



Things that I (barely) Remember:

# **A FAMILY ALBUM**

In 2022 I posted an essay (at [figsson.org](http://figsson.org)) titled 'Anamnesis'. It was about what I remembered from my youth in late 1970s and 80s partly set against the history of short 20th century by Eric Hobsbawm and political-economic history of Turkey by Feroz Ahmad. Driven by photographs that I have taken around those times, I wrote down the selective traces of memory and the scene in Turkey as I recalled. This time around I want to refer to the photographs tucked away in the family album for a long time, photos made by some studio photographers, by other professionals on location and some snapshots taken by family members, and a few taken by me. For me, some of these images do not have 'captions,' some indicate places I vaguely remember and few have proper (exact) dates. But they are of the people I knew, or I thought I knew well, all dear to me, most of them departed. The dates range from early 1940s to end with a few photographs at the end of the last century. They are of Mother and Father, my two brothers, extended family in İzmir and Adana: Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in happier times. For me, their faces are intertwined with memory, but the images may be of historical record for anyone else, if they are worth the label at all. I delve into reading a particular history of my country, as though a 'milieu' will reveal itself in these photographs, a hard task. Or in other words, the photographs are representative of a kind of minority of Turkish society, an educated and secular middle class in a country when 80 percent of the population lived in rural areas. Literature and art, including the documentary photography of roughly the same period was rightfully centered around the peasants and the working class in the cities, on the reality of an impoverished population in comparison to the developed world, somehow stuck in a feudal system of

agrarian economy, land ownership and an industrial production initiated by the state enterprises, and if otherwise, to benefit the owners of the factories.

The photographs are carefully selected and edited among hundreds, some of them have been especially posed for a photographer at a special occasion, in everyone's Sunday best. Casual, everyday attire was abandoned in most of them for then valuable instance of being photographed. They display an aspired and exemplary modernity (read Westernization) of a part of the population from 1940s until the 70s, following Kemalist ideology that had its immense influence. The critical revision of this top-down westernization of the now century old Turkish Republic and Kemalism had been the topic of discussion for the intelligentsia and social scientists for quite some time now, its successes and failures debated in a wide political spectrum, from the socialist left to far right nationalism and to political Islam. Just as Ottoman history cannot be reduced to the Sultan and the Ottoman court in Istanbul, the intricate history of the Turkish Republic display many actors that have a claim on its fortunes. A people's history of Turkey is taking shape for a long time in many treatises, from socio-economic history to the struggles of the left; to the resolutions on the Armenian Genocide and ethnic cleansing of Christian citizens, and to the plight of its Kurdish population.



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*İhsan İnciöliöglu ile Doęan İnciöliöglunun  
19 Mayıs 981 Cumartesi günü saat 21 de Kız Enstitüsü  
Salonunda yapılacak Düğün Töşentisine sayın eşinizle  
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RECEP HEPDENİZ

H. FASİH İNCİRLİÖGLU



Within the history of the art of photography, there are great photographers and their works that lend themselves to writings on a material history. The 'studium' -as Roland Barthes have labeled it- in these outstanding images of people and places have enabled writers to create specific narratives. Outside the oeuvre of these artists like Paul Strand, Lewis Hine, Walker Evans, August Sander and others, there are what would be called 'archaeological finds' of body of works in USA, Europe and often in the global south, like the extraordinary work of studio photographers from Ghana, Mali and other countries. These photographs mostly refer to a recent past with much interest, exposing a special context and a special group of people from delinquent youth to proud descendants of colonial subjects with fashions to match. If these images are not appropriated by art institutions and galleries, they are usually made available online by institutions like the Arab Image Foundation or the Levantine Heritage Foundation and others. The craft and art of photography in Turkey were mainly initiated by the Ottoman Armenians in Istanbul, and survived elsewhere in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East where they were dispersed after 1915. Possibly, some of the images in my family album were done by their Turkish-Muslim

apprentices. Meanwhile, a 'modernizing front' had sprung up in the cities of the post colonial world in mid 20th century, from South Asia, to Middle East and Africa, partly inspired by the Kemalist revolution in Turkey, according to Hobsbawm. (The Soviet sphere underwent another modernism, lightly touching the early Turkish republic.) But rather than the modern institutions established within traditional societies, this modernizing front was made manifest in cultural terms via the outlook of the educated few, which comes up mostly in photographs of people, seen from Kabul to Cairo and Beirut and to cityscapes and cities in Turkey, ie. Ankara. What followed these attempts after a long time can be labeled as a 'lapsus,' a return to traditional ways, conservatism, religious dogma and an intolerance of multi-culturalism and refugees, not very much photogenic. One should seriously note the role of neo-liberal capitalism worldwide to understand similar reversal of modernity in the developed world. From 19th century onwards, it was the 'imagined communities' of nationalism that marked the end of multi-ethnic make up of empires (ie. Ottoman), with United States as the glorious exception to the rule and as the liberal-modern country par excellence. Today, the 'nation' as either the poor, or precariat, or the unemployed is under the spell of strongmen, demagogues and fascists.

For the young Republic of Turkey in its first two decades until the end of 1930s, the carefully posed and chosen photographs of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk displayed almost all (aspired) facets of cultural (and economic) progress on a par with western modernity. In a sense, the country's foundational ideology was made visible in 'tableaux' in which Mustafa Kemal appeared in black and white photographs: while teaching the (new) Latin alphabet to youth; while displaying the first western style hat that displaced the fez; on a tractor in the fields; looking out from a train window ('weaving the homeland with the iron web'); dancing to a waltz in a tuxedo; on the beach in a European style swim wear; at the dinner table with his glass of drink and



etc. All these images came after the war of independence (Turko-Greek War) that ended in 1922, before which Mustafa Kemal appeared in varied officer's uniform and decorations in all portraits. Together with some European photographers (most notably Othmar Pferschy) commissioned to make images -of capital Ankara built from scratch; agricultural and some industrial achievements; schools and hospitals; touristic images of İstanbul and other places- photography was at the heart of the nation-building project possibly in the absence of painters and illustrators. This was a (light) propaganda effort for all the better, modest and earnest in comparison to Mao's China or Kim Il Sung's North Korea and with the fraction of a budget in comparison to Leni Riefenstahl productions. Even today, there frequently appears an appropriate 'Atatürk photograph' in varied locations, from passenger sea lines to the halls of civil aviation, to kindergartens and tavernas (meyhane) etc., in some of which he is caught slightly off-guard, sometimes a bit child-like, and in some cases a little tipsy. As a one-man modernizing force revered by (almost) the entire nation, he was much more down to earth in photographs than he would have been in paintings or posters, infinitely more approachable than his public statues in the city squares or than all the plaster cast

busts derived in multiple generations from his death mask, found in almost all the schools in Turkey.

