Shaping the City: Three Urban Events in Istanbul

Kenti Şekillendirmek: İstanbul'da Üç Kentsel Olay

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Abstract

What of contingent or unexpected urban events that are not the inevitable or determined outcome of other happenings or incidents, and yet transform the present city and exert their force and influence into the future? How might we identify and explicate crucial acts and developments that rupture and reconfigure the morphology and built environment of the city, as well as of its inhabitants' perceptions of space? This paper describes and analyses three urban events in Istanbul that have become significant determining acts in the city's modern period, co-constituting both the morphology of the city, the experiences of its inhabitants, and its ethnic/religious composition. The paper argues that urban events coalesce or entangle to part-assemble the contemporary city, even as their creative dynamics do not necessarily function to produce a coherent urban system.

Keywords: *Shantytowns, modernist architecture, nationalism, urban events, Istanbul*

Öz

Başka hadiselerin ya da kazaların kaçınılmaz ya da belirlenmiş sonucu olmayan, tümüyle olumsal ya da beklenmedik bir şekilde ortaya çıkan ancak güncel kenti dönüştüren ve geleceğini şekillendirmede güç ve etki uygulayabilen kentsel olaylar hakkında ne düşünmeliyiz? Kentin morfolojisi ve yapılı çevresi yanı sıra kent sakinlerinin mekan algısında kırılmaya ve yeni bir konfigürasyona sebep olan mühim eylemleri ve olayları nasıl tespit edebilir ve açıklayabiliriz? Bu makale kentin modern döneminde belirleyici olan, kentin morfolojisini, kentte yaşayanların deneyimlerini ve kentin etnik-dini kompozisyonunu karşılıklı olarak kuran üç olayı tariflemekte ve incelemektedir. Makalenin temel argümanı, her ne kadar yaratıcı dinamikleri zorunlu olarak tutarlı bir kentsel sistem üretmek üzere işlemiyor olsa da, kentsel olayların bir araya gelerek ya da iç içe geçerek çağdaş/güncel kenti parçalayarak-yeniden birleştirerek yapılandırdıklarıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Gecekondular, modernist mimari, milliyetçilik, kentsel olaylar, İstanbul*

Introduction

Environmental degradation or remediation; targeted destruction (*urbicide*) or re-construction of urban environments; spatial conciliation or polarization of inhabitants; and growing or diminishing spatial-political inequalities – each of these are urban phenomena that occur both as ongoing processes and as a series of related, discrete events. A building is demolished. A match unites a city. A green space is privatized. A poor council builds a civic center.

But what of singular urban events that are not the necessary or determined outcome of other happenings or incidents and yet transform the present city and exert their force and influence into the future? How might we identify and explicate crucial acts and developments that *rupture* and *reconfigure* the morphology and built environment of the city, as well as of its inhabitants' perceptions of space? How do we conceptualize critical events that are not representative nor reiterative of already existing social processes or determined by preceding political-economic occurrences, but initiate new assemblages of urban space and form and different experiences of urban affect and everyday life for city dwellers?

In fact, delineation of the relation between past and future events, and their relative determinacy vis-à-vis each other, has been a constant preoccupation of the social sciences and philosophy. As Kapferer (2015) points out in his introduction to a recent volume on the issue, in anthropology as in other disciplines there has been a longstanding awareness of tensions or even disjuncture between incalculable, unexpected events (or innovations in situated practices), and the reproduction of social and political relations (or structure). He traces a first theoretical engagement with this question back to Max Gluckman and the Manchester school, whose work in colonial South Africa and in the Zambian Copperbelt after W.W.II explored the significance of particular events in instituting new clusters of practice or even of reorganizing historical social formations.

In more recent anthropology a prolific literature has described for a diverse range of social contexts the efficacy of both minor and major events in creating change and in generating new social arrangements (i.e. Turner, 1974; Sahlins, 1985; Das, 1995). To give just one example, Caroline Humphrey's (2008; 2014) work on the event has taken up certain ideas of Badiou, exploring how events – occurrences conceptualized as powerful and sudden ruptures in social processes that fracture daily life – shape or

transform individuals. Humphrey draws attention to how actors constitute themselves as new singular subjects (temporarily or permanently) through what she calls 'decision-events.' If for Humphrey new singular subjects cannot be comprehended without reference to the historic 'layers of what someone has been' (2008, p. 374), she denies that this history determines the emergence of the new singular subject from its previous diverse *personae.* Humphrey's argument that the subject-making event brings about a rupture with previous knowledge and in the way a person conceives of themselves contrasts with Veena Das' anthropology of the event,[1] which seeks to lessen the distinction between the myriad selves and roles of everyday life, understood as unremarkable and routine, and the new subject that is composed in a moment of rupture of such cultural repetition, as in the partition of India and Pakistan. Similarly, Humphrey's account is distinguishable from Sahlins' claim in *Islands of History* that 'all events are culturally systematic.' He goes on to argue that 'an event is indeed a happening of significance, and *as significance* it is dependent on the structure for its existence and effect' (1985, p. 153). For Sahlins, then, human action is mostly explicable within the bounds of a total cultural scheme.

