MODERNISM AND NATION

BUILDING
Introduction

MODERNISM ON THE MARGINS OF EUROPE

Some time ago, by the “Sweet Waters of Europe” at the far end of the Golden Horn, I heard the whine of countless gramophones on the caiques plashing the water. And I reckoned that Abdulhamid was dead, the Young Turks had arrived, that the Bazaar was changing its signs and that the West was triumphing. And already today we have Ankara, and the monument to Mustafa Kemal! Events move fast. The die is cast: one more centuries-old civilization goes to ruin.

—Le Corbusier, L’art decoratif d’aujourd’hui, 1925

For Le Corbusier, the making of modern Turkey over the ruins of the Ottoman Empire was just one example of what he saw as the disappearance of balanced, harmonious cultures everywhere with “the arrival of the twentieth century.”¹ He dated “the advent of modern times” in Turkey to the appearance of the Young Turks on the scene, just before his own first visit to Istanbul in 1911.² He observed that what the Young Turks had started then had been carried to its logical conclusion by Mustafa Kemal, the nationalist hero who proclaimed the Turkish republic in Ankara in 1923, dismantling a six-centuries-old Islamic civilization. Indeed, the new republic had recently passed its most radical and, to this day, most contentious decrees, abolishing the Ottoman sultanate and the Islamic caliphate. A series of Westernizing institutional reforms was under way to shape the entire social, cultural, and architectural fabric of Turkey along European models. It was only a
matter of years before Le Corbusier himself would be hailed as a great visionary and his works and ideas would mobilize a new generation of young Turkish architects.

Why, then, do Le Corbusier’s words have such a melancholy ring? Many Western commentators writing in the 1920s expressed ambivalence toward the new nationalist government in Turkey, if not outright nostalgia for Ottoman culture and society.³ Although Le Corbusier shared the general orientalist nostalgia, his agenda was a different and personal one, little related to the historical events under way in Turkey. While evoking the necessity and historical inevitability of the disappearance of old civilizations, his nostalgic remarks were intended mainly to draw attention to the loss of “harmonious cultures” everywhere and to justify his own mission to re-create that lost harmony in the modern world.

During his first visit to Istanbul in 1911, like other European orientalists before him who went to the East in search of the “exotic” and the “authentic,” Le Corbusier had despised the modernizing agenda of the Young Turks, including the new architecture they sponsored. Instead, he had admired “the simplicity of their fathers” who had built the classic mosques and the wooden houses of old Istanbul—those “architectural masterpieces,” as he called them, the spatial and constructional qualities of which he registered in his mind and in his sketchbooks. As recent scholarship on Le Corbusier confirms, in those formative years he was looking at the cultural artifacts and vernacular architectures of eastern Europe and Turkey as conceptual models for a possible modern vernacular.⁴ They were his sources of inspiration to begin contemplating the possibility of a similar harmony, this time between twentieth-century culture and its designed objects. Yet in the official modernist polemic of the 1920s and 1930s (to which Le Corbusier himself significantly contributed), these “non-European” cultural influences became merely anecdotal. Instead, the ocean liners, grain elevators, and airplanes of the industrial West took center stage as the exclusive sources of twentieth-century modernism.

The official history of modern architecture was written in the West with Le Corbusier as its main author and protagonist at once. According to this account, which has become a part of the mainstream cultural history of the twentieth century, “modernism,” or the “Modern Movement” as it was then called, encompassed a revolutionary aesthetic canon and a scientific doctrine in architecture originating in Europe during the interwar period. Use of reinforced concrete, steel, and glass, the primacy of cubic forms, geometric shapes, and Cartesian grids, and
above all the absence of decoration, stylistic motifs, traditional roofs, and ornamental details have been its defining features in twentieth-century aesthetic consciousness. For most people, the works of masters such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe epitomize this modernist aesthetic. Its European origins notwithstanding, it is a doctrine that has claimed universal validity and rationality. The new needs, tools, and technologies of complex industrial societies that informed this modernist vision were presented as the needs, tools, and technologies of a rationally progressing universal history—an epochal force that no nation, culture, or geography could escape.

