

**Calafato, Özge Baykan.** *Making the Modern Turkish Citizen: Vernacular Photography in the Early Republican Era.* London: I.B. TAURIS. 2022. 248 pages. ISBN: 9780755643271.

Reviewed by **İdil Çetin**  
University of Oslo, IFIKK  
idil.cetin@ifikk.uio.no

*Making the Modern Turkish Citizen* focuses on vernacular photography in Turkey from the 1920s and 1930s in order to have a more profound understanding of the construction of modern Turkish identity as a process that stood at the intersection of official, commercial and everyday spheres. Even though there are differing ideas when it comes to deciding which types of images fall under the rubric of vernacular, the photographs that are deemed as such in this study consist of images produced by commercial photography studios, by itinerant photographers and by individuals with hand-held consumer cameras. By investigating the diversity of such self-representations that remain outside of the official imagery of the regime, this study aims at examining the relationship between photography, nation-building, and identity formation of the early republican years at the background of the Turkish modernization project. It aims at understanding how the political and social developments of the period impacted on the construction of a modern identity for the Turkish citizens, more specifically, for the Turkish urban middle classes, and how these individuals used photography to represent and negotiate this identity.

The study draws upon the photographic collection that the author herself built and catalogued for Akkasah, the photography archive at al Mawrid, the Arab Centre for the Study of Art at the New York University of Abu Dhabi. The collection consists of more than 17,000 images from Turkey taken between 1910s until 1990s that the author purchased over the course of multiple visits to second-hand booksellers and antique dealers in Istanbul and Izmir between 2014 and 2018. It is composed of amateur snapshots alongside individual and group portraits taken in photography studios and by itinerant photographers. The book, on the other hand, focuses upon 60 photographs from the 1920s and 1930s from that collection, albeit a couple of images from the 1940s also found their way into the discussion. Upon identifying the prevalent types of portraiture as well as the prevalent occasions for picture-making discernible in the overall collection, the author has selected each image according to their visual appeal, their relevance to the historical period under study, their material qualities as well as the language of the inscriptions that are sometimes visible on the reverse or obverse of certain images. Even though the photographs that are subject to detailed analysis in the book are drawn from the collections of Akkasah, the author has also consulted several other archives and libraries from Turkey for their collections on vernacular photography from the period under scrutiny in order to better understand the prevalence of certain themes that predominated the collection she has built and studied.

The discussion of photographs selected for this study is carried in relation to four focal points that the author has identified as central to the construction of modern Turkish identity; namely, gender (Chapter 1 and 2), body (Chapter 3 and 4), space (Chapter 5), and language (Chapter 6). In order to analyse these four focal points in detail, the author depends mainly upon Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity, Nelson Goodman's concept of worldmaking and Elizabeth Edwards's discussion on the materiality of photographs. The notion of gender performativity allows the author to discuss the constrictions of the ideal Turkish citizen propagated by the regime, within which individuals shaped their identities through repeated performances in vernacular photography, especially when it comes to gender identity. The concept of worldmaking, on the other hand, opens the path for debating how vernacular photography was not only a reflection of existing constrictions but was also a site of empowerment through which people could make up their own worlds by enacting multiple selves in the images. Finally, the discussion on the materiality of photographs makes way for covering the meaning-making attributes of the material dimensions of photographic prints and how they were produced and circulated as a way of negotiating power relations.

The book consists of six chapters. To give a brief overview of each chapter, the first one focuses upon how urban middle-class Turkish women used vernacular photography to negotiate modern femininities as well as the republican ideal for the new Turkish women. The second one pursues the topic of the representation of gender identity but focuses this time upon how normative masculinities were performed in vernacular photography. The third chapter revolves around the role of pose, posture, and props in the construction of modern selves. The fourth one expands on the meaning of pose and posture in the construction of bodies through an analysis of distinct genres of vernacular photography; namely, sports photographs, childhood pictures of mothers who had recently given birth, and photographs from circumcision ceremonies. The fifth chapter focuses upon a case study of a century-old photography studio from Izmir, namely Hamza Rüstem Studio, to discuss how vernacular photography was effective in the making of new republican spaces as well as of classed identities. And finally, the sixth chapter focuses upon the social and familial networks in which photographic prints were circulated as effective modes of communications.

As vernacular photography continues to remain a niche area of academic research in Turkey, this study certainly enriches the literature on the history of photography in Turkey. It is also a valuable contribution to the literature on modernization and identity-construction processes of the early republican period due to its less institutional and more quotidian approach. Nevertheless, it is lacking in its exploitation of the resources on social and cultural life of the early republican years, which would have provided more depth to certain arguments. Furthermore, even though the book aims at being a systematic analysis of vernacular photography of the early republican years through a selection of photographs from a much larger collection, the discussion does not always allow the reader to grasp the prevalent patterns of this branch of photography and, in some cases, comes across instead as an in-depth analysis of individual images. Despite these two points, the book is a good read for anyone interested in the

role photography in the construction, representation, and negotiation of identities in the early Turkish republican period at the background of nation-building and modernization projects.