Posing for the Republic
Making the modern Turkish citizen in vernacular photographs from the 1920s and 1930s
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PART II
THE MAKING OF THE MODERN BODY
CHAPTER THREE

Pose, Posture and Props as Worldmaking

Figure 3.1 A studio portrait of a couple, circa 1930s. 13.6 x 8.6 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.

Figure 3.1 features a couple in a studio portrait, presumably taken in the 1930s judging by the outfits and the man’s mustache. The man, dressed in what appears to be a military uniform, strikes a confident and proud pose with his chest pushed forward and his hands behind his back. The pose of the woman next to him, who, judging from her golden bracelets, is most probably his wife, is more subdued, with her face showing a hint of a smile. Her outfit, an elegant long coat with two-toned, low-heeled shoes, and her short hair with subtle finger waves reflect the women’s fashion of the 1930s. Her golden jewelry, probably given to her as a wedding gift, along with her fashionable bag and gloves, reveals her well-to-do status as the wife of a military man.

The man and the woman both look directly into the camera, standing side by side. There is no space between their bodies; yet, apart from this proximity, they do not display
any physical affection such as holding hands or posing cheek to cheek, as was common in couple portraits of the time. The large military hat enhances the difference in height between the man and the woman, giving the man an appearance of power and authority. On the other hand, the feet of the man and the woman are carefully aligned, creating a sense of parity, presumably as a result of the photographer’s concern with making the picture symmetrical. The man’s rather arrogant pose might appear exaggerated to the viewer today. He seems to be trying to dominate the frame, performing a masculine identity as a proud soldier and a husband in control of his wife.

I have chosen this particular picture to introduce the chapter precisely because of the domineering nature of this man’s pose, which is not common in Turkish couple portraits from the 1920s and 1930s. As discussed in Chapter Two, the majority of portraits I found show more subdued representations of masculinity. I start with this portrait also to challenge our contemporary gaze with an image that we might find funny or quirky today. Finally, despite the man’s exaggerated masculine stance, this portrait also features some of the most common patterns in terms of composition and pose in studio photography of the time.

Indeed, Figure 3.1 serves as a great example for the study of the role of pose and posture in the making of the new Turkish female and male bodies, which is the focus of this chapter. In what follows, I will first look at how poses, postures and props adopted from Western portraiture during the late Ottoman era were appropriated, modified and repurposed in modern Turkish portrait photography. Subsequently, I will examine how they became part of a broader negotiation of modern gender roles and familial relations for the middle-class citizens of the emergent Turkish state.

The photographs I looked at “collectively provide us with a sense of the wider communal world from which they arose, a world view that made them thinkable in certain forms in the first place” (Edwards 2004: 26). With the popularization and democratization of photography, we can observe a gradual increase in playfulness throughout the 1930s, as people started to discover the potential of photography as an instrument to “make worlds” by enacting multiple selves (Chalfen 1987; Goodman 1978; Ryzova 2015a). The second part of this chapter will study how such playful uses of poses, postures and props offered people a renewed sense of agency with regard to their photographic performances, while still pointing to a serious social function (Edwards 2014: 34). In this context, Stüdyo Görçek, Turkey’s unique “selfie” studio offers a fascinating case study, revealing how the studio was reimagined as a theater of the self in modern Turkey.

The modern Turkish aesthetic particularly manifests in the pose and posture of the photographed subjects; yet, little has been written on the meanings of poses and postures in family photographs (Bölük 2004; Eldem 2018; Evren 2004; Shaw 2018). Similarly, apart from a few exceptions (Ak 2001; Bölük 2004; Şen 2002a, b), there is a considerable lack of research regarding the production and meaning of props and backdrops in vernacular photography in the Republican era. This chapter aims to contribute to the scholarship by analyzing how certain poses, postures and props might have helped Turkish citizens to negotiate gender roles and familial relations in the newly formed nation state.

104
Modernizing the Pose: From the Ottoman Empire to the Republic

Since the invention of the medium of photography, people have “posed for posterity” in front of the camera (Yablon 2014). As photography studios rapidly spread across the world from the mid-nineteenth century, “already well-established standards for portraiture taken from painting and daguerreotype portraits” set the parameters for the poses commonly used in cartes de visite (Wichard and Wichard 1999: 21 in Hearn 2013: 29). In this regard, André Disderi’s photography manual from 1853 provides a great example, illustrating a series of standardized poses to be used for sitters of different occupations in cartes de visite. For Disderi, the necessary technical elements for a good portrait consisted of “a pleasing face, appropriate presentation, definition, light, shadow, and proportion” (Darrah 1981: 36 in Hearn 2013: 29).

Three main types of studio poses were deemed appropriate: head or bust, seated and standing, with many variations of each. From 1860 to 1890, portraits were distributed among these three posing types rather equally, although heads became more popular in the early 1860s and throughout the 1870s (Darrah 1981: 26 in Pérez González 2012: 109). The seated pose was favored over the full standing pose as the subject could be more relaxed and maintain a pose for a longer time (Pérez González 2012: 109). Through the poses endorsed by reputable studio photographers, cartes de visite “helped to invent visually the respectable type” (Volpe 1999: 26 in Hearn 2013: 30) and “provided access to social respectability for the masses” (Hearn 2013: 30).

Photographers operating in the Ottoman Empire became concerned with creating masterful portraits early on. This involved the effective use of studio space and lighting. For instance, in Detailed Account of the Practice and Theory of Photography (Ameli ve Nazari Mutfassal Fotografya, 1891), Hamdi Paşazade M. Halid (or Hamdi Pashazade M. Khalid) writes that “from the point of view of photography, a person has four sides: right, left, up, and down,” but light should only come “from above” and “from the right” (in Shaw 2018: 184–85). Halid’s detailed explanations of the use of technology reveal the degree to which Ottoman photographers were thinking about portraiture and how they aimed to create perfect portraits of their subjects.

In a rare essay focusing on the pose, Burçak Evren writes that, among the studio photographers of modern Turkey, each pose was a “trade secret” passed on from generation to generation, from master to apprentice. When an apprentice left a studio to open his own or work for another photographer, he carried with him the secrets he learned. For Evren (2004: 60), this is how photographic knowledge spread across Turkey over the decades. Photographers, as “connoisseurs of human nature,” would know exactly which pose would best suit a client; the poses, developed over decades through a process of trial and error, would “wait for their turn” to be applied over and over again in studio portraits (Evren 2004: 60).

Evren’s account is likely a romanticized one, colored by nostalgia. In reality, studio photographers would probably have been familiar with each other’s work, particularly in neighboring studios like the ones that operated on Istiklal Street. Poses in studio portraits were already largely standardized by the 1920s; however, some studios, particularly prominent ones such as Foto Süreyya (for instance, in Figure 1.14) or Foto Sabah, do seem
to have created “signature” compositions, poses and lighting. Although it would have been hard to keep a certain pose a complete secret, the fact that there was talk about “trade secrets” shows that studio photographers thought of themselves as masters of the craft. They seem to have thought carefully about the poses they used, creating a certain mystique around them.

As Shaw (2018: 181) argues, in the late nineteenth century, the new visual vocabulary of being Ottoman, as embodied in the Abdülhamid II albums, “was defined less through exoticism than through a universalism intended to show it as participating in a supposed global visual culture coded through European norms.” Photography was a by-product of the “individualization and individuation” of Ottoman subjects following the Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876), which aimed to establish a concept of modern citizenship informed by European social and cultural conventions (Sheehi 2016).

Poses in family portraits from the Republican era suggest an expansion of the late Ottoman-era visual vocabulary in which affiliations with modernity and middle-class aspirations prevailed over ethnic and geographical markers (Shaw 2018; Sheehi 2016). Photographs of women, men and children showed the character of “a national citizen of indeterminate ethnicity” not only through the secular outfits worn but also through the standardized and Europeanized poses and postures performed (Shaw 2018: 189). The formation of a new national identity was bolstered by the repetitions of the types of poses adopted by studio, itinerant and amateur photographers throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Looking at the influences of Persian miniature and poetry, as well as Qajar-era painting on Iranian photography, Pérez González (2012) argues that both the persistence and absence of certain poses and postures typically seen as “non-Western,” such as kneeling or sitting cross-legged on the floor, reveal different “indigenous” interpretations of photography that feed on social norms and local cultural practice. In Republican-era studio portraits, the desire to adopt modernity can be observed in the highly standardized poses and postures borrowed from Western portraiture. While the inclusion of modern furniture items such as chairs, desks and cabinets attests to a new Western-inspired identity and class aspirations, the disappearance of certain poses attributed to the Ottoman Empire, including el pençe divan, suggests the Republic’s emphasis on modernity.

Despite the introduction of modern objects like cigarettes as new props, from the late 1920s onwards we observe a general decline in props and in painted backgrounds depicting idyllic landscapes or Greco-Roman interiors. Ornate curtains and expensive furniture items gradually disappear from studio portraits. Still, similar to the Ottoman era, children continue to pose with toys such as dolls or stuffed animals. In particular, the rocking horse appeared as a popular studio prop in portraits of children, along with bicycles (Bölük 2014: 124–39).

