

Politics, Religion & Ideology

ISSN: 2156-7689 (Print) 2156-7697 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ftmp21

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To cite this article: Necmettin Doğan (2024) Unraveling the Islamist nostalgia; Kulturkampf on urban space in Turkey, Politics, Religion & Ideology, 25:3, 364-382, DOI: 10.1080/21567689.2024.2379353

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2024.2379353

Published online: 02 Aug 2024.

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POLITICS, RELIGION & IDEOLOGY
2024, VOL. 25, NO. 3, 364–382
https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2024.2379353

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Unraveling the Islamist nostalgia; Kulturkampf on urban space in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Despite the wealth of literature examining the spatial policies of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) governments, there has been a noticeable absence of comparative studies with the spatial concepts found within Turkish Islamism. This article suggests that the use of space as a political tool in cultural conflict has roots dating back to the nineteenth century, and that Islamism has perpetuated this tradition into the Republican period, particularly during the 1990s. By analysing the spatial policies and practices enacted by the AKP governments, valuable insights can be gained into the potential trajectory of Islamism in Turkey. The disparity between the Islamist conceptions of space in the 1980s and 1990s and the policies implemented during the AKP era not only underscores the controversies and conflicts surrounding space, but also provides an illuminating view of Islamist strategies.

Introduction

The concept of the 'spatial turn' suggests that space cannot be understood as an objective, neutral entity but rather is shaped by social relations. Because space is closely tied to class and cultural dominance, it is a significant component of ideologies and a key site of political conflict.[1] Recognizing the foundational role of social relations in power dynamics is crucial. These relations inherently manifest in a spatial form and interconnect with other entities, shaping the identities and objects they influence. One significant approach to comprehending space is viewing it as a by-product of social relations and interactions. Consequently, it consistently serves as both a manifestation and a medium through which power operates.[2] In other words, social relations, which serve as a means and form of power, also become spatial. When we consider that a group's cohesiveness and power often rely on its ability to exclude those different from its members,[3] it becomes clearer how vital space is in group identity. Ideologies also often use place and space to distinguish between 'us' and 'them,' 'domestic' and 'foreign,' and other

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[1]Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2013).

[2]Doreen Massey, 'Thinking Radical Democracy Spatially', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 13:3 (June 1995), pp. 283–288, doi:10.1068/d130283.

[3]Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Classics in Communication and Mass Culture Series (New Brunswick, NJ, U.S.A: Transaction Publishers, 1998), pp. 157–167.

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categories.[4] This intervention of ideology pertains not only to the (re)production of capitalist social and production relations, as proposed by the initial ideas of Marxist thinkers, but also, space itself constitutes a 'mode of political thinking.' In other words, it is political because it reveals the divisions of the established order and offers a realm of experience for the formation of political identities.[5] Thus, space influences how individuals and groups orient themselves and act within society, and it also helps to create social hierarchies through the use of symbolic languages and discourses.[6] These discourses take on an ontological dimension as they shape the structure of society.[7]

The utilization of space as a political instrument by Islamist movements can be traced back to the era of Abdulhamid II (1876–1909), during which mosques and other religious spaces were perceived as means to mobilize and organize the Muslim population.[8] More recently, Islamist movements have continued to use space to further their political and ideological goals, often in the context of broader cultural and political conflicts. The conservative-Islamic governments of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) have shown a strong interest in creating new spaces, particularly in Istanbul, and this has led to a renewed academic interest in the AKP's space politics. Several scholars have analysed the spatial policies of the AKP, offering different perspectives on the motivations and consequences of these policies. Tokdoğan[9] evaluates the AKP's spatial policies from the standpoint of the sociology of emotions, while Batuman[10] sees the emphasis on religiosity in public space as an effort to build a new nation based on religion and establish counter-hegemony. Dressler[11] also aligns with Batuman's perspective and suggests that the AKP's spatial policies are part of an effort to construct a nation based on Neo-Ottomanism. Çavuşoğlu[12] argues that the AKP created a mechanism for distributing votes and establishing hegemony through corporatism and spatial policies. Dorroll and Dorroll[13] argue that Istanbul's spaces and places are now saturated with Neo-Ottoman idioms and accents as a result of the spatial policies of the AKP. Similar arguments have been developed by Ghulyan,[14] specifically focusing on the example of the Turkish capital, Ankara. Peker[15] shifts the focus on the spatial policy of the AKP, which revolves around urban rents within the context of neoliberal economic policies. Akçalı and Korkut (2015) add another layer to this discussion. They argue that the

[4]Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place*, NED-New edition (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttt1xt.

[5]Husik Ghulyan, 'The Spatialization of Islamist, Populist, and Neo-Ottoman Discourses in the Turkish Capital under AKP Rule', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 61 (November 2019), pp. 125–153, doi:10.1017/npt.2019.15.

[6]Bernhard Schäfers, *Architektursoziologie: Grundlagen - Epochen - Themen*, 2., durchges. Aufl, Soziologie der Architektur und der Stadt / Bernhard Schäfers, Bd. 1 (Wiesbaden: VS, Verl. für Sozialwiss, 2006), p. 19.

[7]Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London ; New York: Verso, 2005), p. 65.

[8]Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*, Studies in Middle Eastern History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[9]Nagehan Tokdoğan, *Yeni Osmanlıcılık: Hınç, Nostalji, Narsisizm*, 1. baskı, Araştırma-Inceleme Dizisi 442 (Fatih, İstanbul: İletişim, 2018).

[10]Bülent Batuman, *Milletin mimarisi: yeni islamcı ulus inşasının kent ve mekân siyaseti*, İlk basım (Beyoğlu, İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2019).

[11]Markus Dreßler, 'The Reconversion of the Hagia Sophia: Silences and Unheard Voices', *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 8:1 (2021), p. 27, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/3/article/845956.

[12]Erbatur Çavuşoğlu, 'Kadim İdeoloji Korporatizme AKP Makyajı', in *İnşaat Ya Resulallah* (İstanbul: İletşim, 2021), pp. 77–94.

[13]Courtney M. Dorroll and Philip Dorroll, *Spatial Politics in Istanbul: Turning Points in Contemporary Turkey*, Edinburgh Studies on Modern Turkey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

[14]Ghulyan, 'The Spatialization of Islamist, Populist, and Neo-Ottoman Discourses in the Turkish Capital under AKP Rule'.

[15]Ali Uzay Peker, 'AKP Döneminde Rövanşist Mimari', *Mimarlık*, 386 (2015).

urban transformation led by the AKP not only involves embedding neoliberalism in the physical environment but also entails projecting a neo-authoritarian vision of nationhood and national history. This is achieved through the construction of buildings designed to showcase culture for the public.[16] However, there is a lack of scholarly literature that examines the conceptualization of space by Islamist groups prior to the rule of the AKP and compares this conceptualization with the spatial practices implemented by the AKP governments. In order to understand the practices of the AKP in recent times, it is necessary to examine the Islamist discourses on urban and spatial design within a historical context. Comparing the Islamist discourses on space and the spatial practices of AKP governments can also provide insight into the sociological background of Islamist ideology in Turkey.