A different language of events and of the relationship – or lack of relationship – between them informs the work of a number of contemporary philosophical theorists. Roland Boer (2013) discerns a common conceptual motif or theme of the emergent or explosive (of the status quo) character of the event in the work of Giorgio Agamben, Fredric Jameson, and Alain Badiou. For each, similarly, the event is not an outcome or reflection of the context around it but an alteration, delinked from the past. He concludes that for each thinker the novel potential of the event is informed by the New Testament's conception of '*kairos*', a 'critical time' that is a future oriented becoming: *kairos* events constitute a 'specific moment of ruptural crisis and a period of opportune, revolutionary time' (ibid: 121) that resignify the past and re-arrange the present-future.

How might these ideas be adapted to understand the *urban event*? As I illustrate below using the example of Istanbul, the urban event there is characterized by a number of key features. First, as asserted by the social

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[1] See Veena Das' paper, 'On Singularity and the Event: Further Reflections on the Ordinary' [https://www.academia.edu/8237494/On_Singularity_and_the_Event_Further_Reflections_on_the_Ordinary]

philosophers referenced above, the urban event is under-determined and contingent, unnecessary in relation to any preceding series of occurrences. Second, an urban event reveals in itself a fateful irreversibility, choking off at the moment of rupture other potential happenings/events and permanently (as far as can be known) de-railing their alternative development. Thirdly, an urban event possesses a generative efficacy, becoming the source of novel spatial arrangements, urban moods, built environments and new forms of social division. Fourth, the urban event begins in a moment of time but is not necessarily ever concluded: it may take place over years, conjoining new urban developments and subjects, none of which could unfold or flow in the way they do without this prior primary event. Last, urban events coalesce or entangle to part-assemble the contemporary city, even as their creative dynamics do not necessarily function to produce a coherent urban system.

To illustrate these features, below I describe and analyze three urban events in Istanbul that have become significant determining acts in the city's Republican period, co-constituting both the morphology of the city and the experiences of its inhabitants. For Istanbul these fateful innovations include (1) the Kemalists' de-Ottomanization of the city via policies of Turkification/ethnic cleansing after 1923; (2) modernist urban planning and its de-facto legitimation of *gecekondu* (shantytowns) (1950-1970); and (3) the spatial activism of revolutionary social movements in the late 1970s, brought to an end by the event of the 1980 military coup, which initiated a re-structuring of Istanbul's political-economy. My discussion of the third urban event reflects a long-standing research project into the recent political history of Istanbul, which has included extensive interviews with urban militants of those years. In sum, Istanbul's contemporary built environments and its inhabitants' perceptions and political experience of the city reflect these events, which simultaneously enable and limit residents in making their own interventions into the urban environment.

The Event of De-Ottomanization and the Turkification of Istanbul

At the turn of the 20th century Istanbul was an imperial and cosmopolitan port city and a center of commerce, consumption and production, its built environment reflecting both 19th century Ottoman modernization and European economic influence. Unlike Rabat in Morocco or Algiers in Algeria, Istanbul was not a colonial city structured by a racial segregation between

indigenous and European 'quarters', or characterized by severe over-crowding and underdevelopment in the 'native' zone (see Rabinow, 1989; Abu-Lughod, 1981). Istanbul's Jewish and Christian neighborhoods were not segregated nor even exclusively non-Muslim, and its large Christian and Jewish communities were neither settler colonialists nor a comprador bourgeoisie acting for foreign powers.

The emergence of nationalism in Ottoman lands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries constituted a rival theory of political and state sovereignty, attacking symbols of dynastic authority and adapting their justifications and rituals of legitimacy for nationalist rule. New states and their leading cadres constituted their authority through a discourse organized around the key terms of ethnicity, race, and nation on the one hand, and independence and development on the other. Their populations, however, were not ethnically homogenous, and their urban centers were richly cosmopolitan. Despite that reality, each post-Ottoman ethnic-state *constituted* as a problem the fact that in its newly inscribed territories there dwelt people who practiced a variety of religious creeds and who spoke different languages from the national majority, necessitating a political decision regarding their 'management.' For non-sovereign ethnic minorities, the emergence of these new nation states led rapidly to an experience of urban precarity, and then to the event of indigenous elimination.

Almost immediately after the instituting of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Republicans expelled the last Ottoman *padishah* [Sultan] from the city of Istanbul. Ownership of family palaces was transferred to the Turkish Republic. The new national assembly gathered in Ankara, dominated by the will of Mustafa Kemal and his followers. The creation of new inhabitants for a new society engaged the political imagination of the Kemalists, to be achieved through the establishment of a number of new social institutions, as well as through the assembling or re-arranging of urban environments. One rather concrete description of the Kemalist revolution is Sibel Bozdoğan's (1994) definition of it as a project of de-Ottomanization. For Kolluoğlu-Kırlı (2002) de-Ottomanization involved the eradication of Ottoman spaces, as pursued, for example, in the Turkish state's rebuilding of the fire zones in Izmir, which obliterated all traces of its non-Turkish history. More significant than this, de-Ottomanization occurred in the mutual expulsion of orthodox Greeks from Anatolia and Muslims from Greece in 1922.