95 For a discussion on the use of the term “indigenous,” see Scheiwiller and Ritter 2018; and Eldem 2018.
96 Eldem (2018: 44–45) describes the el pençe divan pose as “a characteristic expression of deference and submission in the presence of a hierarchical superior” where arms are crossed over the belly with the right hand on top.
97 Around 1890, Studio Phébus brought a rocking horse from France, which soon became hugely popular. This horse was later passed on to Foto Sel, which operated in the Eminönü district of Istanbul. Foto Sel placed the horse in the Eminönü square, attracting a large number of customers for many years. Rocking horses and bicycles were replaced with toy cars and planes by the 1960s (Bölük 2014: 124–139).
The abandonment of certain poses, compositions and props in the transition from the Ottoman Empire to modern Turkey corresponds to a systematic shift in the country’s political and social structure, while also reflecting changes in global photographic trends and technologies. Beyond this shift, however, a variety of personal and social factors may have had an impact on the scarcity or absence of certain poses, postures and props. Families may have discarded the poses “they did not like” and kept only the ones they found acceptable or valuable. An image may have been thrown away if it did not convey the desired “look” or status. Therefore, the poses that appear as common and standardized from the era reveal what people considered better or more proper.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 3.2** A woman poses next to a car, circa 1930s. 14 x 9 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.

Similarly, the absence of certain possessions in photographs may indicate the economic conditions and lack of access of the population to certain technologies and consumer products of Turkey at the time. For instance, the automobile as a novel popular “prop,” which people liked posing next to to show off their wealth (as in Figure 3.2), is a rare sight in Turkish photography from the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, the gradual disappearance of popular late Ottoman era props such as walking sticks, gloves and umbrellas, which
symbolized an elegant bourgeois life, may indicate changing attitudes towards studio photography, which was increasingly seen as a practical necessity of modern life, rather than a status symbol (Bölük 2014).

The unassuming, monotonous backgrounds and general sense of modesty in many pictures of the era could also be partly due to Turkey’s specific political and economic conditions as a nation that had just emerged from a decade-long war. By the 1920s, the war had led to a dwindling of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie population, which had constituted the majority of practitioners and a large segment of consumers of studio photography in the Ottoman Empire.

Interviews with studio photographers of the era give us clues about the degree of agency of the customers with regard to the pose. For instance, in 1942, prominent photographer Etem Tem (Foto Etem) explains to Hikmet Münir (Ebcioğlu) how sitters used to instruct photographers to create their desired poses depending on the intended recipient of the photograph. He recalls a customer who asked him to procure a window screen since he wanted to pose in front of one holding a book, a request that the photographer could not accommodate. By the 1940s, Tem notes, people increasingly left the poses and compositions to the discretion of the photographer. He nonetheless complains about women customers who pestered him with special retouching requests to make sure they looked young, slim and beautiful. He asserts that, thanks to retouching, “women never get old” (in Akçura 2020a). In another interview from 1937, Foto Rekor’s Vahit Kutsal tells Niyazi Acun that young people and lovers often asked for poses that would make them look like movie stars (in Akçura 2020a).

Figures 3.3 and 3.5 reveal how people used their agency to carefully frame the compositions they imagined and the poses they wished to perform outside the studio setting with the spread of snapshot photography in the 1930s. Dating from 17 July 1931, these pictures show a woman posing outdoors in front of the same tree for a photographer, whose shadow is visible in Figure 3.5. Both of the images bear the identical signature of Bedia, and the pictures are dedicated to what appears to be a man named Asım, perhaps the woman’s fiancé. The note “2” on both prints suggest that two copies may have been printed of each, perhaps one for the woman and one for the man. In Figure 3.6, Bedia added a note that reads “an eternal souvenir” to the print.98

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98 In Turkish: “Temmuz 17/7/1931 ebedi bir hatırası asıma Bedia.”
Figures 3.3 & 3.4 (recto & verso) A woman named Bedia poses outdoors. 17 July 1931. 14 x 8.9 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.
These two images were taken with a medium format snapshot camera, perhaps a Kodak, which was heavily advertised in newspapers at the time for holidays and outings (See Chapter Five). The shadow suggests that the photographer was holding the camera around the chest, looking through the viewer from above. It is not clear if the photographer was a woman or a man, although the shape of the shadow may indicate a dress. The two shots of the same person featuring different poses reveal how people enjoyed consuming
their film stock (typically between 8 and 15 shots) for multiple shots during the same outing.

In Figure 3.3, the young woman, in a light-colored dress, stands in front of the tree with her arms akimbo and her hands on her waist, looking off camera. She wears her coat and hat for this shot, taking them off for Figure 3.5. These seem to be deliberate decisions to vary her appearance and pose for those who will see the images. In both pictures, Bedia displays a subtle smile, and her gaze conveys a sense of confidence. Even when she looks away from the camera she is clearly aware of its presence. The pose in each image is carefully designed, both vertically and horizontally. The tree in the middle serves as a prop, enhancing the sense of symmetry achieved by putting Bedia in the center of the frame.

Bedia adopts the conventions of studio portraiture through these poses, presenting a modern femininity self that converges with the proposed image of the new Turkish woman. At the same time, given the relatively private and candid nature of these snapshots, the agency of the sitter, Bedia, and that of the photographer, probably a friend or a family member, is pronounced. It is likely that Bedia would have negotiated her poses in different, freer ways with the person behind the camera than with a studio photographer. These two images, then, give us clues about the kind of poses snapshot photography inspired, and reveal how the pose was seen as an important part of one’s self-representation and self-expression. Through these snapshots, Bedia demonstrates “how picturetaking has the power to transform on-going patterns of activity” into “patterns of behavior that are socially appropriate and culturally expected when cameras are in use” (Chalfen 1987: 10–11).

In his 1942 interview, photographer Etem Tem already reminisces about the “old days” when studios were like “a theater stage” with curtains and painted backdrops depicting interiors, gardens and seaside sceneries, in front of which customers rowed in prop boats or held prop horses, “seeking happiness through pictures when they could not get what they wanted in life” (Akçura 2020a). As Strassler (2010: 79) writes, “(r)ather than a window onto reality, the portrait offers a carefully staged theater-space for the projection of possible selves.” For Strassler (2010: 79), “the studio portrait’s charge emerges from its marriage of the possible (‘this might be’) to the actual (‘this has been’).” In photographic representations of the urban middle classes in the early years of the Turkish Republic, the actual and the possible seem to commingle in such a way as to comply with the Kemalist attempt to bring the modern Turkish citizen into being. The studio as a “theater-space” was configured not only to adopt the image of the modern Turkish citizen that was being constructed by the regime, but also to respond to the social pressures produced by citizens’ own nascent class aspirations.

Exploring Goodman’s notion of worldmaking in literature, Helgesson (2018: 174) notes that “the world of worldmaking is not simply ‘there’, it is in process.” It is neither “the same as the actual world in its entirety, but nor is it exclusively a self-enclosed system. Rather, the world of worldmaking refers more openly to the domain of human activity and to the world as a relational modality” (Helgesson 2018: 174–75). In the case of the early Republican period, this relational modality clearly manifests itself in the way photography’s worldmaking entailed the replication and reproduction of the modern
secular Turkish world that was being created by the Kemalist state. The projection of possible selves was primarily concerned with successfully inhabiting the identity of the new bourgeois subject, as urban middle-class citizens struggled to carve out a space for themselves and their families in the fledgling political, social and administrative networks created by the new government. In the early Republican context, then, the studio as a theater of the self, in which worldmaking took place, was not a totally free space but one constrained by social norms, which were not just imposed upon subjects but also, as Butler emphasizes, became part of who they (felt they) were through inculcation over time.

In this section, I have shown how modern poses, postures and props were adopted and negotiated in Turkish vernacular portraiture as key aspects of the visual manifestation of the new Turkish citizen in the early years of the Republic. Using the framework of photographic portraiture as a performative space, I contend that this space was essentially activated to reproduce modern male and female normativities in the 1920s and 1930s. Arguably, studio photography and snapshot culture together produced and cemented a “standardized system of visual representation” for the new middle classes in the 1920s and 1930s, through which Turkish citizens made and ordered their worlds by replicating the gender and class normativities that they were urged to adopt (Chalfen 1987: 141).

In the next section, I will explore the potential disruption of visual normativities through the introduction of playfulness in portraiture, particularly outside the studio. I will look at how playful performances reconfigured normative femininities and masculinities for the urban middle classes, allowing them to explore who they were, who they wanted to be and who they could be. I will thus study how photographic subjects used their agency to imagine new possible selves, expanding the understanding of photography as a theater of the self with a greater variety of poses, compositions outside the studio setting in the 1920s and 1930s.
Playing with the Pose

Figures 3.7 & 3.8 (recto & verso) Two men posing indoors, 5 August 1931. 6.2 x 9.7 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.
Figure 3.9 Four girls posing outdoors, 1937. 8.7 x 13.7 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.