This study distinguishes itself from existing literature by contextualizing the spatial policies of the AKP era within the historical backdrop of late Ottoman modernization and Republican secularization. While much urban planning scholarship focuses solely on AKP policies, analyzing their Islamist and neo-Ottomanist urban strategies, it often overlooks pre-AKP Islamist spatial imaginaries in Turkey. Therefore, one of the aims of this article is to delineate the relationship and disjunction between Islamist spatial and urban architectural imaginaries of the 1990s and the practices of AKP governments. This article also seeks to illustrate that the utilization of space as a political instrument in cultural disputes has historical roots dating back to the nineteenth century, with Islamism perpetuating this tradition into the Republican era, particularly during the 1990s. While the AKP's conservative-Islamic spatial policies reflect the influence of this conflict, the utilization of space as a cultural battleground has been instrumental in generating urban rents and transferring capital to the emerging conservative bourgeoisie. I also try to demonstrate despite the AKP's endeavours to Islamize urban spaces and instill them with a neo-Ottoman ambiance, the initiative has been subject to contention, particularly in light of Turkish Islamism's assertions regarding urban space. To accomplish these objectives, the study will delve into the discourse surrounding space from the late Ottoman Empire to the republican period.

To delve into the role of space as an instrument in the Kulturkampf within Turkish politics and explore how Islamism conceptualized spatial policy in the 1990s, this paper will examine the portrayal of urban space in *İzlenim*. Published from 1992 to 1996, *İzlenim* produced 40 issues and emerged as a prominent Islamic intellectual publication of its era. Notably, *İzlenim* holds particular significance due to the involvement of several influential authors, including figures such as Ahmet Davutoğlu and Ömer Çelik, who have played pivotal roles in AKP governments. Additionally, certain authors from the journal later assumed crucial positions in media outlets closely aligned with AKP administrations. After thoroughly reviewing all issues of the magazine, I identified and selected articles pertaining to spatial themes through archival research, employing thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as an independent qualitative descriptive approach, is commonly defined as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.[17] While qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis are frequently utilized in qualitative descriptive studies, their boundaries and distinctions are

[16]Emel Akçalı and Umut Korkut, 'Urban Transformation in Istanbul and Budapest: Neoliberal Governmentality in the EU's Semi-Periphery and Its Limits', *Political Geography*, 46 (May 2015), pp. 76–88, doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2014.12.004.

[17]Mojtaba Vaismoradi, Hannele Turunen, and Terese Bondas, 'Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis: Implications for Conducting a Qualitative Descriptive Study', *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 15:3 (September 2013), pp. 398–405, doi:10.1111/nhs.12048.

not always clearly defined, leading to interchangeable usage and confusion regarding their similarities and differences. In thematic analysis, the extracted data serve to illustrate the analytical points the researcher makes about the data, extending beyond their specific content to elucidate the data's significance and implications.[18] Utilizing thematic analysis, I concentrated on articles that delved into spatial themes, placing them within their historical context and scrutinizing their correlation with the spatial politics of Islamism and AKP governments, through the prism of the concepts of Kulturkampf and nostalgia.

Space as a culture war in Turkish politics

The concept of culture war refers to the conflict between different cultural values and ideologies and the ways in which these conflicts manifest in various areas of society, including politics, media, social institutions and space.[19] Societies undergoing modernization work to define their cultural identities within the political, intellectual, and moral spheres. Various social groups, each with political, intellectual, and moral agendas, vie for power to ensure their worldviews prevail. The concept of Kulturkampf, or cultural struggle, is evident in numerous global examples. These occurrences are part of broader social dynamics, which vary in form, duration, and intensity based on historical contexts. As such, Kulturkampf does not lend itself to a fixed, universally applicable conceptual definition. However, it is often possible to discern the underlying motives of these conflicts. The groups involved typically have clear objectives: to foster a sense of belonging in society that aligns with their interests and perspectives, to influence moral authority centres to reflect their biases, and to ensure their version of history is recognized and becomes predominant over others.[20] Imperial Prussia and Republican Turkey are two prominent examples where the process of cultural identification and conflict reached the level of a 'culture war,' or Kulturkampf. In Imperial Prussia, the Kulturkampf spanned from 1871 to 1878 and reflected Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's determination to solidify the Lutheran Church's role as an extension of the Prussian state, while curbing the influence of an international religious authority, the Vatican, in Prussia's administrative affairs. Key actions taken by the Prussian government included abolishing the Catholic division within its Ministry of Culture in 1871, reducing Catholic influence on educational curricula, barring religious orders from teaching in schools, and expelling the Jesuit order from Germany in 1872. In Turkey, the peculiarities of its modernization highlighted the interplay between religion and politics as a central characteristic of Republican Turkish politics. This dynamic has continually shaped Turkey's political landscape, underscoring the complex and evolving nature of its cultural conflicts. The roots of the Turkish Kulturkampf can be traced back to the nineteenth century during the late Ottoman period, specifically to the modernization efforts known as Tanzimat. These reforms marked the beginning of significant shifts in the Ottoman Empire,

[18]Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2 (January 2006), pp. 77–101, doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
[19]James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe, *Is There a Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center : Brookings Institution Press, 2006).
[20]Ural Manço, 'Kulturkampf ve Türevlerini Karşılaştırmak', in Necmettin Doğan and İrfan Özet (eds) *Modern Türkiye'de Kültür Savaşı* (Ankara: Nika Yayınevi, 2023).

setting the stage for the cultural conflicts that would later characterize Republican Turkey.[21] Despite recent scrutiny,[22] Şerif Mardin's influential thesis, widely referenced in scholarly and public discourse on Turkish politics, suggests that the nation's historical trajectory has been shaped by a political interplay revolving around a secular nucleus and a conservative-religious periphery,[23] maintaining its significance within academic realms. As articulated by Özbudun (2013), a key social cleavage that has influenced the Turkish party system remains centred on the division between the centre and the periphery in Turkish politics.[24]

Western influence, which spread from law to architecture after the proclamation of Tanzimat Reforms (1839), became a subject of public debate with the development of communication technologies in the 1860s and was criticized by the emerging modern intellectuals known as the 'New Ottomans,' such as Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, and Şinasi under the banner of cultural imitation.[25] The ideologies embraced by Kemal, who emerged as the most eloquent among a cohort of discontented young bureaucrats and writers, can be aptly characterized as a defense of liberal principles intertwined with Islamic rationale. Kemal and his compatriots, collectively referred to as the 'Young Ottomans', epitomized devout Muslims and staunch Ottoman nationalists, imbued with a sense of nostalgia for both Islam's bygone golden age and the zenith of the empire. They vehemently criticized the policies of Tanzimat Pashas, denouncing them as superficial replicas of European norms devoid of consideration for traditional Ottoman and Islamic ethos, and as servile to European interests.[26] Concurrently, officials during the Abdülaziz era (1861–1876), aiming to garner broader public support for reforms, adjusted the Tanzimat's reformative strategies in response to the growing conservative sentiments among the dominant Muslim population. The official discourse now conveyed messages of imperial stability and rootedness, infused with references to a glorious Ottoman past and its 'common and immutable' traditions. While the state retained the 'Ottomanist' rhetoric from the early Tanzimat, imbued with tones of egalitarianism and inclusiveness, revised definitions of Ottoman identity took on a distinct Islamic hue during Abdülaziz's reign. Interestingly, orientalist images were also internalized within the discourse of 'indigenous, national, and local.' The book '*Usul-i Mimari-i Osmani*' (*Fundamentals of Ottoman Architecture*), prepared by a cosmopolitan group of writers, for an exhibition in Vienna in 1873, stands out as a prime illustration of self-orientalizing aesthetics rooted in this invented 'locality'. The architectural repertoire of the 'Ottoman Renaissance' displayed a specific coherence in the choice and arrangement of historical references. Its general medieval character was shaped by incorporating decorative elements from the European Orientalist vocabulary, especially that of the Alhambra, alongside forms reminiscent of the preclassical Ottoman

[21]Ioannis N. Grigoriadis and Theocharis N. Grigoriadis, 'The Political Economy of Kulturkampf: Evidence from Imperial Prussia and Republican Turkey', *Constitutional Political Economy*, 29:3 (September 2018), pp. 339–369, doi:10.1007/s10602-018-9262-5.
[22]Paul T. Levin, 'Reflections on Şerif Mardin's Center-Periphery Thesis', *Turkish Studies*, 24:3–4 (August 8, 2023), pp. 617–639, doi:10.1080/14683849.2023.2189592.
[23]Şerif Mardin, 'Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?', *Daedalus* 102:1 (1973).
[24]Ergun Özbudun, *Party Politics & Social Cleavages in Turkey* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2013).
[25]Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).
[26]Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 3rd ed (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

era.[27] The tendency towards policies with a solid Islamic emphasis during the reign of Abdulhamid II (1876–1909) emerged as a continuation of this process. Symbolic transformations of space with an Islamic-nationalist aspect were given particular importance in state ceremonies, protocols, and architecture to legitimate the regime during Abdulhamid II's reign.[28] After the proclamation of the Second Constitution in 1908, changes in architectural approaches reflected the influence of rising nationalism. As Turkism aimed to unite society around a new identity, it sought to embody Turkishness in space and architecture.[29] The 'national architectural movement,' which received official support from the nationalist Union and Progress Party (1908–1913) in power after the Second Constitution, was active until the 1930s and influenced most architects working during this time.[30]

The modern state positions itself as the definitive and stable core of national societies and spaces. Portraying itself as the ultimate culmination and essence of history, it often tends to homogenize and flatten the social and cultural spheres.[31] The selection of Ankara as the capital city of modern Turkey in 1923 exemplifies the influence of the modern state on space, as the new capital was chosen as the representative location of the new nation and Republic. The newly established Republic saw Ankara as a blank canvas to implement a modernist project.[32] As a result, in the 1930s, the First National Architecture movement was replaced by modernist architecture. Under the leadership of Atatürk, the new regime saw space as a part of modernization and social engineering. Modernist architecture was imported as both a visible symbol and an effective tool for a radical programme to create a modern and secular nation.[33]

Kemalist urbanism ingrains its governing narratives of Turkish nationalism into the physical environment. To manifest their conceptualization of nations and national identities, Kemalists undertook the 'creation of new spaces' designed as venues for nationalist memory. The Kemalist city is distinguished by the growing density of nationalist monuments, mausoleums dedicated to its presidents or notable figures, memorials for martyrs, and statuary that adorn the new capitals. Remarkably, between 1923 and 1950 no new mosques were constructed in Ankara. In the 1930s, Turkish nationalist discourse fabricated a kinship with ancient Anatolian civilizations, thereby discrediting Islamic Ottomans as illegitimate forebears. This narrative also asserted a connection to the Hittite heritage, fostering a longstanding relationship with Anatolia that served to alleviate concerns raised by other nationalist stories glorifying the migration of Turkish tribes from Central Asia. The tangible expression of this national genealogy manifested in the urban fabric through the incorporation of collective symbols. Notable examples

[27]Ahmet Ersoy, Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary: Reconfiguring the Architectural Past in a Modernizing Empire, Studies in Art Historiography (Farnham Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 10–217.
[28]Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909*, New ed (London: Tauris, 2011), p. 19.
[29]V. G. Cephanecigil and Günkut Akın, 'Geç Osmanlı ve Erken Cumhuriyet Eönemi Türkiyesinde Milliyetçilik ve Mimarlık Tarihi', *İtü Dergisi* 9:2 (n.d.), pp. 29–40.
[30]Seyfi Başkan, 'Türk Modernleşmesi ve Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminin "Milli Mimarlığı"', *Journal of Turkish Studies* 11:13 (January 1, 2016), pp. 97–97, doi:10.7827/TurkishStudies.9878.
[31]Henri Lefebvre, Donald Nicholson-Smith, and Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 23. print (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2013).
[32]Berin F.Gür, 'Unutmak, Öteki ve "Boş Kent" Ankara', *Journal*, 2:4 (2011), pp. 8–22.
[33]Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernizm ve Ulusun Inşası: Erken Cumhuriyet Türkiyesi'nde Mimari Kültür*, ed. Tuncay Birkan, 1. Basım (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2002), p. 18.

include the prominent Hittite Monument erected at the bustling intersection of Ataturk Boulevard and the establishment of key state enterprises such as Sumerbank and Etibank in the 1930s. These enterprises were named after the Sumerians and Hittites, respectively. The nationalization of space, achieved by referencing Hittite sculptural themes, is most prominently observed in the design of Ataturk's mausoleum (Anıt Kabir) atop a hill.[34] The emergence of a secular-nationalist space policy during the early republican period has led to space becoming a central topic of cultural debate in Turkish politics.

Islamism and space

During the formative phase of the party system in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the centre–periphery cleavage, marked by a distinct cultural, political, and economic divide between the 'ruling' elites and the 'subject' masses, remained a defining factor in shaping partisan alignments.[35] During the 1961–1980 period, the cultural and political power aspects of the centre began to diverge significantly. The political realm, in particular, saw increasing penetration from the periphery, notably the Islamic revivalist National Viewpoint (Milli Görüş) and the National Salvation Party (MSP), as well as ethnic nationalist groups like the Gray Wolves (Ülkücü) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).[36] After the 1980s, the Kemalist modernization programme—with its economic policies, secular principles, and ethnonationalist underpinnings—faced intensified scrutiny and growing criticism. During this period, the Islamist Refah (Welfare, RP) Party rose as the leading voice of the anti-Kemalist opposition, rapidly evolving from a tenuous structure to become Turkey's largest political party within a decade.[37]

Social segments that were not significantly impacted by the Turkish modernization and Westernization process have long experienced a sense of alienation from anything they perceive as representative or indicative of these policies. The emergence of an environment allowing them to express their reactions through social movements and the transition to multiparty politics has given rise to various forms of political discourses. One of these expressions is the discourse of 'indigeneity' intertwined with a nostalgic perception of a glorious and golden Islamic-Ottoman past.

Although nostalgic discourse on space and architecture emerged in the late Ottoman Empire, it has become an important characteristic of Islamists' discourse on space in the Republican period. Unsurprisingly nostalgia of a golden age has been a common attitudes of revivalist ideologies in the modern age. Svetlana Boym categorizes the types of nostalgia; Restorative and reflective: 'While reflective nostalgia dwells in longing and loss, embracing the imperfect process of remembrance, restorative nostalgia emphasizes 'nostos' (return home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories.

[34]Christopher Houston, 'Ankara, Tehran, Baghdad: Three Varieties of Kemalist Urbanism', *Thesis Eleven*, 121:1 (April 2014), pp. 57–75, doi:10.1177/0725513614526157.
[35]Sabri Sayarı and Yilmaz R. Esmer, eds., *Politics, Parties, and Elections in Turkey* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Pub, 2002).
[36]Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, *Turkish Dynamics: Bridge across Troubled Lands*, 1st ed., Middle East in Focus (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[37]Reşat Kasaba, 'Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities', in Reşat Kasaba and Sibel Bozdoğan (eds) *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

Restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time'.[38]

The perception of the Tanzimat Era plays a pivotal, negative role in the nostalgic imagination of Islamists regarding the glorious past.[39] For Islamist poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–1983), who had a significant influence on the ideology of AKP elites, the Tanzimat period was a process in which Islam's social influence was consciously erased.[40] Islamists embraced this perspective on the Tanzimat and modernization process in the 1990s to include the city, space, and architecture. From their perspective, the efforts towards modernization and Westernization during the Tanzimat period disrupted traditional Islamic spatial organization, including cities and architecture.

The effort to create a secular and Western city and space in Turkey, particularly in Ankara, intensified the cultural battleground between modernists and Islamic circles. Conservative and Islamist criticisms of these policies resurfaced with the increase in population and urbanization after the 1950s. Writers like Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti (1917–1983), Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–1983), and Arif Nihat Asya (1904–1975) used an Islamist, nationalist language and saw Hagia Sophia as a cultural battleground in magazines like Sebilürreşat, Büyük Doğu, and Serdengeçti.[41] According to Islamists, modernization, largely understood as Westernization, degenerated the identity of Istanbul, and the city's beauty was lost through the reconstruction activities in the Taksim-Pera district of Istanbul. According to them, while the Republic's modernization policy glorified Ankara, it extinguished and depersonalized Istanbul. This degenerate view of Istanbul made Istanbul a target for conquest again in Islamist ideology.[42] As a result, a stronger culture war against secular spatial practices and urban arrangements was launched after 1950, with Ankara being seen as a foreign, Western, and 'a city without a mosque.[43] Another influential Islamist actor, Kısakürek, compares the actions of the Republic to those of historical enemies of Turkey, such as 'the Crusaders, the Muscovites, and the Greeks', and suggests that the 'Western world' is responsible for the current state of the country through its agents within Turkey.[44] The concept of 'indigeneity' has become intricately linked with a nostalgic portrayal of a magnificent Islamic-Ottoman era, especially gaining prominence since the 1980s. This theme has notably permeated right-wing ideologies, including Islamism, occasionally manifesting as a subtle form of nationalism. However, the foundational concept driving this discourse has been undergoing evolution since the 1950s.[45] In the 1970s, the Nationalist Movement Party initially, and later prominently, the National Outlook (Milli Görüş) movement, employed the terms 'Yerli' (Indigenous) and 'Milli' (National) as a counter-narrative against the secular republican elites, often branded as Western-oriented. This rhetoric has been notably adopted by the AKP, especially in the last decade.[46] As expected,

[38]Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).
[39]Mehmet Doğan, *Batılılaşma İhaneeti* (İstanbul: Birlik, 1979).
[40]Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, 'İslam Nasıl Bozuldu?', *Büyük Doğu*, 2:82 (1948).
[41]Umut Azak, 'From Museum to National Temple: Hagia Sophia as a Nationalist Site of Memory in the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 8:1 (2021), pp. 191–196, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/3/article/845953.
[42]Tanıl Bora, 'Fatih'in İstanbul'u', *Birikim*, 76 (1995).
[43]Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti, *Mabetsiz şehir* (İstanbul: Türk Edebiyatı Vakfı, 1995).
[44]Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, 'Ayasofya', *Büyük Doğu*, 16 (1966).
[45]Mert, Nuray, 'Sağdan Yükselen Muhalefet: Yerlilik', *Cogito*, 21 (1999), p. 173.
[46]Tanıl Bora, *Yerli ve Milli*, 2016, https://birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/7422/yerli-ve-milli.

emphasis on being 'indigenous and national' under the AKP has also manifested itself in spatial and architectural practices in recent years. Before delving into the spatial politics of the AKP, it is essential to thoroughly discuss conservative-Islamic initiatives aimed at establishing an Islamic space.

The resistance against secularization of space has manifested in the creation of conservative enclaves like Akyazılı and Akevler. The importance of space in these struggles highlights the significance of spatial relations and the ways in which they can be used to assert cultural and political power. The first Islamist enclave was established in Izmir in 1963. One of the pioneers of the establishment of the enclave was Fethullah Gülen, who would later found and lead an influential Islamic movement that initially supported and later posed challenges to the AKP, most notably evident in the 2016 coup attempt. Gülen came to İzmir and started the Akyazılı project, which was completed in 1977 with a conservative independent enclave vision, especially by organizing tradespeople. A similar project was implemented in İzmir under the guidance of the Milli Görüş movement, a prominent Islamic political group in Turkey that has exercised a significant impact on the AKP. The Akevler project, which aims to bring religious people together and to create a common spatial unit independent of the secular atmosphere of the city, was implemented in Izmir in 1967. Starting with 150 flats, Akevler has grown and transformed its surroundings spatially. An Imam Hatip school, the Faculty of Theology and Kestanepazarı Quran School played a role in the emergence of the environment as an Islamist enclave.[47] These efforts have been driven by a desire to transform both the social and physical space in order to create environments that are more in line with conservative Islamic values. This has often involved the construction of mosques, schools, and other community spaces, as well as the concentration of religious tradespeople and merchants in specific areas. Conservatives and Islamists see these spaces and enclave as a way to counter Turkish society's perceived secularization and Westernization and create a more Islamic environment to live and raise families.[48]

When the Welfare Party (RP) emerged on the political stage and assumed control in the major municipalities of Turkey in the 1990s, the culture war over space became more solidified. During the RP's governance, there was a noticeable transformation of urban space, both in terms of discourse and the physical construction of the environment: Islamic elements, discourse, and practices became increasingly prominent through street name changes, architectural motifs, and various Islamic social practices in public spaces. Additionally, beginning in 1994, there was a significant initiative to rename urban toponyms in Ankara. During this process, toponyms reflecting the city's modern identity were replaced with names referencing the Ottoman past and Islamic heritage.[49]

In 1994, the Welfare Party restructured the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipal Organization for Urban Development. They established a new entity called the Istanbul Residence Development Plan Industry and Trade Inc. (KİPTAŞ). The aim of KİPTAŞ was to advance the agenda of the Islamist slogan 'Adil Düzen' (Just Order) by creating new

[47]İrfan Özet, *İzmir duvarı: laik mahallede iktidar ve kültür savaşı*, 1. baskı, İletişim yayınları Araştırma - inceleme dizisi, 3161 526 (İstanbul: İletişim, 2022), pp. 66–67.
[48]Cihan Tuğal, *Pasif devrim: islami muhalefetin düzenle bütünleşmesi*, ed. Şeyda Öztürk, trans. Ferit Burak Aydar, 3. baskı (İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi, 2014), pp. 124–125.
[49]Ghulyan, 'The Spatialization of Islamist, Populist, and Neo-Ottoman Discourses in the Turkish Capital under AKP Rule'.

urban development zones on the outskirts of Istanbul. Başakşehir emerged as the initial endeavour where the fundamental principles of Adil Düzen would be put into practice: the creation of affordable, family- and community-oriented housing that aligns with 'local values.' Right from the outset, the project aspired to build a novel type of city with a conservative perspective, although the present-day Başakşehir represents a modified version of the original plan. These efforts to make public space more Islamic have continued under AKP rule. The construction of the Başakşehir project continued in the 2000s with the AKP government. Başakşehir has emerged as a magnet for Islamist-conservative residents, flourishing under the populist urban policies of the AKP that cater to their preferences. It has become the preferred residential destination for this burgeoning Islamist middle class, which finds traditional secular districts less accommodating. Simultaneously, this newly established municipal district mirrors the rise of an Islamic fashion industry, government regulations on alcohol consumption, and the growing trend of gender segregation in daily life. This is evident in the proliferation of women-only hotels, swimming pools, and public parks—a reflection of the AKP's Islamic urbanization agenda.[50] The project has caused controversy regarding its impact on the social fabric of Istanbul and its possible role in creating a more conservative, segregated city.[51] In the 1990s, the Islamist vision of space gained greater theoretical depth, with *İzlenim* emerging as the leading intellectual magazine publishing articles on the subject.

Space and imagined cities

Islamism experienced a surge in momentum during the 1980s. The 1980 Military Coup resulted in the suspension of the Constitution and the establishment of martial law. Many civil liberties were suspended, and political parties, trade unions, and other civil society organizations were banned. The coup has had also a significant impact on the political landscape of Turkey, and it played a role in the rise of Islamism in the country. The coup led to a shift towards more conservative and authoritarian policies and contributed to the marginalization of progressive and secular voices in Turkish politics.[52] In this political environment, Islamism emerged as a formidable political force in Turkey, resulting in the proliferation of Islamic media outlets such as magazines, television, and newspapers. One of the prominent magazines among Islamist publications was *İzlenim*. It attracted intellectuals, poets, architects, and writers, fostering a rich discourse on various subjects. Notably, the magazine's articles delved into social and political issues, while also exploring themes of space, urbanism, and architecture. Overall, the magazine's content often contended that prevailing urbanization and architectural paradigms were estranging, straying from the traditional and Islamic values cherished by society. Writers with a focus on urban space and architecture contended that contemporary urbanization and architectural methods were ill-suited for the 'natural and social structure' of society

[50]Hüseyin Kalaycı, 'The Network of Capitalist "Cronies" of the AKP: Başakşehir and Başakşehirspor', *Turkish Studies*, 23:4 (August 8, 2022), pp. 576–599, doi:10.1080/14683849.2021.2011238.
[51]M. Ali Dokumacı, 'Muhafazakarlık ve Neoliberalizmin Kıskacında Yeni Bir Kültürün Doğuşu: Başakşehirli Olmak' (Master Thesis, Hacettepe, n.d.), pp. 40–56.
[52]Nuray Mert, *Batı İslâm'ı çok sevmişti: Batı'nın İslâm siyasetleri ve islâmcılık*, 1. baskı, İletişim yayınları Araştırma - İnceleme dizisi, 3114 516 (İstanbul: İletişim, 2022).

and advocated for their alignment with traditional and Islamic values. Notably, during the 1990s in Turkey, some Islamists viewed the notion of an Islamic city as a means to reclaim and reorient space in accordance with their beliefs and values.

An article in *İzlenim* titled 'We Want Our Mosques Back' is a prime example of Islamism using space as a tool in the cultural conflict within the context of Turkey's modernization. Here author İbrahim Kiras asserts that mosques and masjids are essential to the lives of Muslims and that the Islamic city is characterized by the presence of these places of worship, which create a sense of belonging and add to the city's aesthetic. However, the author criticizes the proliferation of 'skyscrapers and ugly and meaningless' structures in Istanbul and claims that even half of the mosques built during the Ottoman era have not survived. While the author appears to accept the destruction of some mosques for the purpose of road construction during the Menderes period (1950–1960) as a necessary evil, they condemn the sale of mosques to private individuals during the single-party period, which they see as a betrayal by the modern secular republic.[53]

The Habitat I conference was called by the United Nations General Assembly in response to growing recognition among governments of the urgent need for sustainable human settlements and the challenges posed by rapid urbanization, particularly in developing nations. Taking place in Vancouver, Canada, from May 31 to June 11, 1976, Habitat I stands as the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. The second Habitat conference, which took place in Istanbul in 1996 under the United Nations, brought the topics of space, city, and architecture to the forefront of the agenda for Islamists. The 33rd and 34th issues of *İzlenim* Magazine, published in the same year, feature numerous articles on these subjects. However, the authors of these articles tend to emphasize ideology and culture rather than discuss the specific issues of urbanization in Turkey in a concrete manner. In his article titled 'The City and Death', Rasim Özdenören, a prominent figure in Islamist literature, presents a romanticized, nostalgic view of the past and a critique of the 'modern city.' Özdenören[54] portrays the modern city where individuals lead mechanical, secular lives that have lost their sense of purpose. He presents an idealized vision of the 'Ottoman city' as a counterpoint to these negative aspects of the modern city, implying that the Republic and modernity have destroyed these idyllic past cities. Ahmet Turan Alkan's article 'Mahalle' (Neighbourhood) also presents a similar image of the ideal past being destroyed by the Republic and modernity.[55]

It is noteworthy that Alkan's article includes a painting by John Frederick Lewis, an orientalist, depicting a collective meal in Cairo. Alkan uses this painting to support his romanticized view of the past and suggests that it reflects the 'beauty and splendour of the Islamic middle age.' This reliance on orientalist perspectives can also be seen in the writing of other Islamist authors. Mustafa Armağan, for example, suggests that modernist Turkish intellectuals failed to understand the true nature of the cities in which they lived and instead idolized past patterns from the West, repeating the mistakes of the past. At the same time, even a French artist, Alphonse de Lamartine, who visited Ottoman

[53]İbrahim Kiras, 'Camilerimizi Geri İstiyoruz', *İzlenim*, 16 (1994).
[54]Rasim Özdenören, 'Kent ve Ölüm', *İzlenim*, 33–34 (1996).
[55]A. Turan Alkan, 'Mahalle', *İzlenim*:22 (1995).

Empire, described Istanbul as a paradise on earth. However, Armağan argues that Turkish intellectuals have overlooked the unique characteristics of their own cities, instead idealizing Western cities as the sole and superior models. In doing so, they have repeated the mistakes of Tanzimat bureaucrats.[56] Similarly, another Islamist author, Bilal Eryılmaz[57] argues that the neighbourhood played a central role in the organization of basic services in the traditional Ottoman city and served as a place for social solidarity, cooperation, and security. The neighbourhood was self-contained with its own amenities, such as a school, mosque, square, fountain, coffee house, market, and bath. Eryılmaz suggests that the idealized Ottoman city, with its emphasis on community and social cohesion, remains relevant today, even though some may view it as a relic of pre-industrial societies.

This discourse of Islamists on the neighbourhood carries an overt orientalist tone. The 'Islamization' of historical cities and spaces' as depicted in the writings of *İzlenim* authors evokes Edward Said's critiques of Orientalists who argued that Islam exerts a top-down control over all aspects of Islamic societies.[58] Ersoy argues that the 'indigenous and national aesthetic' movement that emerged during the reign of Abdülaziz incorporated elements of orientalism in some respects.[59] Similarly, orientalists like Ernest Renan and William Marçais developed the concept of an ahistorical, ideal 'Islamic city' based largely on North African cities, and many devout Muslims adopted these ideas.[60] However, it is important to note that there is no historical record of an 'Ottoman city' or an 'Islamic city' that was purely shaped by religion and completely distinct from other cities around the world. These conceptions were primarily the result of the work of orientalists and should be approached with caution.[61] It is likely that Islamists of the 1990s incorporated orientalist elements in their conceptions of neighbourhoods and Ottoman-Islamic cities. Mert argues that orientalist ideas have shaped the Islamists' perception of the East and the Islamic world from the very beginning.[62] It is intriguing to note that Islamist writers of *İzlenim* appear to integrate the orientalist notion of the 'timeless Middle East' and the belief that 'everything, from top to bottom, is Islamic' into their conception of Islamic space.

In addition to articles focused on neighbourhoods, the journal also published articles with broader claims about the city and space. The article, titled 'Axis Cities: Indicators of the Destiny of Civilizations,' authored by Ahmet Davutoğlu, who would go on to become Minister of Foreign Affairs and then Prime Minister in the AKP government, evaluates the city, particularly Istanbul, within the context of a 'civilization discourse' that he also explores in other works. Davutoğlu argues that Medina (the ideal Islamic city) is a place where 'servitude, freedom, and power' intersect and that the decline of Islamic civilization can be traced to a loss of the balance between these forces in Medina. He suggests

[56]Mustafa Armağan, 'İslam ve Şehir, Açık Oturum', *İzlenim*, 22 (1995).
[57]Bilal Eryılmaz, 'Küreselleşen Dünyada Kent, İnsan ve Yönetim', *İzlenim*, 22 (1995).
[58]Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Revised edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).
[59]Ersoy, *Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary*.
[60]Janet L. Abu-Lughod, 'The Islamic City--Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19:2 (1987), pp. 155–176, http://www.jstor.org/stable/163352.
[61]Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Alan Masters, *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[62]Mert, *Batı İslâm'ı çok sevmişti*.

that the lack of identity of Hagia Sophia symbolises the identity crisis currently faced by Turkish society. Davutoğlu situates the Islamist conception of space within the larger context of a civilisational imagination, suggesting that the modernization and westernization efforts of the Tanzimat and Republican periods distanced the Turkish people from their civilization and had a significant impact on the way space was understood and used. The discourse surrounding symbolic places such as Hagia Sophia and the alleged 'mosque massacre' (attributed to the Kemalist elites during the 1930s) proposes an alternative vision of the city that seeks to balance concepts of 'servitude, freedom, and power.'[63]

Space, as an important aspect of the culture war, has become central to constructing the Islamist 'we' image in the 90s. According to Islamists, the source of our main problems, including those related to the city, stems from the loss of ideal values in the past. İlhan Kutluer argues that what makes a city worth living in is the alignment between the values that the city was founded on and those upheld by its inhabitants. However, this harmony has been lost, and secular and modern forces have shattered the indigenous and local culture. Kutluer suggests that if the spaces and buildings within a city are based on the values of the people who live there, a sense of belonging and participation in the city can be fostered.[64] However, it is not clear how this can be achieved. This ambiguity facilitates the avoidance of addressing specific issues and instead emphasizes the centrality of purism and indigenousness, which are key themes of conservatism in Turkey, within the Islamic conceptualization of space and urban environments.[65]

Turgut Cansever (1921–2009) was a distinguished architect recognized for his endeavours to integrate traditional and conservative aspects into modern architecture and urban planning in Turkey. He displayed a keen interest in themes such as tradition, culture, Islamic identity, and the dynamics between self and otherness, especially within the realms of conservatism and urbanism. His work and ideas have had a significant impact on the field of architecture and urbanism in Turkey. Cansever's work has been influential in Islamic intellectual circles and is often cited as a reference point. In his efforts to create an 'imaginary "we"' in the fields of architecture, urbanism, and painting, Cansever also constructs the image of the 'other,' or the West, in his works. This reflects his interest in exploring the relationships between different cultural and ideological perspectives and how they shape our understanding of the world and ourselves. According to Cansever, history is a struggle between right and wrong, and space and architecture are also part of this struggle. He believed that the Islamic civilization is unique and advanced but has been wrongly suppressed and underappreciated by internal and external forces. Cansever voiced criticism against the Republican elites, whom he believed had become estranged from their own cultural heritage. He depicted the West as the 'other,' emphasizing disparities between the East and West in their approaches to comprehending the world and the diverse historical and cultural backgrounds from which they emerged. Cansever dedicated a significant amount of his intellectual efforts to advocating for and celebrating the principles and achievements of Islamic civilization.

[63]Ahmet Davutoğlu, 'Eksen Şehirler: Medeniyetlerin Kader Göstergeleri', *İzlenim*, 33–34 (1996).
[64]İlhan Kutluer, 'Şehir Kimdir?', *İzlenim*, 22 (1995).
[65]Uğur Tanyeli, *Rüya, Inşa, Itiraz: Mimari Eleştiri Metinleri* (Esenler, İstanbul: Boyut, 2011), p. 37.

Cansever contended that the West was entrenched in superstition, which he considered a fundamental component of their system of truth.[66] This dichotomy between the West and Islam formed a central theme in his work, as did the contrast between conservative Islamists on the one hand, and supporters of the Tanzimat reforms and Westernization on the other. Cansever posited that architectural and urban challenges reflected cultural schisms and the resultant tensions evident in local politics. According to him, the Ottoman city demonstrated reverence for individuals, neighbours, and the environment, unlike the modern, Republican-era city, which lacked these values. He asserted that Ottoman cities did not face issues such as environmental degradation or pollution, attributing this to Islamic principles that prioritize the welfare of people and the natural world. Cansever contended that Turkey, having deviated from these principles, has yet to fully grasp and integrate them into its contemporary urban development efforts.[67]

Islamism's culture war over space, fought against the Tanzimat reforms, Republican revolutions, Enlightenment, and modernity, is grounded in religion and seeks to draw on specific examples from Islamic history. According to Cansever, the Ottoman city's emphasis on adapting to the realities of life, existence, and creation was superior to the static, Hellenistic Western philosophy that informs modern city planning. The Ottoman neighbourhood organization, with its dervish lodges playing an important role, was an example of this more flexible and adaptable approach. However, these neighbourhood organizations were dismantled in the areas occupied by imperialists in order to suppress resistance to colonialism. Armağan also asserts that the founders of the Republic acted with a colonial mindset and pursued a similar strategy of breaking down traditional communities within their own country.[68]

Rent, space and city under AKP rule

During the 1990s, political discourse in Turkey pivoted from focusing primarily on class disparities and economic challenges to emphasizing cultural concepts that underscore the growing rift between secular and Islamist ideologies. Concurrently, religious brotherhoods and communities began to rise in prominence, appearing to become entrenched elements of the political landscape.[69] As conservatism intensified, the political spectrum's centre of gravity shifted to the right, bringing issues such as spatial politics to the forefront of national discourse. In this scenario, it's important to recall how cultural dialogues often intersect with class struggles.[70]

The 1990s also witnessed the rise of the Anatolian bourgeoisie, a period marked by a nostalgic glorification of the Ottoman era, often viewed as a more favorable counterpart to the modern state. The Islamist writers' quest for an alternative narrative served as a method to resist Kemalism's efforts for social engineering, aimed at catalyzing cultural change. Additionally, this provided an avenue to create urban rents and facilitate capital transfer. This Ottoman nostalgia, viewed through the lens of Boym's (2001)

[66]Erhan Berat Fındıklı, 'Etkilenme Korkusundan Arzu Nesnesinin Tahribine: Mimar Turgut Cansever'de Ötekinin İnşası', *Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi*, 11:1 (2016), doi:10.17550/aid.27701.
[67]Turgut Cansever, 'Habitat'ın Amaçladığı Sivil Katılım Osmanlılarda Zaten Mevcuttu', *İzlenim* :33–34 (1996).
[68]Armağan (1995).
[69]Kürsat Çinar, *The Decline of Democracy in Turkey: A Comparative Study of Hegemonic Party Rule*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics 96 (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).
[70]Ali Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, *The Rising Tide of Conservatism in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave macmillan, 2009).

concept of restorative nostalgia and a longing for a lost golden age, was not merely focused on reconstructing the past, but rather on forging an alternative present.[71] In other words, the cultural debates around space, the city, and housing are closely tied to broader social and political conflicts and struggles for power and influence. The administrators of the Istanbul Municipality, who were members of the Islamist Welfare Party, were inclined towards restorative nostalgia, which motivated them to reinvent traditional spatial forms. During the second half of the 1990s, the staff of the Welfare Party began to incorporate Ottoman arts, eating and drinking practices, and architectural forms into social life, particularly in metropolitan cities. This was an attempt to revise cultural practices and rebuild national identity by re-remembering the country's Ottoman-Islamic past. Istanbul, as the home of the Ottoman-Islamic past of the Turks and a symbol of magnificence and pride, was particularly significant in this effort, as it sought to re-identify itself on a symbolic level with its Islamic tone, in contrast to the secular Republic centred in Ankara.

The 2002 parliamentary elections marked a significant turning point in the history of the Turkish party system, with the AKP securing an absolute majority of seats in parliament and forming a single-party government, the first since 1991. The AKP continued to achieve electoral success in both the 2007 and 2011 parliamentary elections, steadily increasing its voter share. As a result, it has solidified its position as the leading political party, once again reshaping the party landscape.[72] Employing predominantly populist rhetoric, the AKP capitalized on a contentious narrative pitting the 'authentic' populace against 'corrupt' elites,[73] leveraging existing social divisions in Turkey to its advantage. This underscores the enduring schism within Turkish politics, illustrating a Kulturkampf between divergent worldviews of competing factions, transcending mere territorial or socio-economic divides.[74] However, despite its significance in the culture war, spatial politics has consistently been intertwined with power dynamics and the accumulation of capital, particularly evident during the AKP period. Not surprisingly, the transformative efforts concerning space gained momentum with the beginning of AKP governments in 2002.

As pointed out in the introduction, many researchers view the emphasis on constructing and restoring mosques as part of the AKP's broader efforts to promote Islamic values and bolster the role of Islam in society. Numerous buildings commissioned by AKP governments exhibit a Neo-Ottoman architectural style, intended to shape and reinforce a distinct Islamic identity and ideology.[75] In this regard, there exists a relatively continuous discourse between the concept of the 'Islamic city' and the idealized image of the Ottoman neighbourhood, as proposed by certain Islamist intellectuals and city administrators during the 1990s, and the spatial policies and practices of AKP Governments in

[71]M. Hakan Yavuz, *Nostalgia for the Empire: The Politics of Neo-Ottomanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).
[72]Ersin Kalaycioğlu, 'Attitudinal Orientation to Party Organizations in Turkey in the 2000s', *Turkish Studies*, 9:2 (June 2008), pp. 297–316, doi:10.1080/14683840802012058.
[73]Ezgi Elçi, 'Right-Wing Populism in Turkey and the 2023 Elections', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (April 9, 2024), pp. 1–21, doi:10.1080/14683857.2024.2338502.
[74]Kursat Cinar, 'The Historical Roots of Right-Wing Populism in Turkey: A Spatial Examination of the DP, ANAP, and AKP Governments', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 24:1 (January 2, 2024), pp. 121–143, doi:10.1080/14683857.2023.2176195.
[75]Batuman, *Milletin mimarisi*; Gencay Serter, *Muhafazakâr Kentin Inşası*, 1. baskı (Kadıköy, İstanbul: Notebene Yayınları, 2018).

the 2000s. However, despite the political motivation to transform urban space into a more Islamic and conservative one, the primary interest of AKP governments has been to extract capital from city rents. As argued by Harvey, urbanization plays a crucial role in the absorption of capital and has a specific function in the dynamics of capital accumulation. Additionally, the production of space and spatial monopolies becomes integral to the dynamics of accumulation, highlighting the geographical specificity of this process.[76]

As a result of the neoliberal economic policies implemented since the end of the 1970s, globalization has accelerated and an irregular and competitive international environment has emerged for the movement of goods and capital. Big cities have had to define their original values in order to attract more investment and strategic social groups and increase their competitiveness. This has led to city governments becoming entrepreneurs and cities becoming an important part of capitalist production. In this context, the use of space and the organization of cities have become key considerations for city governments as they seek to attract investment and maintain competitiveness. This has had a range of impacts on housing, urban development, and the spatial organization of cities as city governments attempt to create attractive and livable environments for residents and investors. Before the AKP came to power, Turkey had already adopted neoliberal policies, which had a range of impacts on the use of space and the organization of cities. Neoliberalism, based on the reinterpretation of classical liberalism and the belief that society will function better with the logic of the market, became hegemonic in urban politics with globalization.[77]

During the AKP period, various strategies were implemented to transform space and daily life, with the construction industry playing a central role. In particular, the number of construction permits increased significantly between 2002 and 2007, a sevenfold increase compared to previous years.[78] These policies were driven by a focus on economic growth and the development of infrastructure, and were supported by a range of measures such as deregulation and the privatization of public assets. As a result, the construction sector was significantly expanded, and many new buildings, roads, and other infrastructure projects were built. However, these policies also had a range of negative impacts, including the displacement of residents, the destruction of natural habitats, and the emergence of social and environmental problems.

Throughout the AKP era, several legal frameworks were introduced to centralize city management and facilitate the creation of new spaces. These included the 2005 Urban Transformation and Development Draft Law, the 2006 Draft Law on Transformation Areas, and the 2012 Law on the Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk.[79] These laws provided a favorable political and legal environment for the development of new infrastructure projects, including the construction of high-rise office buildings, luxury housing, and other real estate developments. However, the AKP administration also focused on the redevelopment of old shantytowns and areas in the city centres

[76]David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2012).
[77]Michael Gunder, 'Planning as the Ideology of (Neoliberal) Space', *Planning Theory*, 9:4 (November 2010), pp. 298–314, doi:10.1177/1473095210368878.
[78]Serter, *Muhafazakâr Kentin Inşası*, 226.
[79]Asuman Türkün, ed., *Mülk, Mahal, Insan: İstanbul'da Kentsel Dönüşüm*, 1. baskı, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi ; Kent/ Monografi, 461. 8 (Şişli, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2014).

deemed at risk of earthquakes, using the threat of disaster as a justification for these projects. These urban transformation projects were often motivated by the desire to generate rent and transfer it to private actors, rather than addressing the needs of local communities or promoting social and environmental sustainability.[80] On the contrary, the urban transformation projects implemented during the AKP period have not only led to the destruction of the traditional urban fabric, but also the gentrification of the city. The traditional neighbourhoods where the lower and middle classes used to live have been demolished and replaced by luxury housing, offices and shopping centres. This has led to the displacement of lower-income groups and the rise of rent prices in the city.[81]

The urban transformation projects, carried out by the state through TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of Turkey) and other public institutions, have also been criticized for their lack of transparency, corruption, and lack of consultation with the residents. Studies also show that the residents of these houses stated that their neighbourhood relations, belonging to the neighbourhood, and sense of security decreased and that they thought the project also caused great harm to the urban aesthetics.[82] In the 1994 municipal elections, the RP campaigned on an anti-globalization platform, with Erdoğan as the mayoral candidate opposing the construction of new skyscrapers. Subsequently, in 1995, the metropolitan municipality declared a freeze on financial development in the city centre and redirected investment towards the urban periphery, shifting economic capital away from the city centre. This move not only disrupted the previously established urban hierarchies but also challenged the entire urban neoliberalization project. However, during the AKP governments, Istanbul has emerged as the leading city with skyscrapers in Europe. This urban-spatial dimension reflects what Tuğal referred to as Turkey's 'passive revolution', wherein the challenge of Islamism was assimilated into capitalism. Pious AKP Muslims, who began to identify themselves not as Islamists but as conservatives, mobilized religion to reshape the city in ways that deviated from their earlier radical goals.[83] These recent urban developments in major cities under the government's purview have adopted a uniform morphology reminiscent of Dubai aesthetics, resulting in a loss of their multicultural and distinctive urban and architectural identities due to neoliberal urban interventions.[84]

Furthermore, the majority of projects undertaken by the government or companies associated with government circles often adopted names and themes inspired by

[80]Sinan Erensü and Ozan Karaman, 'The Work of a Few Trees: Gezi, Politics and Space: The Work Of a Few Trees', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 41:1 (January 2017), pp. 19–36, doi:10.1111/1468-2427.12387; Nihal Durmaz, 'The Real Function of the "Disaster Law" in the Urban Development of Istanbul', *Alternatif Politika*, 14:2 (2022), pp. 31–52.

[81]Tolga Islam and Bahar Sakızlıoglu, 'The Making of, and Resistance to, State-Led Gentrification in 245 Istanbul, Turkey', in Loretta Lees, Hyun Bang Shin and Ernesto López-Morales (eds) *Global Gentrifications Uneven Development and Displacement* (Policy Press, 2015), pp. 245–264.

[82]Miray Gur, 'Discussing Quality of Life in Urban Transformation Through Bursa Doğanbey', *MEGARON / Yıldız Technical University, Faculty of Architecture E-Journal*, 2016, doi:10.5505/megaron.2016.89410; Batuman, *Milletin mimarisi*; Reycan Çetin, 'Critical Toponymy: Creating Prestigious Spaces Through Using Urban Names', *MEGARON / Yıldız Technical University, Faculty of Architecture E-Journal* (2018), doi:10.5505/megaron.2018.05826.

[83]Cihan Tuğal, 'Urban Symbolic Violence Re-Made: Religion, Politics and Spatial Struggles in Istanbul', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 45:1 (January 2021), pp. 154–163, doi:10.1111/1468-2427.12853.

[84]Isikkaya Ali Devrim, 'Housing Policies in Turkey: Evolution of TOKI (Governmental Mass Housing Administration) as an Urban Design Tool', *Journal of Civil Engineering and Architecture*, 10:3 (March 28, 2016), doi:10.17265/1934-7359/2016.03.006.

Western cities[85] and globalized consumer culture. This trend reflects the desires and aspirations of the burgeoning conservative middle class. Even from Başakşehir, which emerged as an Islamist space project in the late 90s, it is evident that Islamists who became wealthier, migrated to more secular and affluent areas of Istanbul. Based on the findings of empirical research, Balkan and Öncü[86] highlight how the tastes and habits of the conservative-Islamic upper middle class have manifested in the cityscape, giving rise to new consumption sites such as upscale shopping centres with luxury import stores, international cuisine in new restaurants, clubs and casinos, luxury housing developments, and expensive private schools. Amidst fervent claims of reappropriating Ottoman Islamic heritage, the prevalence of emulation, conspicuous consumption, and evolving codes of commodity culture across various sectors of civil society have imbued Istanbul with a distinct appearance and sensibility. In practice, the architectural forms chosen during the AKP period were often more influenced by global and Western trends rather than traditional forms. It is clear that the AKP administration has tried to incorporate certain aspects of Ottoman and Islamic architectural forms and symbols into the official architecture of the country. Notwithstanding, it is also important to note that these efforts have not been consistent or coherent, and have often resulted in an amorphous aesthetic rather than a cohesive architectural style.[87] Even some Islamist intellectuals and politicians close to the AKP have acknowledged this failure to align with the principles of an 'Islamic city.'

Concluding remarks

Space has indeed served as a battleground for cultural conflict among various political factions since the late Ottoman Empire, a role that continues to influence contemporary dynamics. Therefore, it is imperative to evaluate the spatial politics of the AKP within this historical context. The AKP governments, in power since 2002, have enacted a range of spatial policies, many of which have been shaped by Islamist ideologies concerning space, urban planning, and architectural design. Despite endeavours to advance this vision through state-sponsored initiatives such as the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, the erection of a mosque in Taksim Square, and the integration of Ottoman-Seljuk architectural elements into public structures, these practices diverge significantly from the Islamist vision of urban space in the 1990s. The complexities surrounding the realization of the concept of an 'Islamic city,' as articulated by Islamist intellectuals in the 1990s, are indeed manifold, shaped by a multitude of factors that influence the spatial policies of the AKP. One significant factor contributing to this complexity is the nostalgic imagery associated with the 'Islamic city' and the 'Ottoman city,' which largely stems from the essentialist and ahistorical language of Orientalism. Additionally, space undeniably plays a pivotal role in shaping power dynamics and capital relations, and unsurprisingly, the spatial politics of the AKP has not been immune to these power dynamics. Conservative-Islamic business circles have demonstrated significant interest in the

[85]İrfan Özet, *Fatih Başakşehir: Muhafazakâr Mahallede İktidar ve Dönüşen Habitus*, 1. baskı, İletişim Yayınları 2740 (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019).
[86]Balkan Erol and Öncü Ahmet, 'Reproduction of the Islamic Middle Class in Turkey', in *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey* (Berghahn Books, 2015).
[87]Y. Adnan Adanalı, 'AKP Döneminde Şehirler; Kentsel Dönüşüm ve Mimari: Mekansallaşan İktidar, İktisat ve İtirazlar', in *Marka Takva Tuğra, AKP Döneminde Kültür ve Politika* (İstanbul: Evrensel Kültür Kitaplığı, n.d.); Ali Uzay Peker, 'AKP Döneminde Rövanşist Mimari'.

opportunities created by neoliberal urban politics. Consequently, Istanbul, renowned for its historical significance and Islamic landmarks, has been compromised by profit-driven ventures, resulting in the alteration of its historic skyline. In this regard, Islamists in the 1990s fell short of presenting a genuine alternative to the ostensibly secular space shaped by Ottoman Westernization and Kemalist reforms. Instead, their primary function has been to utilize this nostalgic imagery as a cultural tool for mobilizing support among their audience, a trend continued by the AKP later on. The disparity between the ideal 'Islamic city' and the practical urban policies implemented highlights the complexity of urban space, which cannot be reduced to a simple reflection of Islamic faith, particularly as conceptualized by Islamists in the 1990s.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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