“Unveiling” the Tramway: The Intimate Public Sphere in Late Ottoman and Republican Istanbul

James Ryan1

Abstract
With the introduction of the horse-drawn tramway in 1871, the citizens of Istanbul were forced to reckon with a new type of public space—the crowded confines of the tramcar. This article focuses on the removal of a curtain that separated men and women on public transit in 1923, analyzing the discourses that shaped the decision and the way in which gendered discourses around public transit were altered at the outset of the Turkish Republic by the curtain’s removal. Building on the work of Lauren Berlant and Alev Çınar, I suggest that the tramcar constituted an intimate public sphere and site of negotiation in which citizens came to both confront and negotiate modern problems ranging from morality to fashion in a way that was functionally different from other public spaces.

Keywords
public transit, Turkish Republic, Ottoman Turkey, public sphere, sites of negotiation

This article investigates the desegregation of the Istanbul tramway to better understand these confined public spaces as sites of subject formation and cultural–political discourse. Until late 1923, women and men were seated in opposite spaces, separated usually by a fabric curtain, but sometimes by swinging doors or a second deck. The curtain’s removal generated great public anxiety regarding male–female relations in the public sphere and in the newly formed parliament. From its inception, the curtain had brought the typically private, elite construction of the harem squarely into the public arena, and its removal represented the first widely felt secularizing measure to affect Istanbul’s urban public.1 The tramway carried a totemic weight for both the government and the citizenry; riding the tramway was a way of participating in both Ottoman and republican versions of modernity. The tram’s early route construction (Figure 1) placed emphasis on two factors—transporting people through the governmental heart of the city in Sultanahmet and connecting others, especially westerners, disembarking from major intercity transit hubs like the Sirkeci train station, the terminus of the “Orient Express,” to the commercial hubs of the city in Galata and Beyoğlu.2 These advances in transportation were not merely modern comforts; they evoked a very particular modernist, or even futurist, symbolism in the cultural sphere that was widely shared as ridership grew with relatively stable prices in the early twentieth century (Figure 2).3 It was a network that entwined the purposes of late Ottoman bureaucratic and cultural modernization;

1University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Email: jamryan@sas.upenn.edu
however, its localized focus and the difficulty met by the state in policing and controlling the tramcar as a public space created a setting where modernization was contested on a more frequent and open basis than other modes of transit like the ferry or railway. For this reason, the article then moves to discuss the modernization of public spaces connected with the tramway, with a particular eye toward the gendered way in which they changed over the late Ottoman and early republican period.

The space of the tramcar is significant because it was a rare space where Ottomans, and later Turkish republican citizens, would encounter each other on an intimate level, crowding onto platforms and jamming into cars, negotiating personal space, and public mores, on a daily basis. In this way, it constitutes what Alev Çınar has termed a “site of negotiation,” which is an elaboration of Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the public sphere that accommodates non-verbal and non-discursive elements of public communication. Following Çınar’s directive, this article sees the space of the tramcar as a site where dominant national norms and their alternatives are performed, consumed, and negotiated, before and after the curtain was removed. The tramcar’s segregation by sex in the Ottoman period was as reflective of the norms adopted by the elite of that time as its desegregation was in the republican era. I argue that this contestation in the space of the tramcar in both the Ottoman and republican periods was a physical and social manifestation of the myriad, continuing debates among Ottoman and republican era intellectuals about the relationship between morality and the adoption of western technology and science. Hence, changes to the space within the tramcar, such as the removal of the curtain, were intimately related to these broader discourses and brought them to bear on the lived experience of Istanbulites of all classes.

Figure 1. Map of Istanbul tramway around 1920, showing route expansion to population centers in European Istanbul.
Source: Kayseriljoiğlu, R. Sertac Dersaadet ’ten İstanbul’a Tramvay 2. Bolum, p. 51.
The lifting of the curtain in the tramway cars marked a significant alteration to Istanbul’s public sphere. Lifting the curtain meant that so much of the minutiae of modern life in Istanbul would come under scrutiny and discussion in a very confined space. By considering these debates as they occurred in and over such a confined space suggests scholars should consider how the space operated as an intimate public sphere. This article situates the removal of the tramway curtain in the broader schema of the Kemalist attempts to reshape the public sphere in accordance with European norms regarding secularism and gender, which includes both the dismantling of religious authority and reform campaigns, such as anti-veiling, that were specifically intended to alter gender roles, behavior, morality, and comportment. As Sevgi Adak has shown, the fact that these reform efforts were squarely focused on urban spaces and urban women as opposed to their rural counterparts is often obscured in the scholarship on these reforms.

Beyond the secularization of public space, the years following the removal of the curtain also likely posed a new challenge for religious citizens, perhaps resulting in a parallel set of negotiations that set new cultural and political borders for the cultural institution of *mahremiyet* (intimacy), as identified in the work of Sertaç Sehlikoğlu. For this reason, the article then briefly investigates representations and discussions of the tramway in the post-Kemalist period (since 1950) and more contemporary times to assess the ways in which debates over intimacy on the tramcar have been reformulated since the curtain’s removal in 1923.

**The New Turkish Woman’s Genesis in Beyoğlu**

The modernization of Istanbul’s transit system and women’s roles in public developed simultaneously in a public sphere that was changing rapidly along with them. The anxieties felt regarding women on the tramway both before and after the curtain paralleled the increasing presence of women in public spaces and in the public sphere over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For this reason, it is critical to consider recent work on the general restructuring of Istanbul’s urban fabric from the late Ottoman period onward and how the increased presence of women in public and its attendant anxieties developed alongside the proliferation of the tramway.
According to Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, Istanbul since its conquest in 1453 by Sultan Mehmed II was a “consuming city” that served as a place where consumers the world over were introduced to products of both sustenance and luxury that they would find in few other places. They argue convincingly that concerns over public morality were closely tied to consumption patterns, noting the “symbiotic nature of sultan and people . . . where the demand was for consumption and the desire was for control.”\(^{11}\) It is this relationship between desire and control that is critical to understanding the tramcar as a place where cosmopolitan consumerism, state power, and individual anxiety were exceptionally concentrated.

Over the course of the tramway’s development in Istanbul, there was a shift in the cosmopolitan nature of Istanbul’s marketplace that not only fueled anxieties about the role and place of men and women in the public sphere but also encroaching imperialism from the West. While Istanbul’s marketplace and public sphere increasingly served as a window to global indulgences and lifestyles, as Boyar and Fleet note, the Ottoman state expressed a strong desire to control the frequency and manner in which Muslim Ottoman citizens, and women particularly, interacted with, and in, this space.\(^{12}\) However, as Elizabeth Frierson argues, the Hamidian era brought with it a “new culture of display” that reversed the relationship between the origin of consumer goods and the associations between fashion and wealth. Beginning with the changing appearance and prominence of new European fashions among Istanbul’s European and non-Muslim women, who were “relatively free to adopt the new hats and corseted styles, and thus display a streamlined, rock-solid profile of modernity, more, a profile which traced their cultural and commercial connections with European wealth, power, and privileges . . . “\(^{13}\)

The onset of the 1920s and the arrival of the electrified tramway in Istanbul helped foster a revolution in consumer culture that would only amplify concerns over women’s presence and role in public and concern over the tramcar curtain by extension. The radically shifting landscape of Pera and Beyoğlu was the scene on which much of this contestation occurred, as they were the neighborhoods that came to represent the cutting edge of modern Turkish fashion and were also the main thoroughfares by which one traveled from the tramway hub at Taksim across the Golden Horn to old Istanbul’s train station at Sirkeci.\(^{14}\) In part because of this infrastructural connection, business and cultures in these neighborhoods represented the apex of Istanbul cosmopolitanism. Aside from newspapers, an important venue for advertising to an international audience were city guides that were published periodically and distributed through some of Istanbul’s more prominent publishing houses. One such guide, the \textit{Plan-Guide du Constantinople} published by a Galata publishing company in 1921, exemplifies the close ties between the tramway, Pera’s changing landscape, and the changing consumer patterns of 1920s Istanbul.\(^{15}\) This multilingual tourist guide consisted of tramway, ferry, and locomotive schedules and plans for the entire city in Turkish, English, French, and Russian. In addition to the schedules, it included a brief history of Istanbul’s most famous monuments, including all the famous churches and mosques in each language. The most prominent advertising slots featured the two most famous hotels in the district—the Pera Palace and the Tokatlian—which would come to represent the highest concentration of European luxury in Istanbul.

