

Celebrating and Neglecting Istanbul: Its Past vs. Its Present

This essay highlights the major roles the city of Istanbul has played in the past and in the modern era, and the ways it has been transformed from Ottoman times to the Republican period. As the political, military and intellectual center of the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul represented the power and unity of a multicultural system through which Ottomans offered a highly attractive culture to its constituent and client regions. The fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I separated Istanbul from its imperial role. Republican elites neglected Istanbul during the early decades of the 1920s, in part to disassociate themselves from the Ottoman Imperial heritage. By the time administrators of the Republic recognized the potential of Istanbul as a city and as a symbol, its infrastructures lagged far behind those expected of modern European cities. By the time subsequent governments realized that Istanbul could be the business and commercial center of the country its geographic location had already created that reality. Millions were moving into the city from all parts of Anatolia in search of better jobs, a trend that continues today uncontrolled. Despite successive assaults on its architectural urban legacy and social character, Istanbul remains the most valuable historic (and perhaps touristy) site in Turkey. It is a reminder of past glories and inspiration for the future. It represents history and modernity together not only to the Turkish people but also to business people, politicians, intellectuals and the public throughout the world.

Istanbul today is a paradox at the center of modern Turkish life. Istanbul the historic city has an enduring presence in everyday lives of Turkish citizens. Yet from certain neighborhoods it appears to be a completely modern city, with no connection to its legacy. High-rise buildings erected every year demonstrate its integration into the modern

global economy. Istanbul surrendered its imperial claims, but it still provides a crossroads for history and modern life, combining Anatolia's workaholic population eager to catch up with Istanbul and a European side that banks the city's rich imperial legacy.

From the Conquest to Republic

Istanbul, founded in the 6th century BCE, was a city that inspired Turks long before they captured it from the Roman Empire. After that conquest, in 1453, Istanbul became the most valuable jewel of the Ottoman Turks. Its conqueror, Mehmed II (r. 1451-1481)¹ while taking necessary measurements to save the landmarks redefined Istanbul as the center of his Empire. Granting rights to Greek Orthodox and Armenian communities, he envisioned and instituted an imperial city for the ever expanding borders of his state.²

Stories of the conquest of Istanbul tell that, upon entering the city Mehmed II immediately went to St. Sophia, a monument Turks revered — then and now —, to submit his gratitude to God. Repair efforts, which soon began, inspired architectural rivalries. The Ottoman Hakans recruited talented architects to design and build other mosques to compete with St. Sophia. Fatih Mosque (completed in 1471) Süleymaniye (1558) Selimiye Mosque (1574) and Sultan Ahmet (known as the Blue Mosque, 1616) and others demonstrate Ottoman admiration for St. Sophia through their incorporation of its features into the Islamic architectural style.

Almost all Ottoman sultans financed spectacular monuments to commemorate their love and respect for Istanbul, the imperial center. Building programs included colleges, libraries, water reservoirs, charitable institutions, and government and private buildings. Mothers and daughters of the sultans — along with wealthy, high level bureaucrats —

¹ He also reigned briefly between 1444 and 1446.

² For detailed information on Mehmed II's efforts to reorganize Istanbul see: Halil Inalcik, "Mehmed the Conqueror (1432-1481) and His Time," *Speculum* Vol. 35, No. 3 (Jul., 1960), pp. 408-427; idem, The Policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek Population of Istanbul and the Byzantine Buildings of the City *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* Vol. 23/24, (1969/1970), pp. 229-249.

created a legacy for future generations through similar buildings.¹ Within a century of the conquest, owing to these efforts by the Ottoman elite, Istanbul offered every aspect of the civilization that the Ottoman Empire represented.² In other words, for the Ottomans, whose power crossed three continents, Istanbul was the center of a very global world.

At the same time, the city of Istanbul was a microcosm of the Ottoman geopolitical and geo-cultural world. It was no surprise that Istanbul had many names, (all used together) each fulfilling a separate claim: *Konstantiniyye* (Turkish spelling of Constantinople) declared that the Ottomans were heirs of Eastern Rome; *Asitane* (Persian word for Capitol), express that they also encompassed a Persian heritage, and *Pay-i Taht*, (Persian expression but used mainly in Turkish for the seat of crown), denoted the Turkishness of their imperial headquarters. One may prefer to think of the name *Istanbul* as representative of the mixture of claims by Ottomans and modern Turks, merging and uniting all into one.