Figures 3.10 & 3.11 (recto & verso) Three men posing with flowers, 12 February 1940. 6 x 9.2 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.
Among early Republican-era photographs, Figures 3.7, 3.9 and 3.10 stand out due to the diversity of the poses struck by their subjects, which break from the patterns I discussed earlier. They appear to add “a humorous flair and an air of informality” to the repertoire of poses we encounter in studio photographs of the time (Ritter and Scheiwiller 2018: 18). Potential moments of disruption through playfulness were enabled as encounters with photography increased and diversified, particularly with the spread of snapshot photography. Playful poses and compositions opened up portrait photography, offering alternative ways of representing the self.

Figure 3.7 shows two men having a meal, posing playfully. The Ottoman Turkish inscription, still used here even after the 1928 alphabet change, reads: “5 August 1931, when eating at home,” and is signed by a man named Feridun Mahmut, who must be one of the men in the picture. The man on the left holds the ladle as if eating from the bowl, which would be considered inappropriate behavior at a dining table. By striking this pose with the ladle, he could be signaling how hungry he is or how he loves the food so much that he has forgotten about table manners. However, the exaggeration of his pose and his cheerful glance at the man next to him suggest that he is only playing and is not, in fact, eating from the ladle.

Is it true that this photograph was taken when “eating at home” or was the inscription meant as a joke? Is this really a dining or living room in which these men have their meals regularly? The room looks rather untidy, with coats hanging in the background and a large cabinet with empty shelves. The neckties of the two men and their trousers, too, look identical. Are they perhaps coworkers wearing the same outfit? Did they dress like this for the photograph? The presentation of the food on the table is also curious: the food in the bowl could be tzatziki, whereas the food on the plate appears to be fruit compote. Combined with bread, what kind of a meal are these men having and what does that say about their social status?

Indeed, Figure 3.7 presents a curious case. The highly staged image looks like a scene from a theater play. The size and quality of the print and the type of print paper suggest that this picture was taken by a medium-format camera. The two men might be imitating some of the popular comedians of the time, such as Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy or Harold Lloyd. The picture might have been taken by a third, perhaps professional photographer friend in the room, who was part of creating this lighthearted scene with the other two. Together, they break away from the clichéd poses of studio portraits, using photography as a playground for creativity and entertainment. Even if this photograph was one of a theater set, the caption that refers to “eating at home” nonetheless offers clues as to how domestic uses of photography were imagined at the time.

In contrast, Figure 3.9 from 1937 shows a more common composition and pose: four teenage girls are lying on their stomachs on the ground in a grassy, hilly area, with their hands clasped under their chins, a recurring composition across family collections of the time. The pose can be seen as “girly” because it intends to make the subjects appear

99 In Turkish: “5/8/1931 Evde ... yemek yerken: M.A Feridun Mahmut.” Added by the vendor, the “5” written with a pencil on the top refers to the price of the photograph, 5 TRY (Turkish lira).
feminine and innocent. This gesture could be associated with thinking or evaluating but also with daydreaming.

These girls could be on an excursion with their class, with friends or as a family group. All of them smile into the camera. The girl on the right has the most cheerful smile and seems more confident than the others posing for the camera. Her head is up and she has positioned herself directly in front of the camera. The girl with the patterned and buttoned coat next to her displays a subtler smile; with her head slightly down, she seems shy in front of the camera, but this could also be intended as a “dreamy” look. The girl on the very left in the dark outfit has a similar gaze, but she is leaning slightly away from the girl next to her. Her hands are not fully intertwined, as if she is failing or hesitating to mimic the agreed pose.

It is not the pose itself that leads me to interpret the image as playful; it is, rather, the way in which each girl executes the pose, creating the impression not of four identical girls, but of distinct personalities. The most divergent pose is that of the girl in the dotted dress with the closed eyes. Appearing with closed eyes in a picture usually implies a failed shot and tends to be met with disappointment. Yet, this “imperfect” image was printed and kept in a private family archive as a memory until it was discarded many decades later for unknown reasons. Now digitized and published online, this girl has been “immortalized” striking this imperfect pose. She might have closed her eyes because she was disturbed by the sunlight. Whatever the reason, she attracts our attention: our gaze goes to her first because of the way she “disrupts” the composition. At the same time, the position of her hands is the most “perfect,” with her fingers fully intertwined and her arms forming a near-perfect square. Figure 3.9 gives us clues about what might have been permissible for young women in terms of playful poses they wanted and were able to perform, negotiating what was expected from them as fun-loving yet well-behaved students and respectful daughters.

The print size and quality of Figure 3.10 from 12 August 1940 suggest that, like Figure 3.7, it was taken by a snapshot camera. Three young men are in the foreground, looking at the flowers they are holding. Their clothing reflects the trends of the late 1930s and early 1940s, yet instead of being matching suits, their trousers and jackets seem to have been bought separately. Two of the men wear the Turkish-style hat (kasket) that became popular after the Hat Law in 1925, serving as a more local, “familiar” alternative to the European brim hat (Yılmaz 2013). The three young men hold what look like carnations, which are probably red and white. The man on the right with the European hat and without a necktie also has a carnation in this pocket. A beloved flower since the Ottoman times, symbolizing love, loyalty and purity, the carnation has widely been used as a popular motif in textiles, calligraphy, paper marbling, illuminated manuscripts, as well as Iznik tiles. In Yeşilçam melodramas, it would be common for the men to pin a red carnation in their pocket square for a first date, to be recognized by the other party.

In Figure 3.10, each man looks intently at the carnations and executes his own version of the flower-gazing pose: the man on the right stands sideways holding a bouquet of white carnations from which he might have taken one for this breast pocket. His posture is straight while leaning slightly towards the bouquet. The young man on the left, on the other hand, is looking at the flowers but with his body turned towards the camera. He
poses with his left foot forward, displaying the inner part of his leg in a way that suggests confidence and a desire to preen. His left leg partially covers the body of the man in the middle, who leans towards him, yet is not holding the flowers like the other two. Although the camera is not directly acknowledged, the poses and postures of the men make clear that they are aware of its presence. Seemingly lost in their thoughts and concentrating their eyes and bodies on the carnations, these men might be sending a message to their lovers, telling them that they are thinking of them. However, posing in this way could also be a playful act for these men, presenting themselves to the camera as romantic, sensible and loyal lovers.

It is no coincidence that Figures 3.7, 3.9 and 3.10 were all taken outside the studio. The subjects exhibit a more playful relationship to the space they are in and to the people they are with than most of those photographed in the studio. In all three images, the subjects seem to be having fun and enjoying the moment in which the photographic act takes place. They actively take part in it, using their individual agency to make the image more imaginative than the studio portraits they might have performed in on other occasions.

As Ryzova (2015b: 231) points out, the worldmaking capacity of photographs, forging particular historical gendered and classed subjects, is “complicit with (and incomprehensible in the absence of) the immense amount of fun involved in posing for pictures during specifically arranged photographic sessions that experimented with received social norms, or the fun that carried on, later, in the process of adding cryptic playful captions that only the initiated would understand.” While creating some room for playfulness and individual agency, however, Figures 3.7, 3.9 and 3.10 still move within the parameters of the socially desired and accepted norms of modern Turkish femininities and masculinities, which I demonstrated in the previous chapters. As they perform their fun-loving, dreamy or romantic selves through the poses they strike, the photographic subjects simultaneously reproduce their modern, urban, properly masculine or feminine selves, including complying with the dress code of the new Republic.

As discussed in the previous section, early Republican vernacular photographs served the practical function of affirming ideal images of the Republican man and woman, hence the overall absence of playfulness in family portraits taken in and outside the studio. Through a repertoire of standardized poses, photography was used as a tool to chronicle a predefined set of important moments for individuals and families, from weddings to religious holidays, shaping their urban middle-class lives. In this section, I have tried to hint at some disruptions to such patterns of homogenization, enabled through the introduction of playfulness. As snapshot photography gained popularity among the middle classes in the 1930s, photography produced outside the studio space offered new possibilities for experimentations with self-representation, which, however, still remained within the realm of Republican gender normativities. Certain playful poses, as reflected in Figure 3.9, seem to have been more permissible for men than women, who may have been under greater social pressure to behave in a certain way that would not embarrass them, their families, and, in the case of school girls, their teachers. A certain level of “goofiness” or “naughtiness” seems to have been tolerated for men as part of their performative masculinities. In the next section, I will study the possibilities of playfulness
in a studio setting through the case of Studio Görçek, which has lightheartedly been dubbed “the first selfie studio in history” (Bölük 2015).

Selfie before Selfie: Studio Görçek

Figure 3.12 A woman posing with a hand fan, Studio Görçek, Istanbul, circa 1950s. 13.4 x 8.4 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.

Figure 3.13 A woman posing with a cigarette, Studio Görçek, Istanbul, circa 1950s. 13.3 x 8.5 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.
In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes (1981: 12) writes that

what I want, in short, is that my (mobile) image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with my (profound) “self”; but it is the contrary that must be said: “myself” never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it), and “myself” which is light, divided, dispersed; like a bottle-imp, “myself” doesn’t hold still, giggling in my jar.