The most effective organization working for the dissemination of these ideas was the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), which inaugurated its annual meetings in 1928 in Europe. A year before that, a major housing exhibition in Stuttgart, Germany (the Weissenhof Siedlung, 1927), had given a unified image and great publicity to the leading modernist architects of Europe. In 1932 the movement crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and the term “international style” was coined for this architecture after the famous exhibition by that title at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. In a very short time during the 1930s, the architectural and urbanistic precepts of the Modern Movement were embraced by an entire generation of architects, planners, and bureaucrats everywhere as the most progressive and thoroughly rational expression of the modern zeitgeist in the making. As we will see later in this book, its arrival in Ankara, the new capital of modern, postimperial, republican Turkey, was celebrated as a historical moment marking the country’s entry into the twentieth century.

The greatest ideological appeal of the Modern Movement was its claim to transcend ideology. During the interwar period, many new regimes and diverse political systems, from socialism in Weimar Germany and postrevolutionary Russia to fascism in Italy, Zionism in mandate Palestine, and Kemalism in Turkey, embraced the progressive discourse of the Modern Movement. Republican Ankara in the 1930s was one of the earliest manifestations of the historical alliance of modernism with nation building and state power—an alliance from which the term “high modernism” would be born. By the time high modernism reached its epitome in the post–World War II period, it designated not so much the particular aesthetic canon of the Modern Movement (which gave way to new, more monumental, and more sculptural forms after World War II) as its larger political project. Le Corbusier was, without doubt, the mastermind of high modernist vision in architecture and urbanism—“the revolutionary architect par excellence,” as most of his contemporaries and many Turkish architects of the 1930s saw him.
proliferation of the high modernist vision beyond the margins of Europe to other continents and cultures, from postcolonial India to Latin America, shaped much of the history, culture, and built fabric of the twentieth century. The new capitol complexes of Chandigarh and Brasilia are only the most ambitious and famous of its numerous expressions in architecture and urbanism.5

As James C. Scott notes in his compelling account of high modernism, the term is not confined to architecture and urbanism. "High Modernism is the most visionary and ultimately devastating ideology of the twentieth century," Scott explains, "a particularly sweeping vision of how the benefits of technical and scientific progress might be applied, usually through the state, in every field of human activity." 6 That high modernism tends to simplify reality, making it legible and ultimately controllable, and that it sees the past as an impediment to the realization of an idealized future are two of Scott’s observations that are particularly pertinent to an analysis of Kemalist Turkey in the 1930s. There are certain conditions, Scott argues, that have particularly favored the blossoming of the high modernist faith. These include "crises of state power, such as wars and economic depressions, and circumstances in which a state’s capacity for relatively unimpeded planning is greatly enhanced, such as the revolutionary conquest of power and colonial rule."7 The presence of both of these conditions in Turkey at the time modernism “arrived” in Ankara cannot be missed. The country had barely emerged from decades of warfare extending from the Balkan Wars and the First World War to the nationalist War of Independence. The construction of a new nation had to be accomplished in the midst of dire economic conditions, not to mention the impact of the depression of 1929. Finally and most importantly, after the consolidation of single-party rule under Mustafa Kemal’s Republican People’s Party (RPP), there was a new revolutionary regime in power with an all-encompassing project of modernization and civilization at the top of its agenda.

With its predilection for social engineering and top-to-bottom modernization and its self-declared revolutionary premises, the Kemalist regime embraced the high modernist faith as one of its founding ideologies. The architectural culture of the early Turkish republic amply illustrates how high modernism as an ideology appealed particularly to "planners, engineers, architects, scientists and technicians" who "wanted to use state power to bring about huge, utopian changes in people’s work habits, living patterns, moral conduct and worldview."8 Modern architecture was imported as both a visible symbol and an effective instrument of this radical program to create a thoroughly Westernized, modern, and secular new nation dissociated from the coun-
try’s own Ottoman and Islamic past. In this respect, architecture in early republican Turkey can be looked at as a literally “concrete” manifestation of the high modernist vision.