My parents met in Adana in 1950, a south Anatolian city in the heart of cotton growing plains of Çukurova, renowned in Turkish literature by Yaşar Kemal and Orhan Kemal's novels. Mother, originally from İzmir, was assigned to teach at the arts and crafts school for girls (Kız Enstitüsü) in Adana right after she graduated from the teachers college in Ankara in late 1940s. Her specialization was in fashion and floral design. Among her siblings -two sisters and a brother- she was the one to insist on studying until she gained her economic independence away from family, a rare occasion for women around the time. Meanwhile father, from Adana, was a fresh graduate of the school of law from İstanbul University, one of the only two available schools of its kind in Turkey. His father ran a small business enterprise, a logistics outfit in the city where my father set up a law firm of his own. Marriage of my mother and father must have been made possible through intermediaries, and sadly I never learned exactly how they have met the first time. In photographs they seem to be happy, at least up until their third (and last: me) son was into his teens, seen as they danced in new years eve parties at the 'city club' well into the 1960s. The club, possibly exclusive



for 'Adana jet-set' at the time, mostly catered to the provincial landlords, the owners of vast cotton fields and mills, and textile plants: the merciless lot that the mentioned novelists pitted against the peasants and workers. Among rare things that I remember from pre-school is the first bottle of Coca Cola I had at the venue, possibly around mid 60s, that blew my mind away. We were living in the three storey house that my father had built, with a big terrace on top that served as our playground. The first floor was rented out to Herr Poser, a German national working for Nato at Incirlik base close to the city. My parents regarded Herr Poser very highly, remarking his decency and modesty in every occasion for years. But sometime in early 60s he had to leave the country in a hurry, deported for a few dollars in cash in his possession outside the base, apparently a major offence in Turkish law at the time. For close to 20 years we had lived together with the gadgets and appliances that Herr Poser sold (and left) to my family in a rush, from a Frigidaire fridge to a Hoover top loader washing machine, to mixers, tools, a bicycle and other things. It seemed that anything American built in those times were indestructible. The house was still standing the last time I was in Adana in 2004. Today, I suppose that Incirlik is the only active Nato base left in Turkey, which may or may not house nuclear warheads. The use of Incirlik is a domestically contentious issue during every American incursion into the Middle East starting with the first Gulf War, something that should not concern us, the mortal citizens of the republic, together with the presence of nuclear weapons.

As I said before, early childhood years in Adana until 1968 when we moved to Izmir when I was eight, are almost blank. What I remember are bits and pieces, some involving objects like my first bicycle, a Viewmaster stereoscopic viewer together with its disks of slides (mostly of American national parks) that I have watched a hundred times, a miniature replica of a steam engine that actually worked (a boiler heated with rubbing alcohol,



piston, valves, belts, flywheel and horn.) The excursions to the seaside left blurred images of Kizkalesi and Yumurtalık, close to Adana on the Mediterranean coast, as the ones to the orchard that belonged to my father's family. One big attraction to see in the summer was the so called 'water sports festival' at the city's olympic swimming pool, diving competitions, water polo and other 'games' from which many national athletes emerged. Meanwhile Adana was the quintessential bicycle city around the time, flat with mild weather except for the scorching summers. There was a photograph of my family I have seen (now lost) that dated before I was born: family of four on a bicycle, my two brothers on the lap of my parents, riding. The family car came years later in İzmir. Until the dominance of national television towards late 70's Adana was also the capital of open air cinemas for a long time with long summers, some of them exclusively featuring Hollywood movies of the time. All through childhood I grew up with my parents' fond recollections of the movies and the 'stars' (the star system!) of Hollywood, their favorites ranging from Burt Lancaster to Edward G. Robinson, and to Charlton Heston (of Ben Hur fame), Humprey Bogart and Kirk Douglas, Richard Burton and Liz Taylor. My parents were not much into the few Turkish films made in those times, some of which were quite in tune with Neo-

Realismo of Italian cinema. Instead, for them the moral tales of Hollywood were precisely (and masterfully) embodied in the persona of the actors and actresses. It was all about the 'realism' of actors in a make-believe world, detached from the directors of the movies. For Dad, the fascination stretched towards the mid 70s with Marlon Brando (The Godfather, part one, was his all time favorite movie together with the novel by Mario Puzo that he must have read many times.) I assume this was not for the aspiring gangster in him (he was the exact opposite) but with three sons he must have grown an affinity with Don Vito Corleone, with the moral dilemmas of this tormented soul originally from Sicily, albeit with a number of bodies lying dead in his wake. For mother, the favorites also included Anthony Quinn (of Zorba the Greek, Mr. Mediterranean Realism himself) and Sophia Loren and Grace Kelly. Looking at the family album, I am once more struck by the variations of contemporary women's fashion my mother had displayed. They were all sewn and produced by herself, this extremely talented and creative person, to be the role model (literally) to her students, girls who looked up to her. Vogue, Harper's Bazaar and other magazines were not available in Turkey, so I tend to think that the movies and a few Turkish magazines (Hayat: Life) were where she followed the latest fashion. Burda, (first published in 1949) the West German magazine of fashion and sewing patterns was a latecomer, and it was the source of many dresses she made in later times. Mother was the 'maker' in the house, as opposed to my father who was totally incapable of working with his hands except for a beautiful handwriting, and if me and my late brother Hasan developed some manual talent for making and fixing things, we inherited the trait from my mother. Rumor has it that (parts of) the bridal headpiece worn by Farah Pahlavi in 1959 were made by mother, something that I could never get to confirm. But for a long time in 50s and 60s, she had contributed fairly to the family budget making bridal gowns and headpieces. Meanwhile, The Shah of Iran and Farah were on the cover of Hayat

magazine frequently all through the sixties, followed by the movie stars and Monaco royalty, princesses and all the entourage, until Diana showed up. It appears that the bloody coup in Iran in 1953 that killed the popular and democratically elected leader Mosaddegh and installed the Shah did not much register in Turkey.

