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What is This?

Minarets without Mosques: Limits to the Urban Politics of Neo-liberal Islamism

Bülent Batuman

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Abstract

This paper discusses urban politics in contemporary Turkey through a particular architectural phenomenon: that of minarets without mosques. Local administrations under neo-liberal Islamists propose urban regeneration projects which require extensive demolitions in squatter areas. Yet, their reluctance to tear down minarets creates ruinscapes in which minarets seem to have miraculously survived destruction. In this regard, the minarets without mosques should be understood as symptoms of urban transformation led by neo-liberal Islamism. Neo-liberal Islamists envisage these projects as spatial forms of politics of convergence, juxtaposing slum upgrading with luxurious housing within the unifying cultural codes of Islam. It is proposed to interpret these minarets not as bearers of religious symbolism but as nodes within the urban network of everyday life referring to Lefebvre's concept of rhythmanalysis. Viewed in this way, it becomes possible for the minarets to take on new meanings and serve as signs of the displacement of the squatters.

Similar to other architectural types that have symbolic power, the meanings embodied within the mosque cannot be reduced to its practical function in worship; and the minaret bears the representative weight of these meanings. There is a tension between the functional origin of minarets as high platforms from which the call for prayer is vocalised and the symbolic aspect of the minaret as a synecdoche of Islam in general.[1] Viewed by both Muslims and Islamophobes as the signifier of the discursive power of the mosque, the minaret becomes a supplementary sign of religious references attached to the space of worship.

Moreover, the structural relation between the mosque and the minaret is not organic; that is, a mosque without a minaret is not an incomplete edifice. The structural unconnectedness between the mosque and the minaret opens room for new possibilities. One outcome of this dissociation is the construction of mosques without minarets, which is not an uncommon sight in European cities with Muslim populations. The mosque without its minaret emerges as

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a religious space that has given up its claim to public visibility and acknowledgement (Pieterse, 1997). The most recent case reviving the architectural politics of the mosque was the Swiss prohibition of minarets in 2009 (Betz and Meret, 2009; Ronis, 2010). A significant element expressing the anti-minaret view was a famous poster showing the Swiss flag, on which minarets were erected—incidentally reminding one of missiles. The sinister shadows of the minarets cast on the flag dramatised the invasion of the country by Islam. The curious aspect of the poster, which is relevant to my discussion, is the depiction of the minarets as free-standing objects. The minaret is detached from its mosque, which in fact is the *raison d'être* for its existence. This imagery constructs precisely what my object of analysis is: the minaret without a mosque.

How shall we interpret a minaret without its mosque? I will try to answer this question through the case of present-day Turkey—a cultural context in which Islam is currently an important political force. Through a discussion of the minarets without mosques in urban districts undergoing redevelopment in the Turkish capital of Ankara, I argue that these free-standing minarets embody two radically different iconographies. On the one hand, the minaret, as I have already mentioned, is a 'symbol' of Islam; therefore, Islamist municipal administrations refrain from destroying them although their mosques are demolished together with other elements of the built environment in these neighbourhoods. On the other hand, the minarets are the 'symptoms' of the everyday patterns of urban life in the demolished squatter neighbourhoods. Their survival as the physical remainders of these perished patterns becomes a component of urban politics under the conditions of a neo-liberal urban regime coupled by Islamic cultural politics. I will attempt to theorise the quotidian role of the minarets with reference to

Lefebvre's concept of 'rhythmanalysis' and discuss the politics of the minarets without mosques in relation to Benjamin's interpretation of ruin and history. A particular case that I will discuss is an on-going urban regeneration project in Ankara, since the lonely minarets standing on its site have become the trademark of the project in the public eye.

Neo-liberal Islamism and the Minaret from Symbol to Symptom

"The minarets are our bayonets, the domes our helmets/ The mosques our barracks and the faithful our army". These verses had cost Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the current Prime Minister of Turkey and the leader of the pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (JDP), a short prison-term and more importantly a life-long political ban in 1998. The ban was later lifted with a change in the law, and it became possible for him to run for Parliament and finally be named Prime Minister. However, the poem and its quotation by the Turkish Prime Minister were often used by his political opponents and recently brought up in support of the campaign for the Swiss minaret ban (Kern, 2009; Khan, 2009).

The iconography of the mosque has always been a hotly debated topic in Turkey. The republican history has been marked by a radical version of secularism defined by strict state control of the religious domain; yet the mosque has always been a site relatively immune from control. Since it is an actual space that has an important place in the everyday lives of practising Muslims, a total prohibition of the mosque was out of the question. Hence it has been the most powerful symbol for the political manifestations of Islamism. Islamists have often raised demands such as the reconversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, the building of

spectacular mosques in symbolic locations such as Taksim in Istanbul (the largest square of the city) and Çankaya in Ankara (the district where the Presidential Palace is).[2]

The political iconography of the mosque requires an historical understanding of Islamism as political power. It has to be understood not as the manifestation of a religious power unchanged in time, but as a contemporary ideology compatible with historical circumstances. In the case of Turkey, the Islamist opposition successfully adapted itself to the dynamics of neo-liberalisation which gradually became dominant after the 1980s. I am using the term 'Islamism' here to refer to a political ideology. In this respect, it is different from Islam as a religion and its 'Islamic' cultural manifestations (Çınar, 2005; see also Göle, 2000).

Some scholars have argued that the rise of Islamic groups to power necessarily ends up in their moderation and that, in the case of Turkey, the Islamic movement ceased to be Islamist as the result of a compromise with the secularist state (Yavuz, 2009, pp. 5–13). Rather than essentialising the relation between Islamic movements and the state in the form of an inevitable moderation, I propose to consider the particular form of interaction between Islamist politics and the historical dynamics that give way to the Islamists' rise to power. Viewed in this way, the establishment of a government by Islamist cadres does not necessarily end up in either the existence of an (hidden or overt) agenda to transform the state structure into a theocratic one or the total abandonment of Islamist political views. The issue is rather the reorganisation of civil society in Islamic terms to the extent that the economic relations allow. In this regard, I believe it is appropriate to define the particular strand of pro-Islamic politics of the JDP as neo-liberal Islamism, since this particular combination served the

consolidation of neo-liberal hegemony through the Islamic institutions within civil society (Tuğal, 2009). The party's gradual rise to power was the result of the mobilisation of the masses against the deprivation created by neo-liberalism, yet they were paradoxically resubjected to the same system afterwards.[3] Although a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, the 10-year JDP rule in Turkey witnessed the utilisation of controlled mass mobilisation as the engine of neo-liberalisation (Tuğal, 2009, p. 4).

The Islamists' rise to power in Turkey in the past two decades started at the level of local administrations. Most of the major Turkish cities were taken over by Islamist mayors who were then members of the Welfare Party (WP), in 1994. From then on, the political influence of Islam gradually increased primarily through the municipal policies of the WP. It is crucial to note that the Islamist movement has gone through a significant transformation in the 1990s. This was a result of, on the one hand, the military intervention in 1997 and, on the other, their experience in local and central governments leading them to reconciliation with the market if not with the state. After the outlawing of the WP in 1998 and its successor the Virtue Party (VP) in 2001, the Islamists split into two fractions. While the older generation maintained the radical Islamist discourse of the 1990s, the younger generation led by Erdoğan established the Justice and Development Party (JDP). The JDP broke away with the anti-capitalist, anti-Western discourse and embraced an agenda of democratisation in the face of constant threat from the military. From then on, the JDP strengthened its hegemony through the zealous fulfillment of neo-liberal market demands and a populist welfare system utilising Islamic social networks. The neo-liberalisation of urban economy was balanced with a municipal

welfare system distributing a significant amount of aid in the form of household goods to the urban poor (White, 2002; Buğra, 2007). I define this particular model as the urban politics of convergence.

Here, convergence should not be understood as a narrowing of the income gap between the urban classes. On the contrary, this system brings closer different class positions within the same hegemonic network by using Islamic values, particularly the Islamic approach to poverty.[4] Up until the 2000s, the Islamist groups interpreted the traditional Islamic teaching of patience as an anti-capitalist praise to poverty. Yet, under the JDP, it rapidly turned into a means of producing consent to the existing economic order.[5] The religious community leaders still taught the poor to bear poverty, which now functioned as an indirect support to the government's economic policies. The most important economic mechanism to support the politics of convergence was the deployment of the welfare system as a tool of capital accumulation. The supply of goods to be distributed to the urban poor from the local market integrates not only the squatters but also the petty producers, dealers, power brokers and even in-city transport companies with this power network, at the centre of which rests the municipality. Although I will not go into the details, this system has recruited a large body of supporters for the WP-VP and eventually resulted in the JDP's rise to power in 2002 (Batuman, 2012).

Meanwhile, urban space had become a significant means of capital accumulation during the same period (Ünsal and Kuyucu, 2010; Batuman, 2012). The role of urban development in neo-liberalism has been discussed extensively (Harvey, 1989; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Hackworth, 2007). In tune with these trends, urban politics took a drastic step in terms of the production of space in Turkey after 2002. In 2004, urban regeneration became a legal term in Turkish legislation. In brief terms, the municipalities and the Housing Development Administration were granted immense powers that allowed them to co-operate in the redevelopment of old squatter areas. These two agents also have the authority to determine expropriation rates for squatter homes. The squatters are forced either to leave the area with the amount they are given or to use it as downpayment and take loans to own a new home in the same area. This new model meant the end of the traditional pattern of urbanisation in Turkey, which rested on the populist overlooking of squatting (Keyder, 1999). Now market dynamics were extended to the peripheries and a total commodification of urban space was in order (Keyder, 2010; Ünsal and Kuyucu, 2010).

In this fashion, vast areas have been designated as renewal zones in all of the Turkish cities in the past seven years. And it is within this context that the minaret emerges as an urban artifact that assumes new meanings other than its traditional iconography. The Islamist modernisers of the JDP propose large urban regeneration projects which require extensive demolition in urban areas. Yet, their reluctance to tear down minarets creates ruinscapes in which minarets seem to have miraculously survived destruction.

To begin with, a minaret surviving the demolition of its mosque is an expression of deference to Islam. It is the predicament of an urban renewal process led by an Islamist local administration. A particular urban area has been the object of a renewal project; the housing stock, together with the social and cultural facilities—including the mosques— are demolished. Yet, the minaret, precisely because it is seen as the bearer of religious symbolism, is immune from destruction. This, in turn, creates a contradiction on the part of the authorities who desire to use urban regeneration as a tool of total

transformation. In this regard, the minaret without its mosque appears as the symptom of renewal. The modernist will of the municipal administration instrumentalises urban regeneration to exert power in the city. The limits to the immense powers invested in the municipality are not defined by exterior powers restraining it (such as laws, regulations, etc.), but by the cultural codes inherent within it: the minaret as the untouchable symbol of Islam. In other words, the urban texture *resists* Islamist regeneration with Islamic representations of space. These minarets could only be demolished when they are replaced with newer (and larger) mosques (and minarets) erected on the same locations. This means the continuity of certain urban elements within the renewal process.

The minarets without mosques are found in redeveloped squatter areas; they represent the spatial practices that had existed within the scale of a neighbourhood. The regeneration projects, however, propose different living patterns and distinct user profiles for these areas. Being working-class neighbourhoods, these areas are characterised by particular daily routines including public transport timetables, frequent use of communal spaces and the primacy of walking within the neighbourhood. The result of gentrification, in contrast, minimises interaction among neighbours, introduces private cars which are used not only for commutes between home and workplace but even for shorter distances within the neighbourhood.

For instance, the image we see in Figure 1 shows the old squatter area of Çukurambar which has been transformed into a wealthy Islamic quarter where some of the members of the Parliament reside today. Within this transformation, the humble mosque of the squatter neighbourhood was demolished to make room for the new boulevard passing through the district in 2005. The minaret of the mosque stood within the lawn of the eight-floor apartment building along the boulevard for more than three years. It was torn down only with the rising of the minarets of the much larger district mosque built in an adjacent lot in 2009. Incidentally, the new mosque was accompanied with a housing unit including three high-rise residential blocks. The juxtaposition of the traditional architecture of the large mosque and the modernism of the high-rise blocks provides a fine illustration of the peculiar form of urban regeneration under neo-liberal Islamism. Although Islamic representations of space are reproduced as ideological signifiers of power, the everyday lives in the new housing complexes predominantly populated by pro-Islamic residents reveal a level of negotiation with modern urban practices. What is crucial here is that the spaces of both everyday uses and ideological display are incorporated within the political economy of redevelopment.

Similarly, there is a single minaret in the Dikmen Valley regeneration area which has been left in a building site for more than two years. The regeneration of the Valley, which runs for 13 km, was designed in five phases. While the first two phases were finished by the early 1990s, the third phase was realised by the Islamist local administration. The site of the third phase of the project was cleared in 2005 and the small neighbourhood mosque was the only structure left in the area. The mosque was demolished in 2009 when the high-rise luxurious residential blocks towering over it were finished. The small local mosque has been substituted with a new one located by the high-rise blocks. While the new mosque is a semi-private space within a gated community, the minaret of the old mosque still stands at the valley bottom. In both Çukurambar and Dikmen, the spatial practices represented by these minarets—that is, the role of the mosque within the daily routines of the squatters—have become obsolete.

Figure 1.   The single minaret in Çukurambar stood within the lawn of an apartment building until a large mosque was built in the adjacent lot.

The power of the minaret to resist urban renewal stems from the symbolism it embodies. Yet, fitting the urban meaning(s) of the minaret into its religious symbolism means pushing urban life into a narrow domain of politico-religious representations. The minaret is loaded with meanings deriving from its role in everyday practices beyond its religious iconography. In order to explore such meanings, it is necessary to analyse the mosque as a node within the network of everyday life in the city.

The Rhythmanalysis of the Minaret

Everyday life, by definition, signifies the ordinary; it contains patterns born out of practices in endless repetition. This set of insignificant patterns, however, is a major component of the social structure; as Lefebvre (1991, p. 87) has mentioned, everyday life has "a secret life and a richness of its own". The analysis of everyday life helps us to uncover the ideological configurations of social relations, since everyday life has a multilayered character, which is a result of the overlapping repetitive cycles. The attempt to analyse these cycles should begin with their rhythms, since an activity that leads to the interaction of time and space inevitably produces rhythm (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 15).

Lefebvre proposes a new methodology, which he defines as rhythmanalysis. This

Figure 2. A typical residential cityscape in Ankara, in which the network of minarets is clearly visible.

interdisciplinary field of knowledge, for Lefebvre, should explore the natural/biological rhythms together with artificial/social ones. The objective of rhythmanalysis is to dig out the repetitive patterns of movements, gestures, behaviours, situations and differences and to reach at a clear grasp of the everyday life made of linear and cyclical rhythms. If we follow Lefebvre, it is crucial to look beyond the apparent iconography of the minaret and search for the everyday rhythms that it takes part in. Only then will it be possible to uncover the representations the minaret embodies within the context of daily practices. These representations are the products of visual, physical and acoustic rhythms that the minaret defines in urban space. Especially in residential areas, due to lower building heights, the minarets construct a visual rhythm that defines a scale within the texture of the built environment (Figure 2). The basic unit that defines this scale is the walking distance, which also corresponds to the size of the community sharing each mosque space. The mosque is used in different cycles by different users: while some users visit it five times a day, others go to the mosque once a week for Friday

prayers and some others do so only twice a year at the Bayram prayers.[6] The minaret is also the focus of an acoustic rhythm that comes out of the repetition of the call for prayer five times a day. Moreover, the call for prayer is broadcast from many minarets, yet without synchrony. This shows us that rhythm is not necessarily monotonous or even harmonious; the rhythms of everyday life display multiplicity of rhythms (polyrhythmia), their harmony (eurhythmia) or disharmony (arrhythmia) (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 16).

Within rhythm, space and time are experienced through a particular pace, that of spatial practice. The triviality of everyday life expressed with repetition leads to an impression that there is no change; the velocity of transformation is zero. The perception of cyclical time and the recurrence of spatial experience conceal the rhythms of everyday life behind the image of monotonousness. The experience of urban renewal, on the contrary, is a condensation of space and time; the velocity of transformation is high. Furthermore, the municipal authority as the agent of renewal wishes to maximise the pace of redevelopment. It is desired to

achieve both the physical reconstruction process and the socio-cultural transformation that accompanies it within a short period of time.

At this instance, the minaret without a mosque emerges first of all as the sign of the erased patterns and rhythms of daily practices. The network woven by the minarets in a squatter area displays the embeddedness of religious routines in everyday life. Moreover, the minaret without a mosque is the sign of the juxtaposition of not only two different times (the past and the present) but also two different temporalities and two different urban velocities. While the temporality of everyday life in the squatter area rests on daily cycles, urban renewal and its high velocity present the transformation from the past to the present as a linear progress. The permanence of the minaret, in this context, terminates this linearity and constructs a condition of swinging back and forth in time. In other words, the single minaret suspends time in the eye of its observers. The undemolished minaret constantly refers to the past and the former patterns of everyday life embedded in it. Hence, the minaret creates an expanded temporality referring simultaneously to the demolished squatter neighbourhood and the newly erected housing blocks. That is, the new everyday life, thanks to the minaret without a mosque, is defined by polytemporality, a present time containing the past in it.

Nevertheless, it is not only the destroyed rhythms of everyday life that the single minaret represents. The minaret, the mosque of which has been demolished, inevitably reflects the violence that characterises urban renewal. The minaret without a mosque is a minaret torn off from its mosque. In this respect, the minaret is the remainder of a vanished whole; it is the *ruin* of a mosque. According to Benjamin, the ruin is a symbol of ephemerality in relation to history (Benjamin, 1990, pp. 177–182). The corrosion of time over space materialises in the ruin, which in return assumes the power to revive the past within the present. At this point, architecture, in addition to being a component of human experience at the present time, makes it possible to imagine the past through the traces it carries and the corrosion it displays. What is crucial here is the dialectics of the ruin as remainder. The ruin simultaneously represents decay as a negative process and the positive persistence within this very process. It has collapsed under the overwhelming pressure of time, but also managed to survive it. In this respect, the ruin is the signifier of the power that destroyed it. The minaret as ruin, then, is the signifier of the destructive power of urban renewal for the former residents of these neighbourhoods as well as those critical of the destruction caused by urban regeneration operations.

A Field of Minarets: North Ankara City Entrance Project

I have already discussed the rhythm produced by the minaret in areas where building heights allow the minaret to be visible from a distance. Although it is possible to come across individual examples of minarets without mosques in different parts of Ankara, a striking setting of single minarets allowing for their legibility is the site of the North Ankara City Entrance project along the road connecting the airport to the city centre. The project was the prime example of the urban regeneration endeavours of the neo-liberal Islamists and set the guidelines for future examples. Since the road to the airport was defined as a gateway to the capital city, the project was presented as a national undertaking. It was argued that the facades of this prestigious urban axis display 'the nation' to the 'foreign visitors',

hence it had to be cleared of the squatter houses. The project was begun in 2004 with a special law authorising the Ankara Greater Municipality and the Housing Development Administration to redevelop the area. The evacuation of 30 000 people and the demolition of 6500 squatter homes were completed in 2005 and 2006. The evacuation process was rather peaceful since the squatters were promised that they could move into their new homes in late 2007, although none have moved in since the buildings are not finished as of spring 2012. It was planned to construct 8100 houses for the squatters and 21 000 extra units to be sold. A large section of the area was allocated as an upper-class residential zone with a vast recreational area (Gümüş, 2010). Since the area designated as a recreational zone is still empty, the single minarets within this zone remain.

The project is a significant attempt at developing a model for space production compatible with the ideological choices of neo-liberal Islamism. The power of the central government was for the first time added to the capabilities of the Islamist municipal administrations in this project. In this regard, the project can be compared with the construction of a new district to shelter the new government buildings of the young republic and villas for the state élite in the 1920s (Batuman, 2009). Yenişehir, literally the new city of Ankara, was built on the expropriated land across the railroad, which until then served as the southern border of the town. This new city rising on a *tabula rasa* was seen as the site for the creation of the symbolic locus of the republic. In the following decades, the railroad continued to act as the demarcation line separating the poor north and the wealthy south.

Within this context, it is not surprising to see the Islamists attempting to build a symbolic alternative to southern Ankara, which represented not only wealth but also the republican ideology with the Presidential Palace located on the southern hills overlooking the city. In the 1990s, the northern district of Keçiören, which has its own administrative body, was treated by the Islamists as the alternative to republican Ankara with Islamic representations of space and conservative daily practices (Sargın, 2004). While the newly built town hall was decorated with designs reminiscent of Ottoman and Islamic symbolism, the municipality enforced an alcohol ban and introduced gender segregation in urban space.

In contrast to the radical Islamism of the 1990s, the neo-liberal Islamism of the JDP came up with regeneration projects in tune with the politics of convergence.[7] The main idea was to juxtapose slum upgrading with luxurious housing. This was the dream of neo-liberal Islamists; rich being rich and poor being poor yet living side-by-side with the shared identity of Islam. The poorest residents of the district were quickly relocated in the low-quality housing blocks built further north and the squatters who owned title deeds were promised apartments within the project. These apartments were to be built distant from the upper-class residences and their recreational areas.[8] The aim of the project was defined as "bringing a new interpretation and a new definition to the city [of Ankara], which has grown distant to the urban image defined in 1923" (Ankara Greater Municipality, 2005). Although there is no reference to Islam, it is clearly stated that the image of the city was intended to be redefined, without any clear indication of what the new image would refer to. Moreover, with the words of the mayor, this site would be "a new living environment, every corner of which would be under surveillance with smart technologies" (*Sabah Ankara*, 12 March 2006). The prospect of convergence of squatters, the loyal voters of the Islamist

parties for two decades, and the new rich of neo-liberal Islamism requires the strict control of urban space.[9]

If we turn to the current state of the site, it is crucial to note that the multitude of lonely minarets signifies the destruction of a whole residential district and hence points to the social aspect of demolition. The physical marks of the vanished daily practices such as the distances between individual minarets constantly refer to the inexistent socio-spatiality as spectres of past urban experiences in the present time. Put in this way, the network of minarets without mosques resurrects a spatial pattern that previously existed in the squatter district.

Interestingly, the Housing Development Administration seems to have embraced the single minaret as the symbol of the project. A large signboard with the acronym of the organisation was erected near a minaret on a small hill close to the road. Thus, these minarets are not seen as temporary defects to be corrected with replacment mosques and minarets. On the contrary, they are utilised as a component of the project's emblem, representing the Islamist power executing it. Moreover, a new mosque is located on the hilltop facing the road. The new structure defines the silhouette together with the unfinished high-rise blocks. In other words, although the textual representations of the project never refer to Islam(ism), the minarets fulfill this task through their silent presence.

The unusual scene created by the single minarets has led to discussions from the moment it emerged. While journalists often asked the authorities why the minarets were left on the site, vague answers generally defined it as an attempt to avoid future accusations of building too many mosques (by recording the number of the mosques with the minarets). It was often considered that the minarets were not demolished because it would be a "sin to do so" (*Tempo*, 2006). Oppositional media saw this as an Islamist statement suggesting that "everything can be demolished, except for the minaret" (*SOL*, 2008). The phenomenon was also discussed by the residents of the area on Internet forums. While some forum users asked others of their opinions and whether they had information regarding these minarets, others responded with comments, speculations or rumours. Most of the comments referred to the holiness of the minaret and affirmed the act, while some posted the explanations of the authorities. There were even posts citing rumours that the minarets would later be maintained as landscape elements in the recreational area.[10]

The Visual Representation of Urban Destruction

The visual experience of the minarets along the Airport Road is not limited to their observation from the road. The spectacle of minarets is also visually constructed via photographic representation and circulated in public. The pair of photographs in Figure 3 composes the paradigmatic representation of the North Ankara City Entrance project. This pair of images was used for the first time in a book introducing the urban regeneration projects of the Housing Development Administration (Bayraktar, 2006). After that, it was frequently reproduced in the publications of the Ankara Greater municipality. It was reproduced from time to time in the weekly bulletin of the Municipality to report the recent developments regarding the project. Moreover, new photographs of the project site were added to this set to emphasise progress. The photographs become operational tools within the social process of urban renewal through the meanings they produce. They work for the legitimisation of the creative destruction
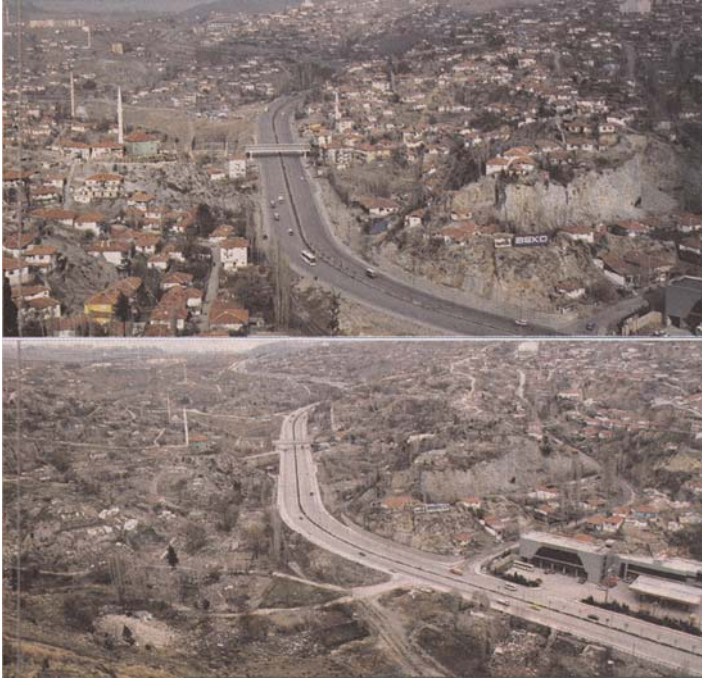
Figure 3. The pair of photographs frequently used by the authorities to represent the North Ankara City Entrance project.

prompted by the municipality. The use of these photographs as a pair tells us about the differences between them, hence the transformation of the district. The photographs do not depict before and after images of the project, since it is not finished yet. What they show is the before and after conditions of the first phase—that is, the evacuation. The swiftness of physical demolition implies the peacefulness of evacuation as a social process. Moreover, rapid demolition promises rapid construction; the hardest chapter of renewal is already completed as witnessed by the photographs.[11] The modernist agent of renewal has finally attained its *tabula rasa*, the photographs tell us; it is only a matter of time before the project is realised.

Nevertheless, what is true for every representation is also valid here: representation cannot guarantee the coherence of meaning.

There is always the possibility of an excess of meaning failing the intentions of the (re)producers of the images. Here, while the municipal authority uses these photographs as the illustration of a clean slate, they can easily be interpreted as images of devastation. In this regard, they can be seen as related to a different genre of photographic representation—that of aerial reconnaissance photographs. The aerial views of the project site significantly resemble that of a bombed area and the ruined areas look like a scarred landscape after destruction.

During the Second World War, an important task of aerial photography was documentation of damage done by bombing raids (Deriu, 2007). The crucial feature of this imagery is the depiction of destruction from a distance, which functions to render the human tragedy invisible. The detached gaze of the airborne camera turns

social catastrophe into abstract visual patterns. The aerial reconnaissance photographs deploy various representational strategies which produce distinct effects. While high verticals show two-dimensional abstract patterns, low obliques allow for perspectival vision and depict the actuality of destruction. While the former records the extent of devastation, the latter allows the viewer to differentiate between the standing structures and the destroyed ones. If we return to the images of the renewal area in northern Ankara, what we have at hand are low oblique views intended to display the vanishing squatter houses. Yet, the destruction of the houses needs to be viewed from a particular distance so that the human details reminding us of the fact that the destroyed structures are actually homes are not detectable. That is, the representational strategy is based on a point of view which is distant enough to conceal the social dimension of destruction and close enough to show its physicality.

In any case, the constant element in these images initially displaying change is the minarets without mosques. Hence, the photographs inevitably highlight these architectural elements that survived demolition. Their survival, as mentioned earlier, is an outcome of the municipality's respect for Islamic values. The public circulation of these images is a silent manifestation of the Islamic character of the community life expected to be created via the project. Nevertheless, the minarets are also relict features of the everyday life of the squatter neighbourhood. Since the minaret is a signifier of the spatial practices in the neighbourhood, its survival passes the traces of past everyday life on to the present. The minarets pinning down the places of religious practice confirm human experience. Hence, the minaret as the signifier of everyday life troubles the strategically chosen distance which conceals the social aspect of destruction.

While the physical existence of the minarets as free-standing objects will eventually come to an end with the completion of the project, the photographs make it possible to register permanently the meanings produced by their solitude. Without doubt, the meanings produced by these images will multiply in time due to the context within which they are viewed. The squatters evacuated from the area currently live in different districts in northern Ankara as (temporary) tenants. It is possible to observe their discontent regarding the delays in the project through the Internet forums they use to communicate. A quick tour through the pages of a nation-wide popular forum website (wowturkey.com) shows that the residents of the area have started discussion topics on the project. Under one of these topics, more than 200 users have posted around 1700 comments about the project.[12] The early messages displayed a high level of optimism despite the apparent delay as of 2008 and 2009. The users shared digitally produced images of the project and photographs of the construction site with excitement. These optimistic exchanges eventually gave way to bitter comments and complaints, not only about the delays, but also about the indifference of the authorities towards their hardship.

There is also a forum website specifically established on the North Ankara City Entrance project in 2008. The site currently has 1214 users and it has been visited more than 180 000 times in three years.[13] In 2009, it was proposed for the first time in these forums to establish an organisation to pursue the legal rights of the displaced squatters; yet this suggestion did not get a positive response. This was due on the one hand to the spatially dispersed condition of the squatters and on the other to their unwillingness to confront the authorities,

for fear of losing the rent aid they received. In December 2010, a meeting was arranged to this end and an organisation was formally established in September 2011. The first action of the organisation was suing the municipality and the Housing Development Administration, demanding compensation. The struggle of the squatters even found an echo in the Parliament: the opposition party (the Republican People's Party) formally requested an explanation from the Prime Minister regarding the delays in the project. Within this context, the photographs that used to represent the willful co-operation of the squatters begins to take on a new meaning. The squatters' renunciation of their earlier consent abolishes the optimism implied by successful evacuation and signifies their temporary-yet-continuous displacement over the years.

Urban renewal—that is, the transformation of the squatter area into a different type of housing—is presented as progress via the photographs showing the consecutive stages of transformation. This use rests on a linear notion of history supported by the sequential order of photographs taken in time. The photographs present an image of urban regeneration grasped within the linear continuity (hence necessity) of history, moving from the old to the new. Yet, this image requires the consent of the squatters to be socially operational. If the attachment of the squatters to the site through their homes (even though they are long gone) is reconstructed, the representations of the built environment open up room for new ways to historicise the urbanisation process. In this context, the minarets without mosques imply the possibility of a different reading and a different historical conception of urbanisation for they carry the memory of a past urban condition within the present.

This is in tune with Benjamin's (2003, pp. 391–395) call for a historical materialism setting out "to explode the continuum of history" by "tak[ing] control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger". The image of the minarets stripped of their mosques is a 'picture of the past' to be experienced in the present, since the struggle on urban renewal is a struggle over meaning. Once the minaret is appropriated as an index of everyday life aside from its religious connotations, it becomes a potential tool for historical consciousness regarding urban life; especially for those seeking ways to resist gentrification projects. This is only possible by viewing the minaret as a spectral testimony to the erased urban condition and not as the materialisation of religious ideology. The image of the minaret without a mosque displays traces of the past in the present time; hence—to borrow Benjamin's term—it explodes the historical claim of urban renewal as progress. As Benjamin would say, the claims of linearity of time and of historical necessity are political; they belong to the victors. The minarets without mosques, in contrast, may serve to destroy the temporality of urban renewal and the creation of a different history of urban politics.

Conclusion

The North Ankara City Entrance project praised itself for "not aggrieving" the squatters. In this respect, the failure of the project to be finished on time is already a testimony to its failure. This should also be understood as the failure of the initial objective of the project to serve as a model of urban renewal in tune with the urban politics of convergence. The project was an attempt spatially to converge the urban poor and the new Islamist élite. With the evacuation of the area, the minarets without mosques became visible and soon turned into the emblematic signs of the project in public perception. This was also in accord with the

intentions of the authorities, since it was not desired publicly to announce the project as an Islamist undertaking. Instead, the minarets served as silent signifiers of Islamism, not as newly erected statements but as relicts of what was already there: as testimonies to the inherent Islamic character of the area. In a sense, the minarets represented the authorities' interpretation of the squatter district: a community held together through the network of minarets. This network also represents the one and only feature that the authorities deemed fit to be transferred to the imminent community of convergence. Shared practices (and spaces) of Islamic faith would serve as the ideological apparatus to build a new urban realm, an alternative to the capital city of republican modernism. In this regard, the minarets function as anchors to implement the project on the actual site.

Nevertheless, the minarets are not merely religious signifiers but also the ruined traces—the remains—of the displaced social practices. While they are representational symbols, they are also architectural elements recalling the past. This duality is precisely the reason why they should be understood as the symptom of the project's failure. As Islamic symbols they are expected to provide the link between the rich and the poor, not only metaphorically but also physically with the shared spaces of a harmonious community. Yet this mythical vision rises over the ruins of the squatter homes as witnessed by the minarets themselves. The existence of the minarets is the sign of the prolongation of the displaced lives of the squatters. That is, while they are intended to act as tools to converge the two separate social groups spatially and discursively, they turn into markers of the limits to the politics of convergence. The urban strategy of neo-liberal Islamism rests, on the one hand, on the production of space through maximisation of rent and, on the other, on the

framing of the social spaces with Islamic representations. In the case of the North Ankara City Entrance project, the Islamic representations—the minarets—ended up as signs of the displacement of the squatters desperately struggling to attain their homes.

Notes

1. For an analysis on the origins and the political history of the minaret, see Bloom (1989).
2. Most recently, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that a mosque—"among the largest in the world and … visible from everywhere in the city"—was planned to be constructed on a hilltop in Istanbul (*Radikal*, 2012).
3. For details of the neo-liberal economic policies pursued by the JDP, see Cizre and Yeldan (2005), Yıldırım (2006) and Sarıca (2011).
4. Obviously, the Islamic values were not the sole determinant in the JDP's success in gaining the consent of the lower classes. For the political economy of the cross-class alliance that the JDP managed to constitute, see Öniş (2006).
5. Through his observations in Sultanbeyli where he conducted fieldwork, Tuğal comments that "workers still talked frequently of patience in 2006, but now they patiently accepted the reigning economic order, rather than patiently and quietly rejecting it like in 2001" (Tuğal, 2009, p. 224).
6. The Bayram prayers occur during the Eid al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan and the Eid al-Adha celebrated approximately 70 days after the Eid al-Fitr.
7. It has to be noted that the mayor of the Ankara Greater Municipality was the mayor of Keçiören until he won his current seat in 1994. In his third term in office, which corresponds to the period 2004–09, he clashed with his successor in Keçiören, although both of them were elected from the JDP. The party did not renominate the mayor of Keçiören in 2009, since he was seen as the representative of radical Islamism. For a

similar clash between the neo-liberal Islamism of the JDP and the radical Islamism of the earlier period in Sultabeyli, one of the foremost Islamist districts in Istanbul, see Tuğal (2009).

8. While they are waiting to return to the area and move in to their new homes, the squatters are living as tenants in different locations and are being paid monthly rent aid of approximately US$150.

9. The relocated squatters are subject to rules and regulations rearranging the rhythms of their everyday practices. In the new housing complexes they are introduced with written rules prohibiting the "misuse" of the environment such as the spread of indoor activities (cooking, hosting guests, growing vegetables, etc.) to the outside and the violation of the clear-cut differentiation of public and private spaces. These rules conflict with the former patterns of everyday life for some of the squatters and result in their being frequently warned by the security staff. For the frustrating experiences of the former residents of the North Ankara City Entrance Project area, see Erman (2011). For a similar case in Bezirganbahçe, Istanbul, see Uzunçarşılı Baysal (2009).

10. For examples of such discussions see the "North Ankara City Entrance Project" at: http://wowturkey.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=23823andstart=10 (last accessed 5 October 2011).

11. It is interesting to note that these photographs were often accompanied by photographs showing the squatters happily demolishing their own homes. For an example, see *Büyükşehir Ankara* 233, the weekly bulletin of the Ankara Greater Municipalty, 17–23 June 2009.

12. See: http://wowturkey.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=23823 (last accessed 5 October 2011).

13. See: http://www.kuzeyankara.net/forum/ (last accessed 5 October 2011).

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