The woman pictured in Figures 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14 aptly negotiates the two selves that Barthes discusses, performing a “light, divided, dispersed” self in a studio portrait, which would typically have been expected to portray the “heavy, motionless, stubborn” image favored by Turkish society of the time. Instead, she lightheartedly reveals a self that is “giggling in a jar.” Through these playful poses, she may have revealed an image closer to her profound self, while still complying with the image of the modern secular Turkish woman as desired by the ruling elites.

The photographs of the woman were taken at Studio Görçek, the name of which is a made-up word that translates as “Look and Shoot” (*Gör* and *Çek*). This studio has recently
been dubbed “the world’s first selfie studio” by Turkish media after the texts written on it by Sunay Akın (2015) and Gülderen Bölük (2015). Patented by Fikret Kaftan under the name Görçek, the studio used an “invention” that allowed customers to take their picture with a shutter that was given to them. They would look into a mirror that concealed the camera and click on the shutter once they had struck the desired pose, hence the name look and shoot. Each Studio Görçek picture was indeed a “self-portrait,” where the sitters could decide on the perfect moment to take the picture.

Studio Görçek was opened in Beyoğlu’s Çiçek Pasajı (Cité de Péra) in the 1940s by Emrullah Ali Yıldız and operated for around 50 years until it closed in 1994. In this section, I choose to extend the time period I am focusing on to the 1950s, when Figures 3.12–3.14 seem to have been taken. By making this exception, I emphasize that although photographers and sitters had been thinking about playful uses of photographs in earlier periods, such uses were primarily reserved for snapshot photography outside the studio setting. The Foto Görçek photographs show that, by the 1950s, the studio space had opened up new ways of worldmaking that went beyond world replication, with people taking up the notion of the theater of the self in a more creative and arguably more literal sense, with the self also becoming the director, instead of simply the photographer taking on this role.

As Edwards (2004: 32) points out, the livelihood of professional photographers “depended not on innovation, but precisely the opposite: on their ability to produce images which accorded with the conventional expression of specific social desires.” Therefore, the priority of photographers was more to fulfill “the imaging desires of a mass market”
in a “cheap, easy and commercially expedient way” than to produce photographs with a “calculated aesthetic force” (Edwards 2004: 32). Through an intriguing invention, Studio Görçek radically changed the understanding of studio photography, transforming the imaging desires of the Turkish market. Studio Görçek provided men, women and children of all ages with a new form of entertainment through which to claim agency over their representations, allowing them to perform new selves in front of the camera.

The novelty of photography as a new technology and the need to adjust to the imposition of a new national identity may have limited imaginative uses of photography in the founding years of the Republic. For instance, I have not come across sufficient evidence to suggest that photo booths, which may have provided people with an outlet for playing with the pose, were popular in Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet it is clear that in later decades, Studio Görçek introduced a new element to Turkish studio photography: having control over the creation of one’s image. The freedom to easily take one’s own image attracted many, particularly women, who started going to the studio with family and friends as a leisure activity. Studio Görçek thus transformed the photography studio into a site for entertainment, freeing it from its former formality. It diminished the authority of the studio photographer while still providing clients with the professional equipment, lighting and printing technology of a studio. Studio Görçek allowed sitters, especially women, to experiment with their self-representation in order to become “someone else” by emulating poses that they might hesitate to perform in front of a (presumably male) photographer. The clients of Studio Görçek immortalized their fantasies in photographs that would be circulated among friends and family as a fun memory or kept as private mementos (Akın 2015; Bölük 2015; Kurt 2016).

However, Studio Görçek was not for leisure photography alone. Used for anything from wedding portraits to graduation pictures, it was also frequented by those who wanted “something different” for their formal portraits (Topçu 2018). It was this kind of interest and popularity that kept the studio alive until the mid-1990s, only a decade before the “selfie” as we know it today started to take over contemporary visual culture.

The middle-aged woman in the three Studio Görçek images above seems to realize the new possibilities the görçek offered within the studio setting: she experiments with new looks and uses different accessories as props of her own making. In Figure 3.12 she holds a folding fan and has put on a decorative scarf. In Figure 3.13, she holds a cigarette. In Figure 3.14, she holds a tulle scarf. Figures 3.12 and 3.13 feature her in an identical hairstyle and makeup; in addition, she is wearing the same blouse or dress. In Figure 3.14, the woman’s hairstyle and makeup remain the same, yet she is no longer wearing nail polish and has on a different outfit. The paper used to print Figure 3.14 is also different from that Figures 3.12 and 3.13 were printed on, opening the possibility that Figure 3.14 might have been taken on a different occasion.

In all three images, nevertheless, the woman poses with an identical, theatrical smile and a dreamy look aimed off-camera. Having had the opportunity to rehearse her poses with the help of the mirror, she must have deliberately adjusted them to fit her left hand holding the various props in the frame. Her right arm is not visible in the picture, as it was possibly reserved to operate the shutter with it. Through her exuberant poses, the woman gives the impression of a carefree and independent woman, staging herself in a very literal
incarnation of a “theater of the self” (Edwards 2004), enabled by Studio Görçek’s innovative idea. Even in this theater of the self, however, she follows established norms of femininity.

The woman might have put on thick lipstick and mascara at the studio right before the shoot and dressed up for the occasion. While it is possible that the studio provided the props, the quality of the items, especially that of the chiffon see-through scarf, suggests that they belonged to her and were carefully chosen and brought to the studio for the portraits. The three images may appear as unusual, original and perhaps slightly “naughty” in the Turkish context, but they still show a desire to emulate certain models of femininity, in this case that of popular celebrities of the time, whose poses the woman mimics. Bölük (2015) and Kurt (2016) write that it was common for the women customers of Studio Görçek to copy the poses of Yeşilçam or Hollywood movie actresses they liked, comfortable in the knowledge that they would not be seen and judged by the photographer.

The poses struck by the woman in Figures 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14 indeed show remarkable similarities to those in the widely disseminated images of Hollywood actresses in Figures 3.15–3.18. In particular, Figure 3.12 includes two elements that are also evident in Figures 3.15 and 3.16: a folding fan and a silk scarf. Figure 3.13 demonstrates a Rita Hayworth-like off-camera-gaze pose with a cigarette (Figure 3.17), while Figure 3.14 resembles Elizabeth Taylor’s dreamy pose in a light-colored scarf in Figure 3.18. It is likely that the woman used Studio Görçek to emulate these stars, perhaps even these very images, which she could have encountered in movie posters, newspapers or magazines.104

![Figure 3.15](image1.jpg) Ava Gardner in the *Naked Maja* directed by Sam Levin, 1958.

![Figure 3.16](image2.jpg) Audrey Hepburn wearing a Hermès scarf, 1950s.

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104 Turkey’s most popular two weeklies that regularly featured celebrity pictures were *Ses* and *Hayat*, both of which were launched in 1956.
A comparison with other Studio Görçek portraits suggests that these pictures were most likely taken around the mid to late 1950s. Given that the star system in the Turkish film industry was not properly established until the 1960s, it makes sense for the woman to have taken inspiration from Western stars rather than local actresses. Moreover, even in the 1960s and 1970s, Turkish stars, whom many looked up to as role models, would not appear with cigarettes except in films in which they played sex workers (e.g. Türkan Şoray in *Vesikalı Yarım* in 1968) or men (e.g. Hülya Koçyiğer in *Deli Fişek* 1967).

In Figures 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14 the emulation of Western celebrities seems to serve as a source of empowerment and remaking of the self, with the woman renegotiating social conventions in fantasy images that she has control over. Ironically, Figures 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14 emulate Hollywood star images that were primarily aimed at “the determining male gaze” projecting “its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 1997 [1975]). Unlike the images of female stars, however, these three portraits are not concerned with the creation of an “appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact” to “connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 1997 [1975]). Instead, they incorporate the iconicity of movie stars into a private fantasy world, which was most likely produced for the female gaze, to be shown to a small circle of family members and friends. Rather than as “a consolation prize for something that cannot be achieved in real life,” therefore, these portraits likely served as “as empowerment and playful experimentations with the limits of the possible through the enactment of multiple selves” (Ryzova 2015b: 231).

Why did this woman go to the studio to have these pictures taken? Was she perhaps an actress herself? Did she replicate the looks used during this photo shoot outside the studio as well? Did she bring images of celebrities with her so that she could imitate their poses
more accurately? In the absence of any metadata accompanying the images, we are unable to answer these questions. However, the images do show that Studio Görçek’s marketing slogan *Pleasure. Excitement. A high-quality photograph. Unbeatable prices* seems to have resonated with women like the one in these photographs. As this section has demonstrated, Studio Görçek offers a unique case study for studio photography where citizens could not only claim agency and, as worldmakers, create new ways of self-recognition and self-representation, but also discovered another important element of photography, namely its value as a form of entertainment, a pastime that could be great fun.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored the role that the pose, posture and props played in the way modern Republican Turkish women and men constructed their desired selves in front of the camera inside and outside the studio setting. I have shown how, through these three elements, a new body image was forged and negotiated in vernacular photography from the early Republican era.