In this book I offer evidence for the essentially ideological appropriation of modernism in Turkish architectural culture of the 1930s. At the same time, I address how this imported ideology was interpreted, justified, modified, and contested in ways unique to the Turkish experience. The architectural culture and production of the early republican period bear ample testimony to the ambiguities, complexities, and contradictions resulting from encounters between imported ideas and local realities, not just in Turkey but everywhere. This book is also about these complexities and contradictions, which make it problematic to explain the Turkish case (or any other case, for that matter) exclusively from the general high modernist blueprint.

The “New Architecture” (Yeni Mimari, as the Modern Movement was called in Turkey) came to Turkey in the 1930s largely through the example of German and Central European architects who worked and taught in Turkey throughout the early republican period. Their more conservative brand of modernism, which can be observed in the architecture of Ankara (mostly a stripped-down classicism), bore little resemblance to the canonic aesthetic of “international style” in the 1930s (with its slick, white boxes, transparent walls, and advanced industrial materials). The discourse celebrating Turkey’s entry into the heroic world of the Modern Movement notwithstanding, modern architecture in early republican Turkey was conspicuously heavier than the celebrated examples of the Modern Movement in Europe. Buildings were constructed more traditionally, with smaller openings and, in many cases, pitched tile roofs, largely as a result of the poverty and constraints of the building industry. Modernist Turkish architects were themselves profoundly contradictory in their comments about modernism. Sometimes they privileged its aesthetic component (as is implied by the term “international style”) by celebrating the “harmonious composition of geometric volumes.” More often they rejected the stylistic implications of an aesthetic understanding of modernism in favor of the principles of “rationalism and functionalism,” which, they believed, were the objective and scientific criteria determining modern form. Mostly they tried to reconcile the two.

As much as young Turkish architects wanted to embrace the Modern Movement, in the passionately nationalist climate of the early republic the word “international” was even more objectionable to them than the word “style.” In the same way that republican leaders wanted to import the positivism, science, and progress of modernity without its liberal
philosophy or its socialist overtones, republican architects wanted a modernism without its international connotations. As will be evident throughout this book, the entire architectural culture of the early republic was one big effort to reconcile the “modern” with the “national.” Some argued that because the Modern Movement was the most rational response to site, context, and program, it was, by definition, “national.” As a corollary to this, others argued that traditional Turkish architecture (classical Ottoman monuments and vernacular houses) embraced such rational designs in terms of function and construction that it was already “modern” in concept. Analogous to (and inspired by) the way Italian rationalist architects elaborated the concepts of “Italianità” and “Mediterraneità” to appropriate modernism for the Fascist state, Turkish architects tried to “nationalize the modern” for a better ideological fit with Kemalism. Any study of early republican architecture in Turkey needs to take into account this ambiguous and very particular sense of what “modern” was all about and resist the tendency to read modern Turkish architecture in terms of exclusive binary oppositions between national and international or be-tween tradi-tion and modernity. At a time when any emphasis on either supra-national or subnational affiliation was anathema to republican ideology, modernism could not be international in its affiliations, nor could national architecture be truly local, traditional, or regionalist.

Both the European modernism of the 1930s and the idea of a “nation-al style” that had been a recurrent obsession in Turkish architectural culture since the late Ottoman period are important backdrops for this book. It was the specific ways in which the two interacted and negotiat-ed in the 1930s, however, that gave early republican architecture its unique character. One central idea informing this book is that a distinction should be made between modern architecture and high modernism, counter to the tendency to collapse the two together. Modern architecture, as it first emerged in Europe around the turn of the century, was before everything else a critical discourse that defied received notions and established canons of architecture. It commenced from the idea of exploring a critical, antistylistic, and continuously self-transforming approach to art and architecture, irreducible to an official style or program in the same way that modernity is irreducible to the grand political proj ect of high modernism. As Scott puts it in the context of social theory, “one of the great paradoxes of social engineering is that it seems at odds with the experience of modernity generally. Trying to jell a social world, the most striking characteristic of which appears to be flux, seems rather
like trying to manage a whirlwind." The same could be said for modern architecture. To turn it into an official style and ideology—simple, legible, and recognizable as such (geometric, undecorated, abstract building forms)—seems very much at odds with its theoretical premises, which emphasize formal indeterminacy, response to context, and response to changing needs, materials, and techniques. Therefore, the initial identification of modernism with nation building under the auspices of an authoritarian state in Turkey is itself problematical—a premise waiting to be questioned rather than taken for granted.