The Pera Palace was perhaps less accessible to the average Muslim citizen of this time, but its surrounding neighborhood boasted many dance halls and bars, most famously the Garden bar, where the clientele would be reliably mixed throughout the twenties. Places like the Garden Bar represented, as G. Carole Woodall notes, “a modern, western-styled, urban leisure venue [that] resembled the Moulin Rouge and Folie Bergere in Paris, Berlin’s Scala, and Vienna’s Peteral.”\(^{16}\) It is in places like the Garden Bar, strewn throughout Pera, that one could witness the sort of stylized, modern fashions that were sweeping Europe and the United States. This change was prominent enough that by 1925, American newspapers were taking notice. In one example, an article titled “Turkish Flappers Find Their New Freedom Entrancing,” the author acknowledges how difficult it was “to reconcile ultra-modernity with our preconceived ideas of Turkish women,” but nevertheless described the Turkish flapper as one who
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has her favorites in the movies. She stops in the afternoon at Redjab’s for ices with her girl chums, she goes to thés dansants, where she does the latest jazz steps with the sheiks of Pera and Stamboul. Her mamma has the permanent wave, plays bridge, drinks cocktails, reads sex novels, gets divorced and studies psychoanalysis.\footnote{17}

Indeed, the author even witnessed a beauty contest being held in Taksim, where a “family” audience examined the beautiful legs of several young Turkish women, “All garbed in chiffon silk stockings, ranging in color from palest flesh to deep rose. This being Turkey, the prize was awarded to the plumpest pair, clad in pink stockings and terminating in a Cinderella-like pair of slippers.”\footnote{18} It is clear that the key site of Turkish women’s engagement with a western-oriented modern culture was in these cosmopolitan neighborhoods. It could be said that this is where the image of the “new woman” in Turkey had its genesis, and the most likely place for ordinary Turks to encounter this woman up close would be on the tramcar.

Social Anxiety and Conflict in the Years of the Curtain

The furious pace of development in Beyoğlu and Pera, particularly following World War I (WWI), which accompanied these rapid social changes in women’s culture and fashion created a great deal of social tension in late Ottoman and early republican Turkish society. Before addressing the lifting of the curtain, it is important to establish the grounds for these tensions, how they were expressed, and the debates which led to the curtain’s removal in 1923.

Cem Emrence has detailed the ways tensions over the intimacy, as well as class, on the tramcar were prevalent before the lifting of the curtain.\footnote{19} He recounts a passage from the memoirs of the novelist Ahmet Rasim that describes the excitement of brushing up against a woman through the curtain:

Such a soft touch of one of her knees, and yet I thought her shins and the rest would come . . . At that moment I wanted it just so that your two knees could be lifted, lifted so you could hit my knees!\footnote{20}

Emrence takes this excerpt from a set of reminiscences from Rasim’s youth, titled Fuhs-u Atik (The Waste of Prostitution), that was published by İkdam Matbaası in 1922.\footnote{21} This collection is full of stories of youthful gallivanting and intimate exchanges both in public and in the confines of Beyoğlu’s cafes and gazinos.\footnote{22} Through these stories, Ahmet Rasim places himself in a long tradition of late Ottoman dilettantes and flâneurs that were often symbols of the hazards of rapid modernization.\footnote{23}

In another story from the same collection, we are introduced to a teenaged Rasim as he grew up on a street adjacent to one of Istanbul’s prostitution districts and chronicles his earliest childhood crushes and love affairs.\footnote{24} Rasim is excited by the prospect that there was a place nearby where he was free to go about cavorting with beautiful women. Later, on the tramway going from Galata to Beyazıt, Rasim’s newly discovered feelings toward women are manifested. He is separated from his aunt and notices his object of affection as she is getting on the tramcar—she is accompanied by a woman with a face veil (peçeli), but she herself is only wearing a head and body-covering (çarşaf)—and he proceeds to list all the features of her face. What follows is a fantasy of romancing her across the curtain, similar to the one described above. Rasim reflects on this revelation by distinguishing it from his younger days among women:

I was changed in one day! . . . Three, four years earlier I was always allowed to sit side-by-side with women. It was not like this! All that time had passed in a second, this was the situation I was in!\footnote{25}

These feelings come to a halt as Rasim suffers from a headache and nausea induced by a waft of perfume seeping through the curtain. Realizing this, Rasim wishes he “could crawl into some cologne! . . . [Unfortunately] There was no cologne at that time.”\footnote{26} For Rasim, the
harem-selamlık divide in the tramcar provoked desires and passions that were meant for the divide in the household. The fact that it was this moving harem that initiated Rasim’s sexual desires suggests that for many Turks, especially those who grew up in poorer families and neighborhoods, this may have been a more salient divide between men and women than those that were in place in their households, for even if you were from a household without a harem dynamic, the tramway curtain enforced that reality regardless of your personal status.

These tensions exhibit themselves even in the earliest moments of the Turkish independence struggle. An April 1919 editorial in the conservative-minded journal Sebî-ül Reşad addressed the apparent fact that on trams running through Beyoğlu, men and women (presumably westerners, potentially white Russian émigrés) would voluntarily lift the curtain and sit side by side. The article includes a letter to the editor from a concerned female citizen who notes that “for the most part, they are closing the curtains on our insistence. Still, men are sitting with women in particular neighborhoods and the conductors are not able to remove these gentlemen.” Both the letter and editorial’s author appeal to governmental regulations and Islamic manners (hükümet and edeb-i islamiyet) to provide greater control over the space of the tramcar and to inform Muslim and Turkish women on the proper comportment for such an intimate space. In the absence of these things, the letter’s author feared that moral depravity would be visited on the women of the nation since

without giving a thought to nation, Islam and circumstance, some of our women—we don’t quite have the right word to give to sisters like these—if they are found in a permissibly confined space where the sexes are mixed, they display a thirst to sit together with men.

This type of tension between old and new would continue to manifest between residents westernized neighborhoods like Beyoğlu and Pera and the neighborhoods of the historic peninsula like Fatih throughout the republican era. They were perhaps best summed up in Peyami Safa’s 1931 novel Fatih-Harbiye, a classic uptown–downtown love story that is facilitated, naturally, by the tramway lines that connect the tony neighborhood above Taksim and what was at the time decidedly more traditional and conservative environs around Istanbul University. From the Ottoman period through the early republican era, the tramcar was a space that traversed neighborhoods with very different characteristics and was often governed by drastically different sets of norms. This is the manner in which the tramcar was a site of negotiation and one in which the larger discourses over westernization, women in public, and sexuality would be impressed on curiosities, anxieties, and concerns of everyday Istanbulites in the course of daily, myriad intimate encounters.