Yet not all Christians and Muslims were unmixed in this population

exchange. Greeks in Istanbul and Muslims in Thrace were exempted from this expulsion of indigenous inhabitants. According to Oran (2003), some 130,000 Greeks in Istanbul were denoted as un-exchangeable, with a similar number of Muslims excused from deportation in western Thrace. Their rights as minorities were sketched out in Article 2 of the 'Convention and Protocol on the exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations' signed at the Lausanne Peace Conference in 1923.

What was the fate of those in Istanbul who in 1923 were allowed to stay? One of the first signs of the problematic cultural status of Istanbul's non-Muslims was the Government's seizure of the building (*Syllogos*) and library of the Greek Literary Society in 1923. A second act constituting non-Muslim residents as problems was the 1927 and 1933 'Citizen Talk Turkish' campaigns, directed at the *sound* of other languages in urban space. In Bursa the municipal government 'passed a decree banning the uses of languages other than Turkish in public' (Cağaptay, 2006, p. 26). But even before this (in 1925), the Turkish State terminated certain rights guaranteed to Christians by the Lausanne Treaty, leading to the abolition of minority family and personal law and the imposition of a new curriculum on the 50 Greek schools in Istanbul, along with the appointment of Turkish teachers to them (see Alexandris, 1983, p. 131-143).

Around the same time a number of other laws were announced designed to *Turkify* the economy. For example, some 40,000 Istanbul Greeks who fled the city in 1922 were barred from returning (despite their non-exchangeable status), and their property confiscated. In 1925 Greeks were barred from travel outside of Istanbul without State permission, and 1928 they were forbidden to own property outside the Greater Istanbul City area (Alexandris, 1983, p. 140). Further, in 1926 the Parliament passed a law that declared that only Turks could be government employees. Military commissions were reserved for Turks, and in their compulsory military service non-Muslims were forbidden from bearing arms. Minorities were also banned from establishing Boy Scout units. In 1928 Ankara legislated that doctors, dentists, midwives and nurses, too, had to be Turks. A 1932 law allocated a number of professions to Turkish citizens, banning 'non-citizens, especially some Istanbul Greeks, who were Hellenic citizens, from a variety of jobs. … More than 15,000 Greek Christians left the country as a result' (Cağaptay, 2006, p. 70).

For the non-Muslim population of Istanbul one result of all these measures was an unravelling of place through dispossession and migration. According to Alexandris, the population of Istanbul in 1924 was 1,065,866, of which 279,788 were Greeks, 73,407 were Armenians and 56,390 were Jews. The census of 1927 shows a large decrease in the city's population, with 809,993 inhabitants in Istanbul of which 126,033 were Greek (Alexandris, 1983, p. 142). In just three years some 150,000 Greeks had left the city.

Four other political acts led to the final collapse of the Ottoman 'world' in Istanbul. The first was the forced conscription in 1941 of all non-Muslim men in Turkey aged between 18 and 45, sent to camps in Anatolia and made to build roads etc. (Alexandris, 1983, p. 213-214). Second and much more calculated was the Government's levying of an extraordinary wealth or capital tax (*Varlık Vergisi*) in 1942, in the context of a serious economic crisis caused by the Second World War. In a party meeting closed to the press the Prime Minister (Şükrü Saraçoğlu) explained the purpose of the tax to the party: 'This law is simultaneously a revolutionary law. It is an opportunity for us to gain our economic independence. We will present the Turkish market to Turkish hands by eliminating the foreigners who control our markets' (cited in Aktar, 2000, p. 148) (my translation). The end result of the 16-month campaign was extremely damaging to Istanbul's non-Muslim population and quarters. The tax collected from the city alone amounted to 349 million liras, of which 93% was collected from Greeks, Jews and Armenians (Aktar, 2000, p. 154). The Wealth Tax was instrumental in destroying the multi-religious structure of Istanbul. Aktar notes that five years later, in the first two years of Israel's founding, 30,000 Jews left the city (ibid: 207).

The third event transforming Istanbul's urban character was the State-sponsored pogrom organized against Greek properties, churches and schools on 6th and 7th September 1955. The coordinated attacks in a number of suburbs caused major damage to Greek Istanbul's built environment. Initiated by an act of provocation – the 'bombing' of the Turkish consulate in Salonika by a Turkish state agent, and faked photographs published in the Istanbul newspaper *Istanbul Ekspres* showing extensive bomb damage to the Salonika house in which Ataturk was born – the final result (as intended) was another mass exodus of Greeks, Armenians and Jews from the city.