The history of modern architecture and urbanism outside Europe and North America is a relatively recent and rapidly growing field of research. Until the last two decades or so of the twentieth century, nineteenth- and twentieth-century architectures in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America were topics doubly marginalized, not only by historians of modern architecture but also by area specialists. As is widely known and discussed today, the reasons for this had much to do with the initial constitution of the discipline of art and architectural history on primarily Eurocentric and orientalist grounds. For many art historians in the so-called area studies, non-Western cultures were interesting mostly insofar as they remained "others" with respect to the West. Thus their attention and scholarly specialization were focused heavily on the classic periods or "golden ages" of Islamic, Indian, Chinese, and other cultures. Modern architecture was regarded as an imported and "alien" discourse not indigenous to these societies—a much-lamented symbol of the "contamination" of their authentic cultural expressions. Little attention, if any, was devoted to the efforts of non-Western cultures to make modern architectural concepts, forms, and techniques originating in Europe their own. "Modern" was assumed to be an exclusively European category that non-Western others could import, adopt, or perhaps resist but not reproduce from within. In the case of Turkey, not only twentieth-century modernism but also the histories of Ottoman baroque, neoclassic, and other European architectural imports of the nineteenth century were, until recently, little known to an English-speaking readership.

Much of area studies has been predicated on a belief in the essential differences between cultures. Twentieth-century modernism embraced the opposite—a belief in the essential "sameness" of human beings as the scientific, objective, biological underpinning of what were to be inevitably uniform modern lives. Consequently, neither perspective has helped much to open up a space for the study of modernism outside the
industrialized West. Area specialists and orientalists have looked at non-Western cultures as strictly "bounded domains," the essences of which were in the past. Historians of modern architecture, on the other hand, have focused exclusively on the social, technological, and intellectual determinants of modernism, the sources of which were in the West. Hence they have regarded modern architecture and urbanism in non-Western contexts simply as extensions of Western developments and therefore as of little interest and originality in themselves—unless, of course, a famous European architect or planner happened to be working in some overseas territory. Until the fairly recent appearance of publications on India's colonial heritage and the work of modern Indian architects, for example, what was known about modern architecture in India was confined to Le Corbusier in Chandigarh.

In the aftermath of the critique of orientalist and Eurocentric perspectives in nearly every discipline, the foregoing picture has been changing dramatically. Orientalist constructions of "other cultures" as timeless and essentialist categories have been radically challenged at least since the publication of Edward Said's ground-breaking work in the late 1970s. An entire new field of cultural studies has emerged, drawing attention to the hybridity and complexity of non-Western societies, "modern" in their own ways and not necessarily following the patterns delineated by the history of the industrial West. At the same time, critical histories of modern architecture have also been dismantling the idea of modernism as a thoroughly rational and universal doctrine that the architecture of every nation would sooner or later emulate. The scholarly trend now is to expose multiple and heterogeneous trajectories, even within European modernism itself, not to mention hitherto unexplored contexts and countries from Latin America to East Asia. As a result, the last twenty years have seen a boom in scholarship and published literature on the plurality of modern experiences, histories, and cultural transformations of non-Western societies. There is a wealth of new research on colonial architecture and urbanism, modern architecture and national identity, and postcolonial architecture. This book is informed by these studies in many ways and was motivated by, among other things, the conviction that such studies of "other modernisms" challenge not only essentialist categories of non-Western cultures as static but also assumptions of a linear, homogeneous, and universal history of modern architecture. Looking at different experiences in different places and circumstances is the most effective way by which we can ensure that modern architecture, traditionally reified by both its supporters and its opponents, becomes historically situated, contextualized, and, most importantly, politicized.
It is not surprising that the categories “power” and “politics” have been at the center of much of the work in this field, because it is through these categories that asymmetries in cultural and architectural history emerge most clearly. The primary reason for the privileging of politics is a simple one. In most countries outside western Europe and North America, modernization was not a profound societal experience resulting from the nineteenth-century “great transformation” into an industrial, urban, and market-oriented order. It was an official program conceived and implemented either by colonial governments or by the modernizing elites of authoritarian nation-states that most of the time placed a high priority on architecture and urbanism as a form of “visible politics.” In Turkey, too, from the reformist bureaucrats of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century to the republican leaders in the 1920s and 1930s, successive generations of modernizers sought to “catch up” with Western civilization and progress by importing Western institutions, forms, and techniques. Architecture, by its very nature, has always been a powerful symbol as well as an effective instrument of reform and change in the modern world. As a result, modern architecture in non-Western contexts has often been a representation of modernity without its real material and social basis—namely, industrial cities, capitalist production, and an autonomous bourgeoisie.

