Provocations of the built environment: animating cities in Turkey as Kemalist

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Abstract

The production of space always has a political dimension, from the design of buildings to the way public places, their ritual use and their users condition the performance of identities within them. This paper is an exploration of urban design, space and political subjectivity in cities in Turkey, using Ankara and Istanbul to illustrate two different but complementary strategies animating cities in Turkey as Kemalist.

Although the Ottoman urban heritage of the two cities is very different, their de-Ottomanization by the Turkish Republic has been pursued in a uniform manner. The paper argues that one recent aspect of urban politics, the formation of a Kurdish diaspora in cities in Turkey, is best understood not only in relation to the general nation-building project of the Turkish Republic but more particularly in this case through the built environment that provokes it. Here the built environment encompasses not only the physical design of new spaces, buildings, forms and objects but also the fashioning of space via nationalist practice, performance and symbols. In this way the paper seeks to partially politicize phenomenological approaches to the city by re-connecting inhabitants’ use and experience of space to State power as constituted through its orchestration of space.

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Introduction

Much of the literature on world cities and their hierarchical insertion into the global economy attests to the generation of urban spatial form and structure by market forces. A number of analyses have examined the immense recent changes in Istanbul in just such a light, noting how the city’s re-positioning as a site for transnational capital and tourist flows by an ambitious Greater Istanbul Council has impacted on the city’s urban morphology (Aksoy & Robins, 1994; Keyder & Öncü, 1994). A re-fashioning of Istanbul as a global city in a somewhat different manner by ‘Islamist’ councils has also been remarked upon (Bora, 1999; Cinar, 1997; Houston, 2001a). Indeed, an examination of the restoration/heritage sites of the Islamist councils, and their recent interest in the habitats, culture and mekanlar (institutions) of Ottoman Istanbul might be seen as pointers towards a rival civilizing discourse oriented towards lessons about how to live an Islamic urban culture. The vast increase in the number of books detailing subjects like Istanbul’un Eski Ramazan Geceler’ (Past Ramazan Nights in Istanbul) and similar nostalgia (see Özemre’s (2002) Üsküdar, ah Üsküdar!, for example) indicates a cultural turn by political Islam in Turkey.

Nevertheless, despite the insight world city research brings to the analysis of changes in urban form and space, its application to cities in Turkey has partially obscured the ongoing role of the nation-state and its endeavour to both constitute and police urban spaces as sites of nationalist identity fabrication. Ironically, this repeats a similar occluding of cities in Turkey as built environments sponsored by the nation-state’s political production of space by earlier analyses of Turkish urbanization, as seen for example in Kemal Karpat’s classic book on the gecekondu (shanty town). Here the transforming impact of the city on the migrant is acknowledged, but both city and migrant are understood as changed by the same processes of industrialization, technology, population growth and economic development. As Karpat put it, “the situation can be described as ‘modernization’ for the city and ‘urbanization’ for the rural migrant” (1976; 34). As a generalization, a common concern linking an earlier literature of modernization with later theories of global cities is their interest in the ‘techno-economic’ as the primary force driving urban development.

In stark contrast to the world city paradigm, more policy oriented research on the problems of those very subjects undergoing ‘urbanization’ often focuses on real issues of social exclusion, cultural adaptation and the practical difficulties of settlement, but underplays in the process the urban spatial order and built forms with which such experiences are articulated. Here the built environment and spatial structure is considered a setting for the migrant experience, determining its contours in some ways but being understood, in an unintended echo of the claimed inevitability of globalization, as un-amenable to or beyond the scope of social policy intervention. King’s still pertinent critique of political economy and its utilitarian bias vis-à-vis the built environment ironically holds for many studies of ethnic groups in the city as well; both approaches omit to ask why “buildings emerge with the particular shape, location and appearance that they have, or what meaning such forms have for their inhabitants” (King, 1980; 5).
Yet social problems, once named, incite disciplinary management. The partial and hesitant acknowledgement of a Kurdish problem in Turkey and the fear of its extension to cities in western Turkey, via the ‘de-territorialization’ of the issue through internal displacement and forced migration, reveal a similar delimiting of concern. The enigma here becomes the Kurd, rather than the Nationalist City and the complicity of its built environment with practices of power (Dovey, 1999). Mooted policy responses might at best call for a widening of the scope for Kurdish cultural expression; but there is little interest in curtailing those aspects and use of space, buildings and the built environment intended to address and constitute citizens as Turks through a national architecture, even when pursued – as in the new capital of Ankara – through an international ‘model’. Sometimes nationalism ‘is in the act as much as in the forms’ (Vale, 1992; 126).

In brief, world cities research in Turkey, insightful in its analysis of the changing spatial environment of urban sites understood as nodes in global networks, is less attentive to the continuing project of the Republican nation-state to mark both spaces and subjects as Turkish. Similarly, researches on the myriad social problems facing Kurdish migrants to Turkey’s cities – see for example the newly published Göç-Der (2002) report titled Zorunlu Göç Araştırma Raporu (Research Report into Forced Migration) – convince in their political analysis of the causes of Kurdish dispersal, yet have little to say about those cities and their forms per se, or about Kurdish place-making as a process of constructing spaces and stories in cities already thoroughly gendered, nationalized and memorialized. Yet it is in dialogue with these meanings continually invested in the built environment that a Kurdish diaspora is created, and not through the mere migration or movement of people.

A more encompassing research question then has two aspects. First is the relationship between modernist city planning and architecture as a general political (even utopian) practice of social transformation and its particular embodiment or operationalization in the project of Turkish Republicanism. Equally important, however, is the question of its articulation with groups and inhabitants’ own construction of space. Research into the efficacy of the built environment needs to consider its facilitation of new social practices, personal habit and ethnic identification, as well as its attempted suppression of alternatives. Yet people subvert, lucidly or practically, the intentions of states and their planners, and cities are partially constituted through the very resistance their built environments provoke. The sections below will argue that the animation of cities in Turkey as Kemalist is formative in the construction and experience of a Kurdish diaspora in Turkey. I use the term animation to acknowledge that cities in Turkey and the experiences of Kurds within them are also generated through a number of other processes.