Such an anxiety about the public display of sexual desire was, as demonstrated by Duben and Behar, not out of the ordinary for the late Ottoman and early republican years among ordinary citizens and elite intellectuals alike. They argue that the fixation on an apparent crisis in family life from the Hamidian era onward was the result of a “displacement” of general concerns about the Turkish state, politics, culture, and so on, that might have otherwise been censored or politically poisonous. They point out that even the most ardent champions of the adoption of Western cultural norms, such as Young Turk intellectuals like Ziya Gökalp or early bourgeois novelists like Ahmet Midhat Efendi, expressed serious concerns about the young women of Istanbul who, in Gökalp’s words, were “dropping into the streets, the bars, the dance halls . . . and ruining their futures in the process.” Among western-oriented female intellectuals like Sabiha Sertel, who edited, along with her husband, a popular monthly journal called Resimli Ay (Illustrated Monthly) throughout the 1920s and was a proponent of greater female presence and involvement in the public sphere, concerns were expressed regarding the solipsistic character of some of Istanbul’s modern bourgeois elite. In a long editorial in the first issue of Resimli Ay, Sertel exhorted upper class women who did little to alleviate the orphan crisis that Turkey faced following the close of the war for independence:
In our country, for each act of molestation, for each screaming child with tears in their eyes, there is a footprint in the heart of every mother. Those who are sitting in their comfortable chairs, can you not see these children through the smoke of your cigars?33

The issue of the place of women in modern Turkish society, their relationship to their husbands and their children—and other people’s husbands and other people’s children—became central to the question of what it meant to be modern in Kemalist Turkey. All the tensions that came along with modernizing Turkish society are tied up in representations of women and families from this period, as Duben and Behar demonstrate through their analysis of literature, the press and photographs of the period, that in their own way, project a type of modernity that is meant to shift the intimate relations within the household—particularly so in photographs that depict men and women standing next to each other or family portraits featuring symbols of modernity like newspapers.34 By examining intimate encounters inside the tramcar, we can see how these “private” tensions sometimes burst out into the intimate public sphere.

“Unveiling” the Tramway

What the concerns of early nationalist modernizers reveal is that Ottoman intellectuals had a problematic embrace of Western ideals. Deniz Kandiyoti has pointed out that in their period, “The West represented both the emancipatory potential of the modern (in contrast to the traditional Ottoman order) and the dangers of excessive individualism, selfishness and narcissism.”35 While Kandiyoti was specifically referring to debates around family construction, the same is true of the tramway curtain—it was necessarily seen as a way to introduce modern transit technology while warding off perceived dangers, both physical and spiritual, posed to women in Western society. The removal of the tramway curtain, which kicked off the Kemalist revolution of secularizing the public sphere, should then be seen as an important development in Ottoman and Turkish modernist thinking—a less wary approach to the “super westernized” or “decadent” aspects of modernity.36 As Nazan Maksudyan has demonstrated in her study of female suicide in the early republican period, the rapid social and technological modernization of Istanbul in the nineteenth and twentieth century carried with it a consistent concern by the state to police and control women’s bodies.37 As the strict policing of women’s bodies on the tramway relaxed in the republican period, Turkish citizens had to negotiate proper comportment between men and women according to the new national norm promulgated by the state. Passengers also had to negotiate with their fellow citizens in new ways, familiarizing themselves with the consumer choices, occupations, health, language, and religion of various other riders in ways they had not previously.38 By figuring out how to carry oneself on the tramcar, citizens of the new Turkish nation carried on twin processes of negotiating the ideology of the state and discerning the fine, intimate degrees to which they and their fellow travelers belonged to Istanbul society.

Exactly when and why the tramway curtains were lifted in Istanbul is in fact a difficult question to answer.39 In some accounts, the lifting of the tramway curtain is referred to as part and parcel of the secularization efforts of Mustafa Kemal.40 While this reform was indeed secularizing in effect, it is inaccurate to say that the decision emanated from the person of Mustafa Kemal. In examining press and parliamentary records from late 1923, we can see that, in fact, the decision to remove the curtains was not made by Mustafa Kemal’s decree—he had only just ascended to the position of President and had many weightier issues at hand—nor by law passed through the parliament. It appears that the Istanbul Police Bureau ordered the curtains to be removed sometime in either November or December of 1923, and following this decision, certain conservative members of the new Turkish parliament requested the opportunity to question the Minister of the Interior regarding the events.41 The Interior Minister, Ferid Bey, eventually appeared in front of the parliament on January 16, 1924 ostensibly to answer two questions posed by
Ziyaeddin Bey. Ziyaeddin, in his preamble to his submitted questions, expressed deep concern regarding the cleanliness of “chaste Muslims, Armenians, Jews [and] Greeks mix[ing] knee to knee, eye to eye, closely touching” on the tramway and ferry, but also directly asked the minister who at the Police Bureau was responsible for this and whether it was within the authority of the Interior Ministry to give the order. The minutes of the exchange reveal that the Interior Minister did not give the order and suggested that the curtains were in fact removed for cleaning at the behest of the municipal government that had reacted to a report from the Health and Social Assistance Directorate regarding the role the velvet curtains were playing in microbial transfer.

What follows from the Ferid Bey’s answer is a lengthy and impassioned response from Ziyaeddin expressing his dissatisfaction with the Interior Minister’s response, intimating that the decision amounted to a unilateral reform by the Istanbul Police that was counter to the cultural and moral sensibilities of the Turkish people. He insists that though the tramway is a western technology, lifting the curtain did not befit the norms of the people because, he says, “This is not taking European industry or knowledge; we are only imitating debauchery and scandal” and that to make such a reform now, when the country has barely begun rebuilding after a war that had disastrous consequences for Turkish and Anatolian industry was particularly inopportune. In truth, the fact that this apparently secular reform occurred almost three years before the adoption of the Turkish Civil Code (Türk Medeni Kanunu) and in the midst of a lengthy debate that would result in the end of the caliphate, it would seem that the removal of the tramway curtain in late 1923 was ahead of the pace of social and cultural secularization in Kemalist Turkey. While no vote on the measure would be held that day in parliament, the Interior Minister would barely get a second word in on the subject, it appears from the minutes that Ziyaeddin’s concerns over the potential debaucheries brought about by desegregated public transit had at least a few supporters, as many voices of agreement are marked as cheering him on; in particular, another rural representative, Yahya Galib Bey from the inner-Anatolian province of Kırşehir. Representatives more familiar with life in Istanbul, however, were able to voice a few dismissive remarks against Ziyaeddin’s complaints, including Süleyman Sırrı Bey, the Minister of Transportation, who insisted that “curtains have been lifted all over the world,” and from Tunalı Hilmi, a Young Turk veteran and representative for Zonguldak, who’s derisive last word to Ziyaeddin in the transcript exemplified his contempt for Ziyaeddin’s conservative fear-mongering, “You should pray to Allah that my testicles are covered once the curtain is lifted.”

An article in the satirical journal Akbaba (Vulture) addressed the curtain issue in late December 1923 and suggests the same as in the aforementioned debate that the official reason for their removal was the velvet curtain’s propensity for spreading contagious diseases. The editorial, likely penned by Akbaba’s owner Orhan Seyfi, dismisses the various complaints of “morally fanatic worshipers” (mutaassip ahlak perestler) whose idea of the curtain as something that protects “ chastity” is woefully out of date, since “in the street, in the market, in the theater, everywhere men and women are together when they get on the tramway and they abhor this harem-selamlık division in its entirety.” For his part, Seyfi is more concerned with tramway crashes, and on that front, he sees it as a neutral measure—he surmises that perhaps mixed company would compel men to act more orderly in the presence of the fairer sex, or on the contrary, “A man wanting to make a maneuver towards his love might take the wrong maneuver and wind up sending the tramcar off the road, killing everyone.” The main thrust of Seyfi’s argument, however, suggests that the removal of the curtain was not really about disease control after all, as he asks, “If the government has decided to remove the curtains to Aksaray Station for six months to clean them of their fetid stench, wouldn’t it be healthier to remove them entirely?” He closes the editorial again asking of those who support the curtain, “Did it not come to these people’s minds to defend against these microbial contagions by making the tramway curtains out of Moroccan leather or tarpaulin?” Since further parliamentary discussion is unavailable, we can
infer at from Seyfi’s editorial that the decision to remove the curtain for cleaning may indeed had been meant as a trial period for a desegregated tramway.