Although one can rightly argue that modern architecture has been a representation of modernity and a foil for modernization everywhere, including the industrialized West, this process has nevertheless been far more evident and transparent outside the West. As a result, the study of modern architecture in non-Western contexts compels us to go beyond traditional categories of art history, formal analysis, or discussion of “origins,” “influences,” and so forth, and to delve into the historical and political contexts in which forms acquire meaning—which may be different from their original meanings in the West. Traditional assumptions about the “autonomy” of architectural form (which have been under critical scrutiny everywhere for some time now) are even more conspicuously contested by the example of “other modernisms.” With the proliferation of studies of the latter, the emphasis has been shifting from architecture as an autonomous, self-referential discipline to what we might call the politics of architecture.

While the top-to-bottom character of modernization in non-Western contexts inevitably brings the issues of power and politics to the forefront of architectural history, it is also important not to read the history of modern architecture exclusively through the lenses of current critical perspectives focused on power and politics. In this book I hope to make a more nuanced assessment of the modernist vision, dis-
criminating between its critical premises and its ultimately authoritarian implementations, between what it meant to its contemporaries and what it means to us today. Modern architecture in non-Western contexts, or anywhere for that matter, may be seen as a form of cultural and environmental oppression imposed upon people by bureaucrats, architects, and planners—as indeed numerous cultural critics have seen at least since Jane Jacobs. Power, however, is not only about oppression but also and literally about empowerment, and it is the factor of historical agency associated with the modernist vision that has made it so appealing to non-Western nations—nations that for centuries were cast as “ahistorical.” New nation-states such as Turkey and many postcolonial governments in the twentieth century initially adopted modern architecture and urbanism as what they perceived to be statements of national independence, pride, and progress. Whatever our retrospective critical assessments may be, to its contemporaries modernism was an expression of the desire of “other cultures” to contest their “otherness” and to claim subjectivity in making their own history.

In this book, my approach to the architectural culture of early republican Turkey is informed by an awareness of the profound ambiguity of the modernist project of the 1930s, including its modern architecture. Perhaps there is a personal and generational explanation for this. Unlike the generation born into the early republic—my parents, my teachers, and the first generation of historians who studied modern Turkish architecture and to whom this book is greatly indebted—I can maintain a critical distance from that period in order to see through modernism into the authoritarian politics. I can question the republican modernist vision with the hindsight of all the developments, critical ideas, and scholarship of the last two decades. I can take issue with its larger claims to scientific truth and with its mandate to transform society for the better and to construct a thoroughly transformed future largely dissociated from culture, context, and history.

At the same time, I am equally distanced from the emerging younger generation of architectural historians who have been focusing, with much critical force and insight, on the ideological programs and authoritarian politics of early republican architecture. Unlike most of these younger scholars, I have caught the tail end of the republican vision through personal memories—family outings in Youth Park, the Atatürk model farm and forest, and the Çubuk Dam in Ankara—the legacies of republican public space that I discuss later in the book. I lived my childhood and youth within the lingering legacy of the Kemalist project, just before the dismantling of the ethos of the early republic and the demolition or transformation of its most representative physical spaces after
1980. Perhaps as a result of this relative historical proximity, I still take the optimism, energy, and excitement of the early republican architects to heart. I am fascinated by their heroic feelings of nation building and history making, which come across in contemporaneous documents, testimonies, photographs, and publications. Such evidence suggests to me that, emerging out of a highly popular nationalist war of independence and conceived by the hero of the war, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey’s modernist vision was more popular than is typically suggested by other cases of high modernist social engineering “forced upon” traditional societies. Interestingly, James C. Scott did not include Mustafa Kemal in his “Hall of Fame of High Modernism,” which features other famous figures from Saint-Simon and Lenin to Robert Moses and the Shah of Iran. I believe that, without negating the high modernist legacy of Kemalism, there are good historical reasons to justify this exclusion. Deified as a secularist and Westernizer by many Turks, detested for the same reasons by others, but ultimately revered as a soldier and national hero by all, Atatürk left a legacy that continues to be one of the more complex and enduring legacies among twentieth-century modernizers and nation builders.