The Istanbul-based high culture of Ottomanness spread throughout this multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural Empire. The city was not only the Imperial center but the symbol of harmony for all peoples it encompassed.³ Ottoman Sultans, who resided in the relatively modest *Dolmabahce* Palace, were a unifying symbol for the many peoples and cultures in their Empire. The most fundamental power to create harmony lay in the personality of the Ottoman Sultan as every group — religious, ethnic or otherwise — was essentially bound to be loyal to him and to Istanbul as his city. He was Padisah, sultan, Kaiser, Grand Signor or Grand Turk, and he offered a then-unique system of government. As long as his subjects remained loyal to him, the Ottoman Sultan was the true guardian of his peoples regardless of their religion and ethnicity. And the

¹ For instance, Mihrimah Sultan Mosque in Uskudar and Edirnekapi, The wife of Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839) and the mother of Abdülaziz (r. 1861-1876) Pertevniyal Valide Sultan 1869-1871 Mosque in etc.).

² See: Bernard Lewis, *Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).

³ See for relevant archival materials on the status of different ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire: Cevat Ekici, ed. *Living Together under the Same Sky* (Istanbul: General Directorate of State Archives publications, n.d.).

Sultan resided in Istanbul, the *payitaht*, the seat of “Muslim Rome.”¹

Istanbul was host to another element that served as a unifying factor and represented the ruler’s power to the world: the elite troops of the Sultan, the *devşirme* system and the Janissaries.² The Janissaries are famous for their ferocity and warrior qualities, but their central role in preserving and upholding an imperial system is less well known in the West. Within the Ottoman Empire, the Janissaries represented the Sultan. They were conscripted from non-Muslim families and particularly from the Balkan regions, an innovative approach to ensure loyalty from distant and different groups.

Janissary candidates were brought to Istanbul and given the best possible training including reading and writing skills, arts, social norms and knightly qualities. Those who demonstrated physical skill were sent to be trained in the Janissary troops. Their training highlighted, first and the foremost, the loyalty to the Sultan and then to the state. They were taught warring skills along with other virtuous and courtly qualities similar to the training of Samurais in classical Japan. Recent scholarship does not emphasize the role of the Janissaries in extending the culture of Istanbul to other corners of the Empire, janissary officers were frequently granted supervision of large estates in remote parts of the Empire. This practice, which led to extensive cultivation of the land, further supported the dual loyalty to Istanbul and to the Sultan.

The Janissaries who showed brilliant intellectual qualities were moved into *Enderun*,³ the elite schooling system specifically designed to train future palace bureaucrats. Access to this training was prohibited to sons of other Turkish and Muslim elements.⁴

¹ The term is inspired by a Turkish historian, İlber Ortaylı; see his article “Osmanlı: Üçüncü Roma İmparatorluğu” (Ottomans: The Third Roman Empire) in *Hürriyet* Daily, Osmanlı addition, October 18, 1999.

² V. L. Ménage “Some Notes on the Devşirme” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol. 29, No. 1 (1966), pp. 64-78.

³ For further information: see Hafız Hızır İlyas, *Tarih-i Enderun, Letaif-i Enderun 1812-1830* [History of Enderun 1812-1830] ed. Cahit Kayra, (Gunes Yayinlari, 1987) and İsmail Hakkı Baykal, *Enderun Mektebi Tarihi* [History of Enderun School] (Istanbul: Halk Basimevi, 1953).

⁴ The exclusion of other Turkish elements from the Ottoman court system was enacted by Mehmed II following the conquest of Istanbul to eliminate his powerful grand vizier (1443-1453) Chandarli

Depending on their abilities and skills *Enderun* graduates could rise to such positions as *Sadrizam* (grand vizier), the second in command after the Sultan. The Ottoman system raised and trained numerous viziers and grand viziers along with thousands of state bureaucrats through this system of conscription. Each conscriptee served and contributed to the unity of the Empire. Sokollu Mehmet Paşa (1505-1579) is a good example. His career as grand vizier, which lasted more than 14 years — extended through the reign of three Sultans: Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566), Selim II (1566-1574) and Murad III (1574-1595). Sokollu was recruited from a Christian family in Bosnia; a brother became the Greek Patriarch of Bosnia. During his tenure, Sokollu served the system that recruited him with impeccable loyalty, as one among many.