The new era of desegregated transit added another setting for the popular comedy of manners playing out across Istanbul’s satirical journals. In addition to commenting on political developments in Ankara, the themes of women’s fashion, public sexuality, and the reversal of gender roles were tropes that appeared in nearly every issue of journals such as Akbaba, Aydede, and Cem since their founding in the post-WWI climate and only accelerated along with Kemalist reforms. The desegregation of public transit offered yet another venue to display the myriad comical adventures of a generation in flux. In the same issue mentioned above, Akbaba cartoonist Ramiz Gökçe offered an early example of a popular trope for the topic of the curtain (Figure 3). In this cartoon, an elderly woman covered head to toe in a çarşaf is heading to the tramway with her daughter, who is dressed in a blouse with décolleté, a fur coat, and a modern headscarf. The daughter urges the mother, “Mother, quickly, let’s get on the tramway!” to which the elderly woman responds, “Ah . . . how should I sit amongst the men? Everyone will look at me!” The new monthly literary journal, Türkiye Edebiyat Mecmuası, commented on these anxieties in a cartoon in their inaugural
issue and offered a similar scenario, only this time, the younger woman expresses concern. The cartoon (Figure 4), titled “After the Lifting of the Tramway Curtain,” depicts a young woman and her mother, both wearing headscarves and stylish looking heels, attempting to catch a tramway.

Figure 4. “After the Lifting of the Tramway Curtain.”
Source: Türkiye Edebiyat Mecmuası Vol. 1:1, September 1, 1924.
The mother, dressed in black, extols her daughter to hurry so they do not miss the tram, the daughter responds, “Ah mother, as soon as I board the tramway they will be biting my neck.” In this cartoon, we see how interaction between men and women on the tramway in Istanbul may have presumed licentiousness on the part of men as much as men perceived as such toward women. This perhaps signals a deep effect of the tramway curtain insofar as it symbolized a sexualized place for either sex; rather than just men or certain licentious “women of the night.”

The lifting of the tramway curtain was one of the first steps on the road to a general dethroning of sharia-oriented civil law that culminated with the adoption of the Turkish Civil Code in 1926. Cribbed from the Swiss Civil Code, the new code cemented the secondary status of women as household “assistants” at a time when traditional household divisions were slowly evaporating. Removing the curtain on the tramcar was in some way a pre-cursor to the general disappearance of the haremlık-selamlık division in elite Istanbul households that “thrust[ed] husbands and wives upon each other on a more regular and routine basis” into accord with the normative Kemalist principles of respectable modernity. It would appear, however, that this idea of a respectable modernity was itself a product of negotiation amid a wide spectrum of concerns in the male-led state and society over how best to modernize society or emulate Europe without relinquishing their patriarchal hold over women’s bodies.

The conservative editor of İkdam (Perseverance), Ahmet Cevdet, entered the debate in a revealing manner on January 11, 1924 with an article titled “Tramway Curtains.” For Cevdet, the issue of women and modesty on the tramway cars highlights the disorder and frustration endemic to a system he believes to be faulty not simply because of the mixing of men and women. The primary concern for Cevdet was the overcrowding of the subway stations and cars. He concedes that although he is a pious man and sees no real problem with modest and chaste women riding the tramway, he has noticed that many of them “are trying [in vain] to turn in accordance with their kıblaname [direction of prayer],” and that, “while it is necessary for these women to ride the tramway, they are not allowed to move back and forth on it!” He then goes on to detail the horrendous waiting he has endured at the Taksim stop, the disorderly, drunken, and inappropriate behavior that he sees as typical of a tramway ride in Istanbul. He suggests that conductors be given the authority to refuse to take passengers who cannot afford to pay, that the number of cars going from Beyoğlu to Istanbul be increased, and that the police be allowed to board tramways without warning to solve disputes and disorder. Implement these policies and “we will forget there was ever an issue over whether the curtain should be closed or open,” he wrote.

It is interesting that despite Cevdet’s admitted piety and the conservative outlook of İkdam as a publication, the author argues for these changes by invoking the standard of comfort and order set by European tramway systems. His chaotic picture of the Taksim tramway stop is compared with those in the European capital of Vienna:

... the doors are handled by those who are leaving. Drunken customers are not allowed inside. In the instance that customers have underpaid, they may be delivered to the police according to whether the payment of the difference is forthcoming. Women with children and the elderly are assisted in entering the car. In short, the car’s order and orderliness, its tranquility, its cleanliness, the protection of its health, everything is dependent on the orders that come from the conductor.

Given his own cultural outlook, Cevdet clearly realized a confluence of pious expectations in a public space and the general comportment of European society. The fact that his appeal was being made directly to a legal establishment that was taking an increasingly secular stance may have also contributed to his choice to invoke European norms over Islamic ones. The appeal to the legal establishment, by framing the situation on the tramway as lawless and chaotic, suggests that the priority for Cevdet is orderliness maintained by the state rather than the tramway company or civil
Once the state has constrained this new, modern space, the issues of impropriety and ill manners, he suggests, would take care of themselves. Embedded in this critique is a recognition that the space of the tramcar is an inherently social one. Essentially, Cevdet’s complaint is that disorderliness on the tramway has allowed its social functions to overtake its practical, infrastructural purposes, and that this poses a threat to the general physical safety of women—and presumably men as well—on the tramcar. This concern was shared by less conservative-minded men like the Ramiz Gökçe, whose August 1924 cartoon in Akbaba featured a man eschewing the tramway, explaining “I have urgent business to attend to, I’m going to walk” (Figure 5). Cevdet’s worries here show precisely how concerns of order in the city and concerns over the sexuality of women are tightly bound together. Although he dismisses overall concern for the abolishment of the tramcar harem, it does not mean we should disregard his insistence that women passengers be “chaste” and “pious.” Cevdet’s concerns may represent,
as Elizabeth Wilson has suggested, a sublimation of older concerns about the moral threat of sexual deviance into a more generalized, and at least superficially gender-neutral, set of concerns about orderliness and safety. In many ways, putatively secular early republican attitudes toward women walked this similar line—recognizing the need, on one hand, for women to appear in contemporary dress, engage to a limited degree in politics, and be unencumbered in public life, but, on the other hand, expressing a desire to circumscribe sexuality as much as possible by resorting to less direct methods and rhetoric for controlling women’s bodies in the public sphere.

From a different perspective, Turks who had already experienced unsegregated public transit anticipated the removal of the tramway curtain with pleasure and excitement. Sevim Sertel O’Brien, daughter of the Turkish intellectuals M. Zekeriya and Sabiha Sertel, recounted in an unpublished manuscript the scandal she created when she unwittingly crossed the curtain’s barrier. Having just returned in 1923 from three years living in New York City with her parents, Sevim, approximately six years old, was out in the Galata neighborhood of Istanbul where she expressed surprise at seeing women in short sleeves and hats, obviously “foreigners” or “Christians,” mixing with Muslim Turkish women all over town. On their way home from visiting her Aunt Fatma, Sevim, accompanied by Sabiha, gets on a tramcar and notices, “[t]he seats in the first two rows were taken. All by women, and all of them wore [sic] charshafs. Dressed like this, they looked like nuns, except you could not see their faces.” She then comes upon the curtain, which she brashly pushes aside and is pleased to find that now I saw many more seats on the street car. All the passengers here were men. They were wearing their red hats with the tassel. How colorful these ‘fez’ hats were compared to the dark [sic] charshaf the women had to wear.

The ensuing commotion involved the car coming to a quick halt, the conductor blowing a horn, and a furious and embarrassed Sabiha retrieving her daughter for a scolding. Although Sabiha admits that she herself is also to blame, “I should have told you. I have forgotten what it was like. Come along, kızım [my girl], we might as well go back now. I guess we both have a lot to learn.” In this comical passage, we see the close connection between fashion and the curtain. Sevim consistently complains about the çarşaf throughout the early stages of this narrative and is thoroughly confused by the foreigners who are allowed to exhibit a different variety of dress. Her encounter with men and women, who they represent and what her relation is to them, both on the street and in the heightened, enclosed environment of the tramcar, is marked by clothing. The elderly man she eventually sat next to is described chiefly in terms of his colorful fez and nervous fumbling with prayer beads, and when the commotion begins, “He did not hear me in the confusion.” This is exemplary of the sort of non-verbal political and cultural discourse encapsulated in Çınar’s concept of “sites of negotiation” and further demonstrates how the construction of national identity carried itself out as much with awkward stares between tram passengers and hushed scolds between mothers and daughters as it did in parliamentary speeches or blaring newspaper headlines. For two people who had formative experiences outside of Turkey, Sabiha earned a degree from the New York School of Social Work and volunteered with immigrant communities, this highlighted the disconnects between the western and modern lives they aspired to but had not yet achieved in their own country.