The Modern Movement may have been conspicuously out of place in a war-torn, traditional Muslim society without the industrial infrastructure to justify its aesthetic and constructional precepts. Yet its introduction into Turkey was elevated to epic proportions in the architectural culture of the 1930s. It was hailed as the visible proof that Turkey was a modern European nation with no resemblance to the exotic and orientalist aesthetic tropes by which the Ottoman Empire had typically been represented in the past. Like Salman Rushdie’s Indian immigrant in a Western metropolis who is “a disguise inventing his own false descriptions to counter the falsehoods invented about him,” the modernist vision of the early republic embodied “as much heroism as pathos.” 20 I hope my account conveys these ambiguous and simultaneous feelings of both pathos and heroism, of both state power and popular empowerment, of both alienation and liberation—feelings without which modernism loses its richness and historical complexity.21 That the current cultural climate in Turkey is increasingly more polarized between a staunch, uncritical defense of the republican modernist vision and an indiscriminate condemnation of its Westernizing, secularizing agenda testifies to the importance and urgency of accounts that complicate the picture.

Finally, some methodological notes are necessary to explain the
sources and structure of this book. As is evident from its subtitle, the concept of "architectural culture" has been central to it. Very simply, the concept of architectural culture starts from the premise that one should look at architecture not as an autonomous, self-referential discipline interested in forms and form-making alone, but rather as a larger institutional, cultural, and social field with important political implications. The concept of architectural culture implies a cultural historian's approach to the buildings, projects, and architectural texts that collectively constitute a "discourse" about architecture, in the original sense of this helpful but now clichéd term. The architectural culture of a particular place and time includes all the institutional practices—architectural schools, publications, exhibitions, competitions, and professional associations—that produce, reproduce, discredit, or lend credibility to discourses about architecture.

A cultural approach does not mean that architecture can be reduced to discourses about architecture or that buildings are unequivocal and transparent expressions of the ideas that are claimed to have informed them. Most of the time the most prolific producers of the discourse (such as Aptullah Ziya, Behyet Sabri, and Bedrettin Hamdi in the Turkish scene in the 1930s) are not the most prolific or the most interesting designers of the period (such as Seyfettin Arkan or Fievki Balmumcu). In other cases the two functions overlap in the personalities of individual architects (such as Zeki Sayar and Sedad Hakki Eldem). Yet even then their published writings, theories, and programs fall short of fully explaining their built work or revealing the tacit agendas, unacknowledged influences, and simply personal aesthetic choices involved in their designs. More specifically, the doctrines of rationalism and functionalism that are at the center of the official discourse of modernism often prove to be no more than clichés that leave out the complex cultural, aesthetic, and personal considerations that go into the making of the best modernist work. The idea behind the study of architectural culture is not to explain the work through what was said and written about it but to see the ways in which what was said, written, and built collectively confirm, interpret, contest, or negotiate the political and ideological agendas of the time.

As the foregoing tenets of the cultural approach suggest, the primary sources for this study were contemporary publications and visual sources of the early republican period, as well as the surviving buildings and surviving people. I surveyed the most representative official, professional, and popular publications of the "long 1930s." I took this quintessentially Kemalist "long decade" to span the period from the graduation and professional organization of the first modernist Turkish
architects in 1928 to the architectural competition for Mustafa Kemal’s mausoleum in 1942, the symbolic closure of the early republican period. With the utopian modernist vision of the Kemalist revolution at its height at home and the establishment of the Modern Movement as the dominant aesthetic and ideological canon abroad, the 1930s constitute a particularly fascinating decade with a strong visual component, to which contemporary photographs testify. The historical overlap between modernism and techniques of reproduction, photography, and advertisement in Europe has been the topic of many recent studies.23 The Turkish scene in the 1930s affirms the importance of these new means in disseminating a visual culture of modernity mostly by the agencies and publications of the state. Thus contemporary photographs, postcards, and posters were also consulted, and in many cases they have been as important and informative as published textual material.