The final blow to the cosmopolitan worlds of local mixed suburbs was the 1964 deportation of Greek citizens, when the Turkish government responded to the killing of Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus by punishing Istanbul's local Rum. Unilaterally abolishing the residency rights of Greek citizens guaranteed under the conventions of the Lausanne Treaty, at least 13,000 people were deported and exiled, most of whom had been born in Istanbul (Aktar, 2006, p. 7; Mills, 2010, p. 54; Oran, 2003, p. 104). Another 30,000 Istanbul Rum left with them, many of them Turkish citizens married to members of the evicted Greek community (Alexandris calls them 'Constantinopolitan Hellenes'). Their few goods were loaded onto trucks – emigrants were permitted to take 20 kilos of possessions and 20 dollars – while much of their immovable property and financial accounts were first frozen and then confiscated by the Turkish treasury (Sasanlar, 2006, p. 86-87; Mills, 2010, p. 56). The end result was the rapid departure of most of the remaining 120,000 Rum in Istanbul, leaving behind a decimated population of less than 3000 people (Mills, 2010, p. 55).

In brief, for four decades Istanbul was a spatial target of the urban event of '*Türkleştirme'* (Turkification). By 1965 its pursuit had led to the catastrophic diminishment of Christian and Jewish minorities in the city, as well as to the creation of a Turkish bourgeoisie under the activist eye of a military-bureaucratic elite. One consequence is that ghosts haunt the ex-minorities' suburbs of Istanbul. Bektaş (1996) and Mills (2010) both show how older Muslim inhabitants in the ex-Christian and -Jewish suburb of Kuzguncuk today feel an intense *nostalgia* for an earlier pre-migration time in which people of different faiths lived together in a neighborly fashion, even as they remain ambivalent regarding the state-led violence against non-Muslims designed to drive them away. Silence surrounds the *intentionality* of acts that violated the rights of minorities, impairing the ability of current inhabitants to identify and condemn perpetrators, as well as to grieve or express contrition for those acts.

Urban events generate moods, which transform inhabitants' perception of the city – here for older Istanbul Turks a partial memory of pleasurable relationships, and a confused un-expressiveness about how those relationships were extinguished. For Mills, both nostalgia and silence serves to deflect 'memory of the inclusive nation that could have or should have been' (2010, p. 110). Indeed, the very absence of the descendants of past generations, noticed in the silence of an empty minority schoolyard, reveals not continuity with the past but an event of irreversible rupture

between inhabitants and generations. This rupture was enacted through a spatial campaign; through deportation orders, followed by state confiscation of immovable property; in legislation to prevent its inheritance or transferral; through the forced selling of houses at a fraction of their value to suddenly mercenary acquaintances; by the auction of goods and carpets in streets outside minorities apartments; and in the occupation of newly-evacuated non-Muslim properties.

For non-Muslim minorities all of this violence led to the leaching of familiars (friends, foes, neighbors and family) from Istanbul places until those remaining were left a tiny minority in neighborhoods they could no longer easily make home. For them urban living is now fragile, hostage to Turko-Greek relations and characterized by watchfulness and insecurity. Thus their precarity takes on different expressive forms, perceived variously (in Kathleen Stewards' words) 'as a sea change, a darkening atmosphere, a hard fall, or [in] the barely perceptible sense of a reprieve' (2012, p. 519)

The Event of Urban Planning and the Advent of the *Gecekondu* City

With the permanent transfer of state administrative institutions and Government to a new Ankara, Istanbul in the 1920s and 1930s was a city in relative decline. Unlike Ankara, Istanbul's makeover through modernist architecture was impractical. Not that its spatial de-Ottomanization wasn't fantasized about. In 1937 the ex-mayor of Istanbul claimed that, 'In order to transform Istanbul into a contemporary city, there is no solution but total demolition, with the exception of Istanbul's monuments, and gradual reconstruction' (Gül, 2009, p. 81).

More significantly, Istanbul became a site of urban planning. The most important intervention in the city in the early Republican period was co-ordinated by Henri Prost, chief urban planner in Istanbul from 1936-1950, who produced a master plan in 1938 after two years of extensive research. Prost was an expert on conserving, managing and modifying 'Islamic Cities', having worked previously as chief urban planner in protectorate Morocco from 1913 until 1923 under French Governor-General Hubert Lyautey (Rabinow, 1989; 1996). His plan for Istanbul was designed to conserve and re-present the historic grandeur of the Byzantine and Ottoman city for its imagined new inhabitant – the appreciative and mobile Turkish *flaneur* – while engineering its modernization and improving its transport

and hygiene (Bilsel, 2010). These two dimensions of planning – preservation of architectural monuments and signs of cultural diversity, and technical modernization – are difficult to orchestrate, as the generally unrealized nature of Prost's intentions for Istanbul illustrates.

A second phase of planning and modernizing of Istanbul was begun under the Democrat Party and its leader Adnan Menderes, whose expert committee in 1952 found Prost's master plan lacking in research and statistical study and recommended the instituting of a permanent team to upgrade and guide the city's urban renewal. Ironically, however, given the accusation that Prost's plan for Istanbul amounted to its beautification and not its modernization (Akpınar, 2010), the new master plan exhibited remarkable continuity with his design.