Later on, Sevim recounted her excitement when she learned of the upcoming hat, headscarf, and tramway curtain reforms:

This was great news! I didn’t have to run off to America at thirteen anymore. I would also have a clear view of my mother now and not lose her on the street, as I had so often done in the past.

“By the way Sevim,” Anneh [Sabiha] said sweetly, “no more curtains in the street cars or boats.”
“What?”

“Yes,” said Anneh, “according to this new law, men and women soon will be able to mix.”

This law, which delighted me, was put into effect faster than anyone expected.64

However, in this passage, Sevim’s delight at the notion that her life would soon be as unencumbered as it was in New York City is juxtaposed with concerned reactions from older family members and acquaintances. When the topic of the hat reform comes up, Aysha, a poor orphan who had been taken in by the Sertels the year before, and who was in her middle teenage years, protested, “But only Christians wear hats,” to which Zekeriya responds,

That is what they say. But remember, what Kemal Pasha says; you are not judged a good Moslem according to what you wear. Even as we talk, Kemal Pasha is touring Northern Turkey in a hat. Does that make him a Christian?

“No” said Aysha abla, “he is our [sic] saviour from the Christians.”

“Good,” said Baba [Zekeriya], “believe me, it is what is in your heart that counts, not on your head.”65

This passage highlights a particular tension of Kemalist discourse in which radically paternalistic “westernizing” reforms like the hat reform were commonly accepted signals of Turkey’s entry into modernity to the Western intellectual elite, but selling the reforms to older, more conservative and poorer groups required Kemalists to trade on the anti-imperialist victory of Kemal Pasha.66 By placing the lifting of the curtain in conversation with the sartorial reforms of Mustafa Kemal, we can see how the type of public spaces in which soon-to-be-uncovered Muslim women were to travel affected public anxieties and perceptions of what it meant to live in a modern society. Surely for Aysha Abla, her discussion with Zekeriya in their home would be replaying later in life, as she would ride in unsegregated tramcars. We can clearly see in the connection between these passages that the intimate space of the tramcar was one in which Turks from all classes began to construct intimate and detailed images of their modern selves and contrast it with those they encountered in public.

A decade after the curtain was lifted, intellectuals continued to consider the space of the tramcar as they confronted the changing social mores of this intimate and unsegregated public space. In a May 1933 issue of the popular weekly literary journal Yedi Gün (Seven Days), the aforementioned author of the novel Fatih-Harbiye, Peyami Safa, pondered a question from one of his acquaintances, “Should I give up my seat on the tramway for a woman who is standing?” The friend continued to share a story in which he offered his seat to a woman who was traveling with a man who he believed to be her husband, but when he arose, she turned to her husband and offered the seat to him, then “amidst the chuckles of the folks on the tramway, he took my seat: Do I or don’t I have the right to be angry at this woman?” Safa first frames his response around the issue of health, insisting that in this day and age this courtesy is reserved for the weak and infirm. If he was suffering from some illness and the woman in question was otherwise healthy, there would be no need to offer one’s seat, but the situation is different if the woman in question is obviously tired, or elderly. Safa is quick to add that her gender really is immaterial, “don’t listen to men or women who are simply in need of comfort. Tired legs affect the two sexes equally,” and that his friend had no right to be angry. However, the conversation turns in a slightly different direction when the friend, after hearing Safa’s reaction, “remembers” that the husband did indeed look more tired, to which Safa replies,
Without a doubt, I said, women are usually out on the street for pleasure whereas men are found to be working. Because of this it is more likely to find men who are tired on the tramway than women. However, if you want to make this small sacrifice in order to provide protection for your grandmother or some single woman, we should know the difference between a young woman going to tea, a date or the movies, a woman coming from work and an old sick woman. Every man should stand up and give his seat to an old or working woman [işçi kadın] on the tramway. . . . Equality between the sexes and good manners command this.67

Setting aside the Kemalist paternalist flavor of feminism in this piece, what is revealed is the perception that a decade after the curtain was lifted, and seven years after the installation of the new Civil Code, the space of the tramcar remained one where a typology of modern citizens could be discerned, and with finer details than in the previous era. Whereas before the curtain was lifted, modern identity as confronted on the tram was marked by consumer choices like fashion, by the 1930s, one had to consider the occupation, age, and lifestyle of the other passengers. It became the place where, as Safa puts it, “Equality between the sexes and good manners” demand that Turks be able to tell the difference between a grandmother, a single woman, a working woman, or a woman on a date with her boyfriend. Although this degree of introspection may not have been universally shared, Safa’s discourse is related to a wider discourse that developed following the installment of the Turkish Civil Code in 1926 and male-only military conscription in 1927 regarding the role of female citizens that exhibited a tension between state imperatives to see women as “mothers of the nation” on one hand, and as “warrior heroines” on the other, descendants of the brave women who fought in the War for Independence who while not compelled to military service would, as Turkey’s first female combat pilot Sabiha Gökçen did in 1937, rise to the defense of the nation on their own accord.68

The anxiety over intimacy that is manifested in this space shows how in this setting many of the grand debates over modernization and westernization are submerged in favor of either practical complaints of overcrowding or fears and anxieties regarding the interactions between men and women. The cartoonist for Türkiye Edebiyat Mecmuası, a modernist and western-oriented publication, epitomized the feminine concern by depicting a young, attractive female unsure of how she would be treated by men in such close quarters after the curtain had been lifted, symbolizing the manner in which the curtain had shaped female perspectives on intimacy in a confined space. Ahmed Cevdet, a pious conservative voice, eschewed concerns over licentious women on the tramcar in favor of directing his venom at the decidedly unmodernized and disorderly state of the tramway. Sevim Sertel’s most basic understanding of how men and women were to interact in the Turkish Republic were formed on the tram and heavily influenced by the role the curtain played in policing those mores. Finally, Peyami Safa’s article demonstrated the way in which the tramcar demanded a sort of socio-anthropological examination of one’s fellow citizens and how judgments following those examinations were conditioned by normative Kemalist values.69

These examples of anxiety and confrontation on the tramway in the early Turkish Republic show how the Kemalist vision for modern Turkish dress and comportment was hotly contested between many different classes in Istanbul and how the tramcar became a space for sorting out these differing visions of modernity and morality.70

**Conclusion: The Continued Importance of the Tramcar as an Intimate Space**

As public transit spaces continue to evolve, they have also been continually contested. Debates over what is acceptable interaction between the sexes in these spaces have cropped up in numerous contexts in Turkey and abroad over the last several years. Considering these conversations in the context of the desegregation of public transit, and the tramcar in particular, is critical to
understanding the roots of contemporary discussions about citizenship, morality, and gender. The lifting of the curtain was a catalyst for a broader set of discussions in Turkey about the place of women in public that are still ongoing.71 These discussions would inevitably express themselves through laws and ideologies that were meant to inculcate a highly gendered notion of modern citizenship in the era of Kemalist reforms, but with greater attention to violence, harassment, and discomfort on the subway or dolmuş (shared taxi) in contemporary times, these laws and notions have become increasingly contested, and some have even suggested re-instating segregation by sex, albeit slightly in different forms.72 As Sertaç Sehlikoğlu has argued, public expressions of intimacy have become a highly contested political subject in contemporary Turkey as the ruling Justice and Development Party has taken up a defense of Islamic moral codes and intimacy, known as mahremiyet, both in the public sphere and on public transit.73

The evolution of public transit in Istanbul, and indeed all over Turkey, has gone through several key changes since the close of the Second World War. Beginning in the late 1950s, tramway ridership began to experience a period of sharp decline. Having reached a peak in ridership in 1956 with more than 108 million riders, figures declined every year following and so drastically by the 1960s that less than ten million people rode the tramway just a decade after the peak.74 There are likely a number of factors that contributed to this decline, most prominently were the expansion of the highway system through and around Istanbul and the introduction of the tramway’s stiffest competition—the dolmuş, or shared taxi, in 1950.75 In more recent years, the exploding urbanization of Turkish society has witnessed ambitious expansions of subway lines in Istanbul and Ankara, and where subway lines have been insufficient to interconnect the unending sprawl of places such as Istanbul and Ankara, airborne teleferik (cable cars), above ground, and undersea light rail have been constructed to much fanfare.76 All these developments bring with them similar sorts of shifts and changes to the intimate public spheres of Turkey’s urban landscape, and will require further, more diverse studies of the interaction of public transit infrastructure and cultural policy.

