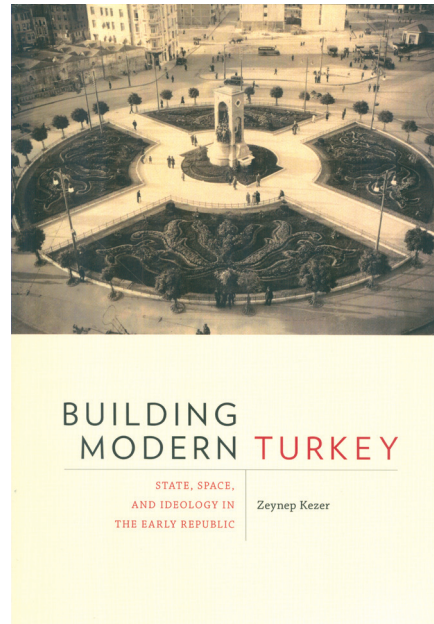


BUILDING MODERN TURKEY: STATE, SPACE AND IDEOLOGY IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

Zeynep Kezer
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BOOK REVIEW

BUILDING MODERN TURKEY: STATE, SPACE AND IDEOLOGY IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

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The historiography on early Republican architecture in Turkey has produced an extensive literature since the mid-twentieth century, examining architecture in relation to the formation of a new state in the country in 1923. Early studies focused on the major spatial interventions of the state such as the relocation of the capital city and the construction of various public buildings across the country to house the administrative, economic, educational and cultural functions of the new modernizing system. Critical approaches towards the nation-building process are dominant in the increasing studies of recent decades that present more inclusive and pluralist accounts of the early Republican architecture, and discuss its role in the very construction of the national identity itself. Zeynep Kezer's *Building Modern Turkey: State, Space and Ideology in the Early Republic* makes a significant contribution to this literature by introducing a

geopolitical frame of analysis with an interdisciplinary method benefiting from various fields of study from geography and urban planning to politics and education. Emphasizing that the founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's call for "a surface of defense ... [as] the entire country ... was proposing to bring very inch of that land into the social imagination as part of a collective responsibility" (p.195), Kezer presents the formation of the Turkish state as "a good case study for exploring the spatiality of nation-building processes" (p.11). Hence, *Building Modern Turkey* broadens the field of analysis beyond the architectural products to understand the built environment in terms of the wider frame of spatial practices in the larger territory of the new state.

Before the inclusive countrywide coverage of the early Republican spatial practices, the built environment of the new capital Ankara as the center of

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this territory is the focus of the first part titled as “Forging a New Identity”, which outlines how the national identity of Turkey was defined as new and modern. The first chapter of this part on ‘Political Capital’ discusses the relocation of the capital city from İstanbul to Ankara as the state’s most strategic and symbolic attempt; and analyzes the planning of the new settlement in Ankara away from the historic city in and around the citadel, presenting the exclusion of the old in the formation of a modern way of life via the new built environment. Kezer’s analysis also emphasizes the interventions in the implementation of the plan as illuminating “the conflicted process of building a modern state” that resulted in the “distorted spaces, misaligned structures, and erased paths” (p.52) of Ankara. The building of foreign embassies is presented as part of this process to understand the attempts of the Turkish Republic to take its place among the international system as a new nation-state. Kezer exemplifies the effect of personal maneuvers and face-to-face encounters among state

officials and diplomats in order to discuss how spatial tactics played out in ‘Theaters of Diplomacy’ - as the second chapter title calls them - were in fact the representations of larger geopolitical constellations, which affected the shaping of the built environment in the new capital city.

Kezer expands her analysis beyond the capital city in the other two parts of the book. The second part titled “Erasures in the Land” focuses on the exclusion of some religious and ethnic groups of the society in line with the attempt of the new state to realize its vision of not only a modern but also a homogenized and unified national identity. One strategy applied here was ‘Dismantling the Landscapes of Islam’, as examined in the third chapter, by closing the pious foundations (*vakıfs*), which had performed commercial and welfare as well as spiritual services across the territory of the Ottoman Empire, and appropriating their public facilities as state property to be adapted to other functions such as museums, or demolishing them to provide land for new public construction. Kezer also

POLITICAL CAPITAL



FIGURE 1.2. AERIAL VIEW OF ULUS FEATURING THE CITY'S GROWTH CIRCA 1930 (1—GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, 2—COURT OF FINANCIAL APPEALS, 3—MAKESHİFT FIRST BUILDING OF THE GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ORIGINALLY, UNION AND PROGRESS PARTY CLUB, 4—ULUS ATATÜRK MONUMENT, 5— MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND TREASURY, 6—MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 7—PARK (MİLLET BAHÇESİ), 8—ANKARA PALAS HOTEL, 9—THREE CITY BLOCKS OF HOUSING CONSTRUCTED BY THE PIOUS FOUNDATIONS ADMINISTRATION, INCLUDING A MULTISTORY PERIPHERY BLOCK CONTAINING A THEATER, 10—CENTRAL BANK, 11—BANK OF AGRICULTURE). COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY AT THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS.

sovereignty and their legitimacy as the self-appointed agents of modernization in Turkey, and Ankara provided just that in practice and in theory.