At the heart of the Menderes redevelopment of Istanbul was the opening up of new avenues and modern roads. Many of them followed routes first mooted in Prost's master plan. The wide boulevards eased traffic congestion and facilitated vehicular circulation through the southern city, even as they cut new lines of division between or within neighborhoods. Major projects included the building of Millet and Vatan streets that ran east west to the ripped-open old city walls, connecting to the new E5 motorway. The 8 traffic lanes of Vatan Street was the widest road ever built in Turkey. It also became the primary arena for military parades on the Republic Day national holiday. A new shoreline road (Kennedy Street) encircled the historic peninsula, connecting Florya and Yeşilköy Airport with Unkapanı, via Sirkeci and Eminönü. Karaköy Square was built on the other side of the Galata Bridge, with new roads connecting it to Dolmabahçe along the Bosphorus and to Atatürk Bridge on the northern bank of the Golden Horn. According to Gul, on the other side of the Bosphorus "a large avenue, Bağdat Street, connecting Kadıköy to Bostancı and a motorway between Haydarpaşa and Pendik were the major works executed in this period" (2009, p. 157). Figures vary concerning the number of older buildings destroyed in the years 1956-1960, the most intense period of city reconstruction. Gül (2009, p. 152) estimates 5000, while Akpınar claims that 7289 were demolished "to make roads in straight lines" (2010, p. 192).

How might we think about relations between the urban events of Turkism and planned modernism in the de-Ottomanization of Istanbul? In their analyses of modern urbanist operations in the city, historians have been sensitive to the violence of planning, in particular to the huge number of buildings demolished by both Prost and Menderes to facilitate the circulation of

automobile traffic and to modernize the city. Yet often they minimize the Republic's acts of excluding ethnic chauvinism, sidestepping its determination to produce a transformation not just in the city's built environments but equally importantly in the ethnicity of the people who owned, lived in and used it. Menderes' demolitions in particular have sparked debate as to whether they targeted the properties or dwellings of non-Muslims. Keyder insinuates that they did, noting that in the southern peninsula new roads 'cut through densely packed Christian areas of the city' (1999, p. 175).

Putting aside these claims, planning histories that focus on the 'bricks and mortar' of giant redevelopment projects and architectural interventions in urban space often overlook the 'violence' of architecture on a less monumental scale, such as in the micro practice of changing the visual appearance of places. Cağaptay notes how the 'Citizen, Talk Turkish' campaign in 1927 started with the postering of the city: 'Signs were put up in theatres, restaurants, hotels, movie theatres, public ferries, and streetcars to recommend that everybody speak Turkish' (Cağaptay, 2006, p. 26). Often un-noticed, too, is the production or transformation of soundscapes, from the sudden enunciating of the call to prayer in Turkish in 1934, to the playing of classical western music on ferries etc. There is a censorious aspect to this transformation as well, the muting in new urban spaces of unacceptable languages or dialects, of both their spoken and sung words. In the composition and decomposition of the city's aural environment we hear another aspect of these two urban events.

We might characterize the micro processes of these urban events as *performative urbanism*, directed not primarily at the city's configured physical environment but at certain of its inhabitants, intended to be felt as warnings testifying to their new placeless status, with far-reaching consequences for their experience of the city. Residents subjected to this urban event (and its forms and experiences of spatial practice) become precarious subjects, losing their trust that the public spaces of the city includes or even tolerates their form of political, ethnic or religious particularity.

By the mid-1960s, then, de-Ottomanized Istanbul was a place transformed by the politics of *Turkist modernism*. At the same time growing numbers of rural migrants to the city were looking for homes. Despite this, government funding of mass housing remained minimal. Further, in Istanbul there were minimal rental stocks, and migrants had little money.

The result was a housing crisis, resolved only by the unauthorized occupation of unused state land and the urban event of creative auto-production of small-scale 'garden cities' – shantytowns or *gecekondu* – on it.

What caused this mass population movement? Supported by the OECD, the turn to *import substituting industrialization* (ISI) as the new accumulation model after the 1960 coup, along with restoration of the parliamentary system and a new constitution, generated a new pull factor for migrant-workers to the city. It also facilitated Istanbul's 'private sector' (Pamuk, 2012, p. 235ff) or 'manufacturing bourgeoisie' (Keyder, 1987, p. 141ff) to dominate the economy. ISI was regulated through the State Planning Office, established by the military regime in 1960. Its crucial role included allocation of scarce foreign exchange and cheap credit to approved industrial enterprises. State Economic Enterprises (SEEs), historically established by state investment in heavy and polluting industry, provided subsidized inputs to the private sector. Along with high customs duties and a quota system on imports, ISI led to the booming expansion of the economy, as well as to an explosion of privately owned large-scale manufacturing plants producing consumer goods on the fringes of Istanbul's settled areas.

