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THE ICONOGRAPHY OF TAKSIM SQUARE: COMPETING CLAIMS ON A PUBLIC SPACE

by

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The Iconography of Taksim Square: Competing Claims on a Public Space

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on *Taksim Square* in İstanbul, which is one of the most significant public places in Turkey. What lends the site significance is the multitude of meanings and readings that have been attached to it. The continuous tension between competing representations of the place and alternate projects centering on its use and meaning turn the square into a 'contested space'. The research explores how different social and political actors seek to interpret the meaning(s) and use(s) of the square in different ways. It concurrently aims to demonstrate how this place is unceasingly remade and reconstructed through the ongoing struggle on its morphology and symbolism. The thesis deals with the discursive construction of space within a theoretical framework, which makes it possible to relate the spatial category with some concepts of cultural politics like social memory, collective identity, and national discourse.

Taksim Meydanı'nın Sembolik Analizi: Kamusal Mekan Üzerinde Yarışan Görüşler

Güldem Baykal

ÖZET

Bu tez, İstanbul'un ve Türkiye'nin en önemli kamusal mekânlarından *Taksim Meydanı* üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Meydanı araştırmaya değer kılan, üzerinde sürekli tartışılan bir mekan olmasıdır. Çalışma, meydanın kimliğinin ve kullanımının kamu oyunda tartışılma boyutlarıyla ilgilenmektedir. Farklı süreçlere bakarak meydanın zaman içinde nasıl değiştiği de araştırma konusudur. Taksim Meydanı'nı söylemsel kurgular üzerinden tartışan bu tez, mekânsal kategoriyi toplumsal bellek, kolektif kimlik ve milli söylem gibi kültür siyaseti çalışmalarının sorguladığı kavramlarla ilişkilendirerek teorize etmeye çalışmaktadır.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I focus on a central public square in Istanbul, *Taksim Meydanı*¹—a hybrid site, a collage of many fragments, a complex image full of diverse meanings. For many people, this place is victim to failed planning; a space too crowded, fully occupied indeed, and a disappointment for foreign travellers expecting to see a conventional, “real” square. Taksim is a nodal point of traffic, a conduit of mobility, a meeting point that facilitates social intercourse. It is a profane place of which customary needs and leisure have come to define its primary function: kiosks, snack bars, nightclubs, cafés, booksellers, flower-gypsies, little children selling handkerchiefs or UNICEF postcards etc... It is a public place often used for articulating social and cultural issues, where people are continuously exposed to a bombardment with announcements and reminders of various kinds: posters announcing charity campaigns and conferences, exhibitions and festivals. There is an always-present orchestra of an institution for the blind. Also, Taksim is a highly marketable image of Istanbul as a ‘global city’, and, in this sense, also a marketplace: giant advertisement boards, megavisions, fast-food chains (Mc Donald’s, Wendy’s, Pizza Hut, Burger King etc.), ethnic and world cuisine restaurants. Most noticeable is the five-star hotel, *The Marmara*, which at least physically, if not symbolically, dominates the square. All those elements on the site along with its closeness to the district of *Beyoğlu*² indicate that the square has a serious touristic potential.

Then, there is the “condensed” image of the Republican Monument, which was “extracted from (a certain version of) chronology to become a symbol” of the national state (Hung 1991: 84). Since its erection in 1928, it towers over the square as a site of official Turkey. The monument serves national myths and republican spirit by contributing to the memory making of the state both through its very existence within everyday life and through ritual practices taking place at the square. A building that supplements the republican atmosphere of the place is the Atatürk Cultural Center – opera, exhibition center, site of half-political, half-artistic ceremonies. The two structures have contributed for many decades to the construction of the cultural framework the republican ideology needed and served the modernization project enthusiastically implemented by the national state.

Yet, at the same time, the official sacredness of the square, used over the years in ceremonial re-affirmations of nationhood, has been challenged by various spatial practices and attempts to re-define the identity of the site. Examined together these challenges reflect how different representations and identifications that transgress the official iconography have accumulated on the square and changed its public character. In this study, I deal with the continuous tension between the competing representations of the square and between alternate projects centered on its use and meaning. I explore how this place is unceasingly remade and reconstructed through an ongoing struggle about its morphology and symbolism. Concurrently, I ask how the contestation over the square has changed in nature and in which terms one should try to understand the cultural tensions reflected on it today.

While discussing the different readings of Taksim Square, I also offer my own reading(s). By doing this, I attempt to examine *the politics of place* in a broader sense, that I refer to the interaction between place and social relations, which can

also be regarded as power relations. The major available source of inspiration for this study has been work on world-widely known and politically significant public places (e.g. HersHKovitz 1993, Hoskote 1997, Hung 1991). However, considering the specificity and complexity of its symbolism, Taksim Square requires a more exhaustive reading, which has to go beyond what was performed by those studies. Today, and especially with regard to Taksim Square's potential for globalization, one has to pose the problem in a more complex way.

The conventional way of examining the dialectical situation of such public squares consisted of confining the issue to the conflict between the official authority exerting power to define its dominant meaning, on the one hand, and popular resistance to this power, on the other. Linda HersHKovitz (1993), for instance, conceptualizes Tiananmen Square in Beijing as "the product of two distinct intertwined spatial traditions" (p. 395). She argues that that square has been continuously produced and transformed through the ongoing struggle between the hegemonic power of the Chinese state and the power of the oppositional movements. Her work is an interesting case study that to exemplifies the articulation of politics through spatial practices.³ Yet, this perspective, which I have borrowed to some extend, is incomplete and simplistic with regard to Taksim Square. Here, one has to deal with the contestation on the square as a more complex process in which a multiplicity of actors is participating. In other words, the dialectical situation of Taksim Square needs to be scrutinized beyond the essentialist dichotomy between the "official" and the "popular".

Thus, I argue that the politics of place encompasses a wider range of social, political, and economic relations. Moreover, if one ignored the global dimension of the current reality, one would decontextualize the issue, and thus loose the

opportunity to make sense of the cultural and identity conflicts mirrored on this particular urban space

My argument is grounded on the critical theory of space developed over the last two decades. The literature on space emerged as a scholar reaction to the ‘aspatiality’ of the social theories that dominated the interpretation of and during the modern era. Theorists from a number of disciplines tried to allocate a place for *space* in social theory by focusing on the complex interaction between space and social relations (Lefebvre 1974, Gregory and Urry 1985, Agnew 1989, Duncan 1989, Harvey 1989, Soja 1989, Massey 1994).

In Chapter I, I firstly trace that process through which *the spatial* dimension attained the status of an explanatory category in social sciences. On the same trajectory, the argument arrives at the principal assumption that “(social) space is a (social) product”, as Lefebvre argues (1974). Yet, the relation between ‘the spatial’ and ‘the social’ should be regarded as mutual, or “inter-reactive and interdependent” as Soja (1989: 81) reminds us. Within this interaction, “space”⁴ is conceptualized as something “constructed out of multiple social relations imbued with power, meaning and symbolism” (Massey 1994: 4). In turn, space acts as the medium and the factor of social processes. This basic premise resides in a broader theoretical context that conceptualizes the category of the social as by no means objective society but as something to be historically constructed and discursively constituted within power relations (Dirks, Elley, and Ortner 1994).⁵ Potentially, space is also political depending on its ongoing interaction with social (political) processes.

As the next step of my argument, I discuss the major implication of these interconnected notions of space and social realm on the identity of a given place. The basic assumption of the socio-spatial dialectic attributes a changing of character to

any place. That is, as place is intrinsically open to politics, its identity is also open to conflict and contestation (Massey 1994), and eventually to transformation. Each actor participating in the struggle tries to define the dominant meaning, or the ultimate identity of the place. Politically significant public places, such as Taksim Square, are the most conspicuous manifestations of such conflictual processes. At the outset, they are planned, ordered and controlled spaces that symbolize the dominant political power and its culture, which is its discursive reality including narrations and myths about the past and the present. Yet, they are also and become ever more appropriated, experienced and spontaneously used public spaces. Consequently, within the dynamic simultaneity of diverse social relations, they are imbued with additional meanings that transgress, challenge and even contradict with the hegemonic identity ascribed to the place.

From the perspective of cultural politics, the examination of the contestation over the identity of a public space is an attempt to explore the power struggle among various groups to define the dominant meanings in the cultural mapping of the social life. In other words, the political conflict over a place is nothing but the confrontation of and the competition between alternative imaginations of the shared culture and collective identity, accompanied by different readings of the past, different definitions of the present, and different prescriptions for the future.

In Chapter II, I discuss how the early Republican state, as the official actor, inscribed its nationalist discourse on Taksim Square through the symbolism of the Monument to the Republic. The chapter presents a thorough reading on the iconography of the monument through which *historic rupture* and *historic beginning* as two integral myths of Kemalist history are constructed and conveyed to the national and the global audience. I examine how the monument, as the reminder of

that celebrated past, has efficiently served to sustain the national commitment to the republican power. I also ask why Taksim was officially chosen to be the square of the Republic; and I try to locate its significance in the landscape of Istanbul, which is a city with multiple pasts and identities.

Taksim still preserves its official symbolism today; yet what lends additional significance to the square is that it works as a perfect medium for the articulation of any political agenda. Its monumental status makes it a symbolic condenser of social power; it becomes the manifestation of “the sacred aspect of the authority” (Lefebvre 1991: 225). In the case of oppositional groups resisting to the authority, access to the place is an attempt to capture the power concentrated in that place and to deconstruct the established hierarchy. Thus, appropriation of this space is in itself a political act expressed in spatial practice (Hershkovitz 1993). Accessing is, at the same time, an effective way to become involved in the symbolic (re)production and (re)construction of the site. Spatial entering turns into political conquest. Taksim Square today is the accumulation of multiple meanings and connotations attached to it by means of, or for the sake of, particular (political) actions (Lefebvre 1974).

In Chapter III, I examine various modes of contestation over Taksim Square. Firstly, I deal with the ‘subversive use’ of the site by dissident groups through which political tension as well as popular resistance have become an integral part of the semiological repertoire of the square. This process culminated in a crucial debate over what may and what may not take place on the site. The official authority closed the space to any ‘deviant’ political action or any spatial practice, which seems to contradict with the official symbolism of the Republican monument. Yet, it never means that the square is no longer open to new and challenging claims and representations. Taksim square’s official significance along with its public nature

still gives reason to debate its control and symbolism. More recently, global economic forces came on the stage as an important criterion to define the use of the square. Today, Taksim Square is not merely an officially sacred space to be cleaned off “polluting” ideas. It is a micro-geography, to be put on the core of the newly mapped-out global city Istanbul. Its significance can no longer be confined to local and national/nationalist concerns.

The fierce debate over the Taksim Mosque project, discussed in the second part of the chapter, is a good example to demonstrate that the square is still a “terrain of political practice” (Ross 1988). This discursive battle is an interesting case to exhibit the spatial nature of cultural politics. The issue at stake is not only ‘who owns or dominates the site’; but the whole process is a political struggle between different cultural and ethical discourses related to interdependent notions of identity, social memory and cultural heritage. My second point is that the image of a “global Istanbul” plays a major role in determining the discursive strategies used to battle against or for the mosque. This case proves that any imaginary of local and “genuine” identity and culture, whether secular or Islamist, has to redefine itself for the requisite compromise with globalization (Keyder 1999).

Finally, looking at the other side of the trade-off between the local and global, I try to understand how the global appropriates the symbolic reserves of the local it encounters. I suggest that while the local, or the national, calculates the advantage of global integration, the global has to take into account and utilize local signs and meanings in constructing and reproducing itself. I particularly focus on an advertisement of an internationally owned communication company, which had recourse to the republican terminology of the square in conveying its message to a national and global audience. Through a reading of this pictorial advertisement, I

discuss how global elements get access to the square and how they are integrated into the structure and iconography of the site.

Access to the square does not just denote ‘entering the square’, which is a well-known power strategy (Carteau 1988), but also increases the chance of, if not guarantee, visibility. Entering the square is possible only if the element does not seem to contradict with the republican symbolism of the square. However, the visibility at public space, in real sense, is possible only if the element is successful in culturally and emotionally bonding itself to the crowd at the square it is addressed to.

Notes

¹ The name of *Taksim* refers to “distribution” in English and derives from the classical 18th century building with the sharp conical roof at the corner of the square. This building used to be the *Maksem* in the late Ottoman period, the place from which the water supply was distributed to different parts of the city.

² The district of Beyoğlu (or *Pera* in its old name) is the most popular entertainment center of the city. What lends additional significance to the neighborhood is its Westernized image, or its *Frank* image, as the Ottomans might have called it. See the endnote 16 in Chapter II, for additional information on the potentiality of the district regarding the westernization process of the late Ottoman period, with its remarkable reflections on the city texture.

³ The related arguments on Tiananmen Square will be mentioned again in both Chapter I and in the endnote 3 of the Chapter III.

⁴ “Space” and “place” (referring to certain location) are interchangeably used in this paper, as they are in most of the work on the issue.

⁵ This academic conjuncture came to be known as the “cultural” or “linguistic turn”, which determined the new modes of analysis in social theory. The introduction of this turn accompanied (and partly reacted to) the collapse of explanatory paradigms speaking in terms of given social categories, and was largely shaped by the case studies of the social historians and historical sociologists. Although their points of departure were different, both groups of researchers came up with the idea that social categories are not fixed and self-evident, but that they exhibit spatial and temporal/ historical variances. Then, social research shifted towards the cultural contexts in which people (individuals or groups) acted (e.g. Bourdieu 1977); and the category of “culture” itself was widely accepted as the realm of texts to be read (Geertz 1973), meanings to be acted, and symbols to be construed or deciphered (see also Dirks, Eley, and Ortner 1994). With the influence of poststructuralists and postmodernists like Foucault, Derrida and Barthes, culture came to be conceptualized in terms of discourse and narrative. In this approach, social categories and relations are imagined within the particularity and the historicity of the cultural context to be focused on. For some of its exponents, power is a major and inseparable component of the context embracing a diversity of social relations. For a detailed discussion on the cultural turn in social theory, see Bonnell and Hunt, 1999.

CHAPTER I

THE POLITICS OF PLACE

“A whole history remains to be written of spaces –which would at the same time be the history of powers- from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat.” (Foucault 1980: 149)

I. The Spatialization of Social Theory:

There has been developed over the last two decades a substantial body of literature on space. Theoreticians from diverse disciplines have attempted to conceptualize space by relating it to social categories. Those new perspectives have fuelled by criticism of the ‘aspatiality’ of social theories, which have been firmly attached to the basic principles of the Enlightenment philosophy and the modernization project. At the first step within the conceptual framework of my study, I would like to discuss briefly this intellectual challenge to social theory, which is perceived as obsessed with time, social change and progress as a major objects of study.

One can argue that the hegemonic view of historicism that conceptualizes history as a linear process based on the principle of sequentiality, has impelled social theorists to concentrate on the question of social progress. Such a notion of history is dependent on the premise that societies are dictated by evolutionary laws of universal validity regardless of any particular spatial conditions. If these laws are universal, every society stands at a certain point in the linear process of evolution whose direction has already been determined by the Western societies ‘guiding’ the rest of

the world. Every step of evolution for societies lined up for 'progress' has already been prescribed in the 'guidebook of modernity'. Shortly, social progress is modelled on Western experience.

Not only the modernization theories so eager to issue prescriptions for socioeconomic development, but also their Marxist critics are predicated upon this understanding of history.¹ They insist on perceiving social phenomena as sequentially arranged in time and therefore can not account for the coexistence of various, often contradictory, social relations representing different periods of time within the same locality. They treat such differences and exceptions as contingencies, temporary deviations, which are to be swept away by the uninterrupted flow of history (Thompson, 1994).² Space would eventually be "annihilated by time" (Harvey, 1985b) once it is conquered (Işık, 1994).

In this view, space, as a contingent category, can not be a constituent of causality. Therefore, it cannot contribute to the explanation of social phenomena and relations. Only the 'temporal' category, for which motion and dynamism are intrinsic, has explanatory power in the theory of social change. 'Space' is, as the other end of juxtaposition, utterly opposed to time as a static entity. It is conceived of as "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" as Foucault (1980) stated in his criticism of the conventional concept. Its definition, thus, derived from the absence of the characteristics ascribed to time.³ In an alternative perspective, as proposed here, space is not something to be conceptualized as derivative of time. In other words, it is not perceived as a stage where social relations and practices are performed as dependent variables of time; on the contrary, it is a significant dimension of social processes with causal effectiveness (Urry, 1985; Massey, 1994).

The questions posed by Marxist/ structuralist geographers in the early 1970s indicated an essential step towards a new theoretical framework where the social and the spatial are conceptualized simultaneously. The previously hegemonic positivist 'spatial science' had endeavored to find generally accepted spatial laws and thus excluded the notion of spatial differentiation from the scope of its inquiry. Marxists criticized this view for ignoring social, economic and political structures underlying spatial processes⁴. They argued, instead, that spatial practices should be scrutinized within their relation to the determining social structures. This relation was most often presented as the dependence of spatial relations and processes on the contemporary economic processes. The implications of capitalist accumulation on space became thus a popular theme in the structuralist geography literature (e.g. Harvey 1975 and 1978).

The debates in radical geography during those years were fruitful in the sense that they provoked the emergence of a critical theory of space. The spatial was for the first time conceptualized in relation to the social. As we read in Massey's retrospective analysis (1994), "the aphorism of the seventies was 'space is a social construct'" (p. 254). Yet, one should admit that what the contributors to the debate presented was a one-way relation, in which spatial practices had no significant meaning without social organization; that is, "geographical forms and distributions were simply outcomes, the endpoint of social explanation" (Massey, 1994: 254). Space was still derivative -this time, of social relations.

In the 1980s, the argument turned intellectually into the question of 'how spatial organization makes a difference to social organization' (Gregory and Urry, 1985; Massey and Allen, 1984). The inadequate characterization of space-society relations evolved into a formulation in which the spatial is accepted as an

explanatory category, far from being just a “static resultant without any effect” (Massey 1994: 255). Thus, social relations take spatial forms, which will in turn influence how society works. On the one hand, space is constructed as an inherently “dynamic simultaneity” of multiple “social relations imbued with power, meaning and symbolism” (Massey 1994). In Massey’s words:

“The spatial... can be seen as constructed out of multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales, from the global reach of finance and telecommunications, through the geography of the tentacles of national political power, to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace. It is a way of thinking in terms of the ever-shifting geometry of social/ power relations, and it forces into view the real multiplicities of space-time.” (Massey 1994: 4).

On the other hand, the particularity of a *place* -the fact that social relations are meeting at a particular location with specific conditions- will make a difference to social processes, thus produce new social effects. That is, space is not a ‘container’ but is both constructed by, and the medium and the factor of social relations and processes.

Edward W. Soja deals with the spatialization of social theory in his elaborate work, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989). His presentation stretches from the initial critiques of long-standing philosophical fixation on history/ time to more recent attempts on the part of Marxist geography for incorporating space into social theory. In his discussion on the concept of ‘socio-spatial dialectic’, he talks about ‘*organized*’ space as a “product of social translation, transformation and experience” (p. 80). Doing so, he apparently refers to the latter category in Henri Lefebvre’s distinction between nature (as a given category) and *socially produced space*. That is, both terms (*organized space* and *socially-produced space*) refer to the idea that “(social) space is a (social) product” (Lefebvre 1991: 26). This definition appears to reflect only one side of the space-

society relation (the idea that space is a social end), yet Soja, in a sophisticated evaluation of Lefebvre's theory, argues that he in fact regards the relation between the two as a continuous interaction. It is also apparent that in Lefebvre's theory social processes are intrinsically connected to power relations; and space, which is ceaselessly in relation with society, is potentially political.

"Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics; it has always been political and strategic. If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be 'purely' formal, the epitome of rational abstraction, it is precisely because it has been occupied and used, and has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape. Space has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies." (Lefebvre 1976b: 31; cited in Soja 1989)

Lefebvre puts forward his idea on the socio-spatial dialectic firstly in *La Révolution urbaine* (1970), where he writes precisely that "social and spatial relations are dialectically inter-reactive, interdependent" (cited by Soja 1989: 81). Agreeing with this idea, Soja argues that the spatialization of social theory has to be accomplished by two developments: moving beyond the insistence on presenting 'organized' space as a merely reflection of -supposedly non spatial- relations, and realizing that space is a significant determinant in social life. Such an accomplishment would amount to a real theoretical progress imbuing social theory with appropriate conceptual tools and insight to deal effectively with the current economic, political and cultural processes.

This broader notion of spatiality, which is the result of an ontological 'revolution' in social theory, has invited further debates revolving around the interactive constructions of place, culture, identity and power. More recent studies have already been inspired by the earlier work on spatialization of cultural politics (eg; writings of Walter Benjamin, Franz Fanon, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre). They emphasize the juxtaposition of place and politics in cultural

theory (see Duncan and Ley 1993, Cope 1996, Gupta 1997). HersHKovitz (1993) quotes James Duncan in order to exemplify the attempts of geographers to bridge culture, place and politics:

“...cultural geographers have had too narrow a view of culture while political geographers have had too narrow a conception of politics. Fortunately it has become increasingly apparent that a radical separation of politics from culture and place diminishes all three concepts, for it creates, on the one hand, an impoverished view of political power as abstracted from the cultural and locational matrix of which it is so clearly a part, and on the other hand a view of culture and place which ignores the importance of political processes in both cultural continuity and change in place.” (Duncan 1989: 185; cited in HersHKovitz, 1993)

The spatialization of cultural as well as social theory opened a new era in the study of the politics of identity and resistance. Since then, intellectuals have begun to search for spatially related concepts of culture, identity and politics (e.g. Keith and Pile, 1993), and tried to explain cultural categories in geographical terms. Essentialist notions and conceptual polarities (like man-woman, black-white, heterosexual-homosexual), which had been honored since the time of the enlightenment, are now deconstructed as incapable of explaining the contemporary reality. The new theoretical perspective has put against such dichotomies a richly differentiated terminology that helps to conceptualize cultural and gender differences within the multiplicity and flexibility of intertwined spatial and social relations.⁵

Along these lines this study hopes to be read as another attempt at formulating a few words about the spatialized nature of cultural politics. Focusing on contestation over a particular urban space, it principally intends to examine power struggles among different social actors to determine the hegemonic meanings in the cultural texture of life. The (re)production and (re)construction of space are the integral parts of a process through which we can look at the decision making processes, conflicts or negotiations in changing social and cultural contexts.

II. The Social Production of Space:

I have already argued that ‘*organized*’ space is the space ‘*produced*’ by human action. Yet, in terms of meaning and identity there is nothing like a completed, finalized space. Space continues to be exposed to the process of reproduction and transformation. Therefore, it can assume different semantic values depending on which of the different symbolic combinations inscribed in it is actualized. Naturally, all possible combinations are confined by the boundaries of the socio-spatial dialectic. In her book *Space, Place, and Gender*, Massey (1994) talks about the implications of the new definition of space on the identity of a given place. She suggests that any place and its identity are constructed out of the coexistence of diverse social relations. In her argument, place is the intersection of those relations, and thus, an inseparable part of the process through which society produces and reproduces space and creates its history. In Alan Pred’s words:

“Place always represents a human product: it always involves an appropriation and transformation of space and nature that is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of society in time and space.... It is not only what is fleetingly seen as place, a ‘locale’ or setting for activity and social interaction. It is also what takes place ceaselessly, what contributes to history in a specific context through the creation and utilization of what is seen as place” (Pred 1985:337; quoted by HersHKovitz 1993: 396)

In so far as social relations can also be regarded as *power* relations, place is a “terrain of political practice” (Ross 1988). As political balance shifts through conflict and negotiation, place is transformed and re-created in a related process. What interests me is the interaction between place and social (political) practice that “involves almost inevitably competition and conflict, and not infrequently violence” (HersHKovitz 1993: 396). Through such a continuous dialectic process the identity of place is, too, re-formed; in this sense it is “inevitably unfixed” and “unbounded” (Massey 1994). History has, of course, witnessed attempts by particular groups -most

frequently state elites- to “construct singular, fixed and static identities for places” (ibid: 168). Yet, a dominant discourse that tries to dictate the definition of place always runs the risk of challenge by alternative discourses, and this implies that place identity is “open to contestation” (ibid: 169).

Official inscription on space

Monumental public spaces are among the most noticeable, concrete manifestations of political power, and most of them exhibit distinct cultural images (Daniels and Cosgrove, 1997) constituted by the dominant political discourses.⁶ In Geertz’s words, they represent “a ‘figure of space’ in which ‘topography tends to recapitulate ideology’ and ideology to transform topography into a ‘legible emblem’, an ‘icon of community’, a ‘social text’” (1989: 301).⁷

Apart from the fact that monumental spaces are invested with a self-conscious symbolic vocabulary, their official producers try to define their function as a public place. Spiro Kostof (1992), in his book *The City Assembled, the Elements of Urban Form Through History*, gives examples on how political authorities in history have been decisive in defining functions and “proper” uses of public space such as city squares. They are “purpose-built stages” (Kostof 1992: 123) for collective activity, mostly designed to host official ceremonies, military rallies, and feast-days. On the other hand, these places also serve as urban territories for daily social and commercial interactions. Therefore squares are open to random, and even subversive, uses as well. As Kostof exemplifies, such places that had originally been planned to symbolize a government and legitimize its exercise of power, turned paradoxically into “ritualized outlets for public displeasure against rulers and their policies” (p. 124). The very expression “city square” is loaded with significance in political

terminology as is evident from popular expressions of different languages sometimes of identical meaning, such as “*movimenti di piazzas*” (“going down to the squares”) in Italian” and “*meydanlara inmek*” (“to descent to the squares”) in Turkish.

Hence, for political authorities, “taming” the space by regulating the behavior within it, is even more crucial than planning. Kostof points to an instance from history:

“When Cardinal Del Monte, governor of Gualdo Tadino in the mid-16th century, saw popular sentiments against the Papal State swell dangerously, he had a spine of houses built in haste down the middle of the main square, dividing it in two and thereby diminishing the space and effectiveness, of a possible uprising.” (Dardi 1988; cited in Kostof, 1992: 125)

An earlier case of such an attempt at control is the construction of a defensive wall around a square, Platea Communis, in Parma, shortly after the conquest of the city by the tyrant Luchino Visconti in the 14th century. The wall was named ‘Sta in Pace’, which means ‘Stay Peaceful’ (Pardo 1982: 161-163; cited in Kostof 1992: 125).

We can get further records of similar interventions in city planning at different parts of the world in different periods. The Tiananmen Square in Beijing is a striking contemporary example as it has repeatedly been subjected to dramatic changes both in its morphology and in its function: first during the Nationalist revolution in 1911, then after the founding of the Communist Regime in 1949 (Hershkovitz 1993; Hung 1991). Thus, public places have not only witnessed political and social changes throughout history; but they have been the settings in which those changes have become most apparent. All regimes have tried to eternalize themselves and their respective ideology by concretizing their power in urban architecture. Such attempts to fixate power on the city plan are apparently rooted in the widespread belief that place has the quality of everlasting stability, regardless of the actual perpetual movement in time. Political power and its

ideology are glorified by the aesthetic design of the monumental place. Seen from this angle, the significance of a monument is not due to its artistic value, but rather to its efficiency in symbolizing the political power inscribed on it. Reading it another way, its artistic value is often measured by its ability to symbolize the political power.

Recourse to the past

Monumental space is the site of remembering, where memory is being articulated and conveyed both through an impressive imaginary and through ritual action. Fentress and Wickham (1992) suggest that a “memory can be social only if it is capable of transmitted, and, to be transmitted, a memory must first be articulated” through such media. However, social memory is not only a mediated but also a complex process, which should not be simply conceptualized by analogy with individual memory. Whether one refers to a personal or a collective cognitive process, the concept of memory is by no means a lucid mental act. As Fentress and Wickham emphasize, “even the words to describe the act (*recognize, remember, recall, recount, commemorate*, and so on) show that ‘memory’ can include anything from a highly private and spontaneous, possibly wordless, mental sensation to a formalized public ceremony” (1992: x). This suggestion also implies that the concept of social memory should not be disconnected from the cognitive experience of any particular individual. One should take into account the ways in which individual consciousness is relating itself to that of collectivity. That is, individual memory is not passively subjected to social inputs. True, one has to concede that individual memory is a social and cultural construct in the sense that it is formed and preserved within certain social groups and cultural contexts. Thus, it is not merely personal. Yet, what I suggest is that this is no one-

way relation in which the social milieu dominates and defines the limits of the individual consciousness. Thus, individual memory is not merely the product of the collective consciousness, either.

In the following chapter, I am particularly interested in two aspects of memory: the transmission of memory through the media of monumental space and ritual action, and the importance of this process for the making of collective identity. Thus, I am rather concerned with the social side of the memory as I intend to focus on the site and the act of commemoration.

Monumental space has a great power to articulate views about the past. It serves to connect a mythical past to the present, and even to a “bright” future. It contributes to creating a sense of continuity of a collective existence. Yet, what it portrays is a past viewed “through the present-day lenses” (Lowenthal 1985: xvi). Also, that past is nothing but a certain reading of the history imposed by the builders of the monument, and moreover, it is a past “invented to fit the present” (Fentress and Wickham 1992: 201), and “moulded by selective erosion and oblivion” (Lowenthal 1985, also quoted by Bartu 1999: 32). Through its interaction with the present, the past turns into a “legimization device on which all political rhetoric depends on” (Fentress and Wickham; *ibid.*: 128). To support this view, Fekri A. Hassan (1998) borrows A. D. Smith’s treatment of the concept and suggests that “the past legitimates because of the aura of sanctity and power it is given by some deep psychological processes” (p. 201).

Therefore, a monument is a human product in two senses: firstly because it is an artistic image; secondly and more significantly, because the past inscribed on it is largely an artefact of the present (*ibid.*). A national monument, for example, is erected to commemorate the independence war of the nation or the national

heroes; and the history it represents is shaped by discourses dominating the present relations. Preserving this history in people's memories plays the major role in constructing the social identity.

Thus, a national monument can be conceived as the part of a cultural project aiming at establishing a sense of belonging to a common culture and history among the public, thereby developing a national identity. Lefebvre describes the role of the monumental space in this process as such:

"Monumental space offered each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage. It thus constituted a collective mirror more faithful than any personal one.
... Of this social space, which embraced all the above mentioned aspects while still according each its proper place, everyone partook, and partook fully –albeit, naturally, under the conditions of a generally accepted Power and generally accepted Wisdom. The monument thus effected a 'consensus' ... the repressive element was metamorphosed into exaltation." (Lefebvre 1994: 220)

Popular expression in space

An officially significant public space is at the same time a social property. Therefore it can be used in ways that are quite different from and even contrary to the uses to which its builders intended it to be put. Through conflict and negotiation between official intentions on the one hand and popular appropriations on the other, the symbolic reality of a place turns into an accumulation of diverse elements. The space, then, ceases to be merely a product of an "imposed sentence of authority" (Hoskote, 1997) and becomes a kind of place where popular uses are integral to its meaning. Thus, a place and its identity are constantly (re)produced through a political process.

Mitchell (1995) explains this process by referring to Lefebvre's distinction between two visions of public space: '*representational space*' (appropriated, experienced space; space in spontaneous use) and '*representations of space*'

(planned, controlled, and ordered space). He claims that at the outset public places are representations of space since certain claimant groups have planned them.

However, as they are used by urban dwellers they also become representational space. In his view, what makes a place “public”, and thus political, is this ongoing dialectic between those who seek order and control and those who need places to express their own agenda. And monumental places, imbued with political symbolism, are good choices for articulating any political agenda.

Mitchell develops his discussion by suggesting a new concept: ‘*space for representation*’; that is, “public space is a place within which a political movement can stake out the space that allows it to be seen” (p. 115). Public space “constitutes an actual site, a place, a ground within and from which political activity flows” (p. 117). Squares, for example, are effectively conducive to the expansion of opposition beyond the confines of a locality. When a political dissidence occupies a material space and articulates itself through public rallies and demonstrations, it has already attained visibility. It now can make itself heard to a wider audience, if mass media are available to the rest of the world. This is one of the main reasons political movements require a place in order to represent themselves. Therefore squares are potentially politicized spaces, and thus considered by their very creators as ‘dangerous places’. The typical response of official planners against this potential danger is to restrict the access to and the activities within the place. Any encroachment or deviance is sanctioned by hegemonic powers (Lefebvre, 1991).

Subversive use of place, as HersHKovitz argues, is a strategy of resistance that political dissidents and subcultures employ against hegemonic power. Such strategy involves “appropriation of certain artefacts and significations from the dominant (or parent) culture and their transformation into symbolic forms which take on new

meanings and significance for those who adopt these styles” (Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987: 98-99, cited in HersHKovitz, 1993: 397). This appropriation reverses the political manoeuvres of power holders. The first requirement for the hegemonic power is a place to prove, concretize its power and to dominate a place of its own (Carteau, 1988). But those who lack that power generally develop a political ‘tactic’ by which they use the dominated space –the ‘space of the other’ (Carteau, 1988).

More precisely:

“A *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus ... [a bit idiosyncratic] The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power (It) is a manoeuvre ‘within the enemy’s field of vision’ ... and within enemy territory ... In short, a tactic is an art of the weak.” (Carteau 1988: 36-37)

This is also an effective way for opposition groups to become involved in the production of space. Through such action, they actively participate in the symbolic inscription on space by loading it with different meanings. HersHKovitz continues with her argument by referring to what Ross (1988) wrote in *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*. Here, I would like to re-quote Ross’s words:

“The workers who occupied the Hotel de Ville or who tore down the Vendome Column were not ‘at home’ in the centre of Paris; they were occupying enemy territory, the circumscribed proper place of the dominant social order.” (Ross 1988: 42, cited in HersHKovitz 1993: 398)

HersHKovitz indicates that what Carteau calls a ‘tactic’ denotes what the situationists termed as ‘*détournement*’. Ross argues that tactical use of space

“... provides an example of what the situationists have called a *détournement* –using the elements or terrain of the dominant social order to one’s own ends, for a transformed purpose; integrating actual or past productions into a superior construction of milieu.” (Ross 1988: 142, cited in HersHKovitz 1993: 498)

Accordingly, *détournement* is not an arbitrary juxtaposition of conflicting codes, but it is the replacement of dominant meanings attributed to the space. Some

places manifest stronger historical and cultural signification, and thus have greater potential for being the site of *detournement*. This is especially true for monumental places, which Lefebvre described as 'social condensers':

"Social space, the space of social practice ... is indeed condensed in monumental space ... Thus each monumental space becomes the metaphorical and quasi-metaphysical underpinning of a society, this by virtue of a play of substitutions in which the religious and political realms symbolically (and ceremonially) exchange attributes –the attributes of power; in this way the authority of the sacred and the sacred aspect of authority are transferred back and forth, mutually reinforcing one another in the process." (Lefebvre 1991:225)

Thus, to appropriate a monumental place is an attempt to seize the power "condensed" in it (Hershkovitz 1993) and to deconstruct the established hierarchy.

On the other hand, David Harvey (1989) claims that any city plan is the manifestation of how political power and hierarchical structures are working:

"..the created space of society is also ... the space of social reproduction. Thus control over the creation of that space also confers a certain power over the processes of social reproduction.... Hierarchical structures of authority or privilege can be communicated directly through forms of spatial organization and symbolism. Control over spatial organization and authority over the use of space become crucial means for the reproduction of social power relations," (also quoted by Hershkovitz 1993: 399)

Thus, reproduction of place and transformation of its identity might be the indications of changes in social relations and shifts in political balances. Then, what follows from Lefebvre's premise -(social) space is a (social) product- is the rule that each form of social relations will generate its own spatiality (Lefebvre 1991). When a new political power brings its own order to social life, it intends to inscribe this new order into the urban space. However, Hershkovitz argues that often it is not going to annihilate the space of the previous order, but to change it into a space superimposed by new symbols.

Contestation of multiple actors

The intellectual challenge of historicism, which underlied the “aspatiality” of the social theory, culminates in the assertion that power relations can be comprehended only if the spatial dimension is taken into account. This idea is crystalized into the situationists’s concept of *détournement*, which is useful in examining the politics of place. Yet, contestation over space needs to be explored beyond the essentialist dichotomy between the “official” and the “popular”, because multiple forces are participating in this complex process. Thus, politics of place includes a wider range of social, political, and economic relations. And, today rather the interaction between the global and local forces plays the major role in determining the conflicts over the identity of a location. Therefore, the conflictual process of spatial reproduction can not be examined disregarding the global dimension of the current reality.

In that context, what Geertz (1989) claims with regard to the ‘Islamic city’ in his case study on Sefrou is still true for urban space in general: Urban space is “disjunct” within a “landscape of diverse orderings that point in divergent directions” of multiple discourses (p. 292). Geertz succeeds in representing the complexity of the spatial reality by applying semiological categories to his analysis. Although he uses the term “social text” for space, he does not contradict Lefebvre’s observation:

“A spatial work (monument or architectural project) attains a complexity fundamentally different from the complexity of a text, whether prose or poetry. What we are concerned with here is not texts but texture. We already know that a texture is made up of a usually rather large space covered by networks or webs; monuments constitute the strong points, nexuses or anchors of such webs. The actions of social practice are expressible but not explicable through discourse; they are, precisely, *acted* –not *read*. A monumental work, like a musical one, does not have a ‘signified’ (or ‘signifieds’); rather, it has a *horizon of meaning*: a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the fore, by means of – and for the sake of – a particular action.” (Lefebvre 1991: 222)

The arguments of Geertz and Lefebvre converge on the conception of space as a site of intersecting meanings associated with various discourses, various constructions of history and identity. On that account, when we look at a place as a '*syntagm*'⁸, in Saussure's terminology, the spatial reality that we see is a combination of different denotations and connotations, which are all shaped by the exchange between the global and the local forces.

Notes

¹ See Young (1990) for the criticism of the prevalent idea of historicism in social theory since the Enlightenment, see Soja (1989) for its implications for the understanding of space.

² Işık (1994) mentions in his article the efforts of both modernization theories and Marxism to conceptualize divergent relations observed within a society at a certain time. He regards the "dualist theory" of the 1950s (Higgins 1956 and 1968; cited in Işık, 1994) as the initial attempt on the part of modernization theories. In his view, the dualist thesis later evolved into the "formal-informal sector" debate (Hart 1973; cited in *ibid.*). Işık emphasizes that both views reject the permanence of "traditional" relations within the society and instead support the idea that these will melt into "modern" relations.

Marxist theories, on the other hand, tried to account for the pre-capitalist relations of production juxtaposed with the hegemonic relations of production in capitalist societies (see Moser, 1978 for the issue of "petty commodity production" and Taylor for "integration of modes of production" debate; both cited in Işık, 1994). Işık argues that Marxist theoreticians were unable to notice the inner dynamics of so-called "dependent" pre-capitalist mode of production, but tried to explain the existence of such relations with an extremely functionalist approach. Yet, he also admits that the "integration of modes of production" was a useful concept as it enabled Marxist theory to acknowledge the juxtaposition of relations representing different periods of time in the same place. It was the first time that Marxists substituted in their theory the principle of "sequentiality" with that of "simultaneity".

³ Foucault (1980), in his criticism of the dichotomous conceptualization of space and time, points to the privileged position of the latter considered as "richness, fecundity, life, and dialectic". Contrasting space with time is indicative of a widespread tendency in western philosophy to conceptualize categories in dichotomous formulations (male/female, white/black, west/east, nature/culture, and so forth). Such dualities are simply "A/ not-A" distinctions, by which "one term (A) is defined positively" and "the other (not-A) is conceived only in relation to A, and as lacking in A" (Massey, 1994).

⁴ With the phrase of "spatial processes", I refer to any process related to (re)production and (re)construction of the space.

⁵ See, for example, Bel Hooks (1990).

⁶ Monumental places have frequently been the object study of those who are interested in political iconography of place. Examples include Harrison's study (1988) on the public squares in early nineteenth century English towns and the two complementary studies by Hung (1991) and Hershkovitz (1993) on Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

⁷ Geertz himself quoted (phrases between the inverted commas) from Steven Mullaney.

⁸ Saussure defines two ways in which signs are organized into codes: *paradigm* and *syntagm*. The former is the set of signs from which the one to be used is selected and the latter is the combination of the chosen signs to form a message (Fiske, 1990). Also see Geertz (1989) for a serious attempt to apply Saussure's semiotics in spatial analysis.

CHAPTER II

THE MAPPING OF TAKSIM SQUARE

AS AN OFFICIAL SPACE

A picture of a monument used to adorn the cover of the geography course books for secondary schools in Turkey (Illustration 1). It shows the figure of a soldier carrying a flag. The picture was accompanied by the title of the course: “*The New Geography of Turkey*”. Through these books, the image of the monument would reach all of Turkish students, even those who were educated in the most remote parts of the *new geography*. The children of Anatolia, who often had never been in the city of Istanbul where the monument was standing (and still continues to stand), would learn about the monument in their secondary school classes.

Students were already familiar with the map of the *new* Turkey since their elementary school years. Even today, without any exception, there is a map of the country on the wall of every classroom alongside with a portrait of Atatürk, which is invariably hung above the blackboard. Although a map of Turkey seems more relevant to a geography course book, the picture of a monument was regarded as much more striking. Yet, of course, that picture was chosen not only because it was assumed to evoke interest. It was preferred precisely because it was assumed that

there was nothing more impressive, thus helpful, than a picture of a monument or a statue in engraving certain notions on children's minds.



Illustration 1. The cover of a geography course book in the 1930s:
 “The New Geography of Turkey” (Istanbul: Kanaat Kitabevi, 1935-36)

there was nothing more impressive, thus helpful, than a picture of a monument or a statue in engraving certain notions on children's minds.

The expression of "*the new geography*" refers to the Turkish territory, whose borders have been re-drawn as a consequence of the Turkish War of Independence. The defence of the country was the primary concern of the emerging Turkish state. Such a territorial defence, however, would have been impossible without public commitment and loyalty to the new regime. The parliamentary government in Ankara had to legitimize itself in order to get the necessary support from the public.

The proclamation of the republic (1923) indicated a new beginning in Turkish history. The War of Independence had culminated in victory and the birth of a new political regime. The new Turkish state defined itself in national terms, and had therefore to transform the people, who until then had been the subjects (*tebaa*) of the Ottoman sultan, into a *nation*. As all beginnings, the process of nation building "contained an element of recollection" (Connerton 1991: 6). As basis of a collective national identity, the state had recourse to a recent 'glorious' past, which was marked by a 'tremendous' victory.¹ The most efficient way to preserve national solidarity was keeping alive the memory of the national struggle and the foundation of the republican state. The War of Independence, during which the Turkish public turned into a 'single heart, single body'² against the foreign enemies, would be regularly reminded to the people.

Public schools were the best place to teach the new generation such notions as national unity and solidarity. To do so the myths of the national struggle and the 'heroic Turkish nation'³ were widely employed. What could personify these myths better than the silhouette of *Mehmetçik* (the super-personal name given to the

Turkish soldier)? He was considered as “the immortal representative of the Turkish nation”⁴?

Children growing up in the remotest towns of Anatolia would listen each day to the stories of the heroic Turkish soldier while looking at the picture of the monument. This monument on the cover of their books, that is, the *Monument of the Republic* at Taksim Square, was one of a few things they would know about the city of Istanbul. For those who had the opportunity to actually travel there, Taksim Square would be among the first places to visit and a photograph taken in front of the Republican Monument would be the best thing to show their fellows back home as an Istanbul souvenir.

Reasons for erecting the monument

The Monument to the Republic stands ‘at the heart’ of Istanbul now for more than seventy years as a conspicuous signifier of the Kemalist revolution in the country. It was erected to convey the Kemalist rhetoric to the national and global audience visually. It serves to perpetuate the memory of the founders of the Turkish Republic. It would mark the site with the imprint of the Republic and advance its ideology.

Erecting statues and monuments is a Western tradition, which Turkey was not acquainted with until the republican period⁵. Sculpture had reached the peak of popularity in Europe, particularly in 19th century provincial France, when it was regarded to be a perfect “pedagogic device” for the dominant political rhetoric to the public (Cohen 1989). Political instruction had traditionally been done by newspapers and public schools, and through military service. Yet, as William Cohen indicates, in an age that still experienced large amounts of illiteracy, sculpture proved to be more

efficient than political pamphlets in winning over the inhabitants of a place and to inspire them with a sense of belonging, a collective identity. Even in a literate society, Cohen argues, people mainly perceive the world visually. He refers to European philosophers of the 18th century who had already stressed the power of visual signs as e.g. Diderot:

“The sort of exhortation which appeals to the heart by means of the senses, aside from permanence, is more within reach of the common man. The people make better use of their sight than their understanding. Images preach without ceasing, and do so without wounding our vanity” (quoted in Laugier 1977: 124-5 and in Cohen 1989: 492)

Statues were symbols so powerful that their destruction was nearly imperative when a new regime took over the country. Right after the French Revolution, the republicans tore down statues in various cities and began to replace them with new ones that propagated their own ideology in the space they had thus conquered. During the following decades, the tidal movement between monarchy and republic found its expression in the constant change of sculpture. Each time a regime came to the power, it tried to eradicate the traces of the previous order and replace them with its own symbols. By doing so, each one tried to “take vengeance on the past and shape a new understanding of it” (ibid.: 493-94).

The republican statues erected in various European cities have been the actual source of inspiration for those of the new nation states, which had emerged at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. Statues, in general, were an immediate and apparently unmediated way of communicating political values. In Turkey, Kemalist secularism, with its very “didactic” tone (Gellner 1981)⁶, and the concurrent modernization project⁷ were in need of such pedagogic devices. For this reason, statues symbolising republican statehood, like the Marianne (the symbol of the

French nation) erected in the city of Lyon in the early 1870s, served as models for the new Turkish state so eager to create “Republican Faith” among people.

The state, thus, enthusiastically promoted the erection of such monuments in every city. Their location was given importance, as this aspect would determine their impact on the people. Central places were chosen as location of the symbols of the republic in order to “ensure its triumph by offering it a maximum of exposure to the public” (Cohen 1989: 495). The occupation of central city squares by landmarks of the new regime served to organize and reconstitute public life on national norms, and thereby nationalized the public sphere (Çınar 1999). The erection of statues also symbolised the city’s participation in national culture (Cohen 1989). Monuments proved to be significant components of the “cultural framework” that any “political authority requires to define itself and advance its claims” (Geertz 1985: 25, quoted by Cohen 1989: 496).

Building a Republican monument in Istanbul was a top priority on the agenda of the Turkish Republic’s government. As an old imperial capital, the city hosted a stunning amount of architectural masterpieces (monumental mosques, palaces, fountains etc.) which, unfortunately, all (re-)presented a rich iconography of Islamic-Ottoman culture. Within this semantic geography, the imperial *Topkapı Palace* and its surrounding (particularly, Sultanahmet Square where all official declarations and popular demonstrations of post-war Istanbul had taken place) used to be regarded as the centre of the city as well as of the empire. The new regime had to replace the Ottoman centre with an alternative one that could represent its power. Placing a monumental mark of the republic in the new centre of the old “*payitah*” (the word used for the seat of the Ottoman dynasty) was to indicate the break with Ottoman sovereignty.⁸ The idea was compelling firstly because sculpture was something

strongly associated with the West. In that sense, the monument would highlight the western and secular image of the national state. The more important aspect, however, was that the statue would evoke denotations and connotations pertinent to the republic, as did republican statues in Europe. The new regime was adamant in its determination to transform the Islamic-Ottoman image of Istanbul into a secular and republican identity. Having brought a new order to social life, it intended to inscribe it into the urban space by superimposing its own symbols, rather than by destroying or obliterating the traces of the previous order. Erecting a monument was an initial, yet a significant, attempt to nationalize and secularize the city.

Taksim Square appeared to be the best location available for such a monument for mainly two reasons. Firstly, during the years of the armistice following the First World War, while Istanbul was under occupation, the enemy forces maintained a military presence on this square because the area was the site of barracks. French soldiers, for example, inhabited the *Artillery Barracks (Topçu Kışlası)*⁹ at Taksim during the initial years of the military occupation. Foreign commanders and visiting emperors were frequently inspecting their troops at the nearby training ground (*Talimhane*)¹⁰ opposite of the Artillery Barracks. Such visitors were either staying at the ambassadors' mansions, all of which were located in the adjacent district of *Pera*¹¹, or at the hotels, which had been established in this quarter in the second half of the 19th century. Consequently, Taksim became strongly associated with the military occupation and the bitter days of the war:

“At that time this was really a place of distribution. On those happy days for enemies, the pain was distributed in masses to the hearts of patriots from here. Ey the place of Istanbul, the most crushed by the enemy's boat! And bled deeply! Ey Turkish people, you are worthy to carry in your heart this glorious Monument showing the history of liberation with the most animated contours this is why we erected it in your heart.”¹²

The Monument to the Republic, thus, commemorates the liberation of Istanbul along with the victory of the Turkish people in the War of Independence and their re-birth in world history:

“The Republican monument of Taksim is a work of art telling our re-birth, our struggle for death or glory and the revolutions our Republic brought us.

In this city, where the enemies' flag undulated and which is in pain under the enemies' boat, the Great Conqueror buried the Middle age to the history. And this city is ornamented with the eternal artistic works of Turkish civilization.

After the First World War, they wanted to erase the Turkish people from the history and destroy their glorious honour in history.

In this period between existence and of non-existence, Turkish people needed second Conqueror.

The Republican Monument at Taksim is the vivacious expression of this. This Monument is propped as a symbol of our Republic and our independence and of the second conqueror of Istanbul, Atatürk.”¹³

Since the monument was erected Taksim Square has assumed symbolic significance for the liberation of Istanbul, which is celebrated here every year.

Illustration 2 reproduces a page from a weekly journal dated 1954. The news and the photographs on the left column of the (second) page deal with the celebrations on an earlier date (See also Illustration 3 for the celebrations in 1939). The subtitles of the illustrations translate as follows:

“Below the first photograph:

The liberation feast of Istanbul is celebrated in exuberance with the participation of all Istanbulites. The city was decorated with the flags and people gathered around the Republican Monument of Taksim. At night, the Governor and the Mayor Lütfi Kırdar gave a reception to the deputies for Istanbul, and the high-ranked officers at Pera Palace. He told in his speech the second conquest of Istanbul by Turkish army.

Below the second photograph:

Before the parade of Turkish Army, B. Refik Ahmet Sevengil, one of the members of Municipal Assembly, spoke about the meaning of Istanbul's Conquest, so he translated the gratitude of the city dwellers to the Conqueror (Atatürk). Above you can see Sevengil at the moment of his speech.”¹⁴

SENE: 1 Cild 2: No. 24

FİATİ 10 KURUŞ

SAHİBİ: A. CEMAL

İdarehane:

İstanbul Ankara Caddesi No. 71

2 inci kat Hususi Daire

Telgraf adresi: İstanbul Yeni Mecmua

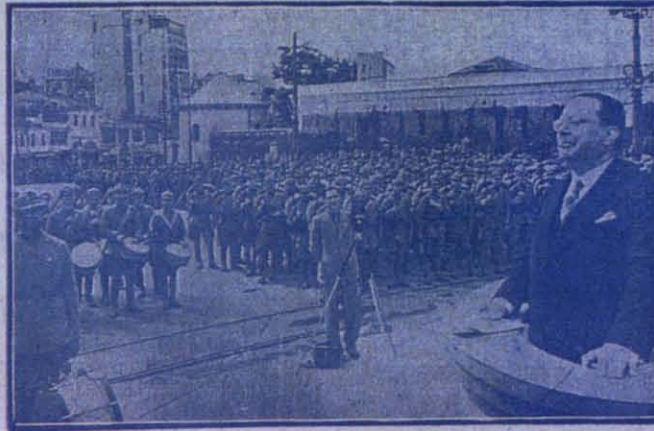
Posta kutusu: 364

YENİ MECMUA

HER HAFTA CUMA GÜNLERİ ÇIKAR, HALK VE GENÇLİK



İstanbulun Kurtuluş Bayramı, Cumhuriyet Ordusunun ve bütün İstanbulluların iştiraki ile coşkun tezahüratla kutlandı. Şehir, sabahın itibaren bayraklarla donanmış ve halk, merasim sahası olan Sultanahmet meydanını, Taksim Cumhuriyet Abidesinin etrafını doldurmuştu. Gece, Vali ve Belediye Reisi Lütfi Kırdar, İstanbul Komutanı, İstanbul'daki Meb'uslar, Yüksek Askari Erkân, Vâhâyet ve Belediye Mâmemsillerine Perapalasta bir ziyafet verdi ve İstanbulun Türk Ordusu tarafından ikinci defa fethinin tarihini, hâtıralarını bir söylevle anlattı.



Cumhuriyet Ordusunun büyük bir irtisamla nuno arın Gazi resminden evvel şehir namına Kürsüye yakın Belediye Şehir Meclisi Akademi B. Hâlik Akmet Sevengil, İstanbul kurtuluşunun yüksek manasını, şük ve belâş söylevi ile anlatarak şehrin şükranlarına tercüman oldu. Vukarda, hatâlet, kâdâsâ söylevini verirken görüyorsunuz.

Illustration 3. The celebrations of the liberation of Istanbul in 1939. (*Yeni Mecmua*, October 1939)

On the other hand, Taksim carried a number of positive connotations, as well. The adjacent district of Pera had been the symbol of progress and change during the 'good days' of the Ottoman era. The district had been selected as the experimental district for the urban reform and become the first Europeanized quarter of the city during the westernization and modernization attempts of the empire in the second half of the 19th century.¹⁶ Furthermore, the barracks of the artillery troops located here were considered a symbol of the military reforms undertaken during this period. It is true that the Kemalist version of westernization and modernization claimed to be radical superior to Ottoman achievements in this direction because it was much more comprehensive and embraced all political, social, and economic institutions. Many historians have argued, however, that it had also much in common with the endeavours of the non-conservative Ottoman elite and can therefore regarded also as their continuation. Taksim and its surroundings provided the appropriate setting for the ceremonial embracing of new ideas the Republic brought the society.

Inscribing a national history

As it is evident from the relevant correspondence and the receipts for donations, the monument was at first intended to consist exclusively of a statue representing Mustafa Kemal (Illustration 4). Pietro Canonica, who had been entrusted with the design of the sculpture, however, felt that the monument should not just be the statue of a single individual. Instead, it was to exhibit a composition that narrated the War of Independence and the subsequent establishment of the Republic. Canonica remarked in his report submitted to the Commission for the Monument¹⁷:



Illustration 4. The receipt for the donation of 100 Turkish Liras by the Orient Bank, declared as “Contribution to the statue to be erected to his Excellency the Gazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha”¹⁸ (Source of document: *Abide Şeref Defteri*)

“According to my opinion, we should not be contented only with the monument of Gazi Paşa Hazretleri, our national struggle should be liven up. With its majesty and architecture, the monument will decorate and widen Taksim Square.”¹⁹

Conniving to the sculptor the commission decided that the monument was to represent the entire period of the national struggle rather than a single hero or a single incident. Below is the relevant part of the commission’s final report before the construction of the monument:

“The work of art, decided to be built at Taksim, will not represent a single event, but the whole period of the National struggle from the beginning to the end.”²⁰

The report continues with the description of the four-sided monument:

“This monument is decorated with the statues around an arch with four fronts. One of these fronts narrates how the Turkish revolution started and how our leader guided our nation with his friends. Here it is necessary to submit to historical realities and to identify the original clothes as well as the social situation of that period. Gazi is represented with his famous posture at Dumlupınar and with his famous uniform at Kocatepe, and the soldiers are represented with the conventional uniforms of those days. The other front portrays the declaration of the Republic. Here Gazi Hazretleri is with his friends wearing civilian clothes and without hats. But at left only the great commander, Fevzi Paşa Hazretleri, and the other lower-rank soldiers are in military attire. The soldiers at the other two fronts are carrying flags; one is in uniforms of today and the other has a ferrous helmet on his head. Our commission accepted the proposal of the artist and made the order, since it represents the historical situation successfully.”²¹

A good deal of argument concerning various aspects of the design had arisen until the commission was ready to prepare the final report. It was especially fiercely debated what the statues of Mustafa Kemal and the other officers, soldiers, and civilians would wear. It was finally decided that on the southern side, which enacts the proclamation of the Republic, “the figures of his Excellency the Gazi, the commanders, soldiers, and other individuals would not wear *kalpaks* (fur hats), but depicted either in today’s uniforms, or bare headed”²². The state’s decision on the

dress of the figures was important since the monument was to represent properly the new Turkish state with its modern army. The *kalpak* had been part of the uniform of the *Kuvâ-yi Milliye* (the national military forces organized during the War of Independence), but not that of the republican Turkish army. Therefore, the three soldiers (the one who stands next to Atatürk is Fevzi Pasha) are wearing the caps of the uniforms used in early republican times, whereas the two founders of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal and İsmet Pasha, are depicted in civilian dress. The group of people behind the leaders of the new Turkish state represent the Turkish nation (Illustration 5).

The composition on the northern side describes the survival struggle of the Turkish nation. Mustafa Kemal is depicted in the front of the group in the posture that has become famous as *Kocatepe* posture and widely associated with the victory of 30th August 1922. He and the Turkish soldiers behind him are represented in their original uniforms (Illustration 6) since the scene narrates a historical event.

Notable are the two figures of “heroic Anatolian woman”: one of them is shown fighting in the war on the front line together with men; the other one is a mother, carrying a child in her arms and standing guard over a box of ammunition.

On each of the two narrow sides of the monument a Turkish soldier is carrying a flag (Illustrations 7a and 7b). At the opening ceremony (Illustration 8), the chairman of the Commission for the Monument and simultaneously deputy for Istanbul, Hakkı Şinasi Pasha described the two soldiers as follows:

The left and right sides of the Monument represent the contrast of the present day: at the right, the Victorious soldier of the Independence war, with the remnants of the war under his feet; and at the left, the heroic Turkish soldier, with an awesome gaze challenging the future.”²³



Illustration 4. The Monument of the Republic: the composition of the national

Illustration 5. The Monument of the Republic: The side representing the proclamation of the Republic (Photograph by the author)



Illustration 6. The Monument of the Republic: the composition of the national struggle (Photograph by the author)

Republic: The Turkish soldier carrying a flag.

above the sculpture is the relief of a veiled woman (Photograph by the author)



Illustration 7a. The Monument of the Republic: The Turkish soldier carrying a flag,

above the sculpture is the mask of a veiled woman (Photograph by the author)



Illustration 7b. The Monument of the Republic: The Turkish soldier carrying a flag, above the sculpture is the mask of an unveiled woman (Photograph by the author)



Հանրապետության հռչակման քաղաքական թարսիմի միջոց, 1928 թն:

Illustration 8. Opening Ceremony (Source of photo: An Armenian schoolbook)

Above each soldier a mask of woman is affixed to the body of the monument: on the one side, a veiled face represents “the captivity of the older period” and on the other, a smiling unveiled face associated with “freedom and the public life of today”.²⁴ The unveiled face signifies the Kemalist image of the Turkish woman, a feature that played a central role in the construction process of national identity (Göle 1997). At the opening ceremony of the monument, the two masks were described as such:

On one side the despairing veiled woman tearing for the misery of the country; and on the other side the enlightened wind of the Great Revolution throws the veil and the new Turkish woman sprinkles her warm happiness to the spirits.”²⁵

It is particularly these two medallions of female faces where *past* and *present* of Turkey are personified. The main parts of the monument tell the story of the transition between the two eras: the rebirth of the nation. Two ‘sacred’ events were selected as representative accounts of the establishment of the Republic. One of them is the triumphal outcome of the national war (30 August 1922), the other one is the day on which the republic was officially declared (29 October 1923). In Kemalist historiography, these two dates separate the centuries of Turkish history in two subsequent stages: the struggle of the people for the national independence and the formation of a national state that was to adhere to Atatürk’s principles and revolutions. The monument offers two more or less interchangeable myths virulent in this kind of official historiography -the *historic rupture* and the *historic beginning*. The two are narrated as connected with the transformation of the people into a *nation*.

The Taksim monument stands there to remind the inhabitants of Istanbul of those myths every day; thus, it contributes to the memory making of the state

(Connerton 1991). It actually does something more than just refreshing *our* memories about *our* 'glorious' past; it also prescribes what to remember about the past. By doing this, it works as a well-designed instrument for the conveyance and the reproduction of the shared memory. Hence, the monument effectively serves to nourish the national commitment to the republican regime and the Kemalist revolutions.

In the eyes of many, the monument fails to adequately symbolize the Kemalist revolution in all its splendour, enthusiasm and patriotic fervour. With its static composition, it has "nothing of the rousing, breath-catching quality of the monuments to be found in lands born of great cataclysms and great revolutions" (Gülersoy 1991: 28). Yet, through this monument, the Republic of Turkey has manifested itself materially for the first time in Istanbul, and its erection was a significant incident because it created a secular and national venue in the nostalgic setting of the old capital.

As far as one can judge from the press of those days, the monument received favourable reactions especially from republicans and was welcomed as a true image of Turkishness:

"Since the history of six centuries we have not witnessed anything, any historical event as Turkish as this monument, which just represents the Turkish essence constituted by the principles of success, freedom, struggle and victory." (Ali Suat, Şehremaneti Mecmuası, August 1928.).²⁶

From the time of its erection until today the symbolic power of the monument has been reconfirmed. It has been and continues to be frequently visited by different political and civil groups, including party delegations, NGO representatives and foreign dignitaries. The monument was widely accepted as a national image in the country so that many popular nationalist reactions have found Taksim Square the place to gather against any 'insult' to the Turkish identity and national values.

Protestors marched with slogans along the *İstiklal Street* (the old *Cadde-i Kebir*), and then converged on the space in front of the monument. Illustration 9 is a snap shot of such a nationalist protest, known as the *Wagon Lits* incident, in 1933.²⁷

Since the early 1970s, the republican atmosphere of the place is supplemented by the Atatürk Cultural Center (*AKM*) –a site of half-political, half-artistic ceremonies (Illustration 10). It includes concert and exhibition halls, and theatres. It serves as the home of the Istanbul Symphony Orchestra and the State and Ballet. Shortly, it contributes for many decades to the construction of the cultural framework the republican ideology needed and served the modernization project enthusiastically implemented by the national state.



Illustration 9. Wagon Lits incident, 1933



Illustration 10. Atatürk Cultural Center, 75th anniversary of the republic (photograph by the author)

Acts of memory

The shrine-like character of the monument turned the square into a 'sacred' site at which commemorative ceremonies are regularly held. Considering the work of recollection, those recurrently performed rites prove to be as efficient as the monument itself. The mythologised events that are visually articulated through the monument find their most impressive representations in ceremonies held at this place. These official rituals are flashbacks to the mythic past and thus create for a few hours time breaks in the mundane everyday life. By way of their regularity they create a sense of continuity between the past and the present and give assurance of the persistence the republican spirit exerts on the public.

It is apparent both from pictures and press coverage that the commemorations held at the square in the first decades of the republican period were much more magnificent than those of today (Illustrations 11a and 11b). At each ceremony, a united band of students and a military body would march along the lines of spectators. High-ranking officials would deliver stirring speeches expressing their gratitude to the founders of the nation and their loyalty to the republic:

“Beloved Mustafa Kemal! The tens of thousands of people who have gathered here today in this square, were formerly trodden under the heel of scouts and haughty foreign soldiers. They are all burning to follow you along the path that you yourself have forged. They are prepared and waiting for your sign, expecting your orders, ready to go whither you will! (Applause and cheers) Accept the greetings and gratitude of hearts full of love and admiration freedom for your great and ever-growing achievements...”²⁸

As the most conspicuous personifications of patriotism, the National War veterans (*gazis*) were the essential staff of this kind of ceremonies. Illustration 12 pictures a group of Kuvâ-yi Milliye warriors in front of the monument (it was printed on the cover of a popular history journal of the 1960s).

One main reason for the difference between present day ceremonies and previous ones is that the square is no longer arranged as a parade ground. Instead, it hosts humbler gatherings and rituals, at which, following the national march played by a military band, a few officials and bureaucrats express their allegiance to the regime by laying wreaths on the monument and reciting their pledge (see Illustration 13 for a present day celebration). One can argue that the major reason for this change is the structural transformation of both the square and the whole city.

The square was officially designed to be a point, from which the republican culture was to spread over the city. In the course of time, however, distinctive patterns have developed, which prescribe the use of space and have swept away the formal and ceremonial structure laid down in the original ground plan of the square.

Practices of political opposition (protest rallies, sit-ins) took place on the same site that was used for the ceremonial re-affirmations of the nationhood. The monument has been attacked with bombs as well as being ornamented with wreaths laid down on official days. Today, it is surrounded by police cars and security bars all day and night.

Moreover, “immediate imperatives” (Hoskote 1997) and needs of street-life accompanied the subversive modes of usage. Thus, what we see today at the square is a “collage”²⁹ of many things: Atatürk Cultural Center (*AKM*), *The Marmara Hotel* and the four-star hotels toward the *Siraselviler Street*, the State Theatre, the *Maksim Gazino*, the Greek Orthodox Church (*Ayia Triada*), Mc Donald’s, parking lots, bus stops, a large subway construction, flower-gypsies and children selling handkerchiefs, telephone-boxes, kiosks, a “super-modern” city toilette next to the monument, book sellers, signboards, cine-visions, giant advertisement boards placed on the top of the buildings, a “historical” tramway stop, countless cars etc... These are the most conspicuous things that we notice at first sight, and the list can be extended. The place has become so crowded with different elements that we can no longer consider it as a *real* (that is, modelled on a European urban example) square.

This transformed state of Taksim square is the product of conflicts and negotiation processes between different claims on the square. I am leaving aside this issue to later chapters. What needs to be emphasized here is that the overall change in the morphology of the square has resulted in the deterioration in its ceremonial status. In a parallel development, the city itself has changed; and the state has found alternative places for official celebrations. Today, Taksim Square is still a significant venue for ritual experience, but there are a number of other places beside it.



Illustration 11a. Nurses in an official ceremony in the mid 1900s



Illustration 11b. A parade of school children

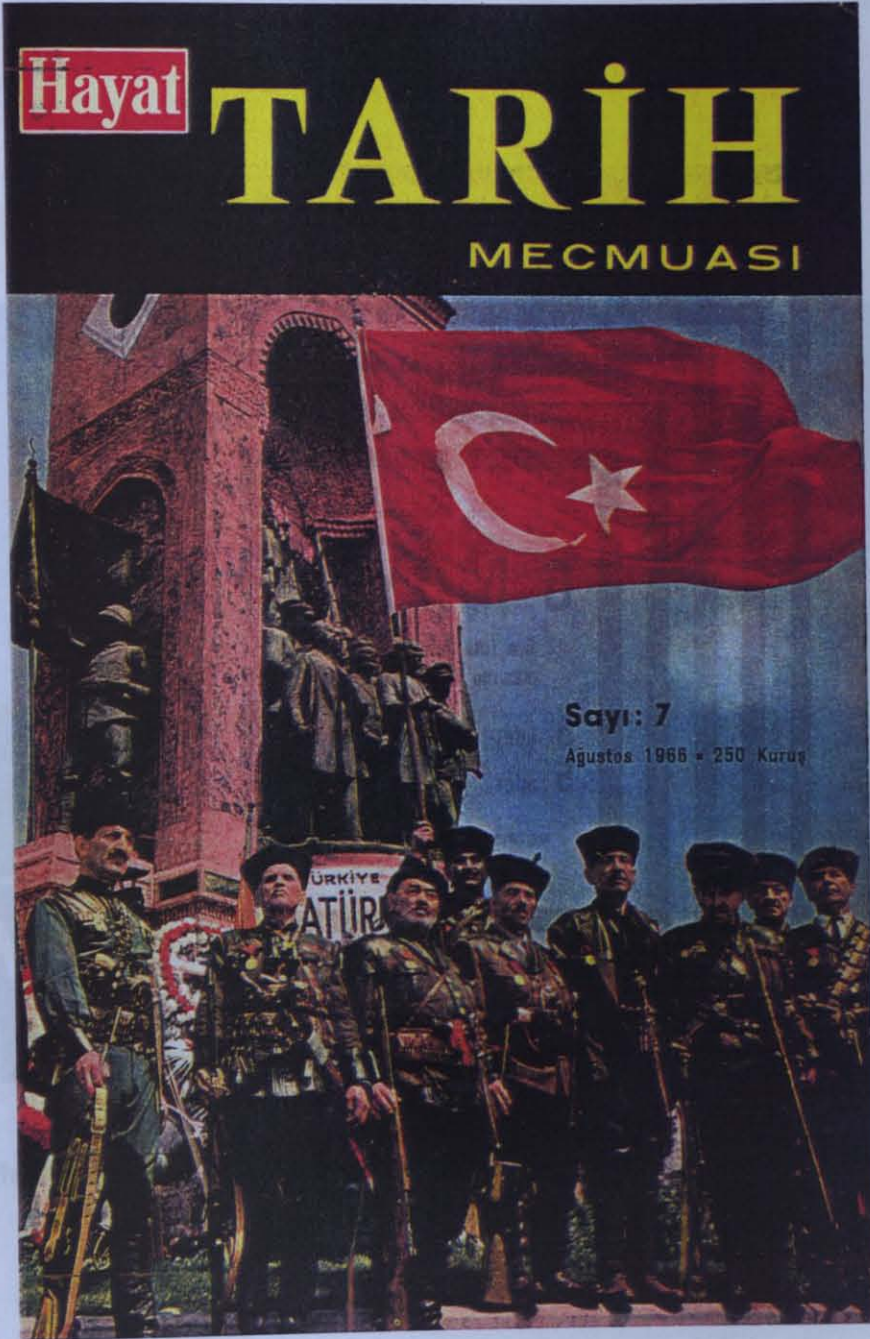


Illustration 12. A group of *gazis* in front of the monument.

Notes

¹ I wrote the words of "glorious" (*şerefli*, 190-17) and "immortal" (*ölümsüz*) with apostrophes since I wanted to indicate that they are creatively used expressions in the Kemalist historiography. The same applies for the other apostrophized words and phrases in the text.

² "Tek yânk, tek vücut olcaz"

³ "Kahraman Türk millet"

⁴ "Türk milletinin 'Milletin birliği'"

⁵ Because, statues showing persons were not erected in the Ottoman Empire with regard to the Muslim religious feelings.

⁶ As Güle (1997) argues, Gülehan criticizes the Kemalist revolution as "didactic secularism" because it is "intellectual and pedagogical", and it "imposes and tries to establish one



Illustration 13. An official ceremony during 75th anniversary of the republic.

Notes

¹ I wrote the words of 'glorious' (*şanlı, şerefli*) and 'tremendous' (*olağanüstü*) with apostrophes since I wanted to indicate that they are commonly used expressions in the Kemalist historiography. The same applies for the other apostrophised words and phrases in the text.

² 'Tek yürek, tek vücut olmak'

³ 'Kahraman Türk milleti'

⁴ "Türk milletinin ölümsüz temsilcisi"

⁵ Because, statues showing persons were not erected in the Ottoman Empire with regard to the Muslim religious feelings.

⁶ As Göle (1997) argues, Gellner coins the Kemalist secularism as "didactic secularism" because it is "moralistic and pedagogical", and it "imposes and teaches secularism as a western way of living" (p. 65).

⁷ The modernization project of the Turkish Republicans was based on the idea of progress through complete westernization of all institutions and should be conceptualized in conjunction with the process of secularization.

⁸ In the bureaucratic literature, the word "*payitaht*" was replaced with the expression of "*devlet makarrı*" (the administrative centre of the state), which referred only to the new capital, Ankara, as it is evident in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's public speech:

"The administrative centre of the Turkish State is the city of Ankara (Türkiye Devleti'nin Makarr-ı İdaresi Ankara şehridir)" Atatürk, Söylev, repr. Ankara, 1966.

⁹ There were two more barracks around Taksim: the Mecidiye Barracks (*Taş Kışla*, now the Istanbul Technical University building behind the Hyatt Regency Hotel) and the Military Band Barracks (now the Military Hospital at Gümüşsuyu). Their presence indicates that the city ended here since, as everywhere in the world, the military barracks were built on the outskirts of cities.

¹⁰ The empty area (*Talimhane*) across the Artillery Barracks was used for many years as training field of the Ottoman troops. After the closure of the barracks in 1920s, the area was turned to be a residential neighbourhood (it is still known as Talimhane), occupied by blocks of flats and favoured by fairly well off Istanbulite families.

¹¹ One might also think that the closeness of the region to Pera would be of advantage to foreign forces since the district had a non-muslim population. Thus, the foreign militaries were staying in a rather Western-style, relatively familiar setting of Istanbul, and they were probably considerably less exposed to negative popular reactions in such a Levantine neighbourhood. Considering this aspect, the monument at Taksim can also be seen as a declaration of the new political power to the non-muslims in the area, who had once been subjects of the Ottoman authority.

¹² From the speech of the Deputy for Istanbul, Hakkı Şinasi Paşa during the opening ceremony of the monument, held on 8 August 1928. See *Taksim Cumhuriyet Abidesi Şeref Defteri*, 1973, p. 40. (Appendix 1)

¹³ An excerpt from the foreword by the mayor of Istanbul, Dr. Fahri Atabey in a book published by the Municipality in the 50th anniversary of the Republic in honour of the Taksim Monument. See *Taksim Cumhuriyet Abidesi Şeref Defteri*, 1973, p. 7-8. (Appendix 2)

¹⁴ See Appendix 4.

¹⁵ See Appendix 3.

¹⁶ Between 1838 and 1908, the Ottoman Empire underwent a drastic phase of sociopolitical and economical transformation aimed at the westernization and modernization of the present institutions. The most remarkable reflections of the initial westernization attempts were on the city texture. The post-1830s were, thus, the years of dramatic changes in city administration and planning. The Ottoman elite thought that the renovated capital city would

be effective in mediating their 'new', 'westernized', 'modernized' visage. They would firstly endeavour to change the image of the city. The reason for choosing Pera as an experimental area for the urban reform is closely related to the demographic structure of the district.

Pera developed as an upper class residential quarter inhabited by the European minorities during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Its closeness to another non-muslim district, Galata had been influential on its demographic composition.

Galata was an old port city occupied by foreign commercial colonies, which made trade and lived there with the privileges obtained since the Byzantine period. The demographic concentration of non-muslims in Galata became remarkable with the increasing number of foreign diplomats due to the capitulations of the Süleyman the Magnificent period (Mantran 1991).

Pera was located on the hill rising behind Galata. Until the 17th century, the area was nothing but an orchard, a virgin land. In the mid-1600s, foreign ambassadors and wealthy Christians began to settle the area; the trees were removed and mansions were built here amid spacious gardens (Mantran 1990). Later, some Armenians, Greeks and a small number of Jews, who were all trading in Galata, were added to the resident population in Pera. On the other hand, the Turks, most of whom janissaries assigned to serve to the ambassadors, were quite small in number.

Pera was highly potential to be a model for the renovation of the rest of the city since it was already been exposed to the western way of living. The reforms in the city administration and the new planning projects were at the same time the final respond of the government to the demands required by the non-muslim population inhabited there.

¹⁷ The Ankara government appointed the Deputy for Istanbul, Hakkı Şinasi Pasha as the chairman of the commission, see *Abide Şeref Defteri*.

¹⁸ "Gazi Mustafa Paşa Hazretlerinin rekz olunacak heykeli için hisse-i iştirak bedelidir. İstanbul'un kıymetşinas halkı namına Büyük Gazi'nin Taksim'deki rekzi mukarrer heykeli masarifi umumiyesine" *ibid*, p. 12.s.

¹⁹ A part of Canonica's first report about the monument: *ibid.*, p. 13. (Appendix 5)

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 20. (Appendix 6)

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 20. (Appendix 7)

²² "Taksim'de dikilecek olan Gazi Hazretleri ile kumandan paşalar ve zabıt ve neferlerimizin ve efradı ahalinin heykelleri kalpaklı olarak yapılmayacağını ve bugünkü üniforma ile veyahut başaçık yapılacağına.." *ibid.*, p. 20.

²³ Elibal 1973, p. 207. (Appendix 8)

²⁴ "Abidenin üstünde iki mask bulunacak ve bunların birisi peçe altında bir kadın çehresi olup eski devrin esaretini, diğer tarafta da yüzü açık gülümseyen bir kadın çehresi hürriyeti, bugünkü hayatı gösterecektir" *Abide Şeref Defteri*, p. 13.

²⁵ Taken from Hakkı Şinasi Pasha's speech. (Appendix 9)

²⁶ See Appendix 10.

²⁷ The nationalist youth had taken some words uttered by the director of a foreign company, Wagon Lits, as an insult to Turkishness and Turkish language. In order to articulate their annoyance, the *National Association of Turkish Students (Milli Türk Talebe Birliği)* organized a protest meeting at Taksim. The photograph is striking in the sense that the protestors could climb on the monument in spite of the mounted policemen.

²⁸ Taken from Hakkı Şinasi Pasha's speech at the opening ceremony: See *Abide Şeref Defteri*, p. 42. (Appendix 11)

²⁹ Hoskote (1997) has also used this description for the public places in Bombay.

CHAPTER III

TAKSIM SQUARE AS A CONTESTED SPACE

A Site of Resistance

The symbolic power of Taksim becomes more evident when we examine its potential to form the stage for a diversity of political expressions and actions. Different social and political actors appropriate the place for their own agendas and in order to communicate their respective messages. As a central city square, Taksim Square serves as the grounds on which any political view can attain public visibility and meet with a wider audience. The importance of such a concretisation in the framework of modern society is obvious even if one has to concede that other media offer alternative modes of communication.

Yet, we still need to consider the more specific reasons for the popularity Taksim Square enjoys with so many and so different political groups and actors. Apparently, the official symbolism of the square has been a provoking factor for its transformation into a terrain of political practices. In the preceding chapter, I discussed the official construction of Taksim Square, and to some extent the socio-cultural implications of this process. This issue constitutes the basis of our discussion here because it is the official meaning(s) attached to the square that has in turn rendered it vulnerable to contestation.

Struggle over the square occurred in various modes. Different political views have tried to gain access to Taksim Square sometimes through temporary appropriations (such as demonstrations or public rallies) and sometimes by “inscribing” on the place physical traces (such as the attempts of the Islamists to build a mosque on the square). Such access amounts either to a sign of victory over the “state” or at least guarantees publicity for a claim in case it addressed itself not directly to matters covered by Kemalist ideology. In retrospection it is possible to observe both types of cases: attempts of access with anti-government or anti-Kemalist agendas, and other ones using Taksim just to confirm their political message and enhance its effect on people because the square exerts such a symbolic power.

What I intend to do in this chapter is to focus briefly on a few snapshots from the recent political history of Turkey. They will be, of course, photographs taken at Taksim. Examined together they reflect how different representations and identifications that transgress and challenge the official iconography have accumulated on the square and changed its public character.

The instance I would like to mention first is the 16 February 1969, now widely known as the *Bloody Sunday* (*Kanlı Pazar*). Leftist students had organized an anti-imperialist rally (known as *Mustafa Kemal rally*) in order to protest against the visit of the Sixth American Fleet to Turkey. They marched from Beyazıt Square to Taksim Square. On the other hand, members of the *National Union of Turkish Students* (*Millî Türk Talebe Birliği*)¹ had heard about the plan for this demonstration and convened in a meeting two days in advance. At this meeting, they decided on a rightist response to the leftist demonstration. At the time when the protesters

assembled at Beyazıt Square, the rightist group crowded the neighboring Beyazıt Mosque and prepared for attack.

When about thirty thousand marchers reached Taksim in the afternoon, they found on the square the rightist crowd along with one thousand policemen (then two third of the total number of policemen in Istanbul) waiting for them and shouting slogans. In the ensuing clash between the leftist protestors and the rightist group that enjoyed the support of the police force, two protestors (both identified as workers) died and more than hundred people were seriously injured (Günaydın, *Hürriyet*, and *Cumhuriyet*, February 17th 1969; *Nokta* February 1987).

The Mustafa Kemal rally was the first of several demonstrations of protest to occur at Taksim Square through the last three decades. The Bloody Sunday can also be considered as the first serious violent fight between leftists and rightist demonstrators as well as between students and the police in the history of contemporary Turkey. The incident thus established a repertoire of spatial practice at Taksim Square to which the secular circles would often refer in their conflict with Islamist or nationalist forces during the years to come.² The “Bloody Sunday” is widely regarded by the media as a “provocation”³ by state officials severely suffering from an anti-communism syndrome. Others accused the government of connivance at the violence.⁴ On the other hand, in the official view this street battle was neither a reactionary or Islamist nor a students’ movement,⁵ but an “arrangement of the communists”⁶.

Eight years later, Turkey experienced its first bloody Labour Day. Hundreds of thousands of mostly young people including members of leftist political organizations, their sympathizers, students, workers, state officials, and some other professional groups attended at the labour-day meeting, which was organized at

Taksim Square by the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK) (Illustration 14). Although it was a legal meeting and the marchers kept a reasonable discipline, the rally ended in violence. This time, the blood-toll was much heavier: Thirty-three people died, hundreds were injured (*Cumhuriyet*, 2 May 1977), and 98 protesters were arrested (*Nokta*, 4 May 1986).

The major repercussion of these two bloody demonstrations for the usage of the square was that political violence became an integral element of the semiological repository of the square. The energy that had exploded on these two days was in a way imagined as the potential of Taksim as a space of resistance activated by mass demonstrations. Solely as a central city square, devoid of its official symbolism, Taksim Square is seen as ready to erupt into open conflict. Yet, it is rather this very symbolism that largely determines the potential of the locality as the site of popular political action. Later instances of demonstrations on the square can be interpreted as challenge of the ideological hegemony of the republican state. Both the official ideology and the protest against it are supported by this spatial symbolism.

In another twist, a public rally or demonstration on Taksim Square may direct a protest against an anti-republican discourse, such as fundamentalism. In this case, the site turns to be a place of “social solidarity” for those who try to protect the values represented by the square (Ekinci 1997: 13).⁷ Or, the square can be used for public complaints about different matters, ranging from those of day-to-day politics to larger political disputes such as those on civil rights or business law. All of them can thus become the object of dispute in public sphere.⁸ In all cases, the square serves as a perfect medium for the conveyance of any message.



Illustration 14. Popular resistance on the square: Labors' Day in 1977

(Source of photograph: DİSK publication)

On the other hand, since the square has been increasingly associated with political mobilization, authorities tended to regard it as a risky place that needs to be kept under close surveillance. They have tried to 'tame' it first by prohibiting protest rallies and sit-ins, then ensuring a massive and regular police control. Today, the monument is no longer accessible because of barriers around it.

One of the most recent unauthorized demonstrations was organized on Women's Day, 1998. The day, which was celebrated in other parts of Turkey and Istanbul in a peaceful atmosphere, ended, not surprisingly, with a violent clash at Taksim. A group of about two thousand people, including male demonstrators and a smaller group of HADEP supporters (a leftist political party widely regarded as sympathizing with the PKK), marched from Lyceé de Galatasaray through the İstiklal Street to encounter the police barricade at Taksim Square. The majority of the demonstrators were Kurdish women. With traditional attires in PKK colors and shouting slogans in Kurdish language they challenged the figure of the idealized Kemalist woman gazing at them from the top of the Republican Monument. The police forces tried to drive the crowd back by using batons and tear gas. Most of the demonstrators offered resistance throwing stones and using wooden sticks. Many people were seriously injured. A large group of demonstrators broke shopwindows and damaged parked cars while fleeing through the back streets of Beyoğlu. In the ensuing clashes, 12 policemen were injured and 28 demonstrators were arrested (Milliyet, 9 March 1998).

Like the other instances mentioned, Women's Day can serve as an example for the both spatialized and "corporeal" (Schirmer 1994) nature of social movements. It illustrates how alternative concepts of group identity seek visibility on an officially dominated public place. The starting point of the female marchers, that is the front of

Lycée de Galatasaray, was not arbitrarily chosen. It is a politically charged space that has served as a “central organizing theme and expression of collective identity” for another kind of demonstration (ibid.: 185-186). Previously, it had already been transformed into a site of resistance through the weekly sit-ins of the so-called “*Cumartesi Anneleri*” (*Saturday Mothers*). For a number of years, every Saturday a group of women had assembled in a non-violent action at this spot in order to protest against the disappearance of their relatives who had been arrested by the security forces on political charges. These women’s demonstrations had been a rather popular form of action serving the demystification of the “state”. Demanding to learn the ‘truth’ about the vanished bodies of their beloved ones, the “Saturday Mothers” openly challenged the tacit presumption many members of the security forces appeared to nourish: That they have the right to arrest-and-exterminate people; an assumption that is an implication of the official mentality typical for national-security regimes.

On Women’s Day 1998, this specific location that had already been employed as the spatial focus of collective action, was again used for political purpose (Offe 1984, cited in Schirmer 1994). The Saturday Mothers’ actions⁹ had provided the vocabulary for another political statement. Yet, the monument was still the primary object of appropriation for the protestors as it maintains its privileged status in the symbolic hierarchy. Its specificity for the official ideology concurrently invested it with a universal quality so that any political group seeks to make use of it to perfectly convey the gravity of its claim to the global audience.

A feminist reading of that day would firstly state the significance of the women’s bodily presence as it challenged the legitimacy of the state image traditionally associated with masculinity. The women were temporarily successful in

feminizing the place that on official occasions is conventionally occupied predominantly by soldiers and male bureaucrats (Schirmer 1994). Yet, that the majority of the protestors gathering there had a Kurdish identity along with a female one is the second, and perhaps the more important, aspect of their action. Kurdishness appeared to claim priority on their agenda; and even a more critical remark would be that Women's Day was indeed 'hi-jacked' by the Kurdish nationalism. The protestors would symbolically depart from the gender issue towards the matter of Kurdish identity as they marched through Beyoğlu to reach the monument. While some feminists might comment that women's body, which has been objectified during the construction of Turkish national identity, was in this instance used as a "site of disobedience" (ibid); I would argue that it came to be instrumentalized for another manifestation of nationalism.

The earlier two instances, that is the Bloody Sunday and the Bloody May 1st, have a prior claim on my discussion, because they provided a model of popular resistance that the further actions followed. Both events still exert a symbolic power and provide the best references for the political literature on the square. However, this is a dialectical situation in which popular resistance would always find its inspiration, but also confront with the official measures taken against resistance.

The Debate on the Taksim Mosque

The political struggles over the project of building a mosque at Taksim date back to the early 1950's. The initial attempts are documented by the Istanbul branch of the Association of Monuments of Turkey (*Türkiye Anıtlar Derneği İstanbul Şubesi Neşriyatı*) in a publication entitled "Our Monuments" (*Âbidelerimiz*) and issued in 1954:

“With the support of the public we decided to construct a Mosque at Taksim according to the model of Yeni Camii, a mosque with two minarets. The Istanbul Municipality had accepted our proposal in principle and began to search for the appropriate place at Taksime for the mosque; yet did not approve our suggestions for the place (we offered the area behind the Maksem or Gezi Parkı). In the reply to our application, it was promised that a place for a mosque would be allocated in the new construction plan of Taksim. But, later we were informed that there was no suitable place for the mosque at Taksim, but the mosque would find its place in the new construction plan of the Beyoğlu district. We were finally informed that the area near the Teşvikiye Cemetery was convenient for building the mosque... It is not a good idea, because that place is far away from Taksim. So we all protest this decision and insist on our proposal of building a mosque at Taksim. We hope to declare to the public opinion that the mosque will be built in the nearest future.” (p. 218) (Appendix 12)

The both determined and sober tone of these lines has been honored by the developments: the project of a monumental mosque at Taksim, just next to the Monument of the Republic, has found supporters throughout the last 45 years. By the 1990's, of both the municipality and the national government have made its realization seem quite a possible. Yet, the project has always met with strong resistance from Republican and secularist forces within the state and civil society. The debate has often been fierce and highly emotional. Only today, it has been removed from the agenda – whether temporarily or for good, is an open question.

In this chapter, after briefly describing the historical process of the project, I would like to focus mainly on the phase (the 1994-1998 period) through which it attained a radical political claim, and I intend to deal with the conceptual implications of the discursive battle occurred in this specific period. By coining the expression of “discursive battle”, I try to catch both the fierceness of the debate and the scope of the confrontation between the dominant Republican rhetoric and the counter-arguments and between alternative readings of past, cultural heritage, and identity. Thus, the battle shows how the identity of this square -and indeed of Istanbul in general- is being questioned all the time and in which ways the

hegemonic definition of the place by the early-Republican state elite is being challenged. The mosque project has been rather successful in terms of contesting the official identity given to the square and disputing its established symbolism. By focusing on a significant central public space of the Republican period, the project has actually been an efficient way of challenging the basic assumptions of the Kemalist elite on major cultural issues such as national identity, cultural heritage and modernity.

The monumental mosque conceived by the Association of Monuments was the ideal of “a valuable artefact, which would transmit the genius of (*their*) ancestors to the present day”¹⁰. Thus, the mosque had to represent successfully that genius, which was identified with the Ottoman-Islamic heritage. In reply to the proposal of the association, the Istanbul Municipality “could not find any suitable place for a mosque” in the Taksim area. However, there was nothing like a zoning problem, as the republicans had already reserved *that place* for legitimating their own power. The Monument to the Republic stood there as an expression of the rupture between the republic and the past, it was not available for a representation of the continuity with the Ottoman Empire. The republican elite had adopted as its ancestors not the Ottomans but the “heroes” who had contributed to this rupture either by fighting in the War of Independence or by actively participating in the establishment of the national state. The competition between these two alternative conceptions of ancestry and cultural legacy is the background of the political battles over the proposed mosque. As long as they co-exist as rivalling options, continuation of the debate cannot be inhibited.¹¹

The next serious attempt to build the mosque was made in May 1977 during the coalition government of the first Nationalist Front (*Milliyetçi Cephe*) chaired by

Süleyman Demirel. Just thirteen days after the “Bloody Labour Day” the Ministry of Culture sent an application letter to which the project of the “*Taksim Camii Şerifi Külliyesi*” had been attached, to the Supreme Council of Monuments (*Anıtlar Yüksek Kurulu*). In the submitted project, the mosque and its complex were proposed to be built next to historical water distributor (*Maksem*). For the left wing of the political spectrum, “this was exactly the place where people had been shot on May 1st”.¹²

The first legal obstacle for the project was the “property issue” on the area (Ekinçi 1997). According to the law, the mosque had to be built on a single plot of land which had to be consolidated by uniting shares belonging to the General Directory of Pious Endowments (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*), the treasury, the municipality of Istanbul and the state-owned Bank of Agriculture (*Ziraat Bankası*). In 1977, the Council of Monuments supported the project and the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement (*Bayındırlık ve İskan Bakanlığı*) altered the zoning and construction plan of the area in order to remove the legal obstacles for building the mosque at the proposed place. The property issue was solved in the span of three years by modifying the project. The project then included a complex consisting of a mosque, a shopping mall (with an office of Ziraat Bankası), and an autopark.¹³ But, by this time, the military coup of 1980 caused the delay of the project.

The primary urban concern of the mayor of the military period consisted apparently of traffic and parking problems. The mayor, who was said to aim at maintaining a military discipline in traffic, started his reorganization with Taksim (ibid.). This led to yet another alteration of the zoning plan that amounted to the cancellation of the previous decision on the mosque complex.¹⁴ The General Directory of Pious Endowments criticized the government’s negative attitude towards the mosque project. It stressed the need for a mosque in a central touristic

place such as Taksim especially in the light of Turkey's relations with the Arabic world:

"Taksim is a touristic center crowded with skyscraper-hotels. Today, foreign politics of Turkey is marked by intensive political affairs with the Islamic world and Arabic states. A mosque at Taksim will attract the attention of the Arabic countries to Turkey and Taksim will offer itself as an international site. The delegates of the Arabic states, who participated in the Conference of Islamic States held at Sheraton Hotel last year, had pointed to the need for a mosque at Taksim and the ambassadors of Arabic countries had promised to provide financial support for the mosque project. This also proves that Taksim urgently needs a mosque." (The General Director of Public Endowments, Süleyman Eyüboğlu, January 7th 1983)¹⁵ (Appendix 13)

The General Directorate of Pious Endowments were adamant in defending and propagating their project and carried their claim as far as to the Council of State (*Danıştay*). The outcome of the court-case was typical for the period when the military, which has internalized a self-image as the guardian of secularism in Turkey, ruled the country: the mosque project was not found appropriate "with regard to the city planning principles and public benefit"¹⁶. The experts who acted on behalf of the government reported that the area was instead suitable for a car-park.

After three years of military rule a new political era began that was characterized by a strong ambition to apply new economic policies and the aim of greater openness and liberalization. The central figure in this economic restructuring process was the new Prime Minister Turgut Özal who managed to form a political alliance under the name of the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*) that included liberal center-right, religious and nationalist interests. This party enjoyed enough popular support to ensure that the government could proceed with its economic reform. Upon realizing the importance of the metropolitans for greater integration with the world economy, the government started to make significant alterations in urban policy, and concerned itself especially with the city of Istanbul.¹⁷ A full

discussion of the connections between the political initiatives serving the aim of economic expansion on the one hand and their reflections on the urban context on the other is beyond the scope of this chapter. Yet, it is necessary to note that during the mid-1980s the project to transform Istanbul to a “global city” was being supported by an image campaign marketing the city as “the East in the West and the West in the East” and “gateway to the Orient” (Bartu 1999: 32).¹⁸ Istanbul’s particular identity, and its multi-layered past including the Byzantine and the Ottoman-Islamic cultural heritages, was considered to be of advantage for the city in competing with its rivals in the world. This discourse on ‘global Istanbul’ has been used by different groups, including Islamists. It was combined with other discourses and reproduced through different debates in variable contexts.

Keyder and Öncü (1993) propose the following explanation for the ANAP government’s concern with Istanbul:

“In the delicate balancing act between demands of the international financial agencies, pressures of conflict and compromise from among different factions within the party itself, and the exigencies of maintaining its slim majority at the polls, ANAP’s political strategy became increasingly focused upon major metropolitan centers as both showcases of the new era of internationalism, and as the most likely bases of its clientelistic networks and electoral appeal. Istanbul naturally emerged as the privileged recipient of this attention.” (p. 21)

Thus, under the pressure of the need for “comprehensive and radical” (ibid.: 21) changes in Istanbul, the government applied certain policy measures including the search for additional financial resources in order to increase the city’s revenue that could be spent for the restructuring of the urban core. Priority was given to grand projects in public transport and infrastructure as well as “housing developments”; but beside these the Istanbul municipality concentrated on redesigning projects that should transform the city into a “world city”. The competition opened for the project

of redesigning Taksim Square that had been arranged by the Metropolitan Municipality of Greater Istanbul in 1987 claimed to serve this purpose:

“Rearrangement of the distorted places, which damage the “world city” image of Istanbul, constitutes the major component of our project. We are principally aiming at providing the city a civilized form” (The Major Bedrettin Dalan, quoted from the project booklet) (Appendix 14)

On the other hand, the left wing was critical to Dalan’s political strategies and claimed that the mayor arranged this competition in order to profit politically –and of course economically- from the mosque project under the guise of a serious municipal redesigning enterprise. In their opinion, the mosque debate turned into a commercial issue with negotiated benefits for both the proponents of the project and the municipality during mayor Dalan’s period (Ekinci 1997).

However, the competition concluded with the rejection of the mosque project. This had two reasons. Firstly, the jury did not assume principally a positive attitude towards the idea of a mosque at Taksim Square. Secondly, the winners of the competition did not include a mosque in their projects by defining the surrounding of Maksem as “recreation area with historical image” (Ekinci 1997b). Similarly, almost all of the competing projects excluded the mosque from their proposals by stressing on the identification of the square with the Republic.

Attempts to build a mosque on the square were institutionalized through the establishment of a foundation (vakf) at about the time of the local elections of 1989. The founders of the vakf included politicians, bureaucrats, and prominent businessmen with various political opinions. Under the administration of the social democratic mayor Nurettin Sözen, the vakf waited for the approval of its application to the Council of Protecting Culture and Natural Resources (*Istanbul 1 Numaralı Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kurulu*) and to the Istanbul Municipality. The council decided to make an archeological excavation in the area; and consequently

the conservative-Islamist municipality of the next administrative period began to search for a new place for the projected mosque. At this stage, the area behind the Maksem was announced “an archeological area” as the reports pointed to the existence of a Byzantine necropolis underground. Thus, the place gained a new meaning, which had not been taken into consideration before. Upon this report, the council prohibited in principle the construction of any building in the area. The hope of building the mosque was now diverted to another area, the *Gezi Parkı*.

A Discourse of “Conquest”

The official attempts of the mid-1980’s to erect the Taksim Mosque can be interpreted as an indicator of a political process through which the boundaries of the state nationalism would be re-defined so as to include the Islamic elements as well. Unlike the previous project, by the mid-1990’s, the mosque was being proposed not to be integrated to the symbolism and the functioning of the square, but to re-define the dominant meaning of the place. The beginning of this new process was the local elections of March 1994, which resulted in the victory of the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*).

The central theme of the Refah Party’s election campaign had been “the second conquest of Istanbul (in terms of leading the darkness into the brightness)”¹⁹. Yet, the party politics required some sacrifice of this radical discourse especially after Refah formed a coalition with the centre-right Party of the True Path (*Doğru Yol Partisi*) on the national level. The leader of the Refah Party, Necmettin Erbakan would become the first Islamist Prime Minister in a coalition government. In his party’s rhetorics, this political success referred to a “great revolution” and caused hopes for “the re-establishment of Great Turkey”²⁰ to flourish. The mosque project

was to be placed in the core of this revolutionary “civilization project” of the Islamist movement.

The discourse of reconquest had not been newly invented. The “expectation that the young generation (that is the generation as young as Mehmed the Second, the Conqueror) would conquer Istanbul for the second time” was a favorite theme of the Islamist and conservative-nationalist political literature since the 1950’s (Bora 1995)²¹. The underlying assumption of the motive is a polemical criticism: the architectural texture and thus the cultural identity of Istanbul is regarded as in a state of degeneration that set in with the process of westernization since the end of the 18th century. The degenerated city that had lost its “pristine purity” (Bartu 1997), then suffered much more with the modernization project of the Republican era.

Using this and similar motives the Refah Party has successfully exploited a pre-existing nostalgic literature on the Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul. On the other hand, the logic of globalization forced Refah’s politicians to redefine their conquest discourse in order to reconcile it with the project of a “global city” as well as with the thriving, yet demanding, Islamist entrepreneurs.²²

The Islamist representation of Istanbul, whether it includes the ‘global’ component or not, is founded on an alternative historical account. The official discourse it challenges has celebrated the liberation of Istanbul by the republican forces as the second conquest of the city (remarkably enough, this republican line of thought also alludes to the conquest in 1453 by Sultan Mehmed). Islamists argue that the Turkish Republic stripped the city of its personality through forced westernization and modernization policies rather than liberating it. Thus, in their alternative narrative, the date of 6 October 1923 refers not to *the conquest*, but to *the fall* of the city. Resurrection of the lost “genuine”, that is the Ottoman-Islamic,

identity of the old *payitaht* (capital), has always occupied a high place on the political agenda of the Islamic movement, and turned into a political promise during the election campaign of the Refah Party. The project of constructing a mosque and an "Islamic Cultural Center" at Taksim Square became the symbolic focus of this promise:

"Taksim is a crucial region for tourism in Istanbul. Someone who visits this area will have a sense that he is in an Islamic city, in the first place. When we gradually bring out the historical and cultural texture of our city, tourists who visit Istanbul will understand that they are in a city populated by Muslims." (Tayyip Erdoğan, *Yeni Zemin*, March 1994)²³ (Appendix 15)

The Refah municipality went to the extremes in their claim of conquest; for example, a leading party official proposed to "clean" entirely the ruins of the Byzantine walls, because "they did not want an Istanbul in a Byzantine atmosphere" (cited by Bora 1995: 46). Yet, by the time, they had to grade down their claims as they received reactions both from the proponents of globalization²⁴ and some Islamist intellectuals, who emphasized the "pluralistic" aspect of the ideal Ottoman Istanbul image that embraced non-Muslim elements in the city as well.

The Islamist imagination related to the Taksim Mosque is an explicit manifestation of the compromise between the conquest discourse and the 'global city' project. The mosque proposal is now a far cry from the *Yeni Cami* model of the 1950's. Indeed, it seems to be more pretentious and much closer to the idea of the *image or theme parks of the West*.

"This Mosque should not be an ordinary mosque. Its construction should be started on May 29th, the conquest date of Istanbul, it should be opened during the 700th anniversary of the foundation of Ottoman Empire. Its dome can be designed like a helmet. An Institute for Research on Conquest can be established as well.

One can enter the mosque from the subway, meet Fatih or Alparslan on a journey to the past and watch their struggle in the exhibition galleries." (Abdurrahman Dilipak, *Akit*, January 29th 1997) (Appendix 16)

The Taksim Mosque project offers itself as a cultural program, that promises to give Istanbul the chance to make peace with its “genuine” identity inherited by the Ottoman and the Selçuklu civilizations.

“At *Sadabat Cultural Center*, one can organize conferences especially with the countries once belonging to the Ottoman Empire, arrange competitions on literature and theatre. This is not an act of discrimination. This is an occasion for making peace with ourselves.” (Abdurrahman Dilipak, *Akit*, January 30th 1997) (Appendix 17)

Apparently, the Islamic image of Istanbul was inevitably tuned to the globalization trend in Turkey. The conceptual alliance between the ‘Islamic’ and the ‘global’ was legitimized in the sense that it would give the additional opportunity of “restoring the city to its centrality in the cultural, scientific and artistic realms during the Ottoman period” (asserted by the Islamist writer, Mustafa Kutlu, cited *ibid.*) In other words, the project of the ‘global Istanbul’ was reproduced in an alternative Islamist version inspired by the representation of “a Balkan metropolis, which dominates both the Muslim and the Orthodox worlds” (Bora 1995: 45).

The Struggle over Gezi Parkı

Following the failure of the previous enterprises, the city council prepared a larger project proposing the construction of an Islamic Cultural Center at Gezi Parkı (*İnönü Promenade*²⁵). By this, the discussion shifted towards the core of the square, something that would intensify the debate over the issue.

“People demand a Mosque at Taksim. It (the mosque) won’t be at the periphery of the square. We shall erect it at the right place, which is Gezi Parkı.” (from Necmettin Erbakan’s speech in a meeting with RP-based mayors on January 8th 1995; *Cumhuriyet*, January 27th 1997) (Appendix 18)

The park seemed to be a better choice of place as it occupies a central location and because its base is higher than the square so that a monumental mosque would indeed dominate the area. Such a mosque would be located just opposite the Republican monument, which in turn would appear incomparably small in size, and the Greek Orthodox Church, *Aya Triada*.. By constructing an Islamist cultural center at the square, the city council would also have challenged the cultural project of modernity. In this cultural center, there would be no room for ‘immoral’, ‘false arts’ performances such as opera or ballet²⁶, which had been denounced by the Islamist mayor Erdoğan as sexual provocation with no relation with arts. Instead, the program envisaged seminars on topics favorable to the Islamist community; international conferences, which would welcome theoreticians and practitioners from Muslim countries with the aim to integrate Turkey with the Islamic world; and ‘real’ arts performances such as concerts by ‘*aşık*’s (‘lover’, a traditional poet who plays traditional Anatolian instruments, like *saz*, or *kopuz*,) or ‘*fasıl*’s (Turkish artistical music datings back to the Ottoman period).

While the mosque project waited to be started, Refah would continue to implement its cultural program through various activities, often organized in the Gezi Parkı. Since 1994, the Beyoğlu municipality sets up each year a large *Ramazan* tent inside the park, in which the *iftar* meal is served to the urban poor and some activities like concerts, exhibitions or *Karagöz* shows (a traditional Turkish shadow theatre) are carried out afterwards.

The Habitat II Summit, held in Istanbul in 1996, gave the Islamist wing the opportunity of overtly challenging the cultural policy of the secularists. In relation to the conference, they argued that the secularists’ portrayal of ‘global Istanbul’ ignored the “genuine” history and identity of the city by reducing “our” cultural legacy into

Hitit and Sumerian civilizations and overemphasizing the universal values. In order to open the dominant discourse on “our cultural existence” to public debate and discuss the alternative perspectives, they organized meetings of their own opposing the official Habitat Conference. Given its centrality and closeness to the Conference venue, Gezi Parkı was again the most convenient site for their activities aiming at the Habitat audience coming from various parts of the world. The objective of the alternative conference can be described as presenting Istanbul as a city with an authentic Ottoman-Islamic heritage and identity.

On the other hand, what made the Mosque urgent for some intellectuals was the closeness of the square to the area of Beyoğlu. They would associate this area with “the cosmopolitan degeneration” (Bartu 1999)²⁷ brought about by modernization and Westernization, and characterize it as a “germs’ nest” (*mikrop yuvası*), “where young girls with mini-skirts are on the run from one night club to another”²⁸. Therefore, building an Islamic cultural center at Gezi Parkı would be a successful manoeuvre within the cultural “cihad” (as Tanıl Bora has coined it), which the Islamists pursued against the “modern cosmopolitan” deterioration of the area (p. 48).

When we examine how, and through which discourses, the revised mosque project was supported by the Islamist media, we initially observe that the idea of the Taksim Mosque quickly developed into a press-campaign revolving around the idea that Taksim needs a mosque. Right after the declaration of Gezi Parkı as “the new area for the project” (Cumhuriyet, 27 January 1997) at the meeting held by the Municipal Council of Beyoğlu on 21 January 1997, especially, the radical Islamist newspaper, *Akit*, covered the issue at length. The paper allocated long columns for the related declarations of politicians and activists in support of the mosque project.

It also frequently pictured the Friday prayers on the streets in order to point out the necessity of a mosque at this location:

Professor Nevzat Yalçıntaş, the President of the Association of Intelligentsia criticized severely the people who reacted against the Taksim Mosque Project:

‘Those who are against our mosque, do not have any legitimate reasons. The claim that the mosque will destroy the image of the square is just a pretext. The Mosque will beautify the area and attribute an identity to the place.

Taksim urgently needs a mosque. I personally need it. As an Istanbulite, I often go to Taksim either to participate in a conference or go shopping. There are many other people like me. Muslim tourists also need it when they visit Taksim. (Akit, February 9th 1997)

“(Headline: Is Taksim Moscow?)

People, who are against the construction of Taksim Mosque, saw once again that the two little mosques near the area are insufficient. Although there are many churches on the Istiklal Street, there are only two little mosques and the Muslim community has to pray on streets every Friday” (Akit, February 2nd 1997) (Appendix 19)

The newspaper was complaining about the insufficient capacity of the mosques and mescids in face of the total number of the Muslim population in the district (Akit, 5, 6 and 7 February 1997). Taksim was critically described as a “heaven for minorities”(Akit, 6 February 1997) with reference to the abundance of synagogues and churches. Accordingly, the district was regarded as “under occupation” (Akit, 7 February 1997), and as the ‘real owners’, Muslim Turks had to claim it back.

On the secularist front, the most active opposition to the mosque project came from the Chamber of Architects, MMOB. Concerned especially with the political overtones of the project, MMOB frequently pointed to the republican symbolism of both the square and the park:

“The mosque project of the Refah Party should be debated as a matter of politics beyond the discussion on urbanism and city culture. It proves how this Islamist group, which came to the power both at local and national level, is actually antagonistic to the republican civilization.” (Oktay Ekinci, Cumhuriyet, January 27th 1997) (Appendix 20)

At the outset, the secularists seemed to have the upper hand in the struggle because building a mosque in the park was claimed to be impossible on legal grounds. Together with MMOB, many of the secularist NGOs collectively voiced their objections to the Ministry of Culture by putting forward the legal obstacles for the project (Cumhuriyet 27 January 1997).

While Refah, in alliance with the Islamist media, tried to shield the project against the secularist opposition, it had to avoid polarization between the party and military as well²⁹. So, they had to facilitate compromise between the mosque and Turkish nationalism:

“(Headline: The mosque and the barracks)
 Unity of religion is essential for Turkish Republic and nationalism: and that is the Islam. Islamic elements would not be regarded as minority. Arabic, Kurdish, Albanian people and others were unified by Islam to constitute the Turkish nation. The War of Independence was actually dedicated to religion; today what we see here is again the alliance of the Mosque and the barracks.” (Dilipak, February 3rd 1999) (Appendix 21)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there used to be the Artillery Barracks (*Topçu Kışlası*) on the area. It was one of the earliest official buildings of Ottomans' westernization effort, which was constructed at the beginning of the 19th century for the artillery troops of the newly formed regular army. The building had suffered considerable damage as a result of the reactionary rebellion occurred on 31st March 1909. Once the republic has been established, like other buildings inherited from the empire, the Barracks would be given a new function. By the 1920s, it had no longer any connection with anything military or political, and its courtyard was soon turned into a stadium where the first national football matches took place and a new contemporary epidemic, football fanaticism, would prepare to sweep through the society. By the end of the 1930s, the ruins of the barracks were totally demolished in accordance with the rearrangements of the French urban planner, Henri Prost.

Interestingly, the Islamists were now claiming back the mosque of the Taksim Barracks. In the eyes of their secularist opponents, such a claim could be nothing else than a political stratagem aimed both at misleading the public opinion and at reducing the risk of any military interference in the affair. Reminding that “the Barracks was a marker of the westernization process that Refah would for long severely criticize” (Oktay Ekinçi, *Cumhuriyet*, 3 February 1997), secularists pointed to the “insincerity” of the argument of the “alliance between army and religion”:

“Proposal of reconstructing the Taksim Barracks, which had been demolished at the 31 March rebellion (1909), is of course a pretext to build the Taksim Mosque. If the Islamist circles were emotionally attached to the barracks, the Rami Barracks would not be demolished by the Refah Municipality.” (*Cumhuriyet*, February 3th 1997) (Appendix 22)

Concluding Remarks

What I attempted to do in this section was to present a narrative analysis primarily based on the press coverage. Yet, I should admit that it does not actually portray the full scope of this public debate. What would be needed for such a portrayal are interviews with the inhabitants of Beyoğlu, and with the more or less frequent users of the square. Only by this, it is possible to explore how the mosque project has been debated among the public on streets, in coffee houses etc., shortly, in daily life. This is the major methodological limitation of this study.

In the absence of a fieldwork, the research, still, reveals the multiple dimensions of this controversial issue. Firstly, the mosque debate is a proof for the basic assumption that place has never a single and a fixed meaning, or identity, but is always open to contestation. Thus, the place can be discursively constructed in different ways. Particularly, the project of the Refah Party was a serious attempt to transform the meaning of Taksim Square and pretentious enough to create an

atmosphere of tension. People took the issue very seriously, because they believed that the mosque, if the project were accomplished, would have been standing there not only as a symbol of the Islamist claim, but a symptom of a principal change in the fundamentals of the republic³⁰. Today, everybody also bears in her mind that such a challenge might emerge again in the future.

The mosque debate also offers itself as an interesting case showing the interaction between different cultural assertions on the one hand and the current politics on the other. By exploring the debates over this project, I also dealt with the competing discourses on the identity of the square, which is elaborated and justified by alternative historical narrations. Thus, I briefly examined how different conceptions of cultural identity as well as different readings of the past shape a political debate of the present.

I should also indicate that the discourses themselves are not fixed and unchanging; instead, their boundaries can be re-defined so as to embrace new conceptions and understandings. Politics is, in a way, the area of discursive manoeuvres. In this case, it is the dominant logic of globalization that required the accommodation of the Islamist discourses of the 'Islamic' and the 'authentic' Istanbul to the global city concept.

The Global in the Local: The Turkcell Advertisement

Very recently, a giant advertisement poster was hanging over one of the facades looking towards the Taksim Square. It was an advertisement of an internationally owned GSM company, *Turkcell* (See Illustration 15). Standing at the opposite of the Republican Monument with a picture of the time shortly after it had

been erected, it created a kind of mirror effect through the juxtaposition of the past and the present.



Illustration 15. The Turkcell Advertisement (a photograph by the author)

This old sepia photograph in the advertisement would stir certain emotions, principally nostalgia for the past of two or three generations ago. The spectator was invited to visit the memory of some “good old days” from where s/he could regain the sense of solidarity and commitment in a “cosy crowd” gathered for a common purpose. The people pictured on the advertisement form an organized, good-tempered *crowd*, which appeared to internalize social discipline. This crowd seems to be ‘positively charged’ and functioning as a *public*. And the eyes of this big anonymous crowd are all directed towards a single object: the monument as the

shrine of a 'civil religion'. The monument in turn blesses *the believers* so that the crowd is *not just a crowd* any more.

That picture, through which our minds flashed back to an official occasion of the early republican years, is the first level with which we can start to read the meaning(s) of the Turkcell advertisement. The second level would be the writing on the top: "*Our meeting point*" ("*Buluşma Noktamız*"). The statement seemingly referred to a mass situation, which potentially includes –thus, invites- *everybody* - friends, lovers, relatives, colleagues etc... It implies that everybody can *meet at Turkcell*, as they do at Taksim. Whereas the picture displayed the public, the title emphasized the privateness of the affair. With that statement in mind, the message of the company reads as such: "We are offering a form of communication, which is for everybody; but it is still going to be *private*".

Yet, besides this transition of meaning from the first level to the next, the message still takes its discursive power from the photographic impression. Basically, it seems to be inspired by the unifying character of the monument that would give a meaning to the crowd and by its capacity to develop a sense of belonging and social commitment. The company aims to create a *Turkcell community* by nourishing similar senses among its customers towards itself.

At the third level, looking at the background of the picture, what I would suggest that the message has also recourse to the claim of 'eternal continuity and stability' of the Turkish Republic signified by the monument. The cleanness and emptiness of the background seems to coincide with the message that Turkcell provides a limitless service without being confined to any unfavourable situation. That is, the Turkcell community is still open to everybody: "Everybody can join us; it's never too late, and "the company will survive forever".

Finally, I would say that the thing, which made this advertisement salient to me, was the criticism it employed, or unintendedly came to imply. Here, I refer to the whole photograph where one can see the conflictual, ironic combination of the huge Turkcell poster, the monument, and the police barriers around it. Apart from the advertisement, the photograph itself successfully portrays the contrast between the *accessibility* of the monument in the picture and its *inaccessibility* today. I think that refers to the dialectical situation in which popular resistance always finds its inspiration, but also confront with the official measures taken against resistance. Here, I should indicate that I am not concerned with whether the image-makers of the company had a purpose of conveying such a political message. Yet, whatever their intention actually had been, the advertisement, put for only commercial purpose, had the political potential to offer a critique of this dialectical situation. So, as we move away from that picture in Turkcell advertisement and its content, the nostalgic theme celebrating the sacredness of the place does not suffice to tell all about the denotations and connotations that the square is loaded with.

I would also suggest that we should re-think the issue of getting access to Taksim Square in the light of the global positioning of Istanbul. Today, it is apparent that commercial interests play the major role in the formation and usage of public spaces. In that sense, Taksim Square is at the same time a market-place embodying a diversity of global symbols (see Illustrations 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20) including the advertisement of Turkcell. I think that the Turkcell advertisement is the best example to show how global symbols get access to the square and how they are integrated into the structure and iconography of the site. It particularly exemplifies how the global appropriates the symbolic reserves of the local it encounters.

In the discussion on the mosque debate, I explored how the “authentic” or “local” identity of Istanbul is being re-problematized within the parameters of globalization. The Islamist intelligentsia had for long sustained an ideal image of “Islamic Istanbul” as a significant component of their construct of “local culture”. This image had been the major motive in their discursive contestation with secularists over the “locality” of the city. Yet, today, any construction of “local”, whether offered by the Islamists or secularists, has to be reformed so as to include some global content. Particularly in the case of the mosque debate, the Islamist representation of Istanbul, once being formulated in the conquest discourse of the Welfare Party, was modified for a possible compromise with the global city project.

With regard to the Turkcell advertisement, the question turns to be how “the global” is discursively constructed vis-à-vis “the local”. The foregoing is an attempt to show how a typical global icon, like a giant advertisement board of a communication company, came to have a symbolic exchange with the very locality of the place in which it is presented. As it was recounted in the previous chapters, Taksim Square has been an ideal site for conveyance of any message; and today, it is indeed a fascinating place for publicly presenting and consuming commercial images. A socio-economically and culturally wide range of people are exposed to a variety of global signs on each day passing through the square. Yet, none of them, with the exception of the Turkcell poster, is relating itself to the crowd on the square. In a double race where the company is competing both in the communication business and a space full of symbolic representations, its advertisement has enjoyed the success of catching the attention of all passing by.

Thus, the Turkcell advertisement was not noticeable on the square simply because it was huge and colourful, but because its message was closely related with

certain connotations attached to the place. First of all is the Western image of the site. Taksim has widely been considered as a gate opening to “West” since the Ottoman period and today it is one of the most potential sites of the city to be re-formed with global consciousness. It is not only a *meeting point* of people, as Turkcell referred to, but also of local or national and global signs that are continuously interaction with each other.

The republican symbolism of the square, as the major component of the locality of the place, acted as a source of inspiration for the advertisement. The imagery of a “western”, “secular” and “modern” public square embedded in that symbolism is being re-worked in the context of globalization. The site provides an established vocabulary of modernization and westernization, which is considered as an advantage to accommodate the global inputs in public life. Beyond that, the national memory attached to it is also re-worked and re-vitalized particularly for commercial purpose.

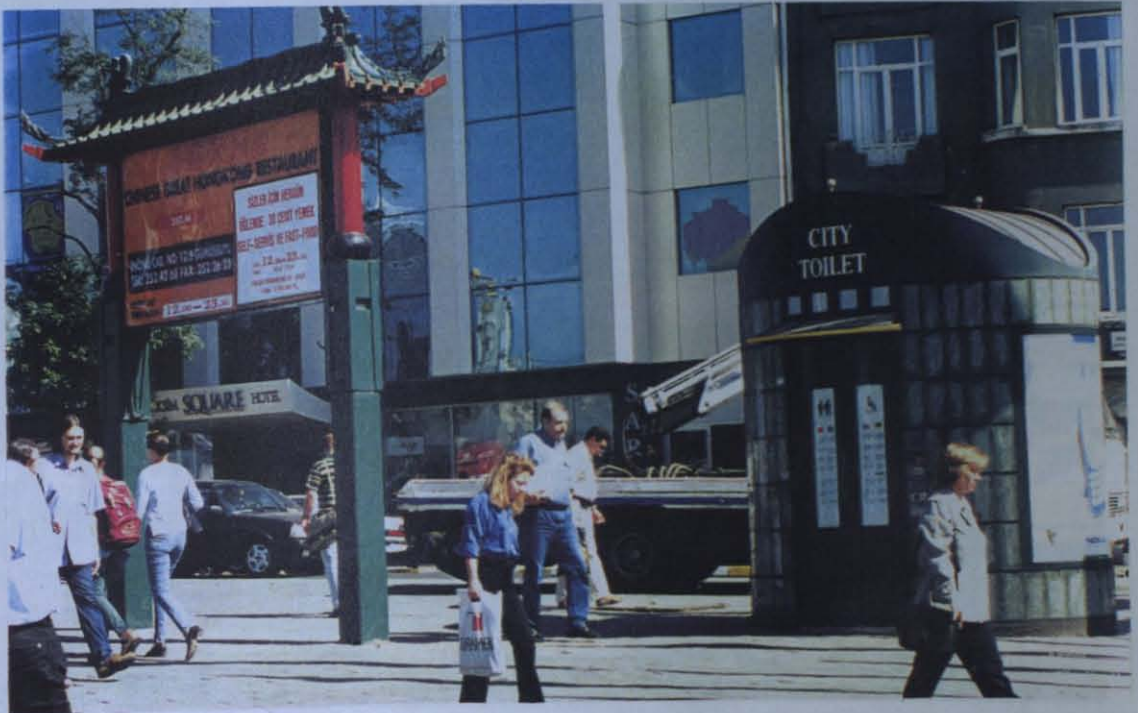


Illustration 16. A Chinese restaurant advertisement and the city toilette
(a photograph by the author)



Illustration 17. Fast food culture on the Istiklal Street (a photograph by the author)

(a photograph by the author)



Illustration 18. Taksim: Mc Donald's (a photograph by the author)



Illustration 19. Taksim: A megavision between AKM and the Marmara Hotel
(a photograph by the author)



Illustration 20. Taksim: The giant advertisement boards on the roof tops of the
buildings (a photograph by the author)

Notes

¹ The same union had organized in 1933 a demonstration at Taksim Square against the foreign director of the Wagon Lits Company claiming he had insulted the Turkish nation. See note 29 in Chapter III.

² Events of this kind have, as a rule, a similar traumatic impact on the meaning of public places. For instance, the Tiananmen Square in Beijing, which has witnessed the some of most important upheavals of recent history, had become associated with political action after the incident of May Fourth, 1919. This was an earlier example of an anti-imperialist rally organized by university students, in this case to protest against the government's passive response to the Treaty of Versailles that handed Chinese lands over to Japan. The demonstrations and rallies inspired by the May fourth movement loaded the square of the Chinese capital with a new political iconography. In the late 1940's, Tiananmen Square turned to symbolize the "self sacrificing patriotism of young Chinese intellectuals as well as the authoritarianism of the modern Chinese state" (Spencer 1982, Strand 1989 cited in HersHKovitz 1993: 406). Towards the end of the 1980s anti-government (and in this sense, "anti-revolutionary") opposition activities made the square once more the stage of all and out political conflict – a symbolically charged controversy culminating in the very real massacre of 1989.

Similarly, since the anti-Soviet Czechoslovaks' struggle with the Warsaw Pact troops in 1968, Wenceslav's Square in Prague remains a symbol for democratization movements in the entire world.

³ 18 years later, the popular political magazine, *Nokta*, revisited the Bloody Sunday Incident. In the heading of the news file, the magazine accused the officials of inciting the reaction: "Kışkırtılan İrtica (Provocated Reaction)". See *Nokta*, 1987.

⁴ "The governor commanded: 'Disperse them But it was too late ... ("Vali emir verdi: 'Dağtın'. Ama artık çok geçti...)" *Hürriyet*, 17 February 1969.

⁵ Uttered by the Istanbul Mayor of the period, Vefa Poyraz in the interview made by *Nokta* (1 February 1987: 18).

⁶ "Komünistlerin tertibi"; see the interview with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the period, Faruk Sükan, (ibid.: 19).

⁷ Oktay Ekinci, in his documentary book, *Bütün Yönleriyle Taksim Camii Belgeseli* (1997), asserts that since the Bloody Sunday in 1969, Taksim Square has been accepted by the secular-republican circles as "platform for social solidarity against Islamist reaction" (p. 13).

⁸ In 1999, for example, a large group of taxi drivers assembled with their cars at the square in order to protest against the murders of their colleagues. Their demands were confined to matters closely related to this issue.

⁹ The activists of the Saturday Mothers' movement themselves had referred to an existing political code originating from Latin America. For instance, Argentinian women had demonstrated at the Plaza Mayor in Buenos Aires in order to protest against the extermination of their arrested relatives as well as the exclusion of their own bodies from the political order (Schirmer 1994).

¹⁰ This definition is taken from the "monument (âbide)" definition made by the association: "Âbide demek, ecdadın dehasını bugüne intikal ettiren yüksek kıymette bir san'at eseri demektir.", ibid.: cover page.

¹¹ See Ayfer Bartu (1999) for a convincing discussion on the current heritage politics in Turkey.

¹² See Ekinci 1997: "halka ateş açılan yer" (p. 14).

¹³ Upon the government's request, Ziraat Bankası transferred its share to the General Directory of Public Endowments to facilitate the construction of the mosque. The bank signed the contract under the condition of return of the plot in case that the construction was not finished within ten years. In 1990, the bank brought a suit to the Council of State (Danıştay) in order to regain their share since construction had not even started yet. The

court-case is said to have proceeded very slowly especially after the campaign for the mosque initiated by the Islamist mayor, Tayyip Erdoğan, in the time when the national government was formed by the coalition of the rightist Right Path (*Doğru Yol*) Party and the Islamist Welfare (*Refah*) Party. The trial ended in 1998 with the decision to return the share to the bank. The authorities of the bank instructed their construction unit to prepare a project of a public park without ignoring the archeological value of the place. For press coverage: *Hürriyet* of 29 May 1998: pages of 1 and 36.

¹⁴ See Ekinci's footnotes for the legal details about the property problem of the area (*ibid.*)

¹⁵ Taken from the petition submitted by Eyüboğlu to the Istanbul Municipality, *ibid.* (Appendix 13)

¹⁶ Taken from the decision: "...şehirçilik ilkeleri, planlama esasları ve kamu yararı açısından..." See decision no. 556 on 7/2/1983; *ibid.*

¹⁷ For elaborate discussions on the urban policy of the Özal period and the new model of metropolitan government, see Kara and Köksal 1989; Köksal and Kara 1990; Keyder and Öncü 1993.

¹⁸ To a degree, it is possible to see traces of a similar image of Istanbul in the declaration of the general director of the pious endowments cited above.

¹⁹ See *Hürriyet*, 30 December 1994: "karanlığı aydınlığa çıkarmak anlamında İstanbul'un ikinci fethi".

²⁰ See Akit, 10 February 1997 for the declaration by the Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan about the mosque project: "...The mosque will be built, of course ... We are experiencing a big revolution. Nobody can prevent the re-establishment of Great Turkey ..." ("Elbette cami yapılacak... Büyük devrim yaşıyoruz. Yeniden büyük Türkiye'nin kuruluşunu kimse engelleyemez...")

²¹ As Tanıl Bora notes, "The Conquest March" ("Fetih Marşı") written by the prominent rightist poet of the period, Arif Nihat Asya, was designed as "material for the agitation of the youth":

"Yürü: hala ne diye oyunda oynastasın
Fatih'in İstanbul'u fethettiği yaştasın..."

... Bilmem neden gündelik işlerle telaştasın
Fatih'in İstanbul'u fethettiği yaştasın...

... Sen ki burçlara bayrak olacak kumaştasın
Fatih'in İstanbul'u fethettiği yaştasın...

... Yürü- hala ne diye kendinle savaştasın
Fatih'in İstanbul'u fethettiği yaştasın..."

²² This discursive twist that Refah took after the elections also indicates that the party would have to sacrifice its populism addressed to its constituency living in the periphery of the city

²³ Also quoted by Ayfer Bartu (1999) and Tanıl Bora (1995).

²⁴ The multi-layered past of Istanbul, which includes the Byzantine civilization, was considered among the major advantages in marketing the city's authenticity to a global audience.

²⁵ In the early 1950's, the park had been the site of a similar political controversy between the two oldest parties of Turkey. The first leading party of the early Republican period, CHP, intended to build the statue of İsmet İnönü (who fought in the War of Independence and became the president of the Turkish Republic following the death of Atatürk) at the park and put a base for it in 1944. Yet, in the next political period, the new government run by a liberal party (Demokrat Partisi) flatly refused the statue proposal of the previous leading party. Although the project failed, the park has been known to be the *İnönü Promenade* as well since then.

²⁶ Tayyip Erdoğan would call it "belden aşağı sanat".

²⁷ The demographic composition and the western image of the Beyoğlu district dating back to the Ottoman period (see the endnote 16 in the Chapter II) has always led to controversies both over its meaning and local administration. Especially, conservatives have been anxious about this entertainment center of the city, which embraces all kinds of marginality. As Bartu (1999) discussed in a relevant article, Refah 'resolved' the Beyoğlu issue within its party politics by exploiting its symbolism for their campaign theme of tolerance and pluralism. Yet, the conservative and the Islamist circles did not change their established negative attitudes towards the neighbourhood.

²⁸ "...Arkasında itiyle diskotekten diskoteğe koşuşturan kızları seyredip ümitsizliğe düşmeyin..." See Haluk Nurbaki, *Vakit*, 20 November 1994; cited in Bora (1995).

²⁹ "We have no conflicts with our heroic army" (Kahraman ordumuzla aramızda bir çelişki yok.), Necmettin Erbakan, cited by Abdurrahman Dilipak, *Akit*, 3 February 1997.

³⁰ I appreciate Christoph K. Neumann's observation concerning this point.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, I explored the (re)production and (re)construction processes of Taksim Square. The oldest actor involved in these processes is the early Republican state, which attached the square an official symbolism. In that sense, Taksim is a space planned and organized to signify the hegemonic republican power. Yet, it is at the same time a social property, therefore, it is inevitably open to alternative representations, which transgress and challenge that identity once stately ascribed to it. This in turn implies that the dominant meaning, or the "real" identity, of the square is unavoidably a matter of contestation.

In Chapter II, I discussed how the early-Republican state discursively constructed the square through the iconography of the Republican Monument. The past images played the major role in this construction. As it was recounted in the theoretical chapter, invoking the past is a common strategy used for legitimizing political discourse. The monument was erected to serve "high" national goals like glorifying the republican history and preserving it in a shared memory. It contributed to the establishment of a "national memory", which was considered to be an exigency for the making of the national identity. So, for many years, Taksim Square has been the site of recollecting and re-enacting the past both through the daily presentation of the monument and through the commemorative rituals still performed today.

However, Taksim Square is not confined to the republican imaginary; it encompasses a diversity of images from the past and the present. The major reason for this, is the fact that it is located in a city with multiple pasts and civilizations. Yet, some of the images in its symbolic repository come from the recent past; and these images are still alive in popular and oppositional memories. The official authority had labelled the place as *the Square of the Republic* and then sealed it off against any action of insurgency; but many people remember instances of protest rallies and demonstrations at the square. Although the square is no longer accessible to such “subversive” usage, people know that Taksim, at least, used to be the *site of resistance* in the recent political history of Turkey. So, the meaning of the square does not only consist of the identity attached to it by the official planners. The place is indeed full of ‘subversive’ memories, which are silenced in the nationalist narrative.

Thus, the ‘the contestation over Taksim Square does not just denote the struggle over the physical production of the place. My discussion rather focused on the (re)construction processes, through which multiple actors negotiate the symbolism of the square as well as its physical appearance. In the case of appropriation of the place by dissident groups, the only physical trace their actions left behind is the police barriers put around the monument to protect it from any further “deviant “ actions. Yet, the memory of these temporary appropriations is permanent enough to be integrated into the symbolic repertoire of Taksim.

A mosque is, of course, another image, of which access to Taksim has been a matter of fierce political debates. Given its presumed incompatibility with the secularist identity of the square, its chance of occupying a place at Taksim is low as long as the secularist forces are dominant in the political order. Yet, Islamists have

repeatedly attempted to increase their chance by seeking the appropriate discursive strategies and legitimating their mosque proposals.

We can infer two significant conclusions from the discussion on the Taksim Mosque Project offered by the Refah Party. First, it is a failed project, yet a successful enterprise in terms of disputing the official identity of the square and contesting its established symbolism. The proposal led to intense public debates revolving around the “authenticity” of Istanbul as well as the “genuine” identity of Taksim. It might also be argued that the project was actually a pretext for challenging the basic assumptions of the republican-secularist elite on major cultural issues such as cultural identity, cultural heritage and modernity.

Second, the discursive twist of Refah Party from the image of ‘Islamic Istanbul’ to that of ‘global Istanbul’ (see Chapter III) indicated that social and cultural contexts in Turkey are significantly changing; and the major reason for this change is globalization. The Islamists had to grade down their claims of reconquest and remake their definition of ‘the local’ to compromise with the ‘global city’ concept. Awareness of this concept has transformed the political terminology in Turkey. It is no longer feasible to think with the concepts of the previous era. Islamic politicians of today also “bow to economic logic of the global-city project” (Bora 1999: 57) and need to re-evaluate the governance of Istanbul in the light of the global positioning of the city. The mosque debate illuminates some part of this strategic change in Refah Party’s urban politics.

The representation of “global Istanbul” to the world was a significant dimension of the mosque debate. The issue of “whether a mosque would fit into a public space with high touristic potential” was a critical question, because it implied a more essential issue of “which ‘local’ to present to the global audience”. “Which

parts of our cultural heritage to resurrect” and “which identity to exhibit on the city texture” were to be publicly discussed and negotiated with regard to the global potential of Istanbul.

The Turkcell advertisement, on the other hand, exemplifies how “the global” negotiates with “the local” in occupying the urban space. The advertisement appropriates the monument’s symbolic power for a commercial purpose. This might be read as an act of *detournement* in the sense that it cites the historical associations and cultural significance of the square, thus integrates the established language of the site into its own construction. So, the process of detournement does not necessarily end with the coexistence of conflicting codes on a shared space, but it might culminate in a new combination of meanings. It would be interesting to look at further cases in which new symbolic vocabularies emerge through the juxtaposition of global and local elements on the urban space.

What both the Turkcell advertisement and the mosque debate has taught us is the possibility of negotiation and compromise between competing claims over an organized urban space. The spatial change is inevitable; yet it is rather a complex process that we should not explain only in terms of the dialectical relations between the popular and the official. The urban space is, instead, a living space, which needs to be read at multiple levels and with regard to multiple relations among multiple actors. The mosque debate particularly points to the complexity of those relations and additionally depicts how the assumed distinction between “the official” and “the popular” is actually blurred.

This thesis aimed at studying the politics of place by focusing on various modes of contestation over Taksim Square. The basic question I posed in each case was how social (political) processes take spatial forms and how social space is

changing both in its symbolism and morphology through these processes. The analysis of these cases went beyond the basic assumption of the socio-spatial dialectic and directed the argument towards more recent debates of cultural politics. In the light of the discussion on the Taksim Mosque project, we realize that the cultural conflicts over Taksim Square have changed in nature and the potential of the square for globalization has been the major determinant of this change. This potential even turned Taksim into a more critical space where almost everybody is aware of “the presence of the global gaze” (Çınar 1999). Therefore, the identity and the usage of the square came to be more fiercely debated in the public sphere.

Today, global signs are the most conspicuous elements of the symbolic geography of Taksim Square. However, as has been shown with regard to the Turkcell advertisement, they keep their symbolic contact with the locality of the site. In that context, Taksim Square also offers itself as a showcase to exhibit the interplay between those global signs and the local features of a globalizing city.

So, it is apparent that the process of globalization creates its own spatiality and loads new meanings to social space. Considering the potential of Taksim Square to be a global site, it is no longer possible to talk about its cultural and political significance only in local and national terms. Likewise, it does not seem to be viable to conceptualize the ceaseless transformation of the square disregarding the logic of globalization.

APPENDIX

1.

“O zaman burası gerçekten bir taksim meydanı idi. Düşmanların o şenlik günlerinde, vatanını sevenlerin gönüllerine yığın yığın azap ve ızdırıp, buradan taksim olunuyordu. Ey Türk, İstanbul’un düşman ayakları altında en çok ezilen ve için için kanayan meydanı! Bütün bu kurtuluş ve yükseliş tarihini en canlı çizgilerle belirten bu şanlı Abideyi göğsünde taşımaya layık olan sendin, bunun için onu senin göğsüne diktik...”

2.

“...Taksim Cumhuriyet Abidesi, tüm olarak yeniden dünyaya ve tarihe doğuşumuzu, istiklal uğrunda ölüm-dirim mücadelemizi ve Cumhuriyetimizin getirdiği devrimleri dile getiren bir eserdir.

Sokaklarında düşman bayrakları dalgalanan ve düşman çizmesi altında inleyen bu şehirde Büyük Fatih, Orta Çağı tarihe gömmüştü. Ve bu şehir, Türk Medeniyetinin ölmez sanat eserleriyle bezenmişti.

Birinci Dünya Savaşı’ndan sonra Türklüğü tarihten silmek istiyorlar, Türkün tarihteki şan ve şerefini de yok etmek istiyorlardı.

Bu yok olma ile varolma döneminde Türk Milleti ikinci bir Fatih’e muhtaçtı. İstanbul ikinci defa fethedilmeli idi.

Taksim Cumhuriyet Abidesi bunun canlı ifadesidir. Bu abide, İstanbul’un ikinci Fatih Büyük Atatürk’ün ve hürriyet ve istiklalimizin sembolü olarak yükseldi...”

3.

Birinci fotoğrafın altında:

“İstanbul’un Kurtuluş Bayramı, Cumhuriyet Ordusunun ve bütün Istanbuluların iştiraki ile coşkun tezahüratla kutlandı. Şehir, sabahtan itibaren bayraklarla donanmış ve halk, merasim sahası olan Taksim Cumhuriyet abidesinin etrafını doldurmuştu. Gece, Vali ve Beldiye Reisi Lütfi Kırdar, İstanbul Komutanı, İstanbul’daki Meb’uslar, yüksek Askeri Erkan, Vilayet ve Belediye Mümessillerine Perapalas’ta bir ziyafet verdi ve İstanbul’un Türk Ordusu tarafından ikinci defa fethinin tarihini, hatıralarını bir söylevle anlattı.”

İkinci Fotoğrafın altı:

“Cumhuriyet Ordusunun büyük bir intizamla sona eren Geçit resminden evvel şehir namına Kürsüye çıkan Belediye Şehir Meclisi azasından B. Refik Ahmet Sevengil, İstanbul kurtuluşunun yüksek manasını, çok veciz ve beliğ söylevi ile anlatarak şehrin şükranlarına tercüman oldu. Yukarıda, hatibi, kürsüde söylevini verirken görüyorsunuz.”

4.

“İSTANBUL’UN KURTULUŞ BAYRAMI: İstanbul’un 31. Yıldönümü, 6 Ekim Çarşamba günü parlak bir merasimle kutlanmıştır. Bu münasebetle sabahleyin Taksim’de bir geçit resmi yapılmış, gece şehir baştanbaşa donanarak fener alayları tertip olunmuştur. Resimde, kahraman ordumuz, Taksim meydanındaki resmi geçit töreninde görülmektedir.”

5.

“.... Bendenize kalırsa İstanbul’da inşa edilecek bir abide yalnız Gazi Paşa Hazretlerinin heykeli ile iktifa etmeyip millet arasında milli mücadele canlandırılmalıdır. Bu esaslar dahilinde heykaltraşlık ile mimarlığa büyük bir yer verilmiş olur. Böyle bir Abide tarihi heybeti ve mimarisi ile Taksim meydanını süslemiş ve genişletmiş olacaktır.”

6.

“Taksim’de vücuda getirilmesi kararlaştırılan eser münferit bir hadiseyi temsil eden bir eser ve müessese olmayıp Milli Mücadeleye başlanmasıyla neticelenmesini temsil edecek büyük bir Abidedir ...”

7.

“Ve bu Abide dört cepheli bir takım etrafında muhtelif tarihi hadiseleri temsil eden bir takım heykeller ile süslenmiştir. Bu cephelerden birisi inhilale sevk edilmek istenilen Türkiye’nin mukabil ihtilal ile milli ıftialinin nasıl başladığını ve büyük Reisimizin bu yolda millete ne suretle önder olarak cihat arkadaşları ile nasıl mücadeleye atıldığını gösteren büyük hadiseyi temsil eder. Burada tarihi hakikatlere boyun eğmek ve o günün kıyafetiyle içtimai durumunu tesbit etmek zaruridir. Tarihi, kimsenin tahrif etmeye salahiyettar olmadığı düşünce ve kanaatıyla bu cephede Gazi Dumlupınar taarruzunda enstantene bir fotoğrafla Kocatepe’de tesbit edilen meşhur harp kıyafetiyle temsil edilmiş ve erler de o günün kıyafetini taşıyarak gösterilmiştir. Diğer cephesi Cumhuriyet’in ilanını göstermektedir. Burada Gazi Hazretleri arkadaşlarıyla sivil kıyafetle ve açık başlı olarak görünüyordu. Yalnız sol taraflarında

bulunan Erkanı Harbiye Reisi muhterem Fevzi Paşa Hazretleri ve yaverleri bugünkü askeri üniforma ile ve kasket ile yapılmıştır. Diğer iki cephelerde bulunan ve ellerinde sancak taşıyan askerler bugünkü üniforma ile ve başları demir miğferlidir. Heyeti umumiyesi bir tarihi devreyi canlandırdığı için bu abidenin başka türlü yapılmasının muvafık olduğuna, komisyonumuz sanatkarın vaktiyle bu şekilde açıklanan teklifini kabule şayan görmüş ve siparişini vermiştir.”

8.

“Abidenin sağ ve sol kenarında bugünün tezatları görüntüyor. Sağda ayaklarının altında düşmanın didiklenmiş harp kalıntıları duran İstiklal Harbinin kahraman cenkçisi, solda sancağının kıvrımlarında kazanılmış muharebelerle katmerlenen ve heybetli bakışıyla istikbale meydan okuyan mutlu Türk Askeri duruyor.”

9.

“Bir tarafta cahil ananelerin cinsini mahkum ettiği esaret ve mahpusiyeti ifade eden yüzünün örtüsü altında vatanın felaketine ağlayan yeisli hanım, gözlere merhamet ve melal verirken, öbür tarafta büyük inkılabın feyizli rüzgarı ile peçesi savrulup dağılan ve serazad hayata açılmış yüzünde hürriyetin ve milli kurtuluşun sevinci incilenen yeni Türk kadını sıcak bahtıyarlığını ruhlara serpiyor.”

10.

“Altı asırlık bir tarihten beri bu abidenin remzi kadar Türk, bunun kadar yabancı eli karışmamış, sırf Türk, esaslarını teşkil eden ihtilâli, mücahedesî, muzafferiyeti, istiklâli, muvaffakiyeti, mefahiri itibariyle baştanbaşa Türk, ruhu Türk, sergüzeşti

Türk olan hiçbir tarihi vak'aya şahit olmamışızdır..." (Ali Suat, *Şehremaneti Mecmuası*, August 1928)

11.

"Aziz mustafa Kemal, üzerlerinde vaktiyle izcilerin, mağrur ve yabancı askerlerin dolaştığı bu meydana toplanan, hep senden ve senin aşıkın olan onbinlerce insan, senin açtığın yoldan ve senin arkandan gelmek için can atmaya hazırlanan aşıklardandır. Onlar her istediğin yerde emrine, işaretine muntazır, bekliyorlar. (Alkışlar, hay hay sesleri) İlerliyen ve yürüten eserinizin önünde hürriyet taşıyan kalplerin selam veminnetlerini kabul et."

12.

"Taksim'de(ki) Şubemizin delâleti ve halkın yardımı ile çift minareli ve yukarıda resmini gördüğünüz şekilde, Yenicami modeli bir cami yaptırmak üzere evvelki sene Hükûmet nezdinde vuku bulan teşebbüsümüz üzerine İstanbul Belediyesi Şehir Meclisi'nce Taksim'de yeni bir cami inşası prensip itibariyle kabul edilmiş ve bunun yerinin tayini için lüzumlu etüdler İstanbul Belediyesince yapılmış ise de talebimiz olan su hazinesi üstünde veya gezinin arkasındaki bahçenin geri kısmında boşlukta yaptırılması muvaffık görülmemişti. Tekrar takip ve yazışmalarımız neticesi bize verilen cevapta evvelâ Taksim imar plânının tanziminde cami yeri de nazarı itibara alınacağı bildirilmiş, aradan zaman geçmiş, tekrar yazımıza gelen cevapta Taksim'de münasip bir yer bulunamadığı ve Beyoğlu'nun imar plânının tanziminde yer gösterileceği cevaplanmıştı. Tekrar takibimizde bu sefer de Teşvikiye mezarlığı civarında bir cami yapılmasında bir mahzur olmadığı son olarak bildirilmiştir. Burası Taksim'den uzak ve manzara bakımından hiç de muvafık olamayacağı için bu

cihete şubemizce itiraz edilmiş ve mutlaka Taksim’de bir yer gösterilmesinde ısrar edilmiştir. Neticeye intizardayız. İnşallah emelimize muvaffak olur ve yakın bir zamanda neticeyi umumî efkâra arz ederiz.” (p. 218)

13.

“Taksim semti gökdelen otellerinin toplandığı, İstanbul’un ve Türkiye’nin en kesif turistik merkezidir. Bugün Türk devletinin dış politikası, İslam alemine ve Arap Devletleri’ne dönük kesif faaliyetler arz etmektedir. Taksim semtinde bir cami yapılması, Arap Devletleri’nin de dikkatlerini Türkiye üzerine celbedecek, enternasyonal bir hüviyet arz edecektir. Geçen seneler İstanbul Sheraton Oteli’nde yapılan İslam Devletleri Konferansı’na iştirak eden delegelerin bu ihtiyaca işaret etmeleri ve bu mevzuda Arap Devletleri elçilerinin ilgili devlet bakanımıza maddi yardımda bulunma talepleri de duyumlarımız arasında olup bütün bu hususlar Taksim’de caminin ne kadar zaruri bir ihtiyaç olduğunu ortaya koymuştur” (The General Director of Public Endowments, Süleyman Eyüboğlu, 7 January 1983)

14.

“...İstanbul’un tarihi bir kent, bir “Dünya Kenti” imgesini zedeleyen bozulmaya başlayan kent parçalarını yeniden düzenleyip çağdaş görünümüne kavuşturmak, devam eden bu çalışma programımızın bir parçasını teşkil etmektedir...” (The Mayor, Bedrettin Dalan, quoted from the project booklet)

15.

“...İstanbul turizminin püf noktası o bölgedir. O bölgeye gelen kişi bir defa, o merkezi gördüğünde bir İslam kentinde olduğunu anlayacak.... Şehrimizin tarihi ve

kültürel dokusunu yavaş yavaş ortaya çıkarınca öyle zannediyorum ki, İstanbul'a gelen turist halkı müslüman olan bir şehre geldiğini anlayacak."

16.

"Bu cami öyle herhangi bir cami olmamalı. 29 Mayıs'ta İstanbul'un fetih günü temeli atılıp, 1999'da Osmanlı Devleti'nin kuruluşunun 700. yılı törenlerinde de açılışı yapılmalı... İçeride kubbe kısmı Alpaslan'ın miğferi gibi dev bir miğfer şeklinde dizayn edilebilir... Bir Fetih Araştırmaları Enstitüsü de kurulabilir.

Camiden ya da metro girişinden girebileceğiniz bir kapıdan yeraltında mini bir yolculuk yaparak, yeraltı galerilerinde Fatih'le ya da Alparslan'la tanışabilir ve onların mücadelelerini izleyebilirsiniz." (Abdurrahman Dilipak, Akit, 29 January 1997)

17.

"...700. yılda Sadabat Kültür Merkezi'nde, özellikle Osmanlı Devleti'nin yayıldığı alandaki ülkelerle ortak bir takım konferanslar düzenlenebilir. Roman, tiyatro, beste yarışmaları açabiliriz... Bu olay bölücülük değil, kendimizle barışmak için tarihi bir fırsat." (Abdurrahman Dilipak, Akit, 30 January 1997.)

18.

"Halk Taksim'e cami istiyor..... Camiyi yan tarafa değil, asıl parkın içine yapacağız. Çok daha güzel olacak." (from Necmettin Erbakan's speech in a meeting with WF (RP)-based mayors on 8 January 1995, cited in Ekinci's article, Cumhuriyet, 27 January 1997)

19.

“Taksim’e yapılmasına karar verilen camiyi bahane ederek günlerdir bir kaşık suda fırtına koparanları, Aydınlar Ocağı Derneği Genel Başkanı Prof. Nevzat Yalçıntaş sert bir dille eleştirdi (heading)

‘... İdeolojik sebeplerden dolayı ibadethanemize karşı çıkanların hiçbir tutarlı savunmaları yoktur. Onların rasyonel, akli ve mantıki sebepleri yok. Görüntüyü bozacak, çevreye zarar verecek türünde ifadeler bahane. Yapılacak cami, Taksim’in görüntüsünü güzelleştirir ve şahsiyet kazandırır.

...Taksim’e cami yapılması bir ihtiyaçtır. Ben bir Istanbulu olarak Taksim’de her zaman işi olan ve bazen oradaki toplantılara katılan veya oralara alışveriş için giden biri olarak, Taksim’e cami yapılmasının ihtiyacını hissediyorum ve benim gibi insanların da sayıları oldukça . Bir de yurt dışından ülkemize gelen Müslüman turistler de bu ihtiyacı hissediyorlar....” (Akit, 9 February 1997)

“(with a heading of ‘TAKSİM MOSKOVA MI?’)

Taksim’e cami yapılmasını eleştiren ve karşı çıkanlar her Cuma olduğu gibi bu hafta da, Taksim bölgesindeki cemaatin birkaç küçük camiye sığmadığını gördü. Bölgede birçok kilise bulunmasına rağmen, İstiklal Caddesi üzerinde sadece iki küçük cami var ve buradaki cemaat özellikle Cuma namazlarını sokakta kılmak zorunda kalıyor.” (Akit, 2 February 1997)

20.

“...İşte böylesi bir alanda RP’li siyasetçilerin ‘cami ve rant tesisleri’ yapmaya kalkışmaları, şehircilik ve kent kültürüyle ilgili tartışmaların ötesinde, bu siyasi akımın bir yandan cumhuriyetin yasalarıyla yerel ve merkezi iktidara gelirken, öbür

yandan aslında ‘cumhuriyet uygarlığına’ ne denli yabancı ve hatta düşman olduğunun da yeni bir kanıtı.” (Oktay Ekinci, Cumhuriyet, 27 January 1997)

21.

“(With a heading of ‘The Mosque and the Barracks’)

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin kuruluşunda, Türk ulusçuluğunun temelinde din birliği vardır. O da İslamdır. Müslüman unsurlar azınlık kabul edilmemişlerdir. Onun için Araplar, Kürtler, Arnavutlar, ve diğer unsurlar İslam kardeşliği etrafında Türk ulusunun esasını teşkil etmişlerdir.

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin kuruluşu ile sonuçlanan Kurtuluş Savaşı’nın mana ve mahiyeti dine adanan bir savaştır ve yine burada cami ile kışlanın birliği vardır.”

(Dilipak, Akit, 3 February 1997)

22.

“19. yüzyıl başında yapılan ve ünlü 31 Mart (1909) olaylarında tahrip edildikten sonra yıllarca harabe şeklinde kalan Topçu Kışlası’nı yeniden inşa etmeyi önermek, hiç kuşkusuz bu kışlanın camisini de şimdi Taksim camisi olarak gerçekleştirmek için... Oysa eğer bu dinci çevreler İstanbul’daki son dönem Osmanlı kışlalarına böylesine gönülden bağlı olsalardı, aynı yapıların en görkemlilerinden biri olarak hala ayakta duran Rami Kışlası Refahlı bir belediyenin acımasız darbeleriyle karşılaşmazdı.” (Cumhuriyet, 3 February 1997)

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