**Animating cities as Kemalist**

The Turkish Republic was instituted in 1923, when the victorious nationalists under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal declared the small town of Ankara the
capital to be of the new Turkish nation. Two goading convictions of their programme – first that modern scientific Europe represented not only an alternative but also the universal civilization; and second that national sovereignty and national identity constituted the mode of modernity politically – immediately inspired Republican practice. These practices took place both in and through the built environments of the major and provincial Anatolian cities. The imposition of the architectonic signs of Republican power over urban structures served to hasten and embed the larger drama of de-Ottomanization.

One of the most striking reforms was the 1928 language revolution, in which the Arabic alphabet (and thus the Islamic educational edifice, as well as the religious superstructures of the old literate classes) was replaced literally overnight by the Latin script. In this process the figure of the schoolteacher, the ordained agent of the State in forming the uncorrupted generations of the future, became the symbolic vanguard of the Kemalist reforms. Zeki Faik Izær’s 1933 painting ‘Inkilap Yolunda’ (On the Path to Revolution) is canonic here, mimicking Delacroix’s famous 1830 painting ‘Liberty Leading the Nation’, as he portrays the Kemalists streaming like a ray of light away from Ankara and its castle to enlighten the darkened hearths of the ignorant. Led by two young women, the book Türk Tarih ve Dili (Turkish History and Language) raised in hand like holy writ, the bearded hodjas cowering before them in fear are cast into confusion. Islam confounded by scientific philology; the aged male by feminine youth; the countryside by the sacred city. Atatürk in front of a blackboard teaching the new alphabet constituted one of the defining icons of the Republic, as the nation with its new territorial space was re-imagined as a classroom.

The realization of the second conviction – the necessity of fostering a new national identity – is seen not only in the painting but in earlier legislation. On the very day that the new Turkish Republic abolished the institution of the Caliphate (March 3, 1924) it also issued a decree banning all Kurdish schools, associations and publications (Seal, 1995; 238). The 14th Article of its 1925 Eastern Development Plan read: “Those who use any language other than Turkish, in Government and Council offices and institutions, in schools, at the market or in the bazaar, are guilty of breaking the law and will be punished” (Tunc, 1993; 40). As part of its project to re-order the practices and social identities of the populations within its new national borders, the Republican State in both the 1930s and 1960s gave Turkish names to many towns and villages, particularly those in the Kurdish areas. This endeavour was also extended backwards in time, not only by describing notable Kurdish Ottoman scholars and ulema as Turkish, but in the deliberate omitting of words such as Kurd or Kurdistan in new Turkish editions of Ottoman texts. The entry on Kurds in the 1940s Turkish translation of the Leiden Encyclopaedia of Islam was heavily censored. In keeping with this attempt to reconfigure space and time through its resignification, official discourse in the single-party period designated Kurds as Mountain Turks, conforming to the claim that they were of debased Turkish origin. The forced adoption of Turkish surnames was justified in like vein. Similarly, the State and many of its academic cadres have devoted extensive ethnographic and linguistic energy to demonstrate
that the Kurdish language is of Turkish origin. Professor Dr Orhan Türkdoğan, for example, as late as 1997 in his book *Etnik Sosyoloji*, argues that Kurdish is a border dialect of Turkish.

How on a macro scale has the Turkish Republic inscribed and animated its cities as Kemalist? The key historical and ideological context of both Kemalist cities and their Kurdish diasporas is the Ottoman Empire. The makers of the Kemalist City sought to impose their design and organization of space on a series of Ottoman urban centres, themselves characterized by a wide variety of economic structures, ethnic and religious heterogeneity, and degrees of political autonomy from Istanbul. Articulated with the world capitalist economy throughout the long 19th century in a variety of different ways, these cities were also sites for new buildings and structures connected to the ‘informal imperialism’ of the British across large areas of the Ottoman domain. (See for example *Crinson, 1996* and his discussion of the building of the Anglican Crimean Memorial Church in Istanbul in 1858.) In other words, recent urban histories have moved away from typological models of the Ottoman or Islamic city to focus on more nuanced considerations of relevant regional histories (see *Eldem, Goffman, & Masters, 1999*). The contrasting historical trajectories of those different urban centres have also allowed contemporary actors to rework their legacies in different ways, both in constructing locality and in contesting urban politics (see below, vis-à-vis Ankara and Istanbul).

In tracing the Republicans’ attempt to standardize from above such complex urban sites, we might note a key difference between European and Turkish modernist projects and visions. A number of writers have argued that modernist city planning and architecture in Europe was primarily reacting against late 19th century capitalism and its ‘dreadful city of night’, as well as the suffocating bourgeois sensibility of such cities (*Bozdoğan, 1994; Hall, 1996; Holston, 1989*). By contrast, modernism in Turkey and the animators of its new Kemalist cities were oriented, with the same ambivalent antagonism, to Islamic/Ottoman cities and their governing order. This Ottoman City, like the 19th century city for CIAM planners, existed nowhere so clearly than in the mind’s eye of the reformist-planner. For republican architects, particularly after the consolidation of the Kemalist regime in the early 1930s, a constructed association between Ottoman architecture, reactionary forces and Arab or Persian cultural contamination became a dominant ideological discourse (see *Bozdoğan, 2001*). Islamic/Ottoman cities were also made to represent sites of backwardness and social oppression, particularly in their organized seclusion of women. One of the first acts of the new Government was to ban dead-end streets in Istanbul (*Finkel & Sirman, 1990*). Given the intent to reform the cultural practices of the population, a more variegated interest in cities and their urban structures as impacted upon by inhabitants’ interaction with the formal organization of the built environment held little appeal. The interpretation as degeneratively ‘Ottoman’ of buildings constructed in the Young Turk period (including even the first National Assembly building in Ankara, built only in 1917) conformed to a singular critical vision linked to the project of revolutionary social transformation, rather than unambiguously reflecting a historical social reality. Political and cultural resistance to the impositions of planners was viewed through this same singular gaze.
Dissonance was located in obscurantist, irrational, fanatical or self-serving ties to ‘traditional’ social relations, rather than interpreted as new forms of practice generated in partial opposition to those very reforms.