By the 1920s, urban middle-class families had adopted modern poses for their photographic representations to show their social status and classed aspirations. A sense of Republican conformity is reflected in the props, which included various Western furniture items as well as painted backdrops depicting interiors inspired by Greek and Roman architecture. The desire of the urban middle classes to affirm their new Westernized lifestyle and to conform to Kemalist principles reveals the complex ways in which modern secular Turkish identity was consolidated with the active participation of the growing urban middle classes in the nation-building process.

As a result, in the 1920s and 1930s, Turkish citizens were most concerned with making their worlds by replicating the new classed and gendered normativities that were being shaped around them, from a secular middle-class lifestyle to a modern nuclear family structure. In studio portraits from the early Republican era, the world-replicating mode seems to dominate the desire for worldmaking in and outside the studio space, attempting to bring the modern Turkish citizen into being. World replication thus appears to prevail over worldmaking in portraits of middle-class people, marking how they adjusted to the image of the modern Turkish citizen that was being built through Kemalist legislation and propaganda, and how they responded to the pressures produced by increased aspirations for social and class mobility among citizens in the 1920s and 1930s.

The dominance of the world replication mode arguably made it less likely for citizens of the early Republic to play and experiment with their photographic representations. Overall, vernacular photography functioned to demarcate the classed and gendered selves in line with the vision of the new regime. As the increasing number of snapshot photographs produced outside the restrictions of the studio space suggests, even when photographed subjects gained more agency within the photographic process, they did not...

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necessarily use this agency to subvert the norms of femininity/masculinity or those of Turkish Republican citizenship.

Still, playfulness was gradually introduced to Turkish vernacular photography throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s with the arrival of snapshot cameras into middle-class households. Playfulness is also observed in pictures taken by itinerant photographers outside the studio setting. The playful images discussed in this chapter suggest that, by the 1930s, the emerging Turkish middle class had discovered the potential of photography as a site where different identities could be performed, as well as its potential as a leisure activity.

Experimentations in photographic portraiture became richer and more diverse as photographic technology became affordable to the masses following World War II. This shift also corresponds to major transformations in Turkish politics with the introduction of the multiparty regime, which led to the end of single-party rule in 1950, when the RPP lost the elections to the populist right-wing Democrat Party. In this context, the broad popular appeal of an invention like Studio Görçek in the 1940s and 1950s shows how the meaning and function of popular photography were changing, with a larger segment of the population gaining access to it and adopting it as a form of entertainment.

As my investigation of vernacular photography in Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s has shown, the theater of the self it constituted was directed to a large extent by the Kemalist regime and the new gender norms it imposed. In this context, Foto Görçek offers a fascinating case study in its creation of a free space for Turkish citizens to perform their selves in more fun and frivolous ways, and perhaps also in ways that challenged Kemalist gender norms. The success of this studio, which spanned five decades, was due not only to the ingenuity of its technology, but also to the avid participation of its customers, who pushed the limits of what the studio could offer. It was only with the invention of Studio Görçek that an actual theater of the self was enabled in the studio space.

In the next chapter, expanding on my discussion of pose and posture, I will explore the different workings of emerging Republican corporeal aesthetics in photographs. I will explore the making of new modern Turkish bodies in three distinct areas, namely sports/exercise, circumcision ceremonies and childbeds. Photographic representations of female and male bodies in these genres offer an important resource for the analysis of the consolidation of modern Republican woman- and manhood throughout the 1930s, as Turkish politics began to increasingly mirror the nationalist ideologies of the times, for which controlling the bodies of citizens was a key concern.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Bodies of the Republic

Michelle Henning (2009: 210), in *The Subject as Object*, focusing on the relationship between photography and the human body, writes that “a photograph constructs different meanings for human bodies through the way it represents them, and through the circumstances in which it circulates.” The muscular male body, for example, can be associated with “a coded homoeroticism” or with “the deeply homophobic culture of Fascism” depending on the historical and political context in which it was photographed or through which we interpret it: “In all instances, photographs do not simply speak of ‘the body’ but of particular bodies, of social groups and the relationships of power between them” (Henning 2009: 210).

In Butler’s (2007 [1990]: 189) theory of gender performativity, the body is not formulated as a “‘being,’ but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated.” As much as this bodily surface “is enacted as the natural” it can also “become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself” (2007 [1990]: 200). Adopting Butler’s (2007 [1990]: 189) notion of gendered bodies as “corporeal styles” that construct meaning through performativity, this chapter attempts to dissect the components of an emerging corporeal aesthetics for Turkish men and women as dramatized in vernacular photographs in the early years of the Republic, while also situating this aesthetics within the global political developments of the time. Specifically, I will examine how, in the transition from the late Ottoman era to the early Republic, visual normativities for male and female bodies were constructed and ritualized through “a regulated process of repetition” (Butler 2007 [1990]), reflecting a shared notion of beauty and health. I will first discuss the construction and popularization of a particular Turkish Republican body image through sports, which was a critical component of the establishment of Kemalist authority. Sports photographs offer a wealth of insight into the way Kemalists imagined a new Turkish nation through the construction of modern male and female bodies. Sports and exercise were seen as signs of a strong and healthy nation, with the regime endorsing a mixture of Western sports such as tennis and fencing, and traditional sports like oil wrestling and horseback riding. The latter were reinterpreted to fit the modernizing agenda.

The second part of the chapter will focus on the meaning of the Festival of Youth and Sports for the making of the modern Turkish female body. As the large number of photographs featuring sportsmen in the public sphere suggests, in the 1920s and 1930s, sports remained a predominantly male activity. Given the central role of the state feminist agenda in the regime’s nation-building effort, however, the modernization of female bodies was equally important. National holidays like the Festival of Youth and Sports, which were enforced through school curricula, were used strategically to promote the visibility of healthy and disciplined female bodies through public parades and athletic performances.
The last part of this chapter will study two elements central to the making of modern Turkish womanhood and manhood in the private space of the home, namely childbirth and circumcision ceremonies, which generated two distinct types of representations in family photography: childbed pictures of mothers with their newborns, and photographs of boys in ornate costumes posing on a bed before their circumcision ceremony. While these two photographic genres may not be unique to Turkey, the degree of their popularity, their ceremonial quality and the inclusion of folkloric elements arguably make them distinctly local, serving as hybrid interpretations of Western portraiture in Turkish photography. Given the strong emphasis of Kemalism on Westernization and Europeanization, this hybridity is particularly relevant to understand the success of Kemalist reforms in shaping the family lives and daily habits of the society. The study of childbed and circumcision pictures also effectively shows that bodies were not only modernized in public space, but also in the private spaces of people’s homes.
Figures 4.1 & 4.2 (recto & verso) The athletic team of the Balıkesir İdmangücü Physical Training Club, Izmir, 30 April 1931. 8.9 x 13.9 cm.

Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.

Figure 4.1 from 30 April 1931 shows a group of nine athletes in their sports clothes posing with a group of men wearing suits. The note in Turkish (Figure 4.2) reads: “The athletic team of the Balıkesir İdmangücü Physical Training Club after the competition with the
Altınordu Sports Club at the Alsancak Stadium in İzmir.” These athletes could have competed in a variety of disciplines, but most likely in running track. They wear well-fitted outfits that carry the logo of their club. The man on the far left wearing a tie carries a banner that features the name of the team: *Balıkesir İdmangücü Atletleri*. The young man on the far right too is holding a banner with the logo of the club. The nine men sporting 1930s fashion in the front row must be club administrators.

Yıldız (2015b) argues that “sportsman photographs” as a category of vernacular photography emerged during the late Ottoman period with images in which young Muslim, Christian and Jewish men, shirtless or in tight-fitting athletic attire, show off their fit, muscular bodies. Such images circulated in sports clubs, schools or among friends as a way to promote healthy physical exercise, bolstering a new form of modern Ottoman masculinity:

> The defining characteristics of this new body were proportionality, a slim waist, defined biceps, a straight back and a broad and hairless chest. The new look was deemed “beautiful” – because it was based on physical exercise as a personal effort, itself a new bourgeois value – and thus “civilized.” This late Ottoman conception of a modern, urban masculinity, which echoed similar ideas and values in major urban centers around the world, stood in stark contrast to older Ottoman views on the body and its relationship to social status. (Yıldız 2015b: 193)

Among vernacular photographs from the 1920s and 1930s, “sports photographs” similarly emerge as promoting a distinct new look. In this period, sports were predominantly seen as a masculine activity, which is reflected in the surviving photographs. Pictures of sports teams remain male-dominated until the 1940s and 1950s, and mostly feature athletes and soccer players. Occasionally, there are photographs related to other sports, including volleyball, tennis (often in mixed-gender groups) and oil wrestling. In group portraits like Figure 4.1, the sportsmen are sometimes photographed with men wearing suits, who could be administrators of the team or officials from the town the team belonged to. At times, men in military uniforms also appear, which might indicate that these photographs portray sports teams within the military. The photographs are usually taken outdoors at a stadium or on a sports field, or in a central location within a town or a village.