Istanbul became the center of modernization efforts after the Janissary system was replaced by a Western-style army, *nizam-i cedit*, in 1826. The creation of the first constitutional document (the *Gülhane Rescript*) and its declaration to the public in 1839 marked the beginning of an era in which new institutions were founded and old ones transformed. Ultimately (though the modernization was never finalized), the Ottoman Empire moved from a military-centered administrative system to a bureaucracy-centered one. This transformation reflected in the emergence of government bureaucratic offices *Bab-i Ali* (The High Gate) as the new center of power in Istanbul.¹

Halil who was in disagreement with the young Sultan about the siege of Constantinople. Chandarli's position was attributed to his cooperation with the Byzantines especially by his rival Zaganos Pasha who was a *devshirme* recruit. See D. Nicolle, J. Haldon, S. Turnbull, *The Fall of Constantinople The Ottoman Conquest of Byzantium* (Oxford, UK, New York, Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2007) pp. 188-189.

¹ See for details: Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

Istanbul Enduring

The contraction of the Ottoman borders during the later part of the 19th century was sporadic but unstoppable. Wars with Russia and Austria-Hungary and, more dramatically, the Balkan Wars in 1913 brought waves of asylum seekers to Istanbul. As the Ottomans lost power they were unable to protect the Muslim and Turkish populations of Caucasia, Central Europe and the Balkans pressed by the rising power of European empires. Prevailing religious fervor accepted no co-existence for Muslims in continental Europe. Istanbul once again met its role as a place of unification, as it became a shelter for refugees forced to flee the Balkans and Caucasian regions. This time, the asylum seekers were not the Protestants of earlier epochs, but Muslims.¹ In this way, the new power structures of continental Europe forced the Ottoman Empire to redefine itself as “Muslim” to a greater degree than it ever had before.

The unifying impact of Ottoman identity (*Osmanlilik*) began to lose its appeal in the nineteenth century. One major reason for this was that the theoretical assumptions upon which the Empire was erected faced increasing challenges from sweeping nationalist movements originating in Western Europe. Ottoman Turks and Muslims — and those allied with them — became primary targets of the new national elite rising in the Balkans and the Caucasus. Istanbul again served as a refuge for the millions who retreated from

¹ Ahmed Refik, *Turkiye 'de Multeciler Meselesi* [Refugees Problem in Turkey] (Istanbul: 1926). For Hungarian and Polish Protestant immigrants and refugees to the Ottoman Empire see: Rodwell John, *Louis Kossuth and the Last Revolutions in Hungary and Transylvania* (London: 1850), Vahot Imrefi, *Die Ungarischen Fluchtlinge in der Turkei* (Leipzig: 1951) and Thadée Gasztowtt, *La Pologne et L'Islam* (Paris, 1907). See also: Kemal Karpat, “Ottoman Views and Policies Towards the Orthodox Christian Church” in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History, Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2002), pp. 586-610 and Ingvar Svanberg, *Kazak Refugees in Turkey: A Study of Cultural Persistence and Social Change* (Academiae Ubsaliensis, 1989). Kemal Karpat, “Ottoman Views and Policies Towards the Orthodox Christian Church” in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History, Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2002), pp. 586-610 and Ingvar Svanberg, *Kazak Refugees in Turkey: A Study of Cultural Persistence and Social Change* (Academiae Ubsaliensis, 1989).

the massacres of encroaching Russian, Bulgarian and Austro-Hungarian armies. Shelters, placed at the corner of every major street, and Mosques throughout Istanbul were swamped asylum seekers. The financial and human resources of the Empire were exhausted by the need to care for so many people. Surprisingly, Ottoman sources record no major incident between the unfortunate asylum seekers and their host Istanbulites. Nor, apparently were there significant conflicts later, as refugees were sent to lands granted them in different provinces, as part of the effort to return the city to functionality.¹ The city and its rulers may have not been as powerful as they once been, but both were still trying to fulfill their guardianship for those who came to Istanbul.