Despite the different histories of these Ottoman cities, their de-Ottomanization by the Turkish Republic was pursued in a uniform manner. Bozdoğan (1994) notes the key architectural developments for the single-party period, particularly post-1930: the constructing of standard administrative, educational and other public buildings – for example, the village institutes, hospitals, schools and post offices – over the whole country, regardless of differences in vernacular styles and without regard for climate and site; the making of new ceremonial and public spaces, including the formal square and municipal park, organized around a variety of Atatürk statues; the fostering of new associational and spatial practices connected with the People’s Houses (Halkevleri), secular centres partially supplanting the mosque complex and its range of activities (Bozdoğan, 2001; 46); and the building of new residential suburbs for the Kemalist cadres, particularly near the new provincial railway stations. The proliferation of these prototype buildings and public spaces was accompanied by the dissemination of a prototype Turkish language, to be heard and spoken within them (see section ‘Kurdish diaspora’ below).

The Kemalist City was built in more ‘negative’ ways as well, through the inscribing of signs of republican reform on the existing urban structures, including the closing down or re-using of the sufi tekke (lodges) and türlbe (graves of holy sheikhs). Dead bodies, as we will see below, are potential loci of kin creation, and thus are also prime sites of political profit (Valery, 1999). De-Ottomanization also involved the transforming of long-standing symbolic or sacred sites into museums, such as Aya Sofia. A ban on the speaking, teaching or publishing of other community languages, excepting the languages of the Christian minorities in Istanbul, supported the propagation of the prototype Turkish.

This programme of ‘cultural de-familiarization’ (Holston, 1989), typical of modernist ambitions in architecture and city planning, had as its aim the decontextualizing of the old urban environment, as well as the welfare and management of the urban population, inspired by the logic of environmental determinism. Yet it was a modernism operationalized through a Turkish-ethnic particularism, simultaneously committed to ‘culturally re-familiarizing’ the population with a new nationalist identity, constructed moreover in the 1930s with racial overtones (Poulton, 1997). In French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment (1989) Rabinow describes this strategy to incorporate a cultural component into modernist planning as ‘techno-cosmopolitan’. Yet given the negative connotations ascribed to cosmopolitanism and international style in Kemalist discourse, in the Turkish context ‘techno-nativism’ is a better term. Avant-garde notions of modernist buildings as utopian ‘social condensers’ apply equally to sites that symbolize and condense this new nativist Turkish identity.

Interestingly, both anthropology and social geography have long been concerned with the possible fit between [natural] environment and cultural practice. Indeed, various traditions of anthropological discourse have assumed a necessary [i.e. a more than arbitrary] relation between a society’s social organization and its physical
The relationship, often represented in primitivist discourse as unreflectively or naturally achieved by indigenous or tribal people, can also be presented as passively induced for modern populations. Working with an assumption of ecological determinism, nation-states and utopian urban planners/architects alike invoke the efficacy of the planned environment and the politics of design to constrain and guide social conduct. In this understanding the environment’s random sovereignty over human activity is replaced by its regulated sovereignty as the planner-expert, acting in conformity to science, reforms that environment through technology in order to rationally serve a universal human nature. Here projects of nationalism and modernism, as inscribed in the physical organization of urban space and form, are intended to produce nationalist and/or modern identities, to generate social subjectivity and new social practices in similarly direct, unproblematic ways. The Kurdish diaspora is constructed in response to the intention of the Turkish State that citizens’ internal organization of subjectivity (identity) conforms to the Kemalist City’s external or physical organization of space.

Some of the differences that exist between Ankara and Istanbul fill out this technonativist ‘orchestration of meaning’ (Bierman, Abou-El-Haj, & Preziosi, 1991) by the Kemalist City. These differences impact on the Kurdish experience of diaspora in various ways. The core of Republican Ankara, laid out on land south of the old town and citadel, was planned by Hermann Jenson of Berlin, whose master plan won the competition to design the capital in 1927. The new capital bears some resemblance to Le Corbusier’s 1924 model in The City of Tomorrow, with its zoned separation of functions, and its organization around two boulevards (one on which the public centre is located) “running north and south, and east and west, and forming the two great axes of the city” (Le Corbusier, cited in Holston, 1989; 32). Although many of the city’s major buildings were designed by non-Turkish architects, Bozdoğan (2001) explores the intimate but never static connection between architects and the Kemalist revolution in its most ‘heroic’ period. Thus she writes about the assumption of both architects and state-planners that form could transform content; on their desire for the ‘total design’ of the domestic interior according to a coherent modernist vision, with a particular interest in realigning the relation between interior space, women’s work and their child-rearing mission; and on the binary ‘progressivism’ of architects and Kemalism, wherein both modernist architecture and Kemalism signify advancement and rationality: “Kemalism is a revolution, modern architecture is revolutionary, therefore it must be the architecture of Kemalism” (p. 61). She also establishes a correspondence between the political problematic of nationalism and the technical problematic of architecture: thus the aesthetic dilemma (and architectural solution) of the problem of symbolizing the particularity of the nation, in the context of a modernist polemic against decoration and ornamentation.