Traditional sports in the Ottoman territories included archery, wrestling, horseback riding, racing and swimming, which were associated with “honor, bravery, and male group spirit” as virtues of masculinity (Di-Capua 2006: 440). Around the mid-nineteenth century, Western sports clubs were established in major cities, including Cairo,
Alexandria, Istanbul and Beirut, mostly by European institutions such as embassies and schools. These clubs introduced sports like cricket, hockey, soccer, tennis and basketball to their predominantly male members (Sehlikoglu 2017). In the early 1900s, these Western sports clubs were gradually replaced by local clubs established by Muslim and non-Muslim Ottoman communities, promoting the modernization of young bodies by making them fit and healthy (Yıldız 2015a, b). As a result, şişman or “the fat one” with a plump belly, previously embraced by Ottoman men as a symbol of “financial prosperity, strength, virility and social status,” came to “represent incompetence, lethargy, and physical inferiority” (Yıldız 2015a: 193).

The Kemalist regime adopted the modernist idea that “a physically and mentally healthy individual is a precondition for the well-being of a robust nation” (Di-Capua 2006: 440 in Sehlikoglu 2017: 4). The Türkiye İdman Cemiyetleri İttifakı (Turkey Training Associations Alliance) was established in 1922 to manage sports activities in the country. Atatürk is said to have argued that the bodies of Turkish people “remained in the East while their thoughts inclined towards the West” (Şenol Cantek 2003: 33), suggesting that the Turkish body too needed to be improved for the creation of a fully Europeanized modern nation.

To separate itself from the Ottoman past, the Kemalist regime also promoted physical fitness as an ancient Turkic feature, which, “forgotten” during Ottoman rule, needed to be reclaimed and restored by the new Turkish nation (Sehlikoglu 2017). As Yiğit (2013: 180) points out, “the imagined ancient past of the Turks in Central Asia provided a rich source of national epics and myths, which helped establish the Turks as an ancient nation.” In this way, the Kemalist nation-building process appealed to a myth of past bodies, reappropriating them for its modernist agenda.

Figure 4.1 offers a striking example of the genre of sports photographs in the way the young men pictured in it perform and negotiate a masculine corporeal aesthetic that was highly promoted by the Kemalist regime. Most of the sportsmen in this photograph strike a similar pose, showing off their slim, healthy bodies. They stand upright with their chest pushed forward and their hands behind their back, except for the third man from the left who is leaning slightly forward. An arresting feature of this image is the man on the far right, who has a bigger build than the rest of the athletes. This may indicate that he practiced a different type of sport within the athletic team, such as the discus throw, the hammer throw or the shot put. He is also the only athlete with a mustache in the traditional Ottoman style. This contrasts with the seated man right in front of him, who has a toothbrush mustache, in line with the Western fashion trend of the time. Despite this difference, however, overall Figure 4.1 reflects Kemalist attitudes towards the construction of a modern Republican male body in the 1920s and 1930s, placing the emphasis on the representation of a robust heteronormative physique that excludes fat and disability.

The early 1930s, when Figure 4.1 was taken, constituted a period in which the emphasis on physical exercise and fit bodies as indicators of a strong nation was spreading rapidly due to the rising political and cultural influence of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy on
Turkey. In this period, public debates and government policies about youth, sports and health were largely governed by the way the regime promoted sports “as an instrument of physical health and moral regulation” (Yılmaz 2013: 188). Physical activity also remained closely linked to the military and was presented as a national duty, essential for the overall health and productivity of the nation, as well as the defense of the country.

Under the influence of fascist ideologies and nationalist movements in Europe, the Kemalists manufactured the image of an ideal Turkish society free from “criminals, political rebels, prostitutes, and other ‘atavistic’ elements” (Ben-Ghiat 2001: 18). In the famous La Turquie kémaliste propaganda magazine, published between 1933 and 1949, slim young men and women with robust and disciplined bodies in perfect proportions were shown ardently fencing, skiing, sailing and playing tennis, all of which were associated with being Western and modern. In La Turquie kémaliste, older sports such as archery, horse riding and wrestling were also encouraged in an attempt to revive the ancient traditions of Turkic people (Başgelen and Akçura 1998). Photographed by the renowned photographer Othmar Pferschy, the male and female bodies portrayed in La Turquie kémaliste exemplify the ideal body image propagated by the new regime, which we also encounter in the national and regional press throughout the 1930s.

While the images in La Turquie kémaliste were aimed at “international circles” (Akçalı 2016), photographs of sports teams were circulated among family and friends of team members, as well as among a wide community of fans and local citizens. Given the quality of the print, Figure 4.1 seems to have been taken by an itinerant photographer, probably commissioned by the Club on the occasion of the contest. The image might have been reprinted and distributed among those portrayed in the picture, and perhaps included in the official annals of the sports club or the city. It may have been used in local or national publications and placed on the walls of the club. The display of photographs in sports clubs, schools, municipalities and military buildings would help to record, popularize and normalize the ideal image of the modern Republican male body (Yıldız 2015b).

In this section, I have focused on the making of modern male bodies through sports photographs, which constituted a core representational aspect of the Kemalist nation-
building process. For the regime, however, the making of the new modern and healthy female body was equally critical to ensuring its success. Central to this effort were the performances of schoolgirls at the Gymnastics Fest/Festival of Youth and Sports, a national holiday that is still celebrated annually on May 19. In the next section, I will elaborate on the way the 19 May celebrations reimagined and promulgated modern female bodies in public space.

**Educating Bodies: 19 May Celebrations**

As Sehlikoglu (2017: 6) explains, “the physical changes in women’s public visibility and bodies were considered indicators of the achievements of modernist nationalist projects, and Kemalists heavily invested in women’s sports as a pillar of the project after the 1920s.” With the personal encouragement of Mustafa Kemal, a small number of Turkish Muslim women from elite families, including relatives of members and managers of sports clubs, became involved in sports that were considered modern and thus appropriate for women, such as fencing, horse-riding and volleyball (Sehlikoglu 2007). Prominent figures like Keriman Halis, Miss World 1932, were chosen as role models to promote Western sports for women. In an issue of *La Turquie kémaliste*, Halis was featured in full

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Figure 4.3 A group of schoolgirls in sports clothes. 8.9 x 14.0 cm. Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.

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111 The first official Turkish women athletes emerged in the mid-1920s and included Nermin Tahsin, Emine Abdullah and Mübeccel Hüsamettin (Argun). In the late 1920s, women started competing in rowing, tennis and volleyball. Fencers Suat Fetgeri Aseni (Tari) and Halet Çambel became the first women to represent Turkey at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Turkey’s first official women’s soccer team was established in 1971 in Istanbul (Accessed August 16, 2020. http://kadineserleri.org).
skiing gear in the Uludağ mountains, illustrating how this sport was gaining popularity in the Republican era (Başgelen and Akçura 1998: 106).

As in the case of other public performances like singing, dancing or beauty contests, the regime used a combination of discourses to justify women’s participation in sports nationally and internationally, negotiating conservative social norms that obliged women to curtail physical activities in public. The construction of the new desired female Republican body relied on the replacement of the veiled, rural, unhealthy-looking and therefore “uncivilized” and “outmoded” body with the disciplined, healthy, urban and therefore “civilized” body (Alemdaroğlu 2005). Women’s unveiled, fit bodies were shown off as symbols of the transformation of the Turkish nation itself, as proof of how modern and secular Turkey had become. Playing sports was deemed a patriotic act and the first sportswomen were perceived as “heroic figures devoted to their nation” (Sehlikoglu 2017: 7).

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, educational networks were used as effective tools to change traditionalist and Islamist attitudes towards women’s participation in sports. Indeed, while vernacular photographs with Turkish women posing in sports outfits remain scarce until the 1940s, girls wearing sports clothes repeatedly appear in school portraits, particularly in pictures taken during festivities such as the Gymnastics Fest (later the Festival of Youth and Sports). This fest has been celebrated as a major national holiday on May 19 since the mid-1930s, converging the commemoration of Mustafa Kemal’s landing in Samsun, which marked the beginning of the Turkish War of Independence, and the desire “to celebrate youth and to raise awareness of the importance of youth and sports for the well-being of the nation” (Yılmaz 2013: 188).

Judging by the type of sports clothes the schoolgirls in Figure 4.3 are wearing, the image was probably taken at a public performance, likely at a 19 May celebration in the 1930s or 1940s. The girls embrace the presence of the camera rather than shying away from it. They lean towards each other, eager to fit into the frame. A lot of them smile and appear happy to be part of the group picture with their two teachers.

As Yılmaz (2013: 179) points out, “national celebrations have been important instruments of political socialization, legitimacy, and mobilization in Turkey,” helping to build a shared national memory and identity. The Kemalist regime consolidated the structure of national holidays through a state-controlled educational system (Öztürkmen 2001: 47). National holidays were celebrated with “sentimental poetry recitation, 112 A precursor of this fest, the Physical Education Day (İdman Bayramı), was celebrated in 1916 and 1917 on May 12, with only men allowed to participate. The celebration was reintroduced on 10 May 1928 under a new name as Gymnastics Fest (Jimnastik Bayramı). The replacement of the word idman, which has Arabic roots, with the French-derived term jimnastik (a transliteration of gymnastique) symbolically reflects Turkey’s Westernization efforts (Sehlikoglu 2017). Simultaneously, in the 1920s, Mustafa Kemal’s landing in Samsun was celebrated locally as Gazi Day. 19 May was officially recognized as a national holiday and as the Festival of Youth and Sports in 1938. Since the 1980 coup, 19 May has been celebrated as the Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day.

113 Among several national holidays that were established during RPP rule, four major celebrations stood out and continue to be celebrated today: Republic Day (29 October), Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day (19 May), National Sovereignty and Children’s Day (23 April) and Victory Day (30 August) (Öztürkmen 2001). These celebrations were closely tied to the school calendar, and “each anniversary
orderly but hard-to-adapt stadium performances, tiring costume parades, and an authoritarian organizational style” (Öztürkmen 2001: 51).

The Festival of Youth and Sports is an outstanding example of this practice and played a key role in secularizing bodies through athletic performances. Islamist discourses on the female body were publicly challenged by teenage girls marching, jumping, running and dancing in public in shorts or skirts that fell well above their knees (Sehlikoglu 2017; Koca 2009). Images of schoolgirls performing in 19 May celebrations also appeared in the press (Figure 4.4), as well as in La Turquie kémaliste (Figure 4.5), cementing and disseminating the way Republican femininity and citizenship were imagined by the rulers of the new nation.

Figure 4.4 An article on 19 May celebrations. The story features schoolgirls preparing for the celebrations, 19 May 1937, Cumhuriyet. Istanbul University Libraries.

celebration marked another stage in the successful evolution of the Republic into a consolidated regime” (Yılmaz 2013: 202).
As in Figure 4.1, the girls’ performed selves in Figure 4.3 were likely meant for multiple audiences: for their teachers and the school heads, who would work hard to ensure the “success” of the celebrations; for their families, who would feel proud to see their daughters’ successful performances; for the public, visiting officials and communities members, including those who would later encounter images of the celebrations and performances on the walls of the school; and for the photographer, who would be the one to capture and reproduce the performed selves across these multiple audiences.

As Yılmaz (2013: 188) notes, aspects of 19 May celebrations in the 1930s such as “the display of healthy and disciplined bodies through athletic performances and the partial shift from town squares and street celebrations to stadiums” reveal the increasingly visible influence of Fascist regimes on Turkey. Consequently, “the formalism and the overemphasized nationalism of the celebrations, repeated over and over for years, eventually created a sense of alienation,” although “the zeal of the 1930s” survived until the 1950s (Öztürkmen 2001: 47, 51).

For girls who looked at Figure 4.3 or pictures like it decades later as adult women, the image of them as modern, active, educated and secular Republican schoolgirls, a role they may or may not have been conscious of performing at the time, may have induced nostalgia for the early Republican era. Indeed, the Kemalist reforms were fervently supported by many urban secular women, who believed that they were being freed from the religious oppression of the Ottomans and given the rights, dignity and education they deserved thanks to Atatürk (Heath 2008).

In this section, I have shown how the Kemalists, recognizing the need to create new female bodies to underscore the success of their reforms, used educational networks to

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114 Teachers often played a key role in the planning and choreography of the performances.
integrate sports and exercise into public life. Public performances for national holidays like the Festival of Youth and Sports on May 19, an integral part of the curriculum, served to normalize the inclusion of sports in women’s public lives. Accordingly, this section has looked at how young women presented and mediated their modern body image in photographs of 19 May celebrations. In the next section, I will focus on the significance of the construction of modern Turkish womanhood and manhood for the new Republican body image through two distinct photographic genres in Turkish family photography: childbirth (lohusa) and circumcision (sünnet) pictures.

Framing Turkish Womanhood and Manhood: Lohusa and Sünnet

In Figure 4.6 a young mother in a nightgown is captured in a medium-long shot, sitting up in a carefully prepared childbirth (lohusa yatağı). Her figure only occupies a very small part of the frame, a clear convention in childbirth pictures of the time. The distance between the camera and the woman conveys a sense of respect, emphasizing her new, “improved” social status as a mother by the inclusion of the bed. The new mother sits in the center of the frame smiling into the camera.

At first glance, our attention is directed to the mother, who appears to be holding a baby. Yet, on closer inspection, her baby turns out to be lying nearby on a few cushions.

115 Lohusa (from the Ancient Greek word lechousa/lechona, derived from lechos, or bed) can be translated as puerpera. Lohusalık refers to puerperium, which Encyclopædia Britannica defines as “the period of adjustment after childbirth during which the mother’s reproductive system returns to its normal prepregnant state” (Accessed August 16, 2020. britannica.com/science/puerperium). Traditionally, this period is considered to be around 40 days in Turkey.

Figure 4.6 A childbirth picture. 8.9 x 14 cm.
Courtesy of the Akkasah Center for Photography.
in a slightly elevated position, crying. The bed is decorated with white sheets and matching embroidered cushions and pillows, as well as a satin quilt that covers the young mother. A carpet with traditional patterns hangs behind the bed. What we see at the very top of the carpet behind the bed is likely to be a copy of the Quran, hung in a pouch to protect the mother and the baby. Typically, a silver mirror, symbolizing “a wonderful life” (parlak ömür), would also be placed somewhere nearby for protection (Çetindağ 2009), which is why the photograph might have been framed to include the mirror.

Celebrations and rituals around pregnancy and childbirth are not unique to Turkey. From ancient Egypt to medieval Europe, pregnancies and childbirth have been celebrated with prayers, gifts (e.g. baby showers), feasts (e.g. amphidromia in ancient Greece), purification ceremonies (e.g. seemantham in ancient India), tea parties (e.g. Victorian Britain) and animal sacrifices (aqiqah in the Muslim tradition). The Turkish customs around lohusalık (puerperium) are believed to go back to the Turkic tribes of Central Asia. While the lohusa period is considered to last 40 days after childbirth, the childbed would be dismantled after a week of confinement.

Ayfer Tunç (2003: 323) writes that while the mother remained in the hospital after the birth, her close female relatives would prepare the childbed at home with the “best bed sheet sets and the most elegant bedcover.” Since the bedroom was considered the “most private room” of the house, even immediate family members would need permission to enter it. Only women relatives and friends could visit the woman in the childbed. The family would try to ensure the quick recovery of the mother so that she could be more mobile and receive visitors. Traditionally, the spicy lohusa sherbet (lohusa şerbeti), made with water, sugar, cinnamon, cloves and red food color, would be served to the mother after childbirth to prevent postpartum depression and increase lactation, as well as to guests visiting the childbed (Tunç 2003: 323–24).

116 According to ancient Sumerian, Central Asian and Caucasian traditions, al (also known as alkarısı or albastı in Turkish) were believed to be demons of childbirth, attacking mothers and children after birth. To protect the mother and the child from al, various items would be added to the childbed decoration, including mirrors, onions, garlics, nazar amulets and a copy of the Quran. Other traditions to guard against al include putting sharp items like knives and scissors under the pillow, keeping the lights on all night, not leaving the mother alone, and attaching a ribbon to the mother’s hair and the cradle of the baby (Accessed August 16, 2020. islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/alkarisi).
In a strikingly similar composition to that of Figure 4.6, Figure 4.7 shows a boy in bed at a circumcision ceremony, wearing an outfit with an ornate hat bought for this special occasion (sünnetlik). This alaminüt photograph is again taken from a distance, so that the boy occupies only a small part of the frame, although, like the woman in the childbed, he is in the very center. As in the lohusa image, the distance taken seems designed to fully capture the bed and the surrounding ornaments in order to emphasize the significance of the circumcision, a critical moment in a boy’s life.

The boy in Figure 4.7 is seated in the center of the frame, looking into the camera with a hesitant smile similar to that of the woman in Figure 4.6. The bed has been carefully prepared, with cushions, clean sheets and an embroidered satin quilt that the boy uses as a cover. The large octagon-shaped cushions on both sides of the bed add a sense of symmetry to the frame. A carpet with traditional patterns is again hung behind the bed. The ribbon over the boy’s shoulder is part of the decoration of the bed. The décor, the boy’s outfit and the composition are representative of a traditional circumcision bed photograph. It appears that, in this case, the face initially came out as dark as the hands; the photograph was retouched to make the boy’s face look fair.