By way of concluding, I would like to provide a look at a few examples from the post-World War II (WWII) period discourse on public space and cultural negotiation that echo the debate over the tramway curtain in interesting ways.77 By showing one or two small ways in which these discourses are connected, we might begin to discern whether, and how, they were affected by the rapid changes to Istanbul’s urban landscape in the ninety odd years since the curtain was removed. Two cartoons from the 1940s, both authored by Ramiz Gökçe, suggest a changing attitude toward intimacy on the tramway over the course of the twentieth century. The first (Figure 6) is part of Gökçe’s famous series, “Tombul Teyze” (“Chubby Auntie”), and depicts a comically oversized woman crammed onto a tramcar, nearly suffocating the distressed conductor under her bosom and dismaying her husband, as well as the copious other riders, in the process. The second (Figure 7), titled “Mayıs Gezintisi: Asude Köşe” or “A May Walk: A Serene Corner,” depicts a young couple out for a walk about Istanbul. The couple is perturbed by the lack of privacy everywhere they go, unable to escape the prying eyes of the police, a tour group at Rümeli Hisar, and a waiter at a bistro. They finally hop onto a tramcar headed to Kurtuluş where, despite being jammed with people, they are able to embrace and kiss without being bothered. In this cartoon, the emotional stirrings of Ahmet Rasim and the anxieties of lawlessness of Ahmet Cevdet are simultaneously realized and reconciled. The tramcar has remained an intimate public space, but for some, it has also become a space, in fact the only public space, where one can be left alone.

Public transit also remained a site where contemporary Kemalist women imagined the fashioning of an independent secular modernity. Much like Sevim Sertel, Gaye Boraloğlu expressed her vision of a woman’s awakening on a crowded suburban regional train in her short story “Mi Hatice.”78 The titular character of this story starts out as a meek, scared woman in a headscarf awaiting her inattentive husband at the Sirkeci station. Hatice is obviously uncomfortable with her situation from the start of the story—the call to prayer that she used to enjoy “as if it were a huge, cloud shaped hand, and lifted [her] up and up, far above all those people rushing around,”
now passed through her “leaving even less of an impact than the smell of hot dogs,” and her husband, Sacit, does not even smile at her when they meet. Once on the train, Hatice begins to notice the wide breadth of humanity stuffed into the space while her husband immediately falls asleep. To Hatice, each person on the train represents the notes in a noisy chorus and describes her own note as “‘mi’—always rasping, hesitant and insecure, incapable of coming out flawless.” However, as the train passes through the outer suburb of Bakırköy, her husband’s body seizes up in an apparent heart attack and dies. Once life left Sacit’s body, “all of a sudden Hatice became a flawless, faultless ‘mi’ note,” and as she leaves the train in Menekşe, all the “notes” inside her coalesce into a “knot” around her throat, which causes her to undo her scarf and vanish into the streets of the surrounding town.

Although the story is an archetypical Kemalist narrative championing a paternalist flavor of women’s liberation, it echoes Peyami Safa by choosing a public transit setting as one of self-discovery. Just as Safa suggested the tramcar as a site for recognizing who your fellow citizens are, Hatice first picks out the other “notes” in the symphony before defining her own among them.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to fully contextualize these examples in their respective contemporary discourses, they serve the purpose here of showing that the tramcar has remained a site where modern Turks negotiate their own subjectivity against spatial constraints.

Figure 6. “Tombul Teyze tramvayda” (“Chubby Auntie on the Tramway”). Cartoon dates from 1940s. Husband is depicted at right, barely making it on the tram. Source: Reprinted in Gülersoy, Tramvay İstanbul’da, 108.
in a few respects. The tramcar’s changing availability, shape, layout, and construction present everyday Istanbulites with a set of state-governed physical boundaries amid which the social life on the tramcar must carry on. The inadequacies and burdens created by these boundaries are lampooned here in Gökçe’s “Tombul Teyze” as they had been in earlier times, even before the curtain was lifted. Changing social mores, enforced sometimes by the state, other times through more organic social pressure, continue to force riders to consider their movements, actions, and appearance as they ride the tram—just as Gökçe’s Maytime lovebirds did by stealing a kiss on
the tram or the concerned mothers and daughters of 1923 did before them—precisely because of the intimate manner in which tramway encounters occur. Finally, as exemplified by the struggles of Boralhoğlu’s “Hatice,” the tramcar continues to be a space passing through spaces, traversing Istanbul’s rich and poor, conservative and liberal, and ultramodern and strictly traditional districts, which forces its riders to negotiate themselves with, and against, the intensely localized subjectivities of the patchwork urban fabric of Istanbul by the hundreds of thousands, on a daily basis.

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Notes

1. Sevgi Adak has demonstrated how anti-veiling campaigns and bans in the 1930s drastically reshaped the urban sphere of many of Turkey’s provinces by policing women’s dress in many public areas, including parks, movie theaters, and bazaars. Such policy decisions, however, were largely left to provincial governments, and Istanbul, while a “super westernizing” urban landscape, did not experience an outright legal ban on the headscarf in this period. Sevgi Adak, “Women in the Post-Ottoman Public Sphere: Anti-veiling Campaigns and the Gendered Reshaping of Urban Space in Early Republican Turkey,” in Women and the City, Women in the City: A Gendered Perspective on Ottoman Urban History, ed. Nazan Maksudyan (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 36-67.

2. Overviews of the history of the tramway can be found in Çelik Gulersoy, Tramvay İstanbul’da [The Tramway in Istanbul], (Istanbul: Istanbul Kitaplığı, Kitapçılık ve Tic. Lts. Şti., 1989) and R. Sertaç Kayseriöglu, Dersaadet’ten İstanbul’a Tramvay [The Tramway from Constantinople to Istanbul] vols. I-II (Istanbul: IETT Genel Müdürlüğü, 1998, 1999). I have previously written an overview of scholarship relating to different approaches to studying transit in Istanbul in, “Technology, Modernity, and the State: Approaches to the History of Transit in Istanbul,” Mobility in History 6, no. 1 (January 2015): 113-19. While the tramway’s initial routes were primarily meant to service the governmental center in Sultanahmet, by the 1880s, construction had begun on several lines running up the Golden Horn and north along the Bosphorus shores to Bebek, thus connecting Sultanahmet with Beyoğlu and the burgeoning suburbs to the north. Texts of founding documents, agreements, and regulations pertaining to the tramway can be found in Latin transliteration in Osman Nuri Ergin, Mecelle-i Umûr-i Belediye [Municipal Civil Affairs], vol. 5 (Istanbul: Istanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, No. 21, 1995), the following documents in that volume establish various rules for sex segregation on public transit: Dersaadet tramvay tesis ve inşası dair şartname [Regulations for the construction and function of the tramway in the capital], p. 2401, which established the tramway and insisted on separate places for women and men (Article 9), Demiryollarnın Usul-i Zabıtası Dair Nizânmâne [Ordinance on the policing of the railroads], p. 2481, which required train stations to have separate waiting areas for married and unmarried women (Article 15), Demiryolları Zabıta Nizânmânesi’nin On Beşinci Madde-i Mu’addilesi [An Amendment to the fifteenth article of the ordinance on the policing of the railroads] (1911), p. 2485, which amended the previous agreement to make an exception for porters to accompany female travelers in the waiting area, Tünel Şirketi Şartnâmesi
Regulations of the Tünel Company, pp. 2494-95, which details the various discomforts for women of subterranean travel (Article 21), Haliç-i Dersaadet Vapurları Şirketi Şartnâmesi [Regulations of the Golden Horne Capital Ferry Company] (1909), pp. 2341-42, which delineates separate waiting areas, entrances, compartments, and latrines for women on first- and second-class levels of the ferries (Article 3), and Omnibüs Osmanlı Anonim Şirketinin Şartnâmesi [Regulations of the Incorporated Ottoman Omnibus Company] p. 2582, which requires the separation of men and “single women” [sırf kadınlar] on the city’s omnibuses.