AN INVISIBLE ANKARA

The second trope presented Ankara as a contemporary miracle, a modern capital built from scratch, through republican ingenuity and determination. Propaganda publications publicized the city's new public and institutional structures, its wide and straight avenues lined with sapplings, its proud monuments and verdant parks. Ankara's happy residents also appeared in these places: students in modern schools, riding horses or playing tennis, enjoying a leisurely afternoon on Atatürk's model farm, or parading in the stadium in celebration of the nation's enormous achieve-

POLITICAL CAPITAL

ments within such a short time. The notion that Ankara was built miraculously from scratch was consolidated in textbooks, and schoolchildren memorized the verses of the “Ankara March”:

Ankara Ankara, handsome Ankara
 Every wretched soul counts on you for support
 And you are all they need Ankara
 May insurgent heads rising up against you be subdued
 May with you Turkish might overcome all odds
 The first city forged out of nothing you are
 May your stones and your grounds live long Ankara!

In contrast to these depictions, which featured it devoid of context—standing alone amid a rugged and barren landscape or juxtaposed with Ankara's memorable landmarks—the Citadel was home to several densely packed neighborhoods both inside its walls and on its foothills. The se-



FIGURE 1.3. ULUS NEWSPAPER CLIPPING ABOUT EQUESTRIAN RACES HELD IN ANKARA. EQUESTRIANISM, A FAVORITE MIXED-GENDER ACTIVITY OF TURKEY'S NEW MILITARY-BUREAUCRATIC ELITE WAS OFTEN FEATURED IN THE PAGES OF CONTEMPORARY NEWSPAPERS.

discusses the critical reactions to this practice by some representatives at the parliament; yet, she concludes that objections were not effective, and by erasing collective religious practices from public life, the state changed the built environment – including its sign- and sound-scape - in line with its modernizing efforts. The fourth chapter “Of Forgotten People and Forgotten Places” examines a similar approach towards ethnicities other than Turks, who were minoritized in the new society in line with the aim to create a demographic homogeneity in Turkey. Despite few and not so effective reactions by these communities, as Kezer explains, the process was generally intact and affected the built environment as their properties were adapted by the state or by Turkish people, or else remained abandoned, and even the names of these places were Turkified, as people of other ethnicities either left the country or lost their wealth.

The final part titled “An Imaginable Community” analyzes how the physical and symbolic space of the modern, homogenized and unified nation was formed, and the sense of the national space of the new state was thus inculcated in the society. The fifth chapter, ‘Nationalizing Space,’ presents the uniform and countrywide web of infrastructural and construction services provided and administered from the capital with the aim to modernize the country. The development of a wide railway system and a more efficient road system completed with bridges, the (re)shaping of towns and cities by planning efforts and the construction of public buildings and spaces altered the physical form of the built environment in the country. Kezer argues that “the idea of nationhood ... invoked both a people and the well-bounded territory they inhabited” (p.195). Thus, the national space was also to be symbolically created as a unified entity in people’s minds by educational means that propagated the spatial developments in media, and at schools and other public cultural centers. The society’s resistance to such propaganda is also discussed by the author; nonetheless, as the sixth chapter ‘Manufacturing Turkish Citizens’ clarifies with detailed examples of new public educational institutions such as Girls’ Institutes and People’s Houses

(*Halkevleri*), the nation-building process in Turkey continued to be operative in creating the sense of national space by educating masses along the lines of the modernizing and nationalizing ideologies of the state, and the built environment was an indispensable part of this process.

Kezer analyzes with historical rigor in these three parts of the book the formation of a modern, homogenized and unified national identity in early Republican Turkey in relation to contemporary spatial practices by using detailed primary documents and wide-ranging secondary sources. One of the conclusive arguments of the book is that nation-building includes not only constructive and creative but also destructive efforts, and interventions in the built environment form an indispensable role in this process. Kezer does not discuss the case of Turkey in a comparative frame; nonetheless, her meticulous analysis of the visionary yet exclusionary social and spatial practices of the early Republican period offers a solid contribution to studies on architectural production in nationalist contexts. In addition, Kezer argues that nation-building also incorporates inconsistencies resulted from rivalry among, or resistance of different actors involved, although the state still emerges as the dominant actor out of her analysis. Kezer titles the introduction of the book as “Ambivalences and Anxieties”, and concludes with the epilogue on the Gezi Park protests of 2013 in İstanbul, emphasizing resistance as a timely and timeless critique of authoritarian state intervention in the formation of built environment. Pointing at how national space is formed and given meaning within a network of actors and activities, *Building Modern Turkey* thus provides a noteworthy reminder for understanding the nation-building process not as fixed and all-encompassing but as realized by competing and/or collaborating efforts in changing conditions.

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