The Ottoman Empire entered World War I in 1914 in alliance with Germany. Prior to that, Istanbul had witnessed a revolution in 1908, in which one of the longest-ruling Sultans, Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) was deposed, and the constitution reinstated. This revolution had been orchestrated by the underground group, the Committee of the Union and Progress (CUP). The coup of 1908 supposedly aimed revitalizing the strength of the Empire by emphasizing the unity of the all Ottoman millets (*ittihad-i anasir*), however the events it triggered brought about the downfall of the Empire within a decade. The CUP's inexperienced, fervent and often capricious leaders had not foreseen the result of encroaching power of nationalist fervor in the Balkans. When, in an unexpected war against the Ottomans, several Balkan nations gained their independence in 1913, it was a big blow to the leaders of the CUP and their ideals. This led to a rushed decision by the CUP leaders to enter the larger war (World War I) to correct the mistake they committed in 1913.

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the World War I, Allied forces occupied Istanbul from November 1918.² For the first time since its capture in 1453, a foreign

¹ See for further information: David Cuthell, *The Muhacirin Komisyonu: An Agent in the Transformation of Ottoman Anatolia 1860-1866*, Columbia University, Ph.D. 2005; Kemal Karpat, "Kossuth in Turkey: The Impact of Hungarian Refugees in the Ottoman Empire, 1849-1851" *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History, Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2002), pp. 169-184.

² See: Nur Bilge Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation, 1918-1923* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

army controlled Istanbul; this continued until the victory of nationalist forces in Anatolia led by Mustafa Kemal.¹ The struggle to recover Istanbul and mainland Anatolia from the occupiers (the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Greece) produced a new group of leaders, and took control from the Ottoman ruling family, the old ruling class and their institutions. The leadership of the nationalist struggle decided to do away with the heritage Istanbul represented, the Empire represented too much of a baggage for the young Republic. Stripped of access to the Ottoman imperial past, the Balkans, the Middle East and the North Africa, the young Turkish republic had to redefine Anatolia as the new motherland. Anatolia, the foundational source of the early Ottoman Empire and the supply center of manpower to Sultan's army, was thus brought into the 20th century.

Detached from the Imperial Past: Istanbul under Republic

The Republic was declared in Ankara in 1923. Turkey was at that point a small country, having given up its North African and Middle Eastern provinces. Many of the Balkan provinces, from which the Ottoman ruling cadre came, were lost prior to 1914. As the geographic center, Istanbul was still a connecting point between Anatolia and the Balkans. But no place in Anatolia, not even Istanbul, possessed the infrastructural facilities then expected of modern cities in an advanced country. Public services in Istanbul had been neglected throughout the WWI and occupation years. The situation in Anatolia was much worse.

Rebuilding Istanbul was not a priority for the new ruling elite during the early years of the Republic.² Ankara, a small city in the central Anatolia, was declared the new capital of the Turkish Republic in October 13, 1923, with construction of new government

¹ Salahi Ramadan Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923* (London: Sage Publications, 1975).

² Eleanor Bisbee, *The New Turks: Pioneers of the Republic 1920-1950*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951).

buildings and the transfer there of many facilities following.¹ The limited resources and redefined priorities of the young Republic meant that Istanbul received little benefit from reconstruction efforts during 1920s.

By 1936, the pressing problems of Istanbul led administrators to seek solutions; they invited Henri Proust to plan a new urban face for the city.² The objective was to improve way the city functioned and make it accommodating to the needs of modern life. Administrators agreed with Proust that it may be necessary to destroy some historical constructions in order to highlight others, and reconstruction started in 1938 with the opening up of the area surrounding the *Yeni Cami* (New Mosque). Proust's plans encouraged both street-level functionality and tourism, the latter a trend in perception which still dominates urban consciousness in the city.

Istanbul Rediscovered

The multi-party regime of the later 20th century brought a new dynamism to the country and Istanbul received its share from this vitality. The Democratic Party (DP) government, in office for a decade from 1950, seized the opportunity to redefine Istanbul as a hub of business and commerce. The DP government initiated extensive renovation and reconstruction projects, opened new highways, expanded narrow streets (such as Vatan and Millet Streets) into major conduits through the city. The process led to a gain in functionality of the city but again Istanbul sacrificed some historic sites. Some were lost through neglect others because they were in the middle of a highway or other construction project.

¹ Nurettin Türsan, *Ankara'nın Baskent Oluşu* [Ankara's Becoming Capital] (Harb Akademileri Konutanlığı Yayınları, 1981). For re-planning of Ankara see: Ali Cengizkan, *Ankara'nın İlk Planı, 1924-1925 Lörcher Planı* [The First plan of Ankara 1924-1925 Lörcher Plan] (Ankara: Ankara Enstitüsü Vakfı Yayınları, 2004).