An integral aspect of the concatenation of all these processes was the tripling of Istanbul's population in 20 years, from one million to three million people in 1970, and then to five million by 1980 (Keyder, 2005, p. 125). This vast movement of people to the city led both to the filling-in by housing of any vacant inner-city land, and to Istanbul's tremendous urban sprawl, destroying greens spaces and market gardens on the city's edge and enveloping Ottoman and Republican tourist spots up the Bosphorus. According to the voluminous literature on the *gecekondu*, rural immigrants were integrated into urban life in the post-war period through employment, finding work in both smaller workshops and in the protected and rapidly expanding import-substituting industrial economy (e.g. Karpat, 1976; Erman, 2012; Şenyapalı, 2004). Employment, precarious or otherwise, meant participation as consumers in the bourgeoning internal market.

For Keyder, however, a more important process of incorporation into the city was through 'settlement and housing' (2005, p. 125). This did not occur via state-funded provision of mass housing, as was the case in Singapore for example. On the contrary it involved the event of informal yet organized and collective squatting on vacant public land on the periphery

of the city. For large-scale capitalists, this do-it-yourself dwelling strategy ensured rapid capital accumulation, not just because of low wage costs but because the state and government declined to tax private profits that might have been used to produce socially subsidized housing. Entrepreneurs, builders, regional associations (*dernek*) and, as we will see below, leftist groups all facilitated migration settlement through particular acts of land-occupation for people from the same village or area, strengthening existing patronage networks (see Erder, 1996; Tekeli, 1992). Colluding with such occupation, populist policies legalized the dwelling places of immigrants in the city, through politicians' promises to retrospectively legitimize ownership of purloined land in exchange for inhabitants' votes.

What is striking about much shantytown research in the 1960s and 70s is their examination and representation of the *gecekondu* suburbs in isolation from the rest of the city. As Erman comments, for many researchers, empirical study of the *gecekondu* and its inhabitants anxiously compared it with the 'modern' urban city and population, with no empirical investigation about how 'modern' residents actually lived. Urban peasants, then, were compared with 'an idealized image of urbanites' (2001, p. 991). More significantly, the economism of dominant theoretical approaches (modernization and dependency theories), with their preference for articulating developments to the industrial or capitalist economy, induced in researchers blindness to the urban event: especially to the State and to its *political* production of space in the city. Core aspects of Istanbul's built environment and their affordances as receptacle for political power – for example, its sites of nationalist signification – were either taken for granted or remained 'invisible' to scholars. The ongoing nationalist intentions informing the event of modernist planning in Istanbul, the city's political architecture (including its statuary), nationalist violence that sought to cleanse the city of non-Muslim minorities (including its re-naming of streets in Istanbul), and the banning of non-authorized signs of Islam from the semi-public space of State institutions: all of these urban innovations were non-issues. Nationalism as State enterprise and ideology is ignored, as is its chauvinistic Turkist (*Türkçülük*) dimensions. In brief, focus on the *gecekondu* and the issue of its residents' assimilable difference as peasant 'others' produced deafness to the Kemalist 'eventfulness' of the city and to its project of Turkifying inhabitants, through the ritual use of space, in its educational curriculums and as encoded in the built environment. This

is important, because it was to these processes that rural migrants and their children were subjected.

Indeed, in the easy light of retrospection, it is clear that researchers perceived the lived experience of inhabitants in the *gecekondu* and the spatial furnishing of their own environments through the evolutionary assumptions of modernization and dependency theory discourses. Residents' patches of garden, the sparse affordances of houses, *gecekondu* women's fashioning of themselves through headscarves, even attendance at the cinema was of intense interest to researchers, but for all the wrong reasons. Each were interpreted as signs of their [lack of] 'modernization.'

Interestingly, a focus on either the macro-economic processes that facilitated the emergence of *gecekondu* suburbs or on phases of its [inhabitants'] urbanization obscured one of their most salient characteristics: their emergence as self-produced. As Bachelard notes in *The Poetics of Space* (1994, p. 14), *the house we make is an inhabited house*. For residents themselves *gecekondu* environments were interactive places of neighborliness, inter-subjective conflict, affective intensities, and gendered sites of mobility and organization.

Thus by the 1970s at least three urban events had intertwined to form new spatial arrangements, modes of governance, and urban practices, as well as to condition (and sometimes haunt) residents' encounter with the city. The forced migration of non-Muslims out of Istanbul intersected with new modernist planning projects in Istanbul and the rise of a surrounding *gecekondu* city, deliberately left outside the boundaries of the plan. As minorities migrated their properties were initially abandoned to dereliction and decay. Thereafter,

> many were occupied by incoming rural migrants who achieved ownership after a period of uncontested occupation. In Kuzguncuk, all of the shops on the main street and many of the houses were transferred in various (and some believe through legally ambiguous) ways to Muslim Turks, some of whom had arrived in Kuzguncuk as rural migrants and worked as employees for minority-owned businesses (Mills, 2010, p. 57).