Father was a gentle person, brought up as the gentleman in manners and speech, with an old fashioned lexicon worthy of an enlightened attorney when the constitution, the law books and records of court cases were all written in an ornate legal language of Turkish that incorporated many Persian and Arabic words that extend back to the Ottoman Court. He was able to read and write in the so called 'Old Turkish', that is with Arabic script, even when his first year at elementary school coincides with the adaption of the Latin alphabet within the long line of 'Atatürk's revolutions.' Elsewhere, I have written about my father in bits and pieces, trying to reconcile what I have inherited from him. Apart from moderate drinking and heavier smoking, I wrote about the books that were left from him, very few in comparison to hundreds of books that he had donated to a public library in İzmir in early 1980s. He started collecting books as a law student in İstanbul around 1945, mostly from European literature and the classics, superbly translated



into Turkish with the initiative of minister of education of the time. On the title pages, he neatly noted the time and place of purchase like a novice collector and an enthusiastic reader. There is not much left to call him a man of letters, but legal documents and letters written for various occasions as well as private ones show his depth of knowledge on language. At some point he must have aspired to be a writer as a young man. His other field of interest as a reader was the Ottoman History in which he had found the glorious early sultans' achievements and the opulence of the empire as a solace when facing the impoverished Republic of Turkey of his time. All of us, brothers, grew up with books at home, especially with varied types and volumes of encyclopedias that my brothers have read cover to cover, and with some other children's literature from Andersen's and Grimm Brothers' tales to heroic deeds of the Ottoman navy and 'naturalized' pirates of the Mediterranean. Reading was the essential pastime.

I have no recollection of my paternal grandparents, as they both passed away earlier than I remember. The Adana years ended in 1968 when we moved to İzmir. Father's unsuccessful enterprising at logistics (he owned several big trucks one after another, all second hand, and marred with mechanical problems) had possibly a major role in the decision, after which he decided to become a government employee. He always said that as a lawyer he never liked handling criminal cases in Adana and the people involved. From that point on mother was the exchequer, managing the family budget with her and father's salary. The house in Adana was sold and several apartment houses were bought in İzmir with the help of mother's savings. It was the time when a new car was more expensive than a moderate apartment house in the city.

Around 1950, İstanbul's population was down to about 750.000, and likewise were the other major cities like İzmir which formerly housed the Christian subjects of the Ottoman

Empire. With few exceptions, this made the entire country somewhat provincial, within an overwhelmingly agrarian economy. Even during my childhood in İzmir in late 60s and 70s, I remember being stifled by the type of conservatism and inertia that the city induced, while living among the educated and 'liberal' extended family, and with high hopes for the future. My contact with the world out there, like many others, were through movies, magazines, rock music and books, all before television came to people's lives for good. Learning English at an early age was a bliss: from the Nato personnel living in İzmir (Americans) trickled down the discarded copies of Mad Magazine, Archie, Charlie Brown and BC comic books as well as an occasional pair of jeans from PX. My favorite chapters in Mad magazine were the spoofs of Hollywood with titles like 'Jaw'd'; or 'One Cuckoo Flew over the Rest'; or 'Botch Casually and Some Dunce Kid', the movies that I have seen in cinemas around the time. My generation took this adolescent humor seriously, because after *Krokodil* from Soviet Union and *Mad*, Turkey supposedly enjoyed the third highest circulation in the world with *GırGır*, a weekly satirical magazine printed 500.000 copies at its peak. It was one of the sources of national pride for us. All things considered, it was a happy childhood, summers spent along the coast of the Aegean sea, swimming, fishing, table tennis, basketball and all the activity together with friends, brothers, cousins, aunts and uncles. Again, open air cinemas were big in İzmir during summers, showing two movies a night starting after 9 pm for dusk to set, featuring Hollywood and few European movies dubbed into Turkish. Spagetti westerns and comedies were big hits, featuring Clint Eastwood, Woody Allen and Peter Sellers. The other hits were the horror and Dracula flicks with Christopher Lee, Italian musicals featuring Rita Pavone and the Vespa scooters, and the heist capers featuring Mini Coopers as the getaway cars inside the sewers of London. I was a competitive student until the last years of junior high, with relatively high grades, mildly ambitious, but not obsessive about the



profession to choose in near future. Looking back, I think a childhood friend's older brother studying architecture at METU in Ankara was a major influence with his superb record collection, art books, pens and pencils and paints and with his several pipes to smoke tobacco. I was not much of an aspiring talent at the time, around mid 70s as a teenager, but it seemed like architecture combined some artistry and good taste with the rationality of science education that I was going through. The problem is that in contradiction to a happy childhood, it appears that I wiped off many of the important instances and entire periods from memory, and mostly the names and faces remain. To this age, I am in awe of people who recite instances from early childhood with all detail, sometimes involving myself on the scene. Was this the sign of the importance (and vanity?) that I assigned to myself at the expense of friends and others, and totally ignored the moment? I doubt that my friends and cousins had diary entries for all the occasions. Years later I developed a theory after reading Orhan Pamuk's 'İstanbul: Memories and the City' that it takes a world class writer to tell stories from childhood starting at age two or three, to write ornate 'reminiscence' that captivates the reader. When anyone else baffles me and starts to blur the boundary between fiction, history and memory, I become suspicious.

As it is for anybody else, several major events helped anchoring time and place in my childhood. Together with mom and brothers, on 20 July 1969 at the age of nine I was in Foça, a small coastal town close to İzmir where we often spent the summers. It was the day when humankind set foot on the moon and we were all hearing this extraordinary event live on the radio, at night sitting outside the only coffee house in town by the fishermen's dock. Today some of my friends tell me that they have seen it live on television. If that was truly the case, it was a major feat for then few years old history of TV broadcast in Turkey. We did not have a TV set at home until 1972. I do not know why I recall the name of the lunar module as 'spider' whereas in fact it was the 'eagle'. But I did register other details of Apollo 11 mission, the command module, and the names of the astronauts that walked on the moon and the one that stayed in the lunar orbit. The radio broadcast makes one's imagination run wild, as it was with the live soccer games around the time. Few years later we all got to see the so called 'moonstone' at the American pavilion in İzmir's International Fair, a small piece of the 21.5 kilograms of lunar material that Armstrong and Aldrin have collected, as told by wikipedia. The fair was the main attraction each year at the end of summer where we got to witness the fierce competition of the cold war, the space race in between the astronauts and the cosmonauts, together with their gear and varied modules of spacecraft, Sputnik and Apollo. We've also got to see the live milk cows brought in for the Dutch pavilion, and the Mercedes cars in the West German one. Years later one of the moon-walking astronauts, James Irwin of Apollo 15, came to Eastern Turkey repeated times, looking for the Noah's Ark on Mount Ağrı (Ararat), the highest peak in the country whose better views are seen across the border, from Yerevan in Armenia. The search stirred much excitement among part of the Turkish population and the press. Some people were convinced that Irwin had an epiphany on the moon looking towards the earth, a revelation that only the deep space

(in combination with the old testament) can incur. It was also considered a good publicity. In the absence of drones at the time, few aerial photographs purported to show shapes resembling ships or boats on the slopes of the mountain, subject to interpretation like the much loved national pastime of fortune telling from the bottom of cups of Turkish coffee. The other Foça moment was in the summer of 1974 when the Turkish armed forces stormed and captured parts of Cyprus, the island being divided in between the Turkish and Greek populations since then. Foça, İzmir and much of the Turkish-Aegean coast being right across the Greek islands, some as close as a few miles, it was the time of highest alert against possible air raids from Greece (a Nato ally) that never happened. But from dusk to dawn lights were dimmed, windows and car lights were screened with blue translucent paper that we mostly used to cover our school books and notebooks. It was a time of anxiety. It was also the time when half the population of İzmir had a good reception of Greek TV broadcast, ERT1 and 2, via stronger antennas. The generations of İzmir's population with the knowledge of Greek language were long gone, but Greek TV channels were richer especially with movies in English, and other shows. "We are watching Athens, dear" some İzmir residents would boast around those times with an air of privilege. The other events that I registered in memory around live TV were the fights, Ali vs. Frazier (of 1974) and Ali vs. Foreman, titled 'Rumble in the Jungle' (again of 1974). For the extravaganza, our parents would wake us up in the very early hours of the morning due to time difference. We were not much into professional boxing and the eyebrows bursting open, but Mohammad Ali was special. He meant many things to blacks, dissenting youth, Muslims, the Socialists and to the peoples of the third world.

My older brother Hasan had died of cancer in 1999, at the age of 44. Afterwards, to this day he became my younger brother, as I remember him in his prime. He was my role model for life. Every so often I ask myself if I am utterly biased to consider him the most



decent person on earth that ever lived. And every time I find myself thinking "... No. He is the one. Capable of immense empathy, most selfless, most gentle..." and so on. Not that we lived side by side for long periods of time. Just the opposite. It was on relatively rare occasions that we came together. At times he might have been headstrong and stubborn towards people around him. But this can never diminish his gentleness and good intentions towards all the living. If I were a believer, I would have considered that god was testing the faith of Hasan's kin and friends by taking him, this most gentle soul, away. How could this be? In reverse, this gives me all the impetus to be a non-believer: This god cannot be. The survivors' only relief is that mother passed away earlier and did not see to grieve her most loved son. My father silently mourned Hasan's death everyday for fifteen years. I know, because I was with him in his last years.

Hasan was the brightest, going away for the high school in Ankara (Fen Lisesi), the top rated one in Turkey at the time that admitted only 96 pupils from all over the country, a boarding school for students educated to be the top scientists. I followed his footsteps to the same school three years after he

graduated. Hasan was the adventurer in his youth. He opened up the many paths and possibilities that I would carefully consider and usually follow. He lavishly extended his higher education to around eight years in two of the top universities in the country, METU and Bosphorus University, to become an electrical engineer. He got married after school, and him and his wife, Emine found their way to the USA, to Un. of Florida in Gainesville. I kind of followed him (to New York) four years later, after finishing architecture school at METU, to study photography. Our paths diverged around 1990 when I decided to head back to Turkey and Hasan and Emine and Defne, their baby daughter, stayed on in various cities in the USA, last being around San Jose, the edge of silicon valley where he was much sought after as a computer scientist. He was the optimist with the rationality of an engineer, a car mechanic, a diver for underwater archaeology, a sailor, maker of things starting from his youth from transistor radios to a pair of shoes that he designed, made and wore during university years in İstanbul. And all this with the meager means of life in Turkey in the 70s when every bit of life's necessities were very valuable. Hasan was at home in America where most mechanical and electronic parts and gadgets were inexpensive but the labor for making and fixing things were not. From the first Mac computer and the dial-up modem with the telephone handset, to a model 1955 convertible car and to a 1967 Pearson sailboat, he surrounded himself with toys to fix and play with.

Meanwhile, up until 80's were the years of 'Arte Povera' in Turkey when almost nothing was thrown away and almost everything were resurrected in artful ways. (My mother was the master of recycling, of clothes and household items.) This era of pre-consumerism in Turkey shaped most educated middle class attitudes (including me and my family) towards money and wealth for years to come, a moral view regarding the quality of life being not exactly commensurate with spending power. This, I must confess, comes with a pity for the poor,



with the ignorance of a working class life, and with an equally ignorant understanding of the habits of the rich and the very rich. It is the consciousness rightfully refuted by a Marxist as 'false', and at the same time ridiculed by the bourgeois. It carries within itself the morals of the convent and 'abstinence', but then it is all the more pertinent today given the state of the planet and the discussions on 'degrowth'.

My oldest brother Can chose to stay together with my parents until he graduated from the medical school (Ege Üniversitesi) in İzmir to become a doctor. Eight years older than I am, we never became so close except for years of childhood when I got all the beating (!) as the youngest of the three. An introvert, Can was (and is) the memory bank of the family, remembering the exact dates of important domestic events and other things that he

witnessed, a trait that borders on autism. Meanwhile, he was the encyclopedia monster, devouring some volumes in English later in life until he got stuck in medical books of specialization, also in English, with heavy volumes of dictionaries on the side. In later years my soul brother was my cousin Cem, who died of a motorcycle accident two years ago at the age of 56. A true sailor (by profession) from his racing years as a child to the huge yachts that he skippered later, for me he was the dearest younger brother that I always lacked, and from whom I've learned many things. Elsewhere on this blog I wrote down my reminiscences of Cem, of the house that he was building all by himself in the countryside, a motor caravan that he built (except for the engine and the body), of his huge tractor for a small plot of land and his tools and gadgets. In the extended family he was the one that was capable of fixing, making and building anything from scratch, and with minimum formal education and maximum observation, he was the epitome of 'learning by doing' that is valued highly in art and design schools.

I remember the last years of my maternal grandmother Remziye, from İzmir. As I recall, she had only one book, the Koran, a worn out copy written in Arabic with Latin script. She had read from the book every day, over and over for long stretches, without the knowledge of the Arabic language but probably with a decent understanding of certain words and phrases. It was like a meditation for her, and she never missed a prayer. Meanwhile, in the entire extended family I have not seen anyone observing prayers, even on Muslim holidays, including Recep, her husband. My grandmother was never the preacher, never a moralist to teach anyone else how to lead her/his life. I sense that for her and for many other devout (and older) Muslims of the time, it was a private affair, a cleansing of the body and soul, insuring the well-being of her family, and a way of righteously dealing with ethical (and not material) deeds that life brought. For her as a woman, this devotion was not a communal thing shared with others: it was

neither about socializing nor about organizing, that is anything but the political Islam. For some time now, the Sunni-Muslim contingent governing Turkey claims that the likes of my grandmother came out of the closet after many years of secular-Kemalist oppression. I wonder what she would make of it if she were alive today. I think that more than the emancipation via the public acceptance of the headscarf, what came out of the closet is a toxic organization of men around prayers and profits, and around the re-distribution of the commons. It all boils down to inequality along gender and class. All this does not mean that my entire extended family were atheists. Many of them were god-fearing individuals to varied extent. Religious sentiment was woven into language, into the everyday speech a little like a lore, a cultural trait to express grief or wish. But for all these individuals, organized religion was deranged, and the members of different sects were disturbed to the degree that "... may God have pity on them".

For many years, my grandfather Recep Hepdeniz worked as the chief mechanical engineer at Çamaltı Saltworks (Çamaltı Tuzlası) in İzmir, starting in 1930s until the early 1960s. His three daughters and a son (my mother, aunts and uncle) grew up in this vast landscape as children. "... I, in turn, grew up with stories of this beautiful wetlands of the Gediz (Hermos) river delta, of the abundance of nature, the fish and marine life, and of the game birds and other fowl, trying to imagine the cartloads of wild geese and fish catch to be distributed among the workers and staff: a carnage from times when nature appeared inexhaustible..." as I have written elsewhere in this blog. When I'd got to know him in his last years, grandfather kept himself busy working on his small plot of a vineyard close to İzmir, producing the world renown raisins apparently without much profit. But the work kept him fit well into his eighties. He transferred his mechanical skills to my uncle Demir, Cem's father, who was in the early group of Turkish 'guest-workers' (gastarbeiter) to settle and work in West Germany in 1960s. John Berger's book 'A Seventh Man' with

photographs by Jean Mohr gives a detailed account of migrant workers in Europe at the time, the humiliating process of candidates' health inspection by the German officials in İstanbul, their arrival, by train, to Europe with no knowledge of the language, customs and cuisine, and the observations on places they lived and congregated before they could be reunited with their families. Uncle Demir lived in Northern Germany, in Kiel and Bremen, worked as a mechanic in shipyards and later at the Olympia typewriter factory. Some of his happy memories from Europe appear in the family album with a couple of photographs when him and several friends toured around Germany, France, Belgium, The Netherlands and Italy in his VW Beetle. Like many other first arrivals he had been adapted fast and well, speaking German fluently, enjoying the bars and 'bierstube's when still a bachelor. He met his wife Şükran there, and Cem was born in Germany. In 1969, before the West German love affair with the gasterbeiters soured, the family headed back to İzmir. Afterwards he ran his car repair shop impeccably. He always spoke very highly of German work ethics, the way that everything was highly organized and of the German products to be exceptionally high standards, from cars to ships to appliances. I never asked him: "... if so, why didn't you stay?..." He must have understood that the same Protestant ethics of high standards would keep him working hard with little prospect but a reasonable and dull retirement. He was a free spirit. By the time he was forty he quit work as a mechanic, built himself a wooden boat, lived aboard and chartered her for a living after his wife passed away at a young age.

This brings me to my mother's older sister, aunt Zişan. Among siblings, Zişan was the one with the sense of humor, with an incredible array of idioms for different situations, taking easy whatever life has thrown at her even when her husband was despotic in later times towards her and their two daughters, my oldest cousins. Her signature gesture was "Eeh, what the

heck, don't worry" (Amaaan, sen de). As a homemaker, she was the reason that all of us cousins found another house to be fed, hang out and enjoy the garden with fruit trees and animals. It was almost a communal and pastoral life in the neighborhood that my larger family have lived in İzmir, where everyone knew everybody else, with the streets available for kids and the young, with minimum motorized traffic. Fifty years back, possibly one out of every ten households had a private car, (and less had a camera) and İzmir's population was one tenth of what it is now. If my memory does not fail me, it was



almost like a western suburbia with some apartment buildings, with slightly narrower streets, fewer gardens and more people gathering out in the open. What really shapes the urban-scape is the car ownership.

And last, mother's youngest sister Şükran represents the proper American side of the family. By the time I was born, she was married to Galip (Aysoy), an engineer, and within a couple of years they have settled in California close to San Francisco. She had two daughters, the younger, Aydan, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. For a long time, her life and that of the rest of her family were shaped around a disability. I have not seen my aunt until I was around fifteen years of age, but the photographs kept coming in: Polaroids and color photographs with either the Golden Gate bridge or Lake Tahoe, or another West American scenery in the background. For the (maternal) extended family in İzmir, the photographs from Aysoys brought in the air of the American life, big cars and bigger houses. For a long time, I also thought that the USA also shaped the physique, and especially the faces, of the people and 'Americanized' them even when born in Turkey, an illusion probably induced by the healthy lifestyle over there, away from smoking and the carbohydrates. Maybe her older daughter's Turkish sprinkled with accent and English words boosted this illusion. Starting in late 70's the hefty suitcases also kept coming to İzmir, together with her and her daughters, suitcases filled with clothing, accessories and electronics for her mother, sisters and other family members. After that, 110 Volts AC power supplies and adapters were the norm in our houses. Some of the hair dryers, irons, a cassette tape deck and an amplifier are still at work today. I now realize how much our lives were intertwined with the fortunes of the USA. On one hand, there is a kind of brain drain that involves not only members of my family, but also many well educated people from Turkey including some of my good friends and colleagues in the present. But it is hard to talk about a Turkish diaspora in America on a par with émigrés

from countries of a troubled past. Meanwhile, Turkey also has a troubled past, and today one can speak of a Turkish diaspora scattered in Europe, especially in Germany in the recent years, of journalists, artists and writers, persecuted for expressing ideas freely. It was also the case after the military coups in 1971 and 1980 when intellectuals, socialists and Kurdish dissidents were imprisoned, prosecuted and in many cases tortured. They mostly sought asylum in Germany, France and Northern Europe, and some returned after being acquitted in absentia. But for many educated Turks since the declaration of the republic hundred years ago, the United States represented the land of modernity and progress, eliciting trust especially after the second world war. For my father, well read in Ottoman history and a staunch follower of Kemalism, the historical baggage that Europe held regarding the fate of his country and his people made America esteemed. That is possibly why we grew up neither as Germanophiles nor Francophones, and nor as Anglophones with a British accent.

With the larger (paternal) family in Adana, I had almost no correspondence, except few visits to İstanbul as a teenager. Around 1970, my two aunts and their family (cousins) have settled in İstanbul, like many other émigrés from Adana. Aunt Ülker, a widower, was the committed socialist and worked as a teacher. She was the masterful cook of the southern cuisine, well known for its intricate and time consuming dishes apart from the kebabs. Before any visits from family, she would start preparations a day earlier, and the cooking would take a whole day until dinner. The Adana contingent could not bear the burden of retirement in İstanbul and headed back home after around fifteen years: It was a tough city for them. And my father longed for his three sisters for many years, until he was around 75. After losing mother, he went back to the city of his childhood to live, only to see his sisters pass away.

Father and I shared the same house in İzmir for around ten years until he died at the age of 91. He was my roommate, taking care of himself, cooking, reading, delivering the cards around the table and negotiating (for himself and his imaginary partner) a game of bridge (his passion for many years.) Mostly at home, he was also living through his much loved annual cycle on television: World Snooker Championship, and the Grand Slam(s) of professional tennis. Sullivan and Federer were his favorites. He never liked Nadal, found him extremely ambitious and stressed out during games, not much his style. Every so often he would find an ad for a nursing home nearby to show me as a suggestion, not to be a burden, as the gentle soul he was. And every time I would tell him to hang in there and do his thing, knowing that he was not much into finding new friends and that he grew varied habits living alone and would be happier at home. I was absent frequently, over the weekends and sometimes for a week or ten days, and otherwise at the university during the week, teaching. But still, we had time to talk of this and that. This was more than ten years ago, when I did not have the slightest idea that someday I would bring out the family photographs and try hard to remember things. His memory and mental capacity was fine until the last day, to tell me that as a child he would go to bed at night with a candy in his mouth and that was why he lost all his teeth. Sometimes he would complain that he had hard time comprehending (not a problem of hearing) the anchorperson speak on TV, but that was it. I could have asked him many questions regarding the past, could even record for an oral history. But then this whole enterprise would be a different thing.

I guess I am trying to read into these photographs of the (not-so-distant) past, neither as an outsider (possibly because I have a stake in them) nor as a true eyewitness (because my memory and knowledge of history fails me). I know that I have been very selective in choosing the images, in remembrance of the people and of the times past, picking up things that suit my liking, as I want to remember my childhood and beyond.

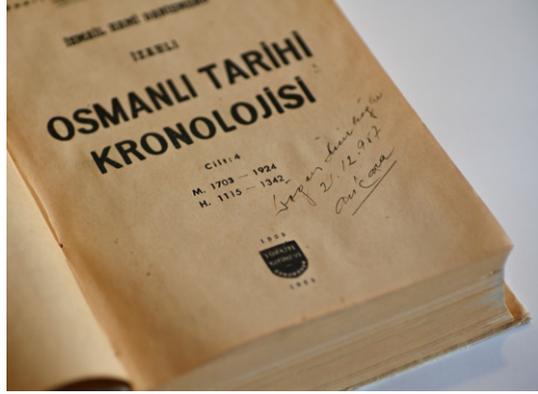
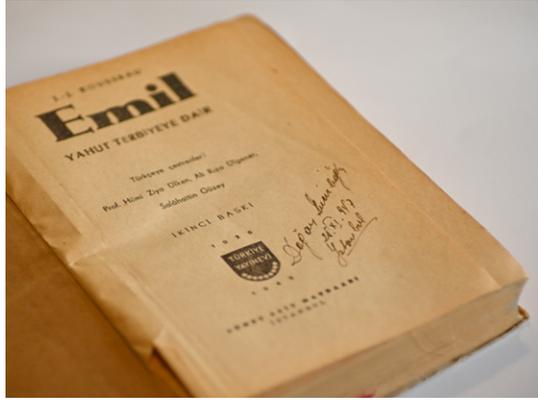
I also doubt that my father would have revealed the darker episodes and characters of the family history if I were to ask him. Old age (both for him and for me) tends to wipe them off, softens the senses and acquits the daemons. My main regret is that in the lack of evidence, I often had to use decades to calibrate time, as in '60s' and '70s', something as repelling as what one finds in the coffee table books of general interest, written by amateur historians.

For many years I was teaching photography to university students of design and fine arts. The generic titles for the courses, like 'Photography I' or 'Advanced ...' does not reasonably suggest a context in which a dialogue is held in class, except for the will of the lecturer and his/her preferences. Formal qualities aside, now that we are deluged with selfies, instagram and other things, as well as the captivating images made by ever expanding technologies in use for everyone, including AI, the academic field either falls flat or it has to re-invent itself. If I were to teach a beginners' course today, for the first week I would ask students to bring in a family photograph and elaborate on their choice, provided that they can find one printed on paper. If not, they would have to talk on a photograph of someone they love, other than themselves, family or not, possibly the wallpaper on the smartphone screen.

November 2025



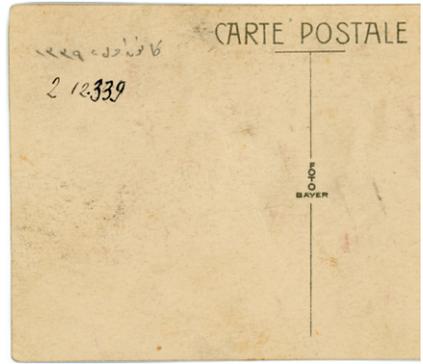
In 1994 Mom and Dad travelled to the USA for the first time to visit her sister in California. It was also the first time that they had been outside Turkey. She was already showing signs of dementia a year before her death.



Mother, to the right, with her two sisters, younger brother Demir, and parents, around 1943. Grandparents slightly represent the 'Turkish Gothic' (after Grant Wood).



Adana 1950, Mother and Father getting engaged. Mom's sisters to the left, and Dad's to the right. Remziye and Düriye, the matriarchs sit comfortably, but a little tense. The rest is the Adana side of the family, with grandfather sitting among his grandsons.



Paternal grandfather Hasan Fasih. Probably my father translated the old Turkish to write down the date of the photograph in Islamic calendar. 339 (1339, that is) is the year 1923 in Roman. Grandfather looks like the last of the Ottomans.

Father, center, with his friends from İstanbul Un. Law School, 1942.



Third from left, standing, among the graduates of the law school in İstanbul, 1945-47.





Father during military service, 1949, with other reserve officers.



The office, Adana 1950s.







It is like a photo booth of sorts: Mother in around fifteen years, starting in 1945

**T.C.**  
MİLLİ EĞİTİM BAKANLIĞI  
**KIZ MESLEK  
ÖĞRETMEN OKULU**  
**DİPLOMASI**  
DİPLOMA SAHİBİNİN  
UZMANLIK ŞUBESİ

*Moda - Yapma Çiçek*

**DİPLOMA N°** **OKUL N°**

675  187

**ADI VE SOYADI**  
*İhsan Hepdeniz*

Ta.

Moda	Edebiyat	
Yapma Çiçek	Ruhbilim Felsefesi	/
Ki Şahıncı ve Yemec	Şiir ve Edebiyat	
Yapma Çiçek	Latın Tarihleri	
Merkezi Resim	İngilizce	
Yapma Çiçek	Felsefe	
Çizim		
Notlar		
Çocuk Bakımı Fizyoloji		
Yapma Çiçek ve Diğer İşler		

*Momisa İsmet İnönü Kız Enstitüsü mezunu olarak müsabaka ile Ankara Kız Meslek Öğretmen Okuluna kabul edilen..1941, İzmir doğumlu ve. Recep Hepdeniz - kızı İhsan Hepdeniz.. okulun. Moda. Y. Çiçek uzmanlık*

My mother's diploma, 1947

24. 9. 49

*Cumartesi öğretilenler  
toplantısı sonu*

**FOTO SPOR**  
İbrahim Mansuroğlu  
Adana Caddesi No. 124  
ADANA

Mother and school staff,  
a group portrait after the  
teacher's meeting, Adana  
1949





Mother and colleagues, Adana 1950-60:  
Women's fashion of the times...





With colleagues, again, Adana 1950-60.  
It seems there was a photographer present at all times.



A student on campus. A French photographer, Jacques Henri-Lartigue took similar photographs about fifty years prior, before hand-held small cameras were available.





My mother with her students, 1950-60s. It was a custom, but very seldom you would find names and date on the back of the photographs.







This time I am in the photograph together with a student, on campus. Must be around 1964.

Mother taught at another Girl's Technical School in İzmir (Cumhuriyet Kız Enstitüsü) from 1968 to the time she retired in mid 1980s. By this time the students shed their uniforms. But mini skirts, favourite of the time, were banned in all schools. Some girls hacked the system with adjustable hemlines.



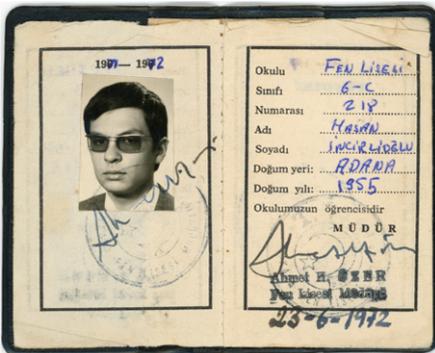
The school staff in İzmir, mid 1970s. Women's fashion have changed considerably, psychedelic patterns ruled, together with geometry. In all secondary education in Turkey, the basics of military (Milli Güvenlik) was a must course. That explains the navy officer among the teachers, whose average age have gone way up in comparison to earlier times.



My older brother Hasan, center back row, in elementary school around 1966. The boy scouts were a big thing around the time, they were called the 'Wolf Cubs' (Yavrukurt), the same, as I just found out, as it is in the Anglo-Saxon world. But then they are not to be confused with the grown up 'Grey Wolves' of later times, the Ultra-nationalist (and violent) arm of the fascist party in Turkey. By the time I was a student, the boy scouts were a thing of the past. For a while now, regrettably, Koranic readings have been initiated in some state schools to bolster extracurricular camaraderie.



With his buddies in junior high school, with the required haircut.



Hasan's student ID in high school.





Hasan throughout the 1970s. He spent most of the summers in a fishing village close to İzmir (Çeşme, Dalyanköy) in a tent, entertained friends, went fishing with the professionals. Varied types of Turkish dope (some good) were available for smoking during his 'hippy years'. By then, the so called 'Pudding Shop' in Sultanahmet, in the heart of İstanbul, was the meeting place on the way to Katmandu.





In high school he broke both of his arms during a hiking trip, around 1971, shocking my mother. For a while he got by with a little help from his friends, as seen here in the dormitory.



Hasan and his wife Emine (Onaran) sometime in late 1980s in Florida.



Their daughter Defne, born 1987



Mother's side of the family photographed in İzmir, 1956. Her sisters and brother Demir, holding Hasan in his arms. Next to my mother is aunt Zişan, her two daughters Bilge and Beyhan in the front row.

My grandmother Remziye holding newborn Hasan and my oldest brother Can, 1955. Can appears terrified. Grandmother fulfills the Turkish attribute: 'Hükümet gibi kadın', that is a strong woman, 'like the government'

Aunt Zişan getting married, İzmir 1951. Three sisters, the bachelor Şükran in the middle. The kids, possibly there for the occasion but quite unrelated, wanted to be in the picture.



Aunt Zişan and her husband Adnan (Yamanlar).



Adnan Yamanlar was active in local politics for a long time, a member of the city council from CHP, the Republican People's Party. Originally founded by Atatürk, the party is the main opposition in the country today.





The Yamanlar Family in 1950s and around 1960. Today my cousins Bilge and Beyhan enjoy life with their sons, daughters and granddaughters.





Paris dönemi, Belvükte  
3 km kağıt olan ve etraf  
manzarı çok güzel bir kente-  
resin köpürümün önümüzdeyiz.  
Önümüzde Büyük ve  
Büyük ve, Gezi güzelliğini  
aldıkca yol yapıştırmak almış-

Uncle Demir, his Beetle  
and friends on the road in  
Europe, mid 1960s. He sent  
these photos home, with  
detailed descriptions on the  
back.



July 1963, İstanbul.  
He served in the Navy,  
as the helmsman for  
a minesweeper: An  
American made wooden  
ship (mahogany) of some  
100ft from way back when.  
Growing up, I heard all the  
stories.



My dearest cousin Cem, Demir's son, together with his mother Şükran.  
All three had passed away, and today we talk about the old days with  
Kerem Hepdeniz, the youngest of the family. I took the photograph  
around 1982.



This must be in İzmir, with a close family friend in between my mother and grandmother. To the right is aunt Şükran and inside the stroller is probably baby brother Can, in 1952-3.



Aunt Şükran with grandmother. Very nice setting for a photograph. For the first time someone does not look into the camera.



Şükran in 1950s





Şükran and her husband Galip Aysoy, 1958. The better photographs in this album were made by Foto Mustafa studio in İzmir, who also specialized in architecture and cityscapes. Some of the photos are sold in auctions today.



The Aysoy family, photographed in an American studio: Ayşegül, their older daughter, and Aydan in front. Early 1970s

EPREUVE  
Kodak  
COULEUR  
K.P.SEVRAH 1-62

For Aysoy family, the Golden Gate bridge was a favorite spot for photographs, either the bridge itself or San Francisco in the background. Their house was in San Mateo.



Sisters, around 1975, in İzmir in front of the apartment we lived. Aunt Şükran always came with a regular (instamatic?) and a polaroid camera. Somehow, most photos were square format.





One of the better prints made in Adana, in 1955. My brothers and parents.



Mom, proud and happy with her first child, 1952

With Can, my oldest brother, 1953



Three brothers,  
Adana, May  
1963. Hasan  
looks grumpy,  
as opposed to all  
other childhood  
photos where he  
is goofy.



With Can again



Parents, brothers and cousins before I was born, before 1960. There is no 'Turkish Riviera' on the Aegean, but this may be Foça again.

Around 1963, Adana. The coffee table in the back is still with me today.



I am probably less than a year old. Mother expected a baby girl to teach all her skills, but...



A hand colored photograph on the school grounds, 1964? Almost all coats, jackets, trousers and sweaters that we brothers wore as kids (and also as adolescents) were tailored by my mother.

I am sitting pretty with my brothers, January 1966.





Around 1975, İzmir. Men's fashion followed the bell-bottoms mania with trousers and belt buckles, with appropriate shirt collars(!)

I do not remember why I looked that way into the camera.



For a while I was the semi-official photographer of the family, but my artistic tendencies did not allow me to take any decent family portraits.





1962: Where did color come from?

Today, the family album can only end with a selfie, with my beloved Füsün, in May 2025.