² For a collection of Henri Proust's designs see: *Şehri Düşünmek, Şehri Yaratmak: Henri Proust'un İstanbul Üzerine Çalışmaları (1936-1951) Penser La Ville, Creer La Ville: L'Oeuvre d'Henri Prost à İstanbul (1936-1951)* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1996).

Twentieth-century reconfiguring and redefining of Istanbul raised two major issues, neither yet resolved. The first was that Istanbul was growing so quickly that the government, and the city administration, could not control, plan or engage with the demographic influx pouring into the city. The second major dilemma for Istanbul was the presence of historic Roman and Ottoman era buildings. They stood in the heart of the city; neither removal nor renovation was easy for developers. The major effort was directed toward making heritage comply with the need for a modern restructuring of the city. Successive governments and city administrations attempted to clear up the neglected shanty constructions around the major landmarks; efforts were successful only for limited times and certain areas of the city. Since the 1950s, Istanbul has always exceeded projections of its growth, a situation which creates both physical and social pressures on the administration and on the people. The story of Istanbul can then be summed up as one of constant growth with an administration mostly failing in their efforts to catch up.

Istanbul Exhausted

During the last 50 years, illegal constructions (houses and apartments) in Istanbul have grown exponentially. This trend started in the Kâğıthane and Zeytinburnu districts in the early 1950s and spread to the rest of the city in the following decades. One trigger was rapid and often unplanned industrialization: New industrial zones were established to create jobs. Jobs in turn encouraged internal migration, often unchecked in regions where city administration had loose or ineffective control. Rapid industrialization invited uncontrolled immigration to the city from all around the country; a result was that settlement in unauthorized regions — new, illegal towns — mushroomed.¹ Past administrations found

¹ One such study for instance shows that the population growth rate in parts of Buyukcekmece district of Istanbul jumped from 70-125 % during the period of 1970-1985 to 1150-2300% during the period 1985-1998. For further details see: D. Maktav and F. S. Erbek, “Analysis of urban growth using multi-temporal satellite data in Istanbul,” *International Journal of Remote Sensing* Vol. 26, No. 4, 20 February 2005, 797-810.

no way around the impasse, and could only recognize the de facto situation. As a manifestation of this dilemma, and of course out of concern for gaining votes from the populations who were settled in these illegal towns, starting from 1948, governments passed legislations that would recognize and legitimize these illegal buildings now to be found almost in every major part of the city.¹ Authorities estimate that towns with 10.000 illegal dwellings include Kâğıthane, Gaziosmanpaşa, Beykoz, Maltepe, Sarıyer, Eyüp and Ümraniye, but there are others. Istanbul today is a city in which more than half of its buildings were built illegally. Many were later legitimized, some continue to hold the status of illegal buildings but still receive municipal services (water, gas and roads). Although the current government and the city administration was able to stop the number of invasive illegal expansions, more than half of all buildings in the greater metropolitan area are estimated to be in this situation.

New efforts to liberalizing state economy in the late 1980s further centralized Istanbul's role in the business and commercial vision of the country. As this objective started to bear fruit it created a strong business and commercial center in Istanbul, but it further accelerated the already out-of-control demographic expansion and related infrastructure problems. Failure of successive governments to plan and coordinate this aspect of development inevitably brought Istanbul to a level of suffocation.

Today Istanbul is the largest metropolitan city in Turkey, with more than 12 million people and growing. The current portrait of the city offers promises, but also represents difficult issues. The large population without efficient public transportation means increased car ownership. Insufficient roads and highways means recurring transportation

¹ Legislations known as *Imar affi kanunları* (Development Forgiveness Laws) were first passed in 1948. Legislations numbers 5218 and 5228 passed in 1948 forgave all illegal constructions built between 1923 and 1948. Another legislation (no. 775) which was passed in 1966 forgave the illegal constructions between 1948 and 1960. Legislation no. 1990 passed in 1976 further extended the legalization of all buildings constructed without permission. During the 1980s four different legislations extended further legalization of illegal constructions in Istanbul. They were legislations numbers 2805, passed in March 3, 1983; 2981, passed in April 24, 1984; 3290 passed in May 22, 1986 and 3366 passed in May 18, 1987.

problems, as the system fails to answer demand.¹ [Consider only the transportation of residents of Anatolian side to European side everyday via two bridges only over Bosphorus.]