3. For a discussion of the representations and symbolism of the tramway and other technological innovations of this time, see Palmira Brummett, Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-1911 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 289-316. As demonstrated in Kayserilioğlu’s work, the tramway was easily the most affordable method of public transit during the period under focus here, with only modest fare increases according to inflationary patterns following World War I and were consistently negotitated and subsidized throughout the early republican era, Kayserilioğlu, Dersaadet’ten İstanbul’a Tramvay [The Tramway from Constantinople to Istanbul], vol. I, 92-93; for further information on inflation and prices, see Şevket Pamuk, A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Graph A-1, 236. It should be noted that in the early 1920s, the tramway was also a site of contention between the state and Turkey’s nascent communist and labor activist movements, as detailed in two articles by Erol Ulker, “Mütareke Döneminde İstanbul Tramvay İşçileri Hareketi ve Türkeysosyalist Fırkasi,” [Istanbul Tramway Workers Movements and the Turkish Socialist Party in the Period of Occupation] Toplumsal Tarih, 245 (May 2014): 40-45 and “Mayıs 1920 Tramvay Grevi: Türkeysosyalist Fırkasi ve İşçi Hareketi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme,” [The May 1920 Tramway Strike: An Assessment of the Turkish Socialist Party and Worker’s Movements] kebikeç 36 (2013): 243-58.

4. Mikiya Konagi’s recent article on the Iranian railway shows how its geographic breadth and social stratification made it more amenable to performing bourgeois-nationalist notions of modernity than the more local and chaotic tramway, see “The Vernacular Journey: Railway Travelers in Early Pahlavi Iran, 1925-50,” International Journal of Middle East Studies 47, no. 4 (2015): 745-63.

5. On Barak has investigated how technological modernization of urban space and time was gendered in Egypt in a similar fashion in “Times of Tamaddun: Gender, Urbanity, and Temporality in Colonial Egypt,” in Women and the City, ed. Nazan Maksudyan, 15-35.


7. Alper Yalçınkaya has recently elaborated the relationship between science and morality in the Ottoman Period in Learning Patriots: Debating Science, State, and Society in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Onur İsci has argued that the popular Ottoman press first began developing a properly national public sphere during the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War in “Wartime Propaganda and the Legacies of Defeat: Russian and Ottoman Newspapers in the War of 1877-1878,” Russian History 41 (2014), 181-96.

8. The concept of the intimate public sphere has been initially theorized by Lauren Berlant in The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), viii. I depart somewhat from her analysis, since her theorization primarily concerns the creation of a common feeling of intimacy through popular culture and consumer culture as a way that citizens formed common, intimate, bonds with one another. While I believe these factors were also at play in Turkey, especially as cinema, radio, and television became more widespread over the twentieth century, I am suggesting that earlier formulations of an intimate public sphere relied on intimate public spaces. Still, I follow closely Berlant’s overarching methodology of analyzing the way intimate, personal aspects of life end up largely substantiating what we normally construe as a “public” sphere.

9. Adak shows how, outside of Istanbul, veiling bans were accompanied by strict attempts to police male behavior toward unveiled women. “Women in the Post-Ottoman Public Sphere,” 50. François Georgean has also investigated the predominant presence of women in public, and in the tramcar, as it appeared in the Istanbul satirical press in, “Women’s Representations in Ottoman Cartoons and the Satirical Press on the Eve of the Kemalist Reforms (1919-1924),” in A Social History of Late Ottoman Women: New Perspectives, ed. Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 248-75.

10. Sehlikoğlu argues that this institution is “about creating boundaries and making them intelligible,
shared and thus normalized” through the ways in which gendered bodies interact on a daily basis, and in Islamic circles through a relationship with popular conceptions of fitrat (natural order, creation). Sertaç Sehlikoğlu, “Intimate Publics, Public Intimacies: Natural Limits, Creation and the Culture of Mahremiyet in Turkey,” The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology 32, no. 2 (2015): 77-89.


12. Ibid., 157-58, 174-83.

13. Elizabeth Frierson, “Unimagined Communities: State, Press and Gender in the Hamidian Era” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1996), 219, though as Boyar and Fleet (pp. 239-40) point out, this “culture of display” combined with the relative freedom of movement afforded to women during the Tanzimat period created a great deal of anxiety, particularly regarding the control of public pleasure gardens during the reign of Abdülmecid I (1839-1861). It should also be mentioned that because access to these gardens and to the sort of fashions and consumer goods central to the “culture of display” was mostly restricted to women of means and the extended royal family. Also in contrast to a more intimate public space, like the tramcar, the pleasure garden was much more difficult to police, due to its proximity to the city center and open construction, though it was a place where intimate, and often illicitly intimate, activity occurred, it was not an intimate space in and of itself.

14. This is important because not only had Pera been the putative center of European lifestyle and cosmopolitanism in Istanbul for centuries, Sirkeç’s train station was the final terminus of the Orient Express, the tramways made it much easier for European tourists to travel directly from the train to the Europeanized hotels, bars, and shops of Pera. For an in-depth look at the transformation of this neighborhood in the 1920s, see G. Carole Woodall, “Sensing the City: Sound, Movement and the Night in 1920s Istanbul” (PhD diss., Department of Middle East and Islamic Studies, New York University, 2008).


16. Ibid., 95.


18. Harrison, “Turkish Flappers Find Their New Freedom Entrancing.” This event was apparently part of a wave of local contests that would culminate in the first “Miss Turkey” contest held by the Cumhuriyet newspaper in 1929; see A. Holly Shissler, “Beauty Is Nothing to be Ashamed of: Beauty Contests as Tools of Women’s Liberation in Early Republican Turkey,” Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 24, no. 1 (2004): 107-22.


20. Ibid., 9.

21. Ahmet Rasim, Fuhs-u Atık [The Waste of Prostitution] (Istanbul: İkdam Matbaası, 1922). This work was eventually translated to modern Turkish and published with the decidedly more demure title, Dünkû İstanbul Hovardalık [Youthful Indiscretions of Yesterday in Istanbul] (Istanbul: Arba Press, 1987).

22. Ahmet Rasim’s experiences of unrequited lust on the tramway also naturally echo Charles Baudelaire’s personification of modernity in the poem “The Painter of Modern Life”—a veiled woman in an urban crowd—which, according to the analysis of Svetlana Boym, evokes a fundamental aspect of modern feeling, being “intoxicated by transience, nostalgic for tradition, the poet laments what could have been.” The Future of Nostalgia (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 21.


24. Rasim, Dünkû İstanbul Hovardalık [Youthful Indiscretions of Yesterday in Istanbul], 1-39. In the original publication, none of the stories presented in Fuhs-u Atık [The Waste of Prostitution] were titled, but in the Arba Press version, chapters were given creative and appropriate titles, this particular story was titled “İlk Gençlik Uyanışlar” or “The First Awakenings of Youth.”