The site selected for the new capital had other virtues: it existed in a region that had a long association with the various civilizations that flourished in central Anatolia. Re-signifying these civilizations’ scattered archaeological remains, Turkish nationalist discourse sought to creatively enliven this association, elaborating a fictive kinship with Hittite and Phoenician forebears that disavowed at the same time other ancestors, specifically the Islamic Ottomans. In the process it also claimed
the Hittite inheritance – an age-old relationship with Anatolia that partially assuaged
the anxiety caused by other nationalist narratives mythologizing the migration of
Turkish tribes from central Asia. This fictive national genealogy was given tangible
presence by the embedding of new collective symbols in the urban texture of the city
(for example, the large Hittite Monument erected on the busiest intersection of
Atatürk Boulevard, or the establishing of major State enterprises Sümerbank and
Etibank – named after the Sumerians and Hittites, respectively – in the 1930s). The
nationalizing of space generated by referencing Hittite sculptural themes is seen most
powerfully in the design of Atatürk’s mausoleum (Anit Kabir), with its solemn
corridor of stone lions presaging entrance to the complex’s public square and
classical temple that house the dead body (see Meeker, 1997; Vale, 1992).

We might also interpret Anit Kabir as a key site of ancestor worship, where living
and dead kin are conceived and related and the progenitor of the Turkish nation is
publicly confirmed, not only on Republic Day by the lineages that declare him as
their own, but through occasional visitation to the tomb by each new generation of
Ankara schoolchildren. Indeed, we might argue that the city itself is sacralized by the
increasing density of Republican monuments, tombs of its presidents/notables and
statues that cover and sanctify the new capital. Amazingly, in the high Republican
period (1923–1950) no new mosques were planned for Ankara. [By contrast, the
mausoleum of Adnan Menderes, the only Turkish Prime Minister executed by the
Republic, is in Istanbul.] Compare too the spotlit prominence of the mausoleum of
the city’s founder with the non-presence of the body of the exiled Islamic scholar and
leader Said Nursi, dis-interred after his death and re-buried in a secret grave by the
Turkish military in 1961. Considering that Said Nursi’s Kurdish origins are of
continuing dispute, we better understand the care taken to ensure that his potential
children remain un-born.

Beyond the inscription of “message-bearing units of composition” (Preziosi, 1991;
in Bierman et al., 1991; 106) in the design details of Anit Kabir, it is the periodic
commemorative ceremonies at the site of Atatürk’s tomb that infuse the
memorial with its social power. Recollecting Atatürk through embodied ritual
activity at Anit Kabir sustains a common social memory, extending across generations
and investing the dead with specific meaning. It is in the ceremonies themselves that
an intersubjective encounter between Atatürk and participants in the performance is
experienced. Evliyagil’s (1993) poem In the Presence of Atatürk, printed in a special
edition of the journal Culture and Art celebrating the 70th anniversary of Ankara as
the capital of the new republic, represents the experience thus:

In Ankara this morning once again
We were at Anit Kabir,
Once again we were together with you.
Once again we refreshed and renewed our ties,
Our trust in you.

You never died nor passed-away,
Your presence never left us,
Because you make your voice heard
Each time our anxieties whelm
We rejoiced believing from our hearts.

Once again in your presence
We gave our word
Your principles will not be deviated from,
Our hearts made an oath
As we passed by you, trembling.

Atam [My Atatürk],
Kneeling down we bound ourselves
To Anit Kabir,
When we left your side
We were at ease at last

Because you were not sleeping:
Your blue eyes
Were fixed on the Motherland from Anit Kabir,
As if standing straight and upright
You were waiting for us.

The historic stripping from Istanbul of its imperial sanctity and the sacralization of republican and nationalist Ankara in its place is echoed in the poem’s divinizing of Atatürk as eternally living guide and inspiration. The encounter narrated in the poem has a broader context: as master of ceremonies, the State attempts to induce and control intersubjective experience, to nationalize the intersubjective consciousness.

And yet as the poem alludes, contemporary urban politics in Ankara consists partially of the creation of rival interlocutors for intersubjectivity, leading to ongoing contestation over the very content and fate of Atatürk’s principles. Refah Party’s controversial changing of the symbol of Ankara from the Hittite sun to one featuring a mosque and citadel in 1995 while in control of the Greater City Council attests to this. Yet Refah’s insertion of a different ancestor into the nationalist genealogy – an Ottoman/Islamic forefather – has not fundamentally challenged its Turkish pedigree. More importantly, neither has it challenged the forced inclusion of Kurds into this fictive lineage.

Istanbul obviously has a different history and its making into a Kemalist City has involved different processes. Indeed, arguing the case for Istanbul’s animation as a Kemalist City is on the surface a quixotic task, given its present self-presentation – at least by certain political actors – as ‘the place where the continents meet’, site of a historic multiculturalism that in the 1990s appears to some observers to have been partially rejuvenated. Further, both Göle (1991) and Keyder and Öncü (1994) make the point that for the nationalists in Ankara, Istanbul in the single-party period and beyond was regarded with suspicion, its imperial Islamic heritage and cosmopolitanism – in terms of its religious plurality and westernised elites – being perceived as a threat to the regime consolidation emanating from the capital. We need to argue then for a different expression of the Kemalist City in Istanbul, generated less through new monumental architecture and the peculiar alliance between modernist urban
planning and ethnic Turkish nationalism (techno-nativism), and more through an antagonistic re-ordering of its ‘historically sedimented’ social, cultural and spatial practices (Rabinow, 1996). The transformation of Aya Sophia from imperial mosque to public museum exemplifies this policy. Nevertheless, Istanbul has not been quarantined from the technical logic of techno-nativism: Henri Prost, head of colonial urban planning under Marshall Lyautey in French Morocco, was engaged as chief urban planner of Istanbul during the single-party period, as typical modernist cum nationalist standardized spaces and forms – schools, army barracks, new military headquarters or museums, hospitals, parks and squares, all prefaced with Atatürk statues or busts – reconfigured Istanbul’s urban landscape. Indeed, according to a jealous Le Corbusier who also applied for the position, Prost was employed only because he was willing to destroy the city’s older houses (Bozdoğan, 2001).