Most common among Jewish and Muslim populations but also in Coptic Christianity and in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, male circumcision as a “religious duty” was seen as a rite of passage marking a boy’s entrance into adulthood. In Anatolia, an elaborate set of customs had been developed around male circumcision, including a ceremony with entertainment involving a large number of guests, including family and neighbors. Traditionally, circumcision of Muslims in Turkey would be done between ages 5 and
13. The ceremony would typically take place in the summer months. The special circumcision outfit with bright colors, sometimes adorned with jewelry, was meant to give the boy a sense of confidence and power. A few days before or on the day of the ceremony, the children to be circumcised would be paraded around the neighborhood, either on horseback or by car to announce this turning point in their lives. For the ceremony, the circumcision bed would be set up in the main room of the house or the garden and would be decorated with embroidered coverings.

Figures 4.6 and 4.7 document two instances that are considered turning points in the life of a woman and man respectively, affirming their gendered social identities. Photography is used to witness and evince the newly gained status of motherhood, “a sacred duty for a woman,” in Figure 4.6 (Ahıska 2010; Tekeli 1995), and the affirmation of manhood for the boy in Figure 4.7 (Barutçu 2015; Selek 2010 Bouhdiba 2000). These images also represent the shifting boundaries between private and public life during the process of the modernization of Turkish society, and the renegotiation of what was permissible and desirable to appear and circulate through photography.

At a time when photography was still a rare practice within households, a professional photographer was likely called in for these occasions. The print quality of both pictures suggests the presence of an itinerant photographer. In Figure 4.6, the photographer was allowed to penetrate a highly private space, the bedroom of a mother in puerperium, which even close relatives would not be allowed to enter. Mert Rüstem (2018) explains that, for lohusa pictures, a woman photographer on staff would be sent to a house since it would be inappropriate for men to see women in such a private setting. However, it is hard to establish how common this was in the 1920s and 1930s, given the apparent scarcity of women photographers at the time.

In childbed pictures, the aftermath of a very intimate act is documented to evince the health and safety of the mother and her child, ensuring the woman’s social acceptance and inclusion as a parent. The absence of the father or any other family members in Figure 4.6 enhances the sense of bonding between the mother and the child although some lohusa pictures from the 1920s and 1930s also include the father, and at times the midwife. The circumcision ceremony, on the other hand, would be considered a public event, the

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117 Today, while circumcision is still universally performed in Turkey, secular families have largely abandoned the ceremony. However, it remains popular for the majority of modern Turkish society. For those who do prepare a ceremony, it is common practice to have the circumcision done in the hospital at a very young age (under 2) and to have the ceremony a few years later. In the early Republican-era pictures, it can be assumed that the boys would be circumcised during the ceremony.

118 In this chapter, I focus on Turkey’s Muslim traditions regarding circumcision ceremonies. It is important to note that Turkey’s Sephardic communities also perform circumcision, or brit milah, on the eighth day of the infant’s life, as required in Judaism. Traditionally, Sephardic circumcisions would be carried out in maternity hospitals, and mothers would stay in the hospital until their sons had been circumcised (Forta 1995: 73).

119 In recent years, circumcision outfits emulating Ottoman Sultans with ornate kaftans in beige or golden tones and crown-like hats with feathers and jewelry have become fashionable, particularly among the conservative segments of Turkish society.

120 As noted earlier, photography was still considered a predominantly male profession and female photographers are largely absent from the history of studio photography in Turkey. Only recently, a few exceptions such as Naciye Suman (Ak 1985), Muzaffer Hanım (Karakısla 2000) and Maryam Şahinyan (Serttaş 2011) have been brought into the limelight.
photographic announcement and commemoration of which were highly desirable. In both cases, photography is used to not only document but also “prove” an indexical reality: a birth and circumcision, both of which the photographs attest “undoubtedly happened” (Barthes 1981: 80).

The making of a new social status for these two subjects is embodied in the staging of the bed. A boy who enters manhood and a woman who, having successfully been married off, gives birth to a healthy child elevate the social reputability of a family. Through the production of these images, the whole family performs itself as a respectable unit, diligently fulfilling its cultural, religious and national duties. The photographs attest that family members continue to perform their citizenship in private spaces that were increasingly made public.

As Barthes (1981: 13) suggests, photography transforms “subject into object and even, one might say, into a museum object.” Similarly, these photographs “fetishize” potentially traumatic and highly intimate corporeal and emotional experiences like childbirth and circumcision. They objectify the people who went through these experiences “by turning them into things to be looked at” publicly (Solomon-Godeau 1991: 221–22). The images invite a voyeuristic looking (Sontag 1977) that Henning (2009: 202) describes as “a mode of looking related to the exercise of power in which a body becomes a spectacle for someone else’s pleasure, a world divided into the active ‘lookers’ and the passive ‘looked at.’”

In Figures 4.6 and 4.7, the mother and the boy are clearly aware that they are being photographed, but their agency is limited. They may be fearful, exhausted or in pain, but they have to put on a “photographic mask” (Hirsch 1997), fabricating themselves according to the expectations of the society they live in (Hirsch 1997: 98). By assuming the proper photographic mask, they perform a self that celebrates and memorializes the joy of becoming a mother and the joy of becoming a man. Photography here serves to turn potentially traumatic events into celebrations, as the subjects turn themselves into museum objects in Barthes’ sense to comply with performative gender norms.

Figures 4.6 and 4.7 can be seen as early examples of how photography in the home modeled itself on studio photography and was able to do so thanks to the mobility and transience of the itinerant photographers I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five. Indeed, the compositions in Figures 4.6 and 4.7 are as carefully designed as those of studio photographs. The pose and posture are formal, and the hung carpet is reminiscent of the painted backdrops that were commonly used in studio portraits. The cushions, furniture, quilt and Quran, as well as the bed, function as props in the symmetrically framed photographs. While the photographer used studio techniques in composing the photograph, those portrayed used their own “techniques” in their pose and posture, either prompted by the photographer or imitating photographs they had seen or posed for before. In Figure 4.6, the woman performs the role of a new mother, but also that of a modest young woman, a role she might also have performed in studio portraits taken at her graduation or wedding. The boy, too, performs the role of boy-becoming-man in a way he might have learned from his experience with studio photography, possibly on a religious holiday.
In this section, I have indicated that in the formative years of the Republic, post-partums and circumcisions were reimagined through photography, incorporating such representations into the making of the modern Republican manhood and womanhood. The integration of these ancient customs, seen as milestones in people’s lives independent of their class, into modern photographic portraiture suggests the degree to which photography was embraced and democratized in Turkish society, increasingly appealing to a larger public beyond the urban middle classes. The childbed and circumcision pictures also show how public and private spheres were shifted and redefined in the early years of the Republic. They help us explore what was allowed to be documented and shared, what emerged into the public domain, and what remained private, kept from the public eye.

**Conclusion**

As part of the Turkish nation-building process, the forging of modern bodies became a central concern for the consolidation of the regime, particularly in the 1930s. The performative potential of photography was effectively used to promote a particular body image for Turkish male and female citizens, both nationally and internationally, as demonstrated in the example of *La Turquie kémaliste*. Recognizing the significance of photography for the making of new bodies, in this chapter I have looked at how modern corporeal aesthetics were constructed for Turkish men and women through a series of distinct vernacular genres of photographs taken at sports events, national day celebrations, circumcision ceremonies and following childbirth. While my focus remains on the forging of an urban middle-class identity, as with the military portraits discussed earlier, the genres analyzed in this chapter were produced by a large segment of society, effectively contributing to the construction of an increasingly coherent national Turkish identity.

As this chapter has argued, sports photographs constituted an effective tool for the Kemalist nation-building process, to reinforce the idea that sports and exercise are precursors and indicators of a healthy and strong nation. The predominantly male outlook of sports clubs is reflected in sports photographs from the 1920s and 1930s, serving as a focal point for the analysis of an emerging corporeal aesthetics of male athleticism. For Kemalists, however, the making of the new female body was equally important to signal the regime’s success in modernizing the country to the world. In order to make sports and exercise acceptable for women in the public sphere, the regime used national holiday celebrations and school curricula designed around them. A striking example was the Festival of Youth and Sports (also known as the Gymnastics Fest), which included mandatory performances and parades for students. The visibility of schoolgirls engaging in exercise at these celebrations was key for the reimagining of modern female bodies.

Photographs of childbeds and circumcision ceremonies in their turn unveil how ancient traditions survived in and were adapted to the modern Turkish Republican context. Childbed and circumcision pictures reinforce a modern imagery of womanhood and manhood for the emerging urban middle classes, while also suggesting that certain Islamic, Turkic and/or Ottoman traditions did not necessarily have to be rejected but could be made compatible with desired Republican visualities, similar to the integration of both
Western (e.g. tennis) and ancient Turkic sports (e.g. wrestling) into modern Turkish identity.

Simultaneously, the childbirth and circumcision pictures show how public and private spheres were being renegotiated in the formative years of the Turkish Republic. The spaces featured in the sports photographs are decidedly modern. On the other hand, the spaces of the childbirth and circumcision pictures are designed in a traditional fashion while also including Western furniture, indicating that the construction of modern bodies was not limited to modernized public spaces but also took place in traditional settings within the private sphere.

In Part III, I will expand the discussion of the relationship between photography and space-making in the early Republican era by studying how photography helped construct and domesticate modern public spaces for Turkish citizens in and outside the studio setting.