One result, as dramatized in Güngor Dilmen's play *Kuzguncuk Türküsü* (Kuzguncuk Folk-Song), was the forced selling of properties for a fraction

of their worth. The phrase, 'Neighbor, how much is your house?' resounded in urban streets as a new local idiom (Mills, 2010, p. 128).

In brief, the urban event of non-Muslim expulsion and Turkification generated pathways to particular futures and forms of precarious urban lives, facilitating Turkish migration to non-Muslim neighborhoods from the early 1950s onwards – for example, to Galata, Cihangir, Ortaköy, Tarlabaşı, Çengelköy, Kadıköy, Karaköy, Kuzguncuk, and the Princess Islands. Turkish nationalism's eventful destruction of the city's cultural system of sharing urban space also degraded Istanbul residents' skill in and practice of urban cosmopolitanism, paving a way, too, to leftist/rightist urban violence in the 1970s (see below).

Activism as Event and the Production of Space in Istanbul, 1975-1983

A third major urban event in Istanbul that transformed the city, modifying participants' perceptions of the urban past and establishing the potential of certain actions (and counter-actions) as future events, was the explosion of mass activism in the second half of the 1970s, followed by the 1980 military coup. In those years, militants of the socialist fractions and the cadres of the ultra-nationalists together sought both to control and to re-make the city, making the city a site of conflict and changing radically the experiences and practices of urban place-making, both for their own members and for the rest of Istanbul's inhabitants.

Why arrow in on the period 1975-1983 to identify a new generic urban event? Is there artificiality in bracketing off these years from the flow of earlier social processes and events that bequeathed to activists already instituted imaginaries, habits and urban environments even as they sought to create new and insurgent social-historical practices and arrangements? Despite this risk, which as we have seen in the different perspectives of Humphreys and Sahlins concerns the relative significance of the rupture or repetition of an event, 1975 seems to herald the emergence of a qualitatively different city from the Istanbul of the 1960s and early 1970s. In July 1974, an amnesty extended to political activists by the short-lived Ecevit coalition government released thousands of leftist intellectuals, trade unionists, student leaders, and journalists imprisoned after the 1971 military intervention and declaration of martial law.

According to Faik, 'when I came out of prison in 1974, I was surprised by the strength of the leftist groups. They were everywhere and very

lively.' They had also become more factionalized: 'The *TKP* (Turkish Communist Party) began to organize in 1973/4 as well, and had become influential. After the mid 70s the left groups divided into two fronts (*cephe*), Maoists and the Soviet aligned groups.' At the same time, labor militancy was growing amongst workers in state industries and in large private factory plants, with membership in unions fractured between two major rival confederations, DİSK (Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions) and Türk-İş (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions). By 1979 more than 1 million workers were organized in unions, the majority of them in Istanbul (Mello, 2010). A broad and eclectic range of civil society associations, parties and organizations had organized to oppose the government. Of course, an active and heavily factionalized radical leftist movement generated its own opposition, not only in employers' federations or in rightwing political parties vying for parliamentary domination, but in the form of a para-military anti-communist organization, officially known as the 'Idealists' (*Ülkücüler*), whose purpose was to combat, violently or otherwise, the influence of the left (Çağlar, 1990). Around this time guns, too, became a feature of activist life: 'All groups began to be armed after 1975/6, because of the violent anti-union attacks', said Erdogan (*Dev Yol*). The result was combat in and over the city: the taking possession of its public spaces and institutions through occupying force, and the attempted creation of politically autonomous zones in the city's shantytowns.

Similarly, what makes 1983 the end of an urban event? Post the 1980 military intervention, the violent pacification of the city continued throughout the years of martial law (1980-1983). The return to restricted parliamentary authority and civilian government with the election of Turgut Özal as Prime Minister in November 1983 signified the cessation of the direct rule of the military junta. In short, the years 1975-1983 may be construed to constitute a distinct period for the city, characterized first by the fearlessness of mass urban mobilization and then by the fear of state terror, both of which marked indelibly, in their reckoning with Istanbul, a generation of activists.

What novel practices and precarious new subjects did this urban event create? Let me limit my discussion here to consideration of the key performative spatial practices of activists and factions in their attempts to both communicate with and mobilize *gecekondu* inhabitants in Istanbul. First, in the light of the unfolding new urban event, activists' perceptions of the *gecekondu* were transformed. No longer were they seen as sites of peasant

backwardness but as places of resilience and revolutionary potential. By the late 1970s the *gecekondu* suburbs became socio-spatial battlegrounds marked by a struggle for their control of their affordances and for their autonomous organization. Although there were no real 'liberated zones' ('*kurtarılmış bölgeler*') in Istanbul, in the sense of areas where police, soldiers or counter-guerrillas could not enter, there were what interviewees called 'districts of resistance' ('*direniş mahalleleri*') controlled by leftist groups. Leftist *gecekondu*, especially the 'edge suburbs' (*kenar mahalleleri* or *varoş semtleri*) that had sprung up outside the city plan and beyond the state's authority, were often boycotted by the council or local capital and provided with little services. In edge suburbs youth became heavily organized into radical groups.