Although the architectural research for this book was focused on “the long 1930s,” the larger cultural and political framework within which the research is meaningful spans the period from the Young Turk revolution of 1908 to the end of the RPP’s single-party regime in 1950. There are many good reasons why there is a clear definition and coherence to this larger period, not just in architectural history but in the history of modern Turkey in general.24 The overarching reason that concerns the structuring of this book is the strong ideological grip of Turkish nationalism on all aspects of politics, life, and culture throughout this period. For this reason, four chapters focusing on modernism as an aesthetic canon of the Kemalist period proper are bracketed by an introductory chapter looking at what came before modernism and a final chapter looking at what followed the rejection of the modernist canon. Taking issue with the common tendency to divide the architectural history of the early republic into stylistically defined periods—that is, a succession of “national” and “international” styles25—I regard the continuity of the nationalist framework as the defining feature of early republican architectural culture, regardless of stylistic shifts.

The thematic ordering of the book follows a loosely chronological structure, but each chapter stands on its own in exploring one component or theme in the architectural culture of the early republic. The first chapter reviews the legacy of the Ottoman revivalist “national style” that preceded modernism in Turkish architecture. The casting of this style as modernism’s academic, stylistic, and anachronistic “other” constituted the first high-modernist gesture that depicted the past as “an impediment, a history that must be transcended” and the present as “the platform for launching plans for a better future.”26 The rest of the book offers historical context and evidence for three impor-
tant and recurrent terms that collectively summarize the aspirations of early republican architectural culture: “architecture of revolution” (inkilap mimarisi), “new architecture” (yeni mimari), and “national architecture” (milli mimari). The primary question that preoccupied early republican architects was how to find an architecture that embodied all three attributes at once.

Chapters 2 and 3 address the meaning and implications of the term inkilap mimarisi (architecture of revolution)—a key term designating an idealized but largely formless quest of the early 1930s. Chapter 2 looks specifically at the official discourse through which modern architecture came to be the primary visual expression of the republican “revolution,” as it was called, and shows how modern forms were mobilized to serve the ideological agenda of the regime. Chapter 3 focuses on the significance of the industrial and technological icons of modernism in the revolutionary consciousness of the republic and in the specific discourses of progress and civilization espoused by Kemalism. It highlights parallels with and divergences from the ways in which the modernist avant-garde in Europe exalted the same technological icons.

How the professional discourse of Turkish architects—their struggle for legitimacy and state commissions and their particular readings of modernism to strengthen their professional claims—took shape around the term Yeni Mimari (“the New Architecture”) is discussed in chapter 4. Chapter 5 then looks at images and ideas of the modern house, the most paradigmatic domain claimed by modernist architects everywhere in the 1930s, as well as the symbol of the republican desire to extend the “civilizing mission” of the Kemalist reforms into the private realm. Nowhere is the ambiguity of modernism more evident than in the architecture of the house (mesken mimarisi, as Turkish architects called it). On one hand, it was a theme that symbolized the democratic potential of the New Architecture, whereby architects could claim service to “the people” rather than to wealthy patrons, states, and institutions. On the other hand, the perception of the house as a means for reforming lifestyles epitomized the penetration of the state, through experts, architects, and planners, to the traditionally resistant domain of privacy, family life, and domestic order.

By the late 1930s, nationalist attacks on modernism had already intensified in Turkey, portraying its abstract, geometric forms as the mark of an alienated, individualistic, and cosmopolitan society. Chapter 6 focuses on the intensification of the milli mimari (national architecture) debates in the late 1930s, discussing how vernacular building traditions—especially the timber “Turkish houses”—were appropriated by modernist architects in an effort to “nationalize the modern.” It