25. Rasim, Dünkû İstanbul Hovardalık, 32-33.
27. “Tramvaylarda Hanımlerin Yeri” [Women’s Place on the Tramway], Sebi-ül Reşad Vol. 16 No. 5-404 (April 1919) p. 142
28. “Tramvaylarda Hanımlerin Yeri.” It is possible, though not explicitly mentioned in the article, that the offenders this author has in mind were white Russian émigrés who were the subject of great concern in Istanbul from the outset of the Russian Civil War in 1917 until 1923. Russian women, usually denoted by the Russian loan word “haraşo” were singled out in particular for their apparent disregard of social norms like segregation and were identified as something of a sexual threat to Turkish women in journals of the period. See Georgeon, “Women’s Representations in Ottoman Cartoons,” 258-59, Bülent Bakar, Esir Şehrin Misafirleri: Beyaz Ruslar [The Imprisoned City’s Guests: The White Russians] (Istanbul: Tarihçi Kitabevi, 2012), 273-309; Zafer Toprak, “İstanbul’da Yaşayan Rusya’ının Armağanları: Haraşolar,” [Russia’s Gift to Istanbul: the Haraşo] Istanbul 1 (1992): 72-79.
31. Ibid., 194.
32. Quoted in ibid., 196.
33. Sabiha Sertel, “Nereye Gidiyoruz?” [Where are we going?] Resimli Ay, no. 1, February 1924, p. 5-7. Duben and Behar provide more examples from the Sertel’s publication of this sort of anti-bourgeois rhetoric in Istanbul Households, 197. Shissler has also demonstrated how concerns over the display of women’s bodies overlapped with broader social concerns about modernity, class and women’s agency in “Beauty is Nothing to Be Ashamed of,” 107-22.
34. Duben and Behar, Istanbul Households, especially the photographs and cartoons on 204, 209, and 224.
36. On the concept of “decadent” modernity in Kemalist Istanbul, see Woodall, “Sensing the City.” On “super-westernization,” see Mardin, “Super-Westernization” and Perin Gürel, “Wild Westernization: Gender, Sexuality and the United States in Turkey” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2010). Orhan Koçak also explains how the anti-imperialist bent of the Kemalist period did have a significant effect on the degree to which certain aspects of Western culture were adopted in “‘Westernization against the West’: Cultural Politics in the Early Turkish Republic,” in Turkey’s Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century, ed. Celia Kerslake, Kerem Öktem, and Phillip Robins (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 305-22.
38. Georgeon mentions that this relaxation was in part due to the prevalence of white Russian women in Istanbul following the outbreak of civil war in 1917; apparently, they were known for ignoring the rules on segregation; see “Women’s Representations in Ottoman Cartoons” 258-59, and Burçak Evren has mentioned that Russian women were known for disregarding the curtain at Istanbul’s beaches in this time, likely precipitating its removal in 1926; see Burçak Evren, “Plajlar,” in Dünden Bügéne Istanbul Ansiklopedisi [The Istanbul Encyclopedia from Yesterday to Today] vol. 6, ed. Nuri Akbayar, Ekrem İşın, Necdet Sakaoglu, Oya Baydar, M. Baha Tanman, M. Sabri Koz, Bülent Aksoy, Affife Batur, and Yağış Yusufoğlu (Istanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1993), 261-62.
39. Kayserililioglu cites an issue of Tevhid-i Efkar announcing that the change occurred in December 20, 1923, but other sources cited below suggest that it may have occurred earlier than that. In any case, December 20 seems like the latest possible date and does coincide with motions in parliament to investigate the matter; Kayserililıoğlu, Dersaadet ‘ten İstanbul’a Tramvay [The Tramway from Constantinople to Istanbul] vol. II, 110.
41. Request by Ziyaeddin Bey (Erzurum) to question the Interior Minister. BCA Fon 030 1 0 0 0, Prime Ministry, box 6, folder 34, series 22.
44. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Tutanaklar, p. 138. Ziyaeddin disregards the minister’s explanation of a health concern by suggesting that if it were merely a microbial issue, the curtains could be disinfected with oilcloth without being removed and that the replacement of the haremlik-selamlık divide merely with signage marking assigned seating for men and women was unsatisfactory and ought to be remedied by assigning whole cars to men or women only.
45. TBMM Tutanaklar, p. 138.
47. “Tramvay Perdesi,” Akbaba, December 24, 1923
48. Ibid
49. Ibid
52. “Tramvay’dan perde kalktan sonar,” Türkiye Edebiyat Mecmuası 1, no. 1 (September 1, 1923).
53. Masha Belenky, “Transitory Tales: Writing the Omnibus in Nineteenth-Century Paris,” Dix-Neuf 16, no. 3 (November 2012): 298. In describing the ways in which the interior of the tramcar became an eroticized place in nineteenth-century Paris, Masha Belenky admits that this is a process largely produced by men. In analyzing such works of art as Marie Cassat’s 1891 color print In the Omnibus, she suggests that women felt oppositely about the eroticization of the tramcar. While one cannot be sure of the gender of the author of this cartoon, it does suggest that women perceived this eroticization in Istanbul, regardless of whether they had a hand in producing it.
54. Duben and Behar, Istanbul Households, 223.
56. Ibid., a kıblaname is a compass device used to determine the direction toward Mecca, in which Muslims need to pray.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
61. This attitude has been illustrated in other contexts, such as female suicide by Maksudyan in “Control over Life,” unveiling in urban contexts by Adak in “Women in the Post-Ottoman Public Sphere” and public beauty contests in Shissler in “Beauty Is Nothing to Be Ashamed of.” On Barak also points out how modern, hyper-sexualized women were presented as distractions from the progress of modernity in Egypt, which is a theme that is also apparent in many Turkish cartoons from the same period, in “Times of Tamaddun.”
62. Sevim Sertel O’Brien, “A Turk Named O’Brien” unpublished manuscript, Kentfield, CA. This memoiristic manuscript, which was composed in English in the genre of a bedtime story for her children, has been kindly provided to me by Sevim’s daughter Tia O’Brien in a lightly edited form, correcting for minor grammar and spelling only.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. It is important to point out that these reforms happened at different times, since the curtain reform occurred in early 1924 and the hat reforms and anti-veiling campaigns did not begin for nearly a year after that. Sevim Sertel O’Brien is clearly collapsing events for narrative weight in this story. For a recent analysis of the implementation of the hat and headscarf reforms, see Hale Yılmaz, Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923-1945 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 22-138.
67. Quoted in Gülersoy, Tramvay İstanbul’da, 136.
Ayşe Gül Altınay was the first to elaborate on this tension and the ways it developed in the 1930s through the life and story of Sabiha Gökçen in *The Myth of a Military-Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 33-58.

It should be stressed here that once the general guidelines for women’s participation in Turkish politics and the Turkish state were set in the 1920s, the negotiation of Turkish identity’s gender elements carried on in finer and finer detail, of which Safa’s is one telling example of many yet to be explored. What I mean by “normative Kemalist values” is exactly the boundaries agreed on by the end of Mustafa Kemal’s first wave of cultural reforms in the 1920s.

Serap Kavas has convincingly argued that Kemalist ideas about modernity, dress, and manners were all of a single piece in the 1920s and 1930s in “‘Wardrobe Modernity’: Western Attire as a Tool of Modernization in Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 51, no. 4 (2015): 515-39.


Most recently, the 2015 rape and murder of Özgecan Aslan, a college student from Mardin, by the driver of her dolmuş, reignited calls by politicians and supporters of the ruling Justice and Development Party for “pink busses” for women only, the popular response of one set of protesters has gone “we don’t need pink busses, we need pink men.” Behlül Özkan, “Pembe Ötobüs ve Yeni Türkiye,” [Pink Busses and the New Turkey] T24, February 15, 2015, http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/behlul-ozkan/pembe-otobus-ve-yeni-turkiye,11271.


Author Biography

James Ryan is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at the University of Pennsylvania. His research interests broadly concern the intellectual, cultural, and political history of the late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic.