INTRODUCTION: THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY AND CULTURAL INCERTITUDE

This paper intends to propose an overview of modern architecture in Turkey. Examples will include as much ordinary buildings as emblematic ones, taking the liberty of stretching the scope as far back to the 1920s, so as to touch on the experience of Modernism in Turkey. The central theme that binds all issues and examples to be covered will be the question of identity that the Turkish architect has encountered since the foundation of the Republic in 1923.1

Contemporary Turkish architecture as I portray it, has suffered from a sense of hesitancy regarding cultural identity. Throughout the Republican period, the question of identity continued to revolve around dualities such as East-West, religious-secular, national-universal, and so on. Caught within a problem of tradition versus modernity, the subject occupied political and cultural agendas alike. Geographically situated between the Orient and the Occident, historically confused between loyalty preferences for Asiatic, Ottoman and Early Republican heritages, the in-between nature of Turkey has always been a source of many forms of hesitancy. Stylistic debates in architecture have followed the same line of argument, leading to identity exercises along cultural polarities.

This hesitancy, or incertitude as to the question of identity, has been the source of many problems in Turkey. Many projects have been undermined by this habit; but it has been a source of cultural wealth as well. If Turkey has survived so many problems, it was partly because of its relative openness to review, time and again, the identity it has taken up. One may view this as a sign of Turkey's assimilation of Modernism despite all the flaws and shortcomings in its application. A quote from the domain of cultural studies would be relevant to argue for the positive side of this incertitude concerning identity incertitude as “symptomatic of the modern consciousness, of the extent of anxiety”, as Richard Sennett argues. “...for one is never certain that one has made the right choice, that one has chosen one’s ‘true’ identity, or even constituted an identity at all. The modern self is aware of the constructed nature of identity and that one can always change and modify one’s identity at will. One is anxious concerning recognition and validation of one’s identity by others.”2

It is possible to produce evidence in all aspects of political and cultural life that reveals persistent anxiety concerning the nation’s taking up of the right identity as well as its recognition by the West.
The project of westernisation has been taken at times rather literally, moulding its aspirations into the model of the French, German, American or Japanese, as the case may be. The habit of following patterns elsewhere is observed by the challenges of westernisation alike, growing aspiration towards Saudi or Farsi sources of inspiration. Architecture and city building constitute an appropriate context to discuss the experience of westernisation and its alternatives in Turkey – a context which offers many tangible forms and cases for a critical rethinking of the modernisation project, its past, modern phase and the current situation.

**EARLY REPUBLICAN INCERTITUDE:**

**BETWEEN EUROPEAN MODERNISM AND NATIONALIST CURRENTS**

The Turkish Hearth Society (pl. 65) and Ministry of National Defence, two buildings from 1927, present a perfect pair to express the cultural hesitancy during the founding years of the Republic. The new building with Neo-Ottoman features embodied the national currents from the return of the century termed later as the "1st National Style"; the other with plain features, these called "cubic architecture" brought in by Austrian architects, was fairly new for the country. The urban landscape Ankara, the newly emerging capital of the Republic, offered examples of both ideas, representing in their conflicting gestures two identities that the Republic oscillated between: being heir to the Ottoman heritage and total denial of it.

The founding fathers of the Republic found in modern architecture a fellowship of spirit. It suited the progressive ideals of the new nation, which was geared to a radical project of "civilisation change" in the direction of the West. Initially, however, during the first attempt at westernisation during the late Ottoman era, then as well as today, the new Turkish identity would mediate between foreign and native resources, "taming" western civilization with elements of eastern culture. Marked with the opposition of "universal civilisation" and "national cultures" the underlying nationalist aspirations of the thesis were not favoured by the founders of the Republic. The building of a new capital provided every opportunity to launch the intended civilisation change, indicating directions to complement appearances, even more so perhaps than the case of specifying modern garments. Urban villas and multi-storey tenements in modernist vocabulary brought new cultural building and living in western ways. The use of the "West" was as little Europe though the French model was replaced with that of Austria and Germany, all in the first World War.

With the establishment of a new architecture in keeping with the new ideas, a young generation of architects grew sceptical towards history and tradition. If a building were to resemble anything, it would not be the Ottoman style because of its regressive connotations. The growing nationalist wave in the world during the 1920s, however, brought a rupture in the formal Modernism of the earlier years. The transformation of the Exhibition House built in 1913 into an Opera House in the 1940s is a bitter case in point where identity politics were exercised on a single building (pl. 66).

The new nationalist wave turned into two forms of regionalism under the leadership of Bruno Taut and Sedad Hakki Eldem. While the former was characterised by the insertion of regional motifs in detail and ornament, the latter was modified in mass and façade composition, characterised by projecting eaves, oriel and fixed window proportions (Tendler and "Neo National Style"). Eldem was an appropriation of the "Neo-Venetian" - a source of inspiration that would resurface again in the following years. His response to tradition was far from being a reactionary imitation, given his justification of his architecture with the canons of architectural Modernism and the traditional timber house with its lightness of structure and emphasis on reconstruction system and façades having numerous windows generously day lighting the rooms, in fact in line with the ideas of the Modern Movement. Nevertheless, his Operahaus Coffee House (pl. 69) was seldom approved by the architectural establishment, much attacked for its direct resemblance to a nineteenth-century mansion in the Bosphorus.

**REPUBLICAN IDEALS "UNDER BALANCE": AMERICAN MODERNISM, PRAGMATISM AND FAITH**

A caricature in the Fine Arts Ball Gazette of 1932 (pl. 67) illustrating the consecutive stages of Turkish architecture underwent every ten years since the foundation of the Republic: Neo-Ottoman, European avant-garde Neo-Venetian, and finally, American Modernism. The 1950s presented a her her A modernisation in building and lifestyle, parallel to that in the conception of the "West" in society. The flow of foreign aid from the U.S.A. to Turkey at that time and the accompanying aspiration to become the little America determined the new direction of identity and architecture.

When Sedad Eldem collaborated with somer for the distinctive Hilton (pl. 70) in the International Style, his opponents accused him of an "identity twist." The Hilton is known to be a turning point in modern Turkish architecture, buildings for tourism, business, and commerce would soon begin to emulate the vocabulary of American high Modernism. The implications of the Hilton have surpassed its architectural meaning, a common perception from passages that appeared in 1955 issue of Architectural Forum: "High above the minarets of the Ottoman Empire modern Turkey builds a symbol of progress, all the more amusing and a magnet for the tourist trade..." Tommery Turks, who long ago discarded the fez and the veil in favour of western ways, the new Istanbul Hilton symbolised something else: the hope that Turkey once considered the sick man of Europe, will become a healthy, wealthy and much visted member of the international family.

The first multi-party election in 1990 was followed by a rupture from Early Republican ideals in many respects. The New American government opened the council of liberal economics and started urban renewal projects shaped by sheer pragmatism. The passage to a multi-party regime also prompted a revival of dormant religious activism. The preponderance of these lifestyle elements in advertising, and the physical environment to suit, paralleled the outspoken demands of religious
groups for Islamic training and mosque building programmes, which had seen a spate in previous decades. The design and programming of mosques have involved, more than any other building types, agendas concerning the nation's integration with either the West or the East. Public disputes on mosque form became instances of broader political disputes about loyalty to Republican secularism or political Islam. Architects' choices of modern or traditional forms began to be read as messages of commitment to one or the other political stand.

The first military coup in 1960 ended with a new constitution with expanded democratic rights; the following decades saw the threat of left-wing social discourse rather than religious activism. Small-scale mosque building from the 1960s illustrate research for reconciliation between the principles of modern architecture and the traditional mosque image. The introduction of novelties did not create controversy among believers, unless the subject was drastically propagated for political expediency. Kocatepe Mosque in Ankara was a monumental example which would occupy the public agenda from 1964 onwards, until its completion in 1982. The prevention of the prize winning project for the initial Kocatepe Mosque was due to political exploitation of the subject. The project was turned down for its modest size and novelty of form; the foundations were laid down in 1964, and a new competition was held, resulting in replication of an eighteenth-century Ottoman imperial mosque.

TRADITION AND MODERNISM DISSOLVE INTO SQUATTER TOWNS AND APARTMENT CITIES

For the architectural establishment of the 1950s and 1960s, traditions were presented in new, stylized forms. Regionalist practices ceased until the mass revival in the 1980s. Eldem's practice for Edirne's residential macroblocks was amongst a handful of exceptions. The architects worked within the discipline of imported movements, particularly of the International Style, mastering its codes and tools in new societies. The possibilities of the building industry in the country were limited. Reined exemplar of international Modernism produced with customised fixtures, furniture and carpentry, often with the paradigmatic "bris soleil", were produced with very scarce means (pl. 68).