Yet despite the changing strategies for managing Istanbul, including those forged by the 1980 military coup and its liberalization of the Turkish economy, it is difficult not to concede a historic consistency of intention expressed through the city towards Kurds, pursued both via the language policies of the Republic, and through the regulation and use of everyday urban space. Bozdoğan argues that until the 1950s the alliance between architects and the official ideology of the State turned architecture into a form of ‘visual politics’ (2001, p. 298). Vis-à-vis Kurds, I would maintain that this aspect of cities in Turkey continues to be significant, conducted not only through the built environment but also through the fashioning of space via nationalist symbols and practice. This visual politics has a dynamic aspect in terms of an ever-changing nationalist aesthetic adorning the city. Periodically changed nationalist slogans or threats are hung by councils or by the office of the Istanbul Governor over key interchanges or walkways; brilliant posters stuck to billboards or underpasses are pasted over or removed to make way for new pithy slogans directed to different events or perceived threats; the beat of a new season pop song coordinates school callisthenics at celebrations of national days; the Turkish flag is stamped on cassette boxes to memorialize the 75th or 80th anniversary of the Republic.

A cursory reading of the daily paper indicates how this visual – and aural – politics is both enforced and challenged. The newspaper Radikal (Dec. 20, 2002) reports that the State Security Court demanded 3 years and 9 months’ imprisonment for a group of teachers accused of singing separatist songs in Kurdish at a union meeting: translation of the songs in court showed they were ‘entirely concerned with love, nature and homesickness’. The charges were dismissed. Equally revealing is the news, again re-reported in Radikal, that the State Security Court has opened a case against 18 members of HADEP (People’s Democracy Party). Significantly, the prosecutor’s charges concentrate on the use of symbols un-acceptable in public space and performance:

At the congress, the Turkish flag was not displayed, nor was the national anthem sung. By contrast, the party’s march was recited, slogans protesting the conditions in F-type prisons and supporting the PKK were shouted, the colours representing that organization – yellow, red and green – were present, as were people donning the pesmerge [guerrilla] clothes worn by that organization’s members in the countryside... (Radikal: Jan. 7, 2003).
Just as importantly, the visual politics at issue here is also enacted through the regular if temporary nationalization of space by significant numbers of Istanbul’s inhabitants themselves. Their ritual colonizing of public space involves an aural aspect as well: the nationalist slogans, din of horns and aggressive chanting sending off young men to their military service (‘Our great soldier, Serkan...’) complement the widespread display of Turkish flags hanging from windows or fluttering over balconies on national days. The national flag swaddles coffins of accident victims. Football victories over European teams result in convoys of youths cruising the streets in trucks and cars demanding stereotypical nationalist gestures in response from pedestrians. These everyday practices of civil nationalism enmesh with the continuing overt presence of the State in public places, prompting Navaro-Yashin to ask about the effort of State power to mobilize what appear as ‘self-generating’ spheres of society (Navaro-Yashin, 1998).

Parenthetically, the visual and aural politics enacted through the ritual use of material settings by urban inhabitants themselves suggests cities outside of Turkey can also be socially constructed – irregularly and fleetingly – as Kemalist. The transformation of public spaces by Turkish Australians or French–Turkish citizens via varieties of these same nationalist practices adds to the complexity of their urban politics. In 1997, after the Turkish team were knocked out of the world youth basketball championships in Melbourne, the injustice of the loss was best expressed for one man by his doing namaz against the stadium wall. Who knows which direction was Mecca? In this case, the Kurdish diaspora in Europe or Australia is constituted not only in relationship to the policies of the Turkish Republic and to the built environments of French or German nationalisms, but in relation to everyday yet novel performances of Turkish nationalism in European cities animated as Kemalist in the process.

In sum, the production of space always has a political dimension, from the design of buildings to the way public places, their ritual use and their users condition the performance of identities within them. My rather schematic remarks on Ankara and Istanbul illustrate two different but complementary strategies animating cities as Kemalist in Turkey. The power of Kemalist cities has a formative influence on the construction and experience of a Kurdish diaspora in urban settings in Turkey. Yet as I will show below, besides the key but complex influence of a mobilized urban spatial order, Kurdish diaspora is also produced through rival nationalist practices and discourses on the Kurdish self by Kurds themselves. This elaboration of Kurdish particularity impacts in turn on the continuing animation of cities in Turkey as Kemalist. In other words, the Kemalist City itself is more fully comprehended as constituted partially through the specific resistances provoked by both its built environment and the nationalistic construction/experiences of urban space by some of its inhabitants. Section 3 below explores how Kurdish creations of their own diaspora articulate with cities in Turkey thus constituted.

**Kurdish diaspora**

Diaspora in general and the Kurdish diaspora in particular is not created automatically through the mere act of mobility, either of migrants, refugees or
borders. Similarly, it is not a necessary outcome of a broken link between a place or territory and its inhabitants. More than this, diaspora requires the self-constitution and self-representation of subjects as a group in connection to a place, mapped or imagined. It is both the active constituting of that connection, as well as the narrativization of its rending, that creates a Kurdish diaspora in Turkey. This active imagining is conducted in dialogue, however negatively, with the rival processes of ‘place-making and people-making’ (Ferguson & Gupta, 1997) pursued by the Turkish State in different ways since 1923. As the formation of a diasporic community depends on the acceptance and elaboration of this connecting and disconnecting, the number of Kurds in diaspora in Turkey is less than the number of Kurds living in its cities, although as the Turkish census refuses to ask questions concerning ethnicity or mother tongue, putting an exact figure on either is impossible.

Indeed, how the animation of cities as Kemalist impacts on Kurdish constructions of identity, their attempts at place-making, and their experiences of home or homelessness is the key question for Kurdish diaspora formation. Kurdish responses to the nationalist construction of place by both neighbours in their own apartment block and the State are complex and multiple. They range from rival creation of nationalist symbols and the temporary marking of places as Kurdish (see HADEP congress above); to conspicuous refusal to display the paraphernalia of Turkish nationalism; to more acquiescent deferral to its colonization of communal space. Interpreting this third strategy is tricky: perhaps the Kurdish minibus driver that pastes the national flag on his rear window is practicing *taqiyya* [literally ‘guarding oneself’, in order to avoid persecution], concealing the impurity of his identity as a precautionary measure against the Kemalist City’s privileging and propagation of Turkishness. Dissimulation here is not necessarily a ruse to hide Kurdishness, but to conceal the profounder ambiguity of not being Turkish. A fourth, perhaps more acceptable tactic, is the Islamization of home environments and the self, wherein Islam is seen as providing a safe haven that resists the obligation to signal ethnic identification. For example, one Kurdish friend framed his journalism degree from Istanbul University and stuck it on the wall of the public lounge room in his house, blacking out, however, the photograph of himself at its centre. The last three strategies point to a perverse reversal of public and private realms: the surveilling of the public sphere for any sign of a Kurdish presence, as well as its nationalizing through everyday practice means that freedom of expression, most intimately in regard to communicating in Kurdish, exists only in the private sphere, at least concerning relief from Turkish assimilation. In urban contexts then – the PKK’s declaring of certain areas of the southeast in the 1990s as liberated zones notwithstanding – the construction of a rival Kurdish architecture (indeed, of an ‘Islamic’ one too) re-ordering physical space and the built environment is not a viable option. As the HADEP court case shows above, the judicial system acts to ensure that the formal representation of the city in terms of Kemalist and nationalist icons is conformed to.

The history of a Kurdish diaspora in Turkey is the history of the self-constitution and self-representation of Kurds as a group in connection to a place, as well as the
narrativization of their rending from it (see above). Yet somewhat paradoxically, the making of a Kurdish diaspora does not necessarily require the physical scattering of Kurds from the places to which diasporic discourse binds them although migration, forced or otherwise, typically facilitates such a construction. Indeed, the animation of cities as Kemalist in the regions where Kurds have been historically the majority of the population itself contributes to the formation of a local diasporic consciousness: the State’s sometimes murderous incorporation of Kurdish regions into the Turkish Republic has encouraged many Kurds to imagine themselves as a nation or ümmet under occupation, sedentary exiles in their own land.

Kurdish diaspora then is firstly produced through the narrative imagination and has an irreducible intersubjective content. It also has an irreducibly plural aspect: as the various, sometimes rival ways of imagining the character and significance of the Kurdish homeland shows, different individuals and groups have different memories, sentiments, and convictions about wherein the vitality of that homeland consists. Accordingly, those Kurdish revolts described as nationalistic, as well as those rebellions attributed to more religious motivations, are both significant for a history tracing the making of a Kurdish diaspora in Turkey.

Indeed, in general the history of a Kurdish diaspora in Turkey has been articulated by Kurds themselves in either nationalist or Islamist terms. Although these two ways of interpreting the Kurdish past and present have been viewed as incompatible by many activists and commentators, it is also important to note the themes they share in common. Neither consents to the project of the Turkish State and the Kemalist City to make Kurds into Turks. Their point of conflict is not over the existence of Kurdishness per se, but over the place of Islam in its definition. At base both are discourses on Kurdish identity, in the context of an aggressive Turkish nationalism (Houston, 2001b). They share common ground in a further significant way as well: both are augmented by and cannibalistic upon the fragile and sensuous social memory of people, seeking to deform and reform individuals’ lived experiences of places, events, and human relationships with their more systematized accounts of Kurdish suffering. These memories may be of first-hand experiences or of events experienced indirectly, tales of atrocities or belonging recounted by significant others (see Neyzi, 1999). One of my friends told me that when he was a boy there was a man in his village whose tongue had been severed by the army for speaking Kurdish. For him, the violence memorialized by the missing tongue and the still remembered sound of the man stammering is given meaning through diasporic discourse.

Such fragments of remembering indicate a major way Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish identity in Turkey is presently constituted: through narratives of violence, exile and displacement. For both Kurdish nationalist and Kurdish Islamist historiography, evocation of the homeland often involves an account of forced separation from it. These experiences impact not only on the families and relatives of the people involved, but also on those whose own lived experience resonates in some way with these stories. Here a Kurdish counter kinship is imagined, associated not with official sites commemorating national history but with lost, forsaken or destroyed places. Imagining the loss of the homeland or the theft of a territory named Kurdistan is facilitated by the actual lost locality of the village. Identification
with those exposed to the political punishment of exile, a punishment sometimes traced back to the policies of the Ottoman Empire (Alakom, 1998), contributes to the construction of a retrospective Kurdish identity stretching across generations, over tribal boundaries, and beyond notable families.

What are some of the formative events incorporated within contemporary Kurdish diasporic discourse? Citing a book published by the Turkish General Staff in 1972, Kirisci and Winrow (1997) note that of the 18 officially recognized rebellions violently suppressed by the army between 1924 and 1938, 17 were in Eastern Anatolia, while 16 involved Kurds. Of these, several are extremely influential in the self-representation and life histories of diasporic Kurds, interpreted not only as exemplary moments revealing the ‘true face’ of the Turkish State, but significant also because of the exile of Kurdish families throughout the western and Black Sea regions of Turkey in their aftermath. The Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925 and the Dersim uprising in 1937/1938 are vital events in the creation and narrativization of a Kurdish self-consciousness. Both resulted in the deaths and forced relocation of tens of thousands of people – indeed, van Bruinessen (2000) has argued that in the Dersim case, Turkish State policy should be analysed as genocidal, while Neyzi (1999) notes that the region, remapped and renamed as the province of Tunceli, remained uninhabited for 10 years (see also Watt, 2000). The military coup of 1960 resulted in the arrest and deportation to western Turkey of 55 Kurdish notables and their extended families, including Abdulmelik Fırat, grandson of the aforementioned Sheikh Said, who had already spent the first 13 years of his life exiled in a camp in Trakya (Fırat, 1996).

A more recent defining influence on the making of a Kurdish diaspora in Turkey has been the massive trauma of the war between the PKK and the Turkish military, which since 1993 has resulted in the forced evacuation of at least 3500 villages from the southeast (Mazlumder, 1995). The vast majority of these evacuations have been conducted by the Turkish armed forces, often with extreme brutality, exercising an unaccountable power granted to them by the declaration of a state of emergency in the 10 southeastern provinces in 1987. The U.S. Department of State has described forced displacement as a “systematic process of evacuating and often burning villages throughout the southeast. The scale of evacuations and their continuance suggest that they are part of the Government of Turkey strategy designed to deprive the PKK of any logistical base in the southeast” (USCR, 1999). Most human rights groups put the number of displaced persons over the decade at between 2.5 and 3 million people, although the then Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit claimed in 1997 that only 364,742 inhabitants from 3185 villages had been emptied ‘for security reasons’. The State has also targeted individuals for expulsion, new state of emergency legislation in 1990 giving discretionary power to the governor of the emergency province to ‘remove from the region’ citizens perceived as threats to public order. The expelling of scores of teachers, party officials, and trade unionists followed.

Finally, elaborations of a Kurdish diaspora are communicated – more exactly, listened to – in competition with the social production of aural space by the Kemalist City. Cities in Turkey are also animated as Kemalist in sound. Most clearly, the
The aural environment of the Kemalist City is created and heard through language. Standard built forms of the Republic – the schools, the palace of justice, the military bases, even the concert hall – hum in linguistic monotone. They also echo with the sound of the national anthem: school children are made to sing it every Monday morning and Friday afternoon. The fury of war in the southeast, its role in the ‘un-forgetting’ of earlier campaigns to pressure minorities to speak Turkish – for example, the Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş (Citizen Speak Turkish) movement – means that for many talking Kurdish in public is fraught with apprehension. Even on the commuter ferries, murmuring in disreputable tongue, buyers of hain (traitorous) newspapers obscure publications’ mastheads behind books or bags.

In other words, the aural environment resonates with a cultural politics. A striking red poster pinned on the notice board at Bilgi University, one of Istanbul’s newer private institutions, whose curriculum is taught mainly in English, proclaims, “‘bye bye’ Ne Demek?” (What does ‘bye bye’ mean?)

It goes on to explain:

Say NO to English affectations and show respect to Turkish! Protect Atatürk’s legacy and our future. SPEAK TURKISH!!! “To say Turk is to say Turkish, and to say how fortunate are those who can claim to be a Turk!” “The Turkish nation, who knows how to protect its independence and territory, should liberate its language from the yoke of foreign languages”. M.K. Atatürk (my translation).

The poster concludes by giving the website for a group called the Association for National Enlightenment. It speaks to the long concern of the Turkish State and some of its more ardent citizens to purify Turkish, as part of the nation-building process, from the influence of other languages, particularly Arabic and Persian. Lewis (1999) has described the language revolution initiated and overseen by the Republic as ‘linguistic engineering’, as a new proto-Turkish was developed through the amazing söz derleme seferberliği (word collection mobilization campaign) begun in 1932. Its results have been mixed, as the very poster above shows: the words used for independence (bağimluluk) and affectations (özantılık) are neologisms, coined in the 1930s. By contrast, the words asking readers to ‘protect Atatürk’s legacy’ (Ata’nın mirasına sahip çık) are Ottomanisms. I mention the poster not only to note the breathtaking hypocrisy of Turkish language purists’ vis-à-vis Kurdish – the language mobilization collected Turkish words from old texts and Turkish dialects as far away as Siberia while Kurdish itself was being banned – but also to demonstrate more generally the parameters of acceptable, if not necessarily much supported, political debate in Turkey. The Türk Dil Kurumu (Turkish Language Society) still produces monthly lists of borrowed words and recommended Turkish equivalents. Imagine if the poster read, “SPEAK KURDISH!!! To say Kurd is to say Kurdish and to say how fortunate are those who can claim to be a Kurd!” Here the emblazoning of the words ‘Kurds’ and ‘Kurdish’ in public space would display the politically unthinkable.

In brief, accompanying its manufacture of a new Turkish, to be voiced and listened to as well as written, the Turkish Republic has long proscribed the use of
Kurdish as a sound to be heard in public. Poulton (1997) cites Kurdish writer Musa Anter, who writes in his memoirs how until 1950 speakers of Kurdish were fined according to a tariff for every Kurdish word spoken. In the wake of the military coup in 1980, the newly rewritten 1982 constitution declared Turkish the mother tongue, rather than the official language, of all citizens of Turkey (Watt, 1999). New laws were enacted aimed at silencing minority languages. These included a ban on “any language which is not the first language of a country that recognizes Turkey” (Watt, 1999: 652). Indeed, Chapin-Metz (1995) claims that officials of the SIS [State Institute of Statistics] were prosecuted for preparing guidelines for the 1985 census that directed census takers to list Kurdish when asking what languages, in addition to Turkish, interviewed individuals spoke. This ban was partially lifted in 1991, when the legalizing of Kurdish for private communication was agreed to (Gürbey, 1996).

Since then, vocalization of Kurdish in the general mass media has occurred obliquely as it were, with the stylizing of a Kurdish-inflected Turkish in some comedy and satirical programmes: comedian Levent Kıraca’s new film (Şeytan Bunun Neresinde) features characters marked as Kurds both by their dress and their particular pronunciation of Turkish. On the other hand, films in which spoken Kurdish is actually heard – such as Yılmaz Güney’s Yol – have long histories of censorship.

Nevertheless, alternative soundscapes resound in the aural nooks and crannies of Kemalist cities. Although there is as yet no Kurdish language programme on television (as of early 2004), Kurdish is taught at some private educational foundations, often disguised under names such as ‘Mesopotamian Cultural Centre’. Their common rooms ring with songs in Kurdish, a newly created popular music, its more politicized artists re-imagining the experience of being Kurdish in cities echoing with Turkish pop music. The Kurdish aural diaspora is plural as well – the two-minute silence to remember PKK martyrs at meetings held by Kurdish nationalists; the sound of Islamic hadith recited in Kurdish in a basement in an illegal Istanbul Kurdish medrese; the transmission of game shows in Kurdish via satellite TV into the lounge room of middleclass Kurds. Then there is the Walkman, which allows the listener to impose on the soundscape of the ferry or Republican spaces an alternative aural order that the policing of its visual environment makes impossible. While the headphones are plugged in, the sounds of the city, Kemalist or otherwise, are jammed. Indeed, jamming the meanings conveyed in the forms, practices and sounds of Kemalist cities is one way of describing the endeavour of participants in the Kurdish diaspora. Through their imagining of a Kurdish homeland, however conceived, diasporic urban Kurds circumscribe their engagement with the nationalistic iconography of the built environment and its animation as Kemalist.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, this paper takes as self-apparent the irreducible complexity of cities and their articulation with global flows and forces, which necessitate a global political economic optic (see Keyder, 1999 for an enlightening analysis of Istanbul’s globalization). But its attention is directed to the ongoing production and
signification of space and built environments by the nation-state, which is not cancelled out by the global logic of capital and the ubiquity of its new sites of investment. Keyder’s analysis rues the fact that Istanbul’s inability to ascend to global city status lies “in the constraints imposed by the political sphere” (Keyder, 1999; 23). Accordingly his interest, at least concerning the post-1980 transformation in that city’s urban environment, is in the tension between Istanbul’s partially composed new material and cultural orders and the continued ambiguous attitude of the political elite and the nationalistic State towards their completion. By contrast, in this paper I have attended less to the negating power of the ‘political sphere’ and more to its continued vitality in generating spatial organization and practice, as well as new forms of resistance that rub up against them.

In this process a contemporary Kurdish diaspora has been forged in conjunction with two ongoing and interpenetrating policies of the Turkish State. Both of these strategies are operationalized through the creation, use and control of nationalized space and the built environment: both of them in turn are resisted by Kurds through alternative interpretation and use of that space. The first has been a strategy of concealment: here the very existence of Kurds, or that ‘Kurdishness’ signifies any referent, is denied. The visible traces of an assertion of Kurdish identity through the built environment and its use is censored; the Kurdish language is proscribed; questions about ethnic affiliation or language are not allowed in the census surveys; geographic place names are changed; the Kurdish origins of historical figures denied or re-inscribed.

Somewhat paradoxically, the second strategy by contrast has been that of containment. Yeğen (1996) has called this an enunciating of the exclusion of Kurdish identity – an interesting phrase in light of the above discussion over the social production of aural space by the Kemalist City. Here Turkish State discourse has constituted Kurdish identity in terms of reactionary or Islamic politics, tribal resistance, and banditry/smuggling, these being the ‘social space’ to which ‘Kurdishness’ is connected. In other words, the Republic enunciates the existence of Kurds but attempts through legislation and other means appropriate to this enunciation to denigrate and transform that social space.

Kurdish diaspora in the cities of Turkey is constituted intersubjectively, both in relation to the general re-structuring of urban sites and space by Kemalism, and to these particular strategies of the State. Contradicting the State’s concealment of Kurdish existence, a defence of the historical presence of Kurds has been developed. The historical and social institutions of Kurds are researched; the Kurdishness of historical personages is re-claimed (i.e. Said Nursi); Kurdish contributions to the history, expansion and glory of Islam and the Ottoman polity are invoked; application to rename in Kurdish suburbs of Diyarbakir and other southeastern cities are made by local councils to state provincial administration.

Contesting the State’s territorial containment of Kurdish identity, Kurds continue to move without visas between nation-state borders, in the process declaring present nation-state divisions artificial stitching on the social space of a greater Kurdistan. In some Istanbul suburbs where Kurds are now a majority Kurdish New Year (Newroz) is openly celebrated. Pro-Kurdish groups also enunciate an alternative discourse
through which Kurdish identity is constituted, while making publicly visible the signs of a Kurdish presence appropriate to this enunciation. Kurdish cultural associations teach the Kurdish language to young people; a discourse on Kurdish culture and its distinguishing features is initiated; new editions of Kurdish oral narratives are printed, along with contemporary Kurdish fiction and poetry; new Kurdish ‘pop’ music is composed and disseminated, and Kurdish versions of well-known turku (folk songs) recorded; a discourse on the ‘Kurdish reality’ is tenuously institutionalized in the Turkish parliament by a number of pro-Kurdish political parties (HEP, HADEP, DEHAP). In these processes, not only the Kemalist City but the Kurdish diaspora itself is re-constituted through the very resistance it in turn provokes.

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