How did leftist groups initially order *gecekondu* settlements? Vacant state land was valuable. Different leftist groups were able to extract both a form of land rent and political loyalty once they were in control of an area. For a small sum of money given to the organization, people could buy land, or a subdivision. There had to be no state presence for socialist organizations to confiscate and distribute public land. If there was no state authority, then occupation happened extremely quickly. Militant groups were aware, of course, that in many cases an informal 'land mafia' was organized to facilitate chain migration from a particular region to new *gecekondu* areas. Illegal political groups joined in and politicized this older pattern of land appropriation and allocation.

Ergün (from Maoist *TKP/ML*) explained how his organization did it:

> I went to 1 Mayıs, and to Nurtepe (to *Enternasyonel Mahallesi*: now it is just a *meyhane* name). We went to do political work (*siyaset calışması*), to win the masses (*kitle kazanmak için*). We helped make houses: the more houses you could make, the more supporters you could win. Thus wherever we could we commandeered land. I went with others to Kağıthane steel-works: we called a meeting and said, 'is there anyone here who has no house?' We took them to Nurtepe and said, 'here, your houses.' We divided up land with a thread.

Organizations also insisted upon militants' practical work in the *gecekondu*. Partisans' attempted building of relations between the resistance districts and themselves became a rite of passage for tens of thou-

sands of leftist students. For student-militants, visiting, working, and staying in informal settlements, perceived as sites of unfolding revolution, was a duty as well as a process of character formation. According to interviewees, student work in squatter settlements (i.e. in Kocamustafapaşa, Fikir Mahallesi, Topkapı, Alibeyköy, Ümraniye) involved a huge range of practices, including selling the group's journal there, teaching literacy classes, protecting the *gecekondu* from attacks on its sites of solidarity (for example, on its coffeehouses), and providing services (holding health clinics, bringing medicine, giving legal advice). 'I took a woman to have an abortion—I was 16!' said Özlem.

In short, activists and residents were involved in their own event of spatial production, from the actual generation of material environments (building of roads, stairs and houses; subdivision of vacant state land and the selling of plots to families; laying down of cement barriers at entrances to suburbs as defense of the area against attack) to the recruitment of potential recruits and the organization of protests, boycotts and various forms of local self-governance, including consciousness-raising education directed at inhabitants. Activist groups developed and administered an informal political order in the *gecekondu* through these daily practices and uses of place. Ruthless and well informed, the first act of the military junta after the coup was to target for special treatment the resistance districts of the city.

Conclusion

This paper has examined three singular and powerful urban events in Istanbul in the Republican period, each of which majorly transformed the city. Events modified the perceptions of inhabitants as well, and methodologically, may be most clearly identified and tracked through sensitive description of residents' altered, moods and experiences of place, violence, precariousness, mobility, urban knowledge, agency or resilience. To give just one brief example: in Istanbul urban events changed the basic experience of walking in the city. Prost's building of a modernist Gezi Park in the 1940s as a place for an emerging Turkish middle class to promenade and stroll contrasts with the experience of activists in the 1970s, for whom moving through the city was exhausting, requiring constant observation concerning where to walk, which way to pass, and who controlled space.

Can our analysis of critical urban acts or events in Istanbul tell us something about the urban event in general? One issue concerns the nature of the event in relation to the ordered beat of chronological time. Purged of its divine underpinnings, in the work of the social philosophers examined by Boer, subjects must seize the revolutionary moment of the *kairos* event, unexpected precisely because it is unrelated to the flow of present and preceding occurrences. The history of Istanbul reveals a different quality to urban events, one that affirms their unnecessary and under-determined emergent character even while acknowledging the *preparatory* work of earlier events and processes, and equally importantly, the acts of the organizers' and perpetrators of those events. Indeed, the ethnic cleansing of minorities in Istanbul testifies to the possibility of *planning* a rapturous event (but not in the way envisioned by marketing, business and event management disciplines).[2] Secondly, if as Kapferer claims events open up 'numerous pathways into various potential futures' (2015: 16), the analysis of urban events in Istanbul also shows how they simultaneously close down or blockade other, once possible, alternatives. Even as they unexpectedly diverge from existing systemic processes, urban events also institute particular new features in the city, changing modes of governance and property relations, spatial arrangements, urban action, population composition, and perceptions of inhabitants. Last, although understandable as atypical or even unique, urban events also interact with other urban events, entwining to co-assemble the city. But their assembling (of Istanbul) does not generate a coherent urban system, given that each event encompasses a range of different situated practices, some of which relate more closely to, or frictionally rub up against, aspects of other urban events. Logically, too, urban events may come to an end, when their generative power fails any more to part-fabricate the built environment or individual subjects, or when new urban events take up and transform their unrealized possibilities. Cities, then, are in part the frictional outcomes of urban events, and anthropology and urban studies would do well to more carefully study them.

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[2] For example, see *Event Studies: Theory, research and policy for planned events* (Getz and Page, 2016).

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