Two major — and unhappy — experiences in recent history demonstrate the destructive nature of infrastructural problems, and the levels reached by the lack of planning and lack of law enforcement. The first one surfaced during a major earthquake in August 17, 1999. Although the epicenter was in Gölcük, 70 km from İstanbul, it destroyed thousands of buildings and claimed more than 981 lives in İstanbul out of more than 200.000 buildings and 17.480 lives respectively owing to the absence of construction standards. (The majority of the buildings destroyed by the earthquake in surrounding towns, like Adapazari, Kocaeli, Yalova, Bolu, Bursa, was traced to the use of sub-standard quantities of concrete and iron, which shows how a corrupt culture of development spread to cities around İstanbul and escaped (!) the attention of authorities.) The second experience, a major flood in 2009 in İstanbul, claimed more than 30 lives and destroyed several houses. Investigations revealed a lack of control by the city administration and corruption and greed on the part of the population. Developers dumped enormous amounts of debris at unauthorized sides in the forests,² built dwellings on former creek beds and bribed city officials to get permissions. All contributed to the destruction that came with the flooding. Uncontrolled population growth, leading to the destruction of the natural environment and the eco-system that supported İstanbul for centuries, became the norm.

¹ Füsün Ulengin, “Easing the Traffic in İstanbul: At What Price?” *The Journal of the Operational Research Society*, Vol. 45, No. 7 (Jul., 1994), pp. 771-785.

² Erhan Öztürk and Haber Merkezi, “İstanbul coğrafyası altüst oldu, sele davetiye çıkarıldı,” *Sabah* (14.09.2009)

[http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2009/09/14/istanbul_cografyasi_altust_oldu_sele_davetiye_cikarildi]. Accessed on September 9, 2009.

Conclusion

My discussion attempts to highlight the importance of Istanbul for Ottomans as the center of their Empire and for Republican Turks as the center of commerce and industry. After the conquest Mehmed II and his successors repaired, expanded and glorified Constantinople, creating the astonishing Ottoman city Istanbul. Ottomans kept the Roman landmarks but reorganized the city as their own. The seat of the great Ottoman Sultans, it was from Istanbul that the great Ottoman armies departed to conquer Europe, the Caucasus, the Middle East and North Africa. Istanbul represented the high achievements in culture and civilization of Ottoman Turks. Istanbul continues to call on its Roman and Ottoman heritage to attract prestige from around the world.

Modern Turkish people, though they too revere the beauties of Istanbul, have failed to maintain Istanbul at level comparable to that of their ancestors. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I brought major changes to the administrative landscape in Turkey. According to the new world order formed after World War I, Istanbul (as representative of the old Ottoman Empire) had to lose its imperial status, and the national capital became a small town in Anatolia. Ankara had no imperial claims, but its position as the center of the newly founded Turkish Republic supported Turkey's reorganization around nationalist concerns. Ankara was meant to be purely Turkish and a modern, if not Western, city. But it took decades for Ankara to form and expand as the capital of a nation state. And, although Istanbul lost its capital city status, it retained its role as the capital of industry, business and commerce in the country.

When modern Turkish people discovered the possibilities, their love for Istanbul went beyond the pragmatic, to almost what could be called an abusive level. The new Istanbulites, the migrants of the 1950s through 1990s, all wanted a piece of Istanbul: a new and better job or a plot land to occupy and claim. While this trend of taking seems to have halted in the last decade the results accumulated from earlier urban policies or lack thereof remain the biggest challenge for the future of the city.

There has been no grand strategy for inventing or reinventing the main — historical

and modern — characteristics of the city for decades.¹ Recent initiatives highlight the heritage aspects of Istanbul owing to their tourist value, but the realities of daily life limits cultural idealism. Consecutive unsuccessful urban planning schemes since the 1920s has resulted in an accumulation of problems affecting all aspects of daily life. The immediate need to solve these problems always takes precedence over strategizing about the future of the city.

Today Istanbul has reached a point where it can, but should not, progress further. In the last decade, city administrators have taken a global approach to the issues of the city and have solved most of the infrastructure problems. Access to fresh water in the city was a major problem almost 15 years ago; today it is not. But social and cultural problems in the city remain unaddressed; millions of recent migrants from small towns of Anatolia are poorly integrated into the city, if integrated at all. Engagement with the larger