory of gender performativity to dissect some of the key components shaping gender normativities in the early Republican era, and to understand how these normativities were reproduced and negotiated in photographs. I explore the performative character of gender representations in photography and photography's performative possibilities "for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler 2007 [1990]: 192–93).

Chapter One examines how urban middle-class women negotiated modern femininities and the Republican ideal of the new Turkish woman, embodied in the notion of the Republican Woman (*Cumhuriyet Kadını*), through photographic portraits taken in and outside studio settings. It highlights how these women adopted photography as a way to perform their classed and gendered identity as modern secular citizens in the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. By analyzing photographic self-representations of women in the private and public sphere, the chapter highlights the cultural and social disruptions, as well as the continuities between the late Ottoman era and the Kemalist regime when it came to the visibility of women.

Chapter Two, in turn, looks at some of the key components of the performance of normative masculinities in vernacular photographic portraits of modern urban middle-class Turkish men. It investigates how men in family photographs performed their desired selves as modern, secular and loyal citizens, soldiers, husbands and/or fathers, negotiating their male subjectivities within the restrictions of the imposed hegemonic masculinities and state feminism. In this chapter, I specifically address questions of conformity and subversion with regard to modern heteronormativities as envisioned by the Turkish regime.

While Part I discusses the specific visual markers that shaped gender normativities,

such as the dress code, Part II looks at the role of the pose, posture and props (Chapter Three), and of distinct genres of vernacular photography (Chapter Four) in the making of the new bodies deemed necessary for the creation of a strong and healthy nation. As Merleau-Ponty (1962 in Butler 1988: 520) argues, the body is not a “natural species,” but rather “an historical idea,” gaining its meaning “through a concrete and historically mediated expression in the world.” Part II accordingly investigates how the modern Turkish body as “a construction that constitutes the domain of gendered subjects” (Butler 2007 [1990]: 12) came into being and was reproduced through photographic representations of citizens engaging in a range of activities, from casual outings (Chapter Three) to the tightly choreographed sports performances of students on national holidays (Chapter Four). In addition, this Part looks at how negotiations between modernity and tradition shaped the middle-class body image for women and men. Studying where such negotiations appear in photographs helps to understand the making of new public and private spheres in a modernizing society.

Chapter Three specifically focuses on the significance of pose, posture and props for the making of new Turkish bodies. It explores how these three attributes contributed to the construction of modern selves by middle-class women and men in vernacular photography. Investigating issues of intimacy and agency, the chapter also studies how people explored the performative potential of photography as playfulness was gradually introduced in portraiture in the 1920s and 1930s. This chapter includes a detailed discussion of Elizabeth Edwards’ notion of the “theater of the self” (2004) and Nelson Goodman’s “worldmaking” to illuminate how the Turkish middle classes used photographic portraiture as a performative space in which to make worlds, which largely (but not always, and not necessarily flawlessly) replicated the new Republican world created around them by the Kemalist regime. Finally, through the case study of Studio Görçek, which made it possible for people to take their own photographs, the chapter explores how, by the 1950s, the studio space had opened up new ways of worldmaking that went beyond world replication. This development coincided with a shift in the country’s sociopolitical environment from the rigorous nation-building process of the early years of the Republic to the pursuit of economic development and liberal democracy.

Chapter Four expands on the meaning of the pose and posture in the construction of male and female bodies in the founding years of the Republic through an analysis of sports photographs, including portraits of schoolgirls taken at the Festival of Youth and Sports celebrations. It further examines the making of modern womanhood and manhood through two distinct examples in Turkish vernacular portraiture, namely childbed pictures and circumcision ceremonies. Exploring how postpartums and circumcisions were reimaged through photographic practices that signaled modernity but also allowed for the inclusion of ancient Turkic and Ottoman customs, the chapter reveals the multi-layered nature of the modern Turkish identity-building process.

For the Kemalists, creating new, extended geographies of public life around newly constructed Republican spaces was as important as the forging of new Republican citizens. The effort to redesign the public realm as a secular space that would also include women prompted extensive transformations of both the central cities and Anatolia through ambitious architectural projects and intensive urban planning, all meant to mark a radical

break with the Ottoman past. Part III (Chapter Five) discusses the role vernacular photography played in the making of new Republican spaces through Koch and Latham's notion of domestication (2013), and examines how this making of new Republican spaces through photography was intertwined with the making of classed identities, in both the urban and the rural.

Chapter Five approaches the relationship between photography and space-making through the case study of the Hamza Rüstem Studio, a century-old photography studio from Izmir that still operates today. The chapter explores how the work of this studio in the 1920s and 1930s contributed to the making of a new Republican city and its social memory for a newly forged urban Turkish middle class. In the second part of the chapter, I study how itinerant photography helped to democratize photography in the 1920s and 1930s. I analyze the role itinerant photography played in the making of modern Republican spaces and the domestication of public life through the extensive documentation of citizens in cities and the countryside across Turkey.

As noted, the materiality of photographs is an important issue throughout this study, which focuses not only on what vernacular photographs show us but also on how they were produced, consumed and circulated. Part IV (Chapter Six) examines the circulation of prints and the role of language in shaping the early Republican era photographic culture that produced the new modern Turkish citizen. Given the radical language reform that Turkey went through in the 1930s, this Part also highlights the multiple political and social meanings of photographic inscriptions beyond their communicative functions.

In Chapter Six, through a series of portraits given or sent to one individual named Şükrü Bey in the late 1920s, I look at how the circulation of vernacular photographs helped to construct and disseminate the image of the new Republican citizen among family, friends and colleagues. Taking the Şükrü Bey series as a starting point, the chapter reveals how middle-class Turkish citizens used photographic exchanges and inscriptions not only to build and share memories but also to promote a classed self-image. This chapter analyzes the complex networks in which photographic prints were circulated within and outside family circles, serving multiple functions as effective modes of communications and tokens of self-promotion. Through a detailed analysis of the linguistic patterns used in photographic inscriptions in the 1920s and 1930s, it shows the political, social and cultural significance of language in the making and dissemination of the modern Turkish identity.