Domestic Arrangements: The Maid's Room in the Ataköy Apartment Blocks, Istanbul, Turkey

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The first phase of Istanbul’s Ataköy Housing Development, an icon of architectural modernism in Turkey, inflects modernist architectural forms with local domestic traditions. This study examines the maid’s room, a sphere of the Turkish modern interior where post-war ideas and ideals both reconciled and contradicted the customary and the modern. The case study extends recent attempts to re-think postwar architectural culture and its global effects.

Introduction
A maid’s room is found in many apartments designed for upper-income groups in the 1950s and 1960s. In Turkey, the midcentury maid’s room is a remnant of earlier domestic interiors, especially late 19th and early 20th century residential buildings designed to emulate European models.1 A maid’s room as part of a distinct service zone with a separate service entrance, appears in Istanbul’s Ataköy Housing Development, Phase I (1957–62), an iconic mass housing project regulated, funded, built, and marketed by the government. Distinguished by unadorned aesthetics, green areas, reinforced concrete load-bearing structural systems, open plans, large windows, and roof terraces, the development exemplifies the ideals of post–World War II modernism. The Ataköy apartments were among many multistory apartment projects built in response to a web of political, social, and economic circumstances that produced rapid urbanization in Turkey. As such, they formed part of a series of government modernization programs profoundly influenced by postwar Western lifestyles and aesthetic concerns. The maid’s rooms in the Ataköy development were a product of the dynamics which drove modernization in Turkey; these forces, operative at a number of scales, converged to shape the program and interior architecture of the apartments.

My research, a close reading of the Ataköy project, provides insight into the transformation of the Turkish domestic realm in response to Western postwar ideas and ideals, and demonstrates the fluidity of cultural norms and practices.2 At the same time, my scholarship extends recent attempts to rethink postwar architectural culture and its global effects beyond simplistic, canonic, and ontological definitions or explanations.3 Using this frame, and grounded in historical research, oral histories, and my analyses of the extant buildings, my study describes the social implications of the design of the Ataköy interiors, highlighting the maid’s room—an ordinary space, often overlooked in the studies of the built environment. My intent is to show how Western modernism in the 1950s and 1960s was transformed by local society and culture, and to demonstrate, in turn, how these modern residential interiors of the period reflected and organized everyday life—defining the social order, and normalizing social, class, and gender relations.4

As urbanization accelerated in Turkey, a growing shortage of urban housing became an important national challenge, particularly for the Democrat Party government, which came to power in 1950. Headed by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, the new government marked the termination of an era of single-party rule by the Republican Peoples Party, with a promise of a more liberal and democratic policies.5 It reinforced ties with the West, and especially with the United States; participation in the Korean War (1950), membership in NATO (1952), and taking part in Cold War foreign aid programs were important signifiers of this alliance. In this political context, American and European experts were invited to Turkey to develop solutions for the nation’s housing problem. The invitees included prominent planners and architects such as Charles Abrams (1954) and a team from the U.S. architectural firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill under the direction of Gordon Bunshaft (1951).6 The new government shifted the bulk of modernization efforts from Ankara, built as the capital of the Republic of Turkey (which had been founded in 1923), to the old capital of Istanbul. In fact, making “Istanbul into a modern city” by means of rebuilding, “establishing a new road system for better traffic flow, constructing new public squares, restoring mosques and beautifying the city” was high on the agenda of the Menderes government.7

Unfortunately, Turkish urban renewal projects generally led to the demolition of older buildings and the eradication of the traditional fabric, and destroyed areas of the historic city of Istanbul. The Ataköy Housing Development, as well as other projects by the same developer (the Emlak Kredi Bank) became influential models for subsequent projects (Figure 1).8 Here, the meaning of “modern” embodied a leitmotif of modernization theory, as developed by social scientists and theoreticians in the United States in the Cold War era: “the world was converging from a congeries of traditional life ways onto a unique modernity.”9 This ideology promoted a singular understanding of modernization, uninfluenced by geography or culture. Housing developments, like the Ataköy project, would materialize this singular “unique modernity” and link Turkey to a larger international community, albeit one defined by Western postwar culture.

continued
European-style mass housing had a significant impact worldwide during the mid-twentieth century. In developing economies, these housing projects were an endorsement of Western industrial society by cultural and economic elites. The abstracted forms, large windows, and new domestic equipment that typified housing projects like the Ataköy blocks signaled that a modern lifestyle was available to some social groups in Turkey.