The 1950s saw slab and point block constructions introduced in planned residential quarters. Decent products realised under CIAM principles attained a level of quality close to Western examples. The cities were not shaped, however, by distinguished examples of modernist architecture. Migration to towns, housing shortages and lack of a sufficient accumulation of capital gave way to a rapid urbanism that operated with a limited pragmatism and speculative intents. The growth of "squatter towns" on the fringes paralleled the emergence of multi-storey apartments. Cities, having basically two variants: standardised blocks on narrow lots (built individually), or bundles of slab or point blocks (mostly mass-produced) in formless aggregations.

The invention of a modern vernacular altered the architectural landscape of Turkey, either erasing the traditional and early modern heritage alike. Characterised by a total disregard to varying contexts, the practice produced itself in every settlement, irrespective of its particularities. The majority of cities in Anatolia lost their historical fabric in just fifty years. They could not survive the frenzy for maximisation of urban rents. The destruction of historical quarters to open wide traffic arteries or to provide several stories for developers resulted in recklessness and ruthless transformation of urban land. A country which managed to save cities from devastation by the bombs of the Second World War then self-destructed its historical towns. Not only the house traditions of centuries, but also the earlier examples of modern housing have been gradually replaced by a deplorable practice, giving way to a complete break with an entire culture of dwelling and city building.

In a few decades, architects witnessed the divorce of building production from architecture and town planning, with a further divorce of architecture itself from town planning. Ironically, planning disciplines were introduced to the State from the 1960s onwards, and independent city planning departments were established within architecture schools. Scholarly work done on squatter and vernacular settlements proliferated. While the study of the vernacular became institutionalised in the academy, the practices of High Modernism were vulgarised.

MODERNISM VERNACULARISED AND VULGARISED: CONTRACTOR- AND MINISTRY-STYLED MODERNISM

The mainstream architectural production showed consistent decline in quality from the 1970s onwards. Increasingly the contractor-dominated market of apartment flats for anonymous owners required no architectural talents, except for signature procedures in the hands of lesser – if not totally dilettante - architects, a "contractor modernism" emerged in its most prosaic forms. These apartment buildings are 'modern' only to the extent that they are reproductions of a reduced "Domino frame", excluding its endless possibilities in free plan, as well as in massing. The design of apartment buildings turned into a restricted exercise in producing the most efficient plan and mass, to bring maximum profit to the contractor.

A rival in monotony and mediocrity to the contractor's modernism in apartment buildings was the technocrat's modernism in buildings for public services shaped by Ministry codes. A new generation of architects was shaped in state competitions held with official restrictions of the Ministry of Public Works. The Ministry's responsibility for the development and prosperity of the country bit into the discipline of imported movements, particularly of the International Style, mastering its codes and tools at a time when the possibilities of the building industry in the country were very limited. Reined exemplar of international Modernism produced with customised fixtures, furniture and carpentry, often with the paradigmatic "bris soleil", were produced with very scarce means (pl. 68).

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several formulae: fragmenting bulky forms into smaller scale masses and subdividing façades with numerous mullions to reveal the modular order. Selal Eldem’s Social Insurance Institution in Bodrum, such a formula was the model for many buildings for decades to come. Exemplary buildings were codified into a mediocre practice, vulgarised under Ministry codes and perpetuated through building production by public tender.

The mainstream practice of technocratic modernism grew violent from the 1970s onwards. Two consecutive military coups took place in 1971 and 1980; expansion of the State during the military regimes gave way to governmental office buildings of colossal size. This modern language was codified in oppressive extremes: civic buildings which were erected to be built and put into use for everyone; were not easily built in a temple monumentality and private feudalisation. The professional and academic establishment was drained of its artistic roots, conducting an enterprise based on sheer instrumental rationality.

**POST-**MODERN ‘Liberation’; Variations on the Stereotype

If the Post-Modern current had not emerged in the West, Turkish architects would have invented it. The stereotypes of contractor’s and technocrat’s modernism had taken much of the joy out of architecture. The growing awareness of the Turkish architect to the problem of identity was intensified by the close repetition of this mainstream practice, which was justifiably equated with genuine architectural Modernism.

During the 1980s, architectural Modernism became the exception; the problem began to be solved on all occasions, catchwords being “loss” or “lack” of identity. Two kinds of concern were discernible from discussions of identity in Turkish architecture. The first was concerned with the absence of an identifiable Turkish character in new buildings and towns; the second regarded the absence of any character at all, its cultural focus being less of a concern. Both views focused on an “essential” or “distinct” national identity, and they shared in common a concern with the presence of a style as an analytical response to the broader question of cultural identity. They varied, however, in their conception of cultural identity. Identity discussions of the first category were based on the assumption of an immutable identity, with very insignificant modifications, nationalist or religious in nature, of argument. They focused on the cultural forms of the past as models to follow. The second group of discussions was open to embracing new identities, pointing to quality and character, and values.

With the delayed infiltration of the Post-Modernist discourse and language, the 1980s’ stylistic vocabularies began to be favoured. The most persistent ones up to today were codified by styles of Mario Botta and Hans Hollein; their formal gestures were among the first to be appropriated, to replace the crude vocabulary of the Ministry. Apartment blocks were to celebrate a greater stylistic freedom. Architects and developers, after years of acclimatising, indulged in identity exercises all along sources of inspiration: Ottoman and Classical were among the favourites. However, since these exercises were confined to façade treatments of what is essentially the mainstream typology, this false liberation did not account for any recovery of an identifiable urban or house form. Nor did any identity politics lurk behind it; contrary to previous ideological loadings of architectural styles, the ‘traditionalist’ and ‘modernist’ appearance of new apartment buildings were often coincidental or representative of taste cultures, with reference to any ideological stands of developers or inhabitants.

On the other hand, mosque building began to be invariably realised in traditional guises. Architects were completely dispelled from a field where approximately “one mosque was under way in every six hours”, according to statistics declared by the authorities. The mosque flourished especially in the unauthorised squatter districts on the fringes of large cities, where migrants from rural areas lived. A migration to towns confronted the displaced population with an identity problem: the mosque functioned as a cultural anchor for the community. The form of the mosque therefore sustained its iconic nature by reproducing a stereotypical image, often with false domes and minarets. The mosque in itself reveals itself when the celebrated Ottoman mosques are compared to their contemporary versions in popular practice, with their odd shapes and proportions, mimicking their original in their crude and pedestrian detailing.

One notable experiment in mosque design was marked by yet another battle over the mosque form (pl. 74). The idea of building a mosque within the parliamentary complex of a secular state gave rise to public controversy at the outset. For many, the integration of a mosque into the parliamentary complex was a betrayal of Republican principles, and a challenge to the state’s secular nature. The parliamentarians were determined to maintain the mosque as an unobtrusive house of worship. Not only have they preserved the traditional elements of architecture, but the entire tradition of introverted and centralised space organisation has been cast aside. The prayer space extends alongside a full length transparent masonry wall. The transparency of the wall is complemented in mosque architecture. The arch is not an element in exploring the past and present, nor the East and West, but an intrusive obstacle with stereotypes of the mosque Builders of modernity and cultural polarities.

**LIBERATION FROM THE MORAL CODES OF MODERNISM:**

**ECLECTIC COLLAGE AND NEW TEMPLES**

Post-Modern relativism found its way into Turkish life with the Özal government (a parallel of Reagan and Thatcher in economy). In the first elections following the 1980 military coup, Prime Minister Özal represented a fusion of all tendencies into one conservative and progressive spir-
The new wave of the 1980s, continuing well into the 1990s, can be adequately described through the work of architect Murat Kavas (pl. 72). Themes stressed in the justification of his work include pluralism, populism, symbolism and democratic tolerance. In his sketch for a project, the principles of an Anatolian Collage are demonstrated as a mixture of Greek, Roman, Seljuk and Ottoman patterns. Official modernism in architectural competitions clashed with his casual eclecticism and fantasies over cultural and natural forms.

A rather field wherein eclecticism found thriving conditions was tourism developments, marked by the collapse of another architect, Tuncay Çavdar. Themes taken up in his work included catchwords of Post-Modern culture memory, allusion, quotation, irony, and metaphor. His architecture displayed a wealth of form and meaning, ranging from tectonic profusion to a mantra of exotic images to set the scene for the average fantasy seeking tourist. What was exploited to the Hilton half-century ago was almost realised – a mission completed to become the new funfair of tourism. Hotel interiors staged all the signs of indulgence that architecture Modernism could never stomach: paraphernalia and tacky decoration to be mistaken for temple interiors.

The concern with spirituality denied from the interiors of average mosques began to be addressed provisionally in hotels and shopping malls. With the proliferation of themost typical shopping mall, the growing consumerism built its new temples, with soaring bodies and volumes. The Post-Modern wave was uncovered as a reaction to secularism. During the 1990s, live TV programmes organized as an arena for public dispute staged Muslim activists as well as other critiques of the Republican principles. The Kocatepe Mosque complex turned into a hallmark of ‘Post-Modern Turkey,’ as a perfect blend of faith and consumerism. The opening of a fashionable shop under the rubric of ‘intelligent building’ are fairly new. The profuse exploitation of imported materials, fixtures and finishes cannot conceal their cliché solutions. The most recurrent design approach in contemporary Turkish architecture represents diversity based on such a ‘play of forms’, distinguished from each other by grand gestures materialized with variations on the bodywork. A new architecture of ‘mirrored bodywork’ constitutes the new townscape of every settlement nowadays, from downtown Istanbul to its fringe developments and to all provinces where its influence reached.

The cumulative performance of architecture and city building in the past century seems to have fallen short of Modernist promises. Walking or driving through the streets of any town in Turkey gives one the poignant opportunity to contemplate the costs of brutal assaults on natural and historical assets, the devouring of urban lands by a greediness for rent, the erosion of architectural heritage, and the spread of contractorification. In the justification for his work, the architect涨价, now confined to the private sector, incorporates variations on the bodywork. While the claim for intelligence is confined to facilities such as controls of domestic tasks, ethical issues concerning the sustainability of resources are just not part of the question.

The expansion of the construction market over the past twenty years gave way to diversity and material wealth in the building sector, without much innovation in building technology. A new vernacular has emerged in the genre of antiseptic high-tech imagery with their mirrored skins, these buildings in fact are low technological profiles confined to RC frames, wrapped up with façades of modern flourishes. The profuse exploitation of imported materials, fixtures and finishes cannot conceal their cliché solutions. The most recurrent design approach in contemporary Turkish architecture represents diversity based on such a ‘play of forms’, distinguished from each other by grand gestures materialized with variations on the bodywork. A new architecture of ‘mirrored bodywork’ constitutes the new townscape of every settlement nowadays, from downtown Istanbul to its fringe developments and to all provinces where its influence reached.

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NEW DIRECTIONS IN REALISM AND AUTONOMY

The sudden liberation from the moral codes of Modernism and the emphasis of excessive imagery and artificialness in architecture resulted in counter argument. Symposia and publications followed one another, occasions for professional debate increased, leading to an accumulation of architectural criticism and a building up of professional integrity. A distinguished product displayed in publications, exhibitions and award programmes helped to set standards, the repeated themes of Post-Modern eclecticism gradually became more The National Exhibition and Awards.

Footnotes:


3. Perfect accounts of the subject can be found in: Renata Holod, Ahmet Evin eds., Modern Turkish Architecture, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995; Sultan Bayrakdar, Selcuk Cobanoglu, Gediz and Bayram Arif in Turkey, Concept Media, 1997. Observing this lightness and transparency achieved through generous openings in the timber Anatolian house, the historian Godfrey Goodwin is known to have exclaimed that there was nothing wrong with the Modern Movement had failed to emerge out of Turkey (anecdote by Professor Enis Kortan).

4. According to anecdotes told on the occasion, Eldem was teased in the "Güzel Sanatlar Balo Gazetesi," the 'Fine Arts Ball Gazette', with the following quip: "I have lost my identity in the Hilton; as I'll have a new one, the previous is invalid" (on the authority of Professor Feyyaz Erpi).


6. Two positions crystallised in a seminar held in 1984 by the Ministry of Culture to discuss the subject with professional and academic circles. See passages by Turgut Cansever and Doğan Kuban in: Mimaride Türk Milli Üslubu Semineri, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayını, Ankara 1984, pp. 23-30, 155-158.


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61. KEO International Consultants, Nader Ardalan (principal designer), Al Ain Diwan, Al Ain, UAE, anticipated completion 2006.


63. Arif Hikmet Koyunoglu, Turkish Hearth Society, Ankara, Turkey, 1927.

64. Şevki Balmumcu, Exhibition House, Ankara, Turkey, 1933.


72. Mehri Kazancı, Peri Tower Hotel, Kocaeli, Turkey, 1996.
73. Turgut Cansever, Emine Ögün, Mehmet Ögün and Faysal Cansever, Demir Holiday Village, Bodrum, Turkey, 1987.