The Ataköy development was situated in a prominent location between Istanbul’s international airport and the city. The project urbanized an area called Baruthane, between Bakırköy to the east and the airport to the west. The London-Istanbul motorway and the Sirkeci-Florya shore drive adjacent to the Sea of Marmara defined the project’s borders on the north and south, respectively. The 50-hectare strip of seashore along the Sirkeci-Florya drive was designed as a tourist area, with a modern beach, recreational facilities, and hotels, further increasing the attractiveness of the area.

Initiated in 1955 and only finished in 1991, the government-funded development was led by the Emlak Kredi Bank, which was established as Emlak ve Eytam Bankası in 1926. As the Emlak Kredi Bank’s most comprehensive mass housing initiative, Ataköy was planned as a small city of ten neighborhoods. The construction of the first neighborhood or Phase I started in 1957 when the bank established a planning office. The 50 Phase 1 buildings housed approximately 3,000 residents and were completed in 1962. The office was run by a group of Turkish architects, including Ertuğrul Menteş as the chief and the prominent Italian planner and architect Luigi Piccinato as a consultant.

Ranging from 110 to over 200 square meters, the apartment plans were spacious, light, and airy, with large glazed areas providing natural ventilation, and central heating. Many materials were imported, and construction costs were high as a result. Contrary to the Emlak Kredi Bank’s original intention to provide housing for civil servants, the spacious flats were affordable only for the middle and upper-middle class. In 1958, Zeki Sayar, an architect and the publisher of the country’s most prominent professional journal, questioned the motives of the mass housing project, stating that it was designed as a “holiday
village” rather than inexpensive housing for people with low incomes. The relatively luxurious Ataköy apartments did not resemble Western European and North American public housing developments, such as the public housing blocks in England by G. H. Weed, A.R.I.B.A in London by Robert Haning and Anthony Chitty, and Rotterdam complexes by W. Van Tijen, all of which were celebrated in Arkitekt as models for housing a modern society. According to Muhteşem Giray, a key architect, Medeni Berk, Minister of Public Works and Housing in Prime Minister Menderes’ cabinet at the time, suggested the large size of the earlier units. As Giray explained, “Minister Berk had been influenced by housing developments that he had seen abroad. He insisted on spacious flats of 200 sq. m. and above despite the fact that Piccinato suggested designing more affordable, smaller units.”

Surrounded by greenery, the blocks contrasted with the low-scale fabric of neighboring areas as well as the traditional wooden houses of Istanbul. The development’s universal architectural language, zoning of functions, and landscape connect Ataköy to CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne, 1928–1959) principles. Overall, the architects emphasized “the element of height,” and “sufficient space, sun, [and] ventilation,” as outlined earlier in the CIAM tenets of “housing, work, recreation, and traffic.” Yet, the planning and the landscape layout in Phase I of Ataköy, with its irregular paths and greenery, did away with the rigid orthogonal geometries of CIAM modernism. The organic planning of the first phase of the development, which was followed by more regular and mechanized designs in the 1970–1990 sections, is arguably indebted to Piccinato. The prolific Italian planner, an admirer of Wright, understood the master plan as an integrated ensemble that developed over time and came to define a place within an existing landscape or context, rather than an abstract geometric organization.

According to contemporary lifestyles, the structure [of Istanbul] needs to be changed in an organic way. This requires revitalization of old neighborhoods and the foundation of a new urban organism. That is, to carry the city formation enclosed within itself to an open, airy, and centrally organized network of little cities composed of housing clusters organized around educational, entertainment, administrative, commercial, and social facilities. These small cities are connected with automobile roads.

Other aspects of the Ataköy Phase I project reflect an emerging critique of CIAM, most notably by its younger members, such as Giancarlo De Carlo, Aldo van Eyck, and Alison and Peter Smithson, who formed Team 10. These influences can be seen in the variety of size and scale of the Phase I buildings and in the broken masses of the lower blocks. The siting of these blocks takes into consideration both sunlight and ventilation; they are oriented to maximize sun exposure and minimize shadows. Nevertheless, the primacy of the freestanding block and a universal and rational architectural expression remain in the overall design.

The Ataköy’s Phase I blocks included ten different building types. With rectilinear masses, planar surfaces, a reinforced concrete load-bearing system, large glazed surfaces, balconies, flat-roofed terraces with concrete pergolas, and the use of pilotis...
to make segments of the ground level available for car parking, the buildings clearly demonstrate the influence of Le Corbusier. This influence can also be readily observed in the larger four-bedroom schemes of Blocks B, D, and F, which are the focus of my research.27 These blocks contain 228 units in 26 buildings.28 Composed of two flats on alternating levels, the four-story blocks of B and D are similar in massing, articulation, roof height, and exterior appearance, as well as in plan (Figure 4). They are composed of two adjoining masses: one side meets the ground directly, while the other is raised on pilotis. The ground-level walls and the pilotis are covered with Betbebe mosaic and partly decorated with abstract compositions of lines and squares in primary colors. Sculptural support elements in Block B and grill panels in Block D are other decorative touches characteristic of the period (Figures 5–6).

Distinct from the broken masses of Blocks B and D, the eight-story Block F is a massive rectilinear prism that formally inaugurates the Phase II buildings. It is surmounted with a roof terrace and partially raised on pilotis (Figure 7). The roof terrace, which combines two buildings into a single mass and includes indoor and outdoor areas, is designed to take advantage of the views of the Sea of Marmara. Block F recalls Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation (1947–1952, Marseille), which embodied 19th century collective housing ideals exemplified by Charles Fourier’s phalanstery.29 In contrast, the Ataköy apartment block was more exclusive, catering to a privileged lifestyle. An earlier model of this project, with plastic roof forms, as published in Arkitekt (1958), betrays another influence—Brazilian Modernism. The roof elements recall the plastic forms of Oscar Niemeyer’s Hotel Regente in Rio de Janeiro, which was published in a special issue about Brazil in L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui30 (Figure 8). This particular issue of the magazine was available in Turkey, and architects like Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa had a profound impact on the younger generation of Turkish architects.31 The Ataköy blocks are an example of this influence.

Designing for the Modern and Its Other

The relationship between Brazilian Modernist architecture and the Ataköy blocks is not limited to the building’s massing and decoration; both Niemeyer’s apartment designs and the early Ataköy buildings include a maid’s room with a separate service entrance. As Paul Rabinow observes, Niemeyer’s Brasilia housing blocks include a maid’s room and separate circulation systems for domestic helpers and residents:

Oscar Niemeyer, the communist architect, did provide space in each apartment for maids. These modern rooms have no windows, but, as opposed to the equally omnipresent maids’ rooms in Rio, they often do have space for a dresser or chair as well as the bed. In Niemeyer’s (and his followers’?) six-story super-quadra buildings there are two systems of elevators: one for the maids—these don’t
stop at the main floor, only the underground garage level—as well as the regular elevators for Brasilia’s modern citizens.  

In Niemeyer’s buildings, social and class hierarchies are not only expressed in the program, but are reinforced through the design of a circulation system that limits the visibility of the domestic worker at the formal entry point to the apartment buildings. The early Ataköy interiors would also reflect the prevailing social hierarchy in its organization of circulation and other functions.

In Istanbul, the presence of maid’s rooms can be connected to both traditional upper-class lifestyles with roots in the Ottoman elite, and Westernized apartment schemes emerging in the 19th and early 20th centuries, catering to the upper class.  

Maid’s rooms are found in Turkish residential designs from the 1920s and 1930s, and in the Modern schemes of their famous European counterparts, such as Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. A canonical example of a modernist maid’s room appears in the Birkan Apartments (1955) designed by Haluk Baysal and Melih Birsel. Modeled on the Corbusian hygienic ideal, with roof terraces, pilotis, and metal Mullions, the design promoted an industrial image, despite the fact that its metal Mullions had to be produced by hand. As was typical for urban apartments designed for upper-income groups during these years, the plans include a service zone with a kitchen, an ironing room, a small toilet, and a maid’s room, accessed from a separate entrance door. Overlooking the Bosphorus, the modernist aesthetics of the Birkan Apartments with their open plan and the distinct servant zone reconcile modern lifestyles and traditional patterns of domesticity (Figures 9–10).

However, it is curious to find a similar spatial organization in some of the earlier blocks of the Ataköy housing, since it was meant to accommodate more middle-class residents. In the Ataköy blocks, although the maid’s rooms are the smallest rooms in the apartment, they enjoy plenty of light and a view of the greenery (Figure 11). This difference is important to note for it indicates the sensitivity of designers towards improving the environment of every inhabitant of the building. It also indicates a status shift for middle and upper-middle class families as well as their domestic staff. In most cases, the Ataköy interiors represented an improvement for both the family and its servants, a mark of prestige for all involved.

The Ataköy plans define three distinct interior zones: a public and spacious living/dining area (which would have been separate rooms in earlier apartments), a private bedroom area for the family, and the service facilities. Visible from the front door, the living and dining area was designed to be the “front stage” of the apartment, a place where guests would be received. With large windows facing the street, the living area was always the largest room in the apartment (Figure 12). It served as a showcase of the inhabitants’ modern status, while the servants’ quarters were “backstage.” The service zone included the service hallway, the kitchen, a laundry area, a maid’s room, and a small toilet designated for the maid’s use. Different from the family bathroom which was equipped with modern fixtures, the maid’s wet space contained a traditional squat (Turkish-style) toilet fixture, which accommodated traditional bodily practices and therefore was usually preferred by domestic helpers. The wet space also included a continued
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37 A tiny sink and a shower faucet attached to a wall. The live-in maid was assumed to either take a shower in this space, over the Turkish-style toilet basin, or in a small laundry room (provided in the Block D1 plans) adjoining her room. Neither space has a shower basin, only a drainage hole in the floor.

38 The Ataköy’s maid’s rooms and their toilets are organized along a small corridor connected to the kitchen, which serves as a buffer between the maid’s quarters and the rest of the apartment. In Blocks B and D, each level’s landing accesses the small elevator, the staircase, and two doors for each unit. The main entrance has double doors opening into the apartment’s foyer, which leads directly to the living/dining area and the adjoining bedroom zone, while the service door opens into the servant’s hallway (Figures 13–14). In Block F, the units have only one entry point. Once inside, however, the service zone is accessed through a secondary doorway off the foyer. In either case, the schemes propose two major circulation patterns from the entrance: one is for the family to reach the living/dining area and the private bedroom area; the other is for access to the service zone (Figures 15–17).

In both schemes, the maid is removed from the family domain. The maid’s apartment is tucked into a corner of the apartment and distinctly segregated from the rest of the household spaces. This organization minimizes unannounced appearances by the domestic help. At the same time segregation...
from the family provides flexibility and privacy for
the maid, lending her some autonomy. As residents
explained, live-in maids were usually widows or
unmarried young girls who had often migrated from
rural areas and the Eastern provinces in search of
better economic conditions. Other forms of domestic
help, such as an evlatlık (a so-called foster child),
were also seen. The evlatlık was a cheaper form of
labor than a maid, and was preferred by the middle
class.39 That said, not all occupants of Blocks B,
D, and F had live-in help. They were usually only
employed by families with young children and by

Figure 16. The plans for the D blocks, showing the two-door scheme.
One door opens to the entry (hol), which flows into the living/dining
area (salon/yemek) and the bedroom zone (yatak/banyo); the other one
opens to the service area. The service zone is circled, and shows: service
corridor, maid’s room (hizmetçi), Turkish-style WC, kitchen (mutfak), and
Kavcık for Arkitekt).

older residents. Whether the maid lived with the
family or came in on a regular basis, the service zone
was designed to remove her from the life of the
family and their guests. The residents enjoying the
modern lifestyle of the Ataköy blocks did not wish to
be intruded upon by servants, whose lives reflected
another, non-modern reality. In this respect, the two
doors indicated an understanding of the maid as the
other.40

For many apartment dwellers of the 1950s and
1960s, the division represented by the two entrances
shaped everyday life.41 As a Block D resident explain
to me, while one door receives guests, the other
allows domestic workers to enter the apartment
without disturbing the family life:

The water supplier delivers the water from this
doors. Our domestic helper has always used
this door. If we have something delivered to

the kitchen, we always use this door. Also
when we have guests in the living room, for
example, our children use this door.42

However, not all residents considered the
service door useful. “I used it very little at the
beginning,” explained a female resident, “then, I
stopped using it altogether, but decided to keep
the door itself intact, just to preserve the original
look of the unit.”43 A small grocery store owner,
who had run a neighborhood store for over 30
years, told me that fewer and fewer people use
the service doors, and that typically “the service
person takes the groceries to this door” only for
older people.44 Many residents consider them a
risk factor for theft, a growing problem in the city
in general.

The physical distinctions between the family
and its maid created within the Ataköy blocks
reflected larger differences at the urban scale. In
this respect, the Ataköy blocks possess another
similarity to Niemeyer’s Brasilia housing projects;
both materialize a distinction between the modern
and its other at the scale of the interior and at the
scale of the city. In Brasilia, conceived by President
Juscelino Kubitschek (in office from 1956 to 1961)
and by Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer “as a city
of the future, a city of development, a realizable
utopia,” the low-income citizens lived on the
periphery while much of the middle and upper class
lived and worked at the center.45 Scrutinizing the
Brazilian housing blocks, Rabinow states:

The fundamental contradiction of this modern
city is the fact that those who built it and
those who kept it running basically cannot
live in it. There is almost no low-income
housing in Brasilia and those who service
the city are forced to live twenty miles away
in the semicircular ring of impoverished and
unplanned satellite towns.46
Similarly, in the Ataköy development, service workers often commuted from low-income neighborhoods outside of the socially hygienic boundaries of Ataköy, as is still the case in many similar developments in Turkish cities. In Istanbul, these neighborhoods were typically squatter housing (gecekondu) formed as a result of a massive influx of rural populations to major urban centers in search of new job opportunities. This migration was spurred by the mechanization of the countryside. New agricultural machinery, funded by Western aid, was meant to promote democratic capitalism and prevent the spread of communism post–World War II. Although the squatter settlements were generally regarded as a problem by both the government and the public, the gecekondu provided housing for a cheap labor force, and they were allowed to remain.47 Modern housing developments like the Ataköy blocks developed in parallel with the gecekondu. Family life in the modern apartments depended on labor from the squatter housing; the squatter housing rose in response to rural modernization. Both Ataköy and the gecekondu depended on an alliance between the modern and its other, an alliance which operated at the scale of the interior, the city, and the region.

New Domestic Arrangements
As the interiors of the Ataköy apartments revealed the local social and economic dynamics that defined domestic life, they also exposed crosscultural influences. In the early 1950s, Prime Minister Menderes intended to make Turkey “a little America.”48 The Ataköy kitchens reflected a strong current of American influence by providing space for refrigerators, even though the plans published in Arkitekt do not show the equipment. In contrast, the kitchens found in Turkish apartments from the 1930s and 1940s were too small to accommodate refrigerators, which were expensive and uncommon at the time.

In Turkey during the 1950s American refrigerators such as Frigidaire, available to upper-income groups, dominated the imported goods market. Their advertisements, as well as images of postwar American kitchen designs, could be seen not only in popular media such as newspapers and magazines like Hayat, and Hollywood movies, but also in professional publications. For example, a 1950 issue of Arkitekt featured the equipment of an American kitchen in great detail. The article also noted that planning domestic tasks was a function carried out in this kitchen.49 In Turkey this function was materialized in a home office, which appeared as an extended section of the kitchen in 1950s and 1960s middle and upper-middle class apartment plans. Such office spaces are included in Blocks B, D, and F as a small area of the kitchen with a counter. They are shown in three configurations: as a buffer zone between the maid’s area and the rest of the apartment, as part of a passage through which the trash can be taken out to the garbage chute next to the elevator, and as a transitional space between the place where food is prepared and the dining room where food is served.

This scaled-down version of the postwar American kitchen, with a space for planning the household tasks, replaced an earlier Western model of the kitchen, the 1930s rationalist Frankfurt Kitchen by Margarete Shütte-Lihotzky. She, along with her husband, was one of the German-speaking architects and experts invited to Turkey as part of an early republican westernization and advancement program, and she worked for the Turkish Ministry of Education from 1938 to 1940. The Austrian architect had applied the principles of Taylorism to domestic life in Germany during the 1920s in order to liberate women from the kitchen.50 This goal, however, was not the intent of Turkish kitchen designs, even though Taylorist and scientific home management ideas were popular, especially among young women educated in the girls’ institutes established in the early republican era.51 In Turkey, then, innovations in kitchen design during the 1940s did not reflect a change in women’s status; rather, they reflected cultural influences flowing from the West.

The washing machine was another appliance that slowly made its way into Turkish homes during the Cold War period. Before national production of washing machines began in the 1950s, they were imported and expensive. Advertisements depicting women as content housewives in the presence

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**Figure 17.** The plans for the F blocks. The main door opens to the entry (hol), which flows into the living/dining area (salon/yemek) and the bedroom zone (yatak/banyo); the service entry leads to the maid’s area and the kitchen. The service zone is circled, and shows: service corridor, maid’s room (hizmetçi), Turkish-style WC, and kitchen (mutfak). Arkitekt 26, no. 291 (1958): 63–66. (Courtesy of Eren Sayar Kavcu for Arkitekt.)
of a washing machine were plentiful in 1950s and 1960s Turkey. Arguably, washing machines entered the domestic scene a little later than refrigerators because of the availability of cheap domestic labor. Accordingly, architects often did not provide space for washing machines in 1950s apartment plans, and Ataköy was no exception. Washing machines had to be squeezed into the bathrooms, or in the case of the Block D1 scheme, they found their place in the laundry room. Located inside the maid’s room, this wet space received plenty of light and was equipped with plumbing, drainage in the floor, and Betebe glass mosaics on the walls (Figure 18). With or without a washing machine, its location and accessibility through the maid’s room imply that the laundry was her responsibility.

The actual function of the maid’s room and its relationship to the other service areas varied from household to household. If the room was not used for the accommodation of domestic helpers, it was often used as a guest bedroom or housework-related space, such as a pantry or storage, laundry, or ironing room. The use of the room and employment of maids changed with changing lifestyles, social, economic, and family conditions, further developments in technology, and the widespread use of household appliances. However, as a local real estate agent explained, “today once again, the maid’s rooms are more often being used for live-in help.” This development is tied to increased employment among Turkish women and the availability of domestic helpers from the former Soviet Union countries, such as Moldova, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Many women from these countries leave their families and come to Turkey to earn money. They do not have permanent work permits, and cannot stay in the country for long periods. They work for low salaries and prefer live-in employment to keep a low profile as well as to be able to save money to support their families in their home country. Often, they cannot speak the local language well and live in isolation for the duration of their stay.

This new population of migrant domestic workers illustrates the role that market forces play in shaping the built environment. During the 1950s, multistory residential developments, whether built by the state or private enterprises, produced significant commissions for architects. Architects who worked on these projects claim that clients and dwellers, especially housewives, often requested a maid’s room in their apartment because they felt that the domestic servants needed an area to change clothes, rest, iron, and to retire to in the presence of guests. The room provided a space for the domestic helper to undertake housework without, as one architect put it, “intruding” on the household. Significantly, a maid’s room was also in demand because it made the apartments more marketable; apartments with a servant’s quarters were considered profitable real estate investments. In this respect, the mass housing units of Ataköy contributed to the proliferation of the maid’s room by turning this feature of elite households into an amenity for middle and upper-middle class households. The maid’s room became a norm rather than an exception, regardless of the actual needs of the residents.

**Conclusion**

When the Ataköy development was designed and built, it answered to a set of postwar ideals prevalent in the West: renewal, democracy, liberation, and the notion that housing was a public good, deserved by all. The development’s construction started shortly before the 1957 elections, and it became a showcase for the urban modernization initiatives undertaken by the Democrat Party government in the 1950s. The Ataköy blocks demonstrated that Turkey was a “modern society,” a part of the wider world. It represented a model of progress that tied Turkish life to the ideology of Western modernity. But the apartments in Ataköy’s Phase I reserved the privilege of “modernity” for a middle and upper-middle class clientele, rather than accommodating the housing needs of the newly urban poor. In this respect, Ataköy may be considered an early precedent of more recent architectural and urban formations of high-status enclaves and controlled housing environments, such as gated communities. These housing typologies, criticized for cultivating socioeconomic segregation, have been proliferating in Turkey and worldwide, from Brazil to South Africa to the United States. Similar to Ataköy, these so-called “modern” housing communities fail to consider the actual needs and experiences of their residents.
developments promote architectural form and style as means to a contemporary lifestyle. Their advertisements—with seductive architectural imagery, minimalist interior design, green areas, swimming pools, manicured landscapes and promises of security—present a utopian vision of the ideal home.55 The two-door schemes of Blocks B, D, and F set boundaries between the master and the servant, and the contemporary and traditional. The articulation of the service area as a separate zone speaks to tacit assumptions about what is considered modern and its other, and is a product of socioeconomic circumstances in a consumer society shaped by global dynamics. Including a maid’s room in an interior program when the end user (i.e., the specific family or persons that would inhabit the unit) was unknown during the design phase indicates a general market demand for this room, fed by the availability of cheap domestic labor.

Beyond this socioeconomic dynamic, however, one can read the efforts of Ataköy’s Phase I designers to improve the quality of life for everyone who would inhabit the apartments. Despite its segregation from the modern spaces of the family, planning the maid’s room as a separate space with large windows indicates a concern about providing privacy and some autonomy for her. The same can be said for the apartment building janitor’s (kapıcı) quarters, which is placed at the ground level of each block.56 Compared to the typical janitor’s quarters, often placed in the basements of apartment buildings, these provide more humane accommodations for the janitor and his family, who typically were rural immigrants, like the maids. Both of these service spaces mark a status shift for the people employed in those positions. They also provide a better working environment than agricultural and factory jobs. Thus, the service positions both crystallize and accommodate the gap between social strata and between the physical space of the modern apartment and squatting housing. Finally, while the maid’s toilet with a traditional Turkish-style fixture in the service zone displays a contrast to the family’s modern-style bathroom, it also shows sensitivity towards accommodating the traditional practices associated with domestic help. Therefore, even with its shortcomings, such as inappropriate bathing arrangements, the maid’s room reflects a concern for the particularities of these local households. This concern explains, in part, the larger size of the apartments, which takes into account extended families with grown children, grandchildren, or grandparents.57

The Ataköy blocks could be understood as just another manifestation of modernism’s ubiquitous forms. But a closer look reveals the discrete cultural and spatial dynamics of Turkish domestic life in the 1950s and 1960s, a moment when local aspirations—for both the middle class and the urban poor—became entangled with global forces. The open, transparent, and spacious interiors followed the formal design precepts of the modernist home, but accommodated local family structures. New programs and spaces, such as the home office, bearing traces of an American influence, were accompanied by traditional spaces such as the squat toilet. The design scheme simultaneously contradicted and reconciled the customary and the new, marking the in-between space of modernity.58 The interior architecture of these apartments suggests ways in which mainstream modernism was adapted, contextualized, and even regionalized, specific to location, culture, and local economies.

Notes
1. For examples of multistory apartments with servant’s rooms in Turkey, see the Helbig Apartments (1892) in Istanbul; “Pertev Apartmanı, Taksim” [Pertev Apartment, Taksim], Mimar 2 (1933): 46; “Bayan Firdevs Evı” [Mrs. Firdev’s House], Mimar 12 (1934): 334.
8. Other major projects developed by the Emlak Kredi Bank include: apartment blocks on Atatürk Bulvarı (1957), the Fourth Levent Development (1956–60) in Istanbul, and the Emlak Kredi Bank Apartments in Ankara (1957–64) and İzmir (1956–59).


10. While beyond the scope of this study, I note briefly that high rise apartment blocks on Atatürk Bulvarı (1957), the Fourth Levent settlement. These vacant Phase I units were rented for several years. MuhteşemGRAY, interview by the author, Istanbul, September, 2006. Ataköy residents, interviews by the author, Istanbul, September, 2006.


15. Formally distinct examples of these ranges from the celebrated Casa Milá (1905–12) in Barcelona by Antoni Gaudí to Berthold Lubetkin’s Highpoint Apartments (1935, 1938) in London.

16. For this project, see “Birkan Apartmanları (Bebek)” [Birkan Apartments], Arkitekt, 27, no. 294 (1959): cover, 4–10. Baysal and Birlis was one of Turkey’s first architectural partnerships, established during the 1950s.


21. For more on this project and its influence on later projects, see “Birkan Apartmanları (Bebek)” [Birkan Apartments], Arkitekt, 27, no. 294 (1959): cover, 4–10. Baysal and Birlis was one of Turkey’s first architectural partnerships, established during the 1950s.


30. For this project, see “Birkan Apartmanları (Bebek)” [Birkan Apartments], Arkitekt, 27, no. 294 (1959): cover, 4–10. Baysal and Birlis was one of Turkey’s first architectural partnerships, established during the 1950s.

31. Architect Enis Kortan (educated at Istanbul Technical University) and architect Nejat Ersin (educated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul), interviews by the author, Ankara, December, 2006 and Ankara, May, 2006, respectively. Oscar Niemeyer was influential in the Turkish architectural community. For a published interview, see “Oscar Niemeyer Küp’lär Mimarişine Karşı” [Oscar Niemeyer Is Against the Architecture of Cubes], Mimarlık 25 (1965): 38–39.

32. For an earlier assessment of this point and the influence of Mies van der Rohe’s stylistic concerns, for example, in the use of “I” profiles on the facades of high-rises, also see Enis Kortan, Türkiye’de Mimarlık Trendleri ve Eleştiri 1950–1960 [Architectural Movements and Critiques in Turkey 1950–1960] (Ankara: Örta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 1971), 42.

33. For this project, see “Birkan Apartmanları (Bebek)” [Birkan Apartments], Arkitekt, 27, no. 294 (1959): cover, 4–10. Baysal and Birlis was one of Turkey’s first architectural partnerships, established during the 1950s.

34. For this project, see “Birkan Apartmanları (Bebek)” [Birkan Apartments], Arkitekt, 27, no. 294 (1959): cover, 4–10. Baysal and Birlis was one of Turkey’s first architectural partnerships, established during the 1950s.

35. For an earlier assessment of this point and the influence of Mies van der Rohe’s stylistic concerns, for example, in the use of “I” profiles on the facades of high-rises, also see Enis Kortan, Türkiye’de Mimarlık Trendleri ve Eleştiri 1950–1960 [Architectural Movements and Critiques in Turkey 1950–1960] (Ankara: Örta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 1971), 42.


37. I have argued elsewhere that the contrast between the modern family bathroom (equipped with a Western-style toilet bowl, a bathtub, and a bidet) and the Turkish-style toilet (which accommodates traditional toilet practices) illustrates the spatialization of a dichotomy between the modern and the traditional. See ibid., 215–33.

38. This arrangement is similar to maid’s accommodations proposed in earlier domestic designs, such as the Weissenhofsiedlung (1927). Considered “revolutionary,” this modernist working-class housing prototype also included small maid’s rooms. The so-called “new home” and “new forms of living” presented in Weissenhofsiedlung clearly limited its revolution to reflect middle-class, rather than working-class, realities. See Karin Kirsch, The Weissenhofsiedlung: Experimental Housing Built for the Deutscher Werkbund, Stuttgart, 1927 (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 33. A showcase of modern architecture, this project was composed of 21 structures designed by 17 architects. Fifty-five architects and interior designers from Germany and other countries were involved in the fittings.


40. For this assessment, which suggests that a clear distinction between the modern and non-modern (or the other) leads to the systematic exclusion of the other, is influenced by Foucault’s notion of Otherness and his critique of the obsession with normality and the construction of knowledge. See Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, first published as Les Mots et les Choses, 1966 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

41. My comments on this idea are not limited to Ataköy residents, but are also shaped by interviews carried out with other urban apartment dwellers.

continued
42. A female resident of a Block D unit, interview by the author, Istanbul, September, 2006.
43. A female resident of a Block D unit, interview by the author, Istanbul, September, 2006.
44. Local market owner, interview by the author, Ataköy’s first neighborhood, Istanbul, September, 2006.
45. Scott, Seeing Like a State, 119, 130.
54. From interviews by the author.
55. Discussing this condition in the context of Brazil’s gated communities, Caldeira writes, “The middle and upper classes are creating their dream of independence and freedom—both from the city and its mixture of classes, and from everyday domestic tasks—on the basis of services from working class people. . . . They also ask their badly paid maids—who often live in the favelas on the other side of the condominium’s wall—to wash and iron their clothes, make their beds, buy and prepare their food, and frequently care for their children all day long. In a context of increased fear of crime in which the poor are often associated with criminality, the upper classes fear contact and contamination, but they continue to depend on their servants.” See Teresa P. R. Caldeira, “Fortified Enclaves: The New Urban Segregation,” Public Culture 8, no. 2 (1996): 303–28.
56. A serviceman is usually responsible for cleaning the building, running the heating and hot water, collecting the garbage, collecting the maintenance fees, providing security, and keeping the grounds. He also helps with grocery shopping on a daily basis.
57. For this point in the context of block apartments on Atatürk Bulvarı, see “İstanbul Belediyesi, Türkiye Emniyet Bankası Blok Apartmanları Atatürk Bulvarı” [Municipality of Istanbul and Emniyet Bank Multistory Apartments on Atatürk Boulevard], Arkitekt 26, no. 286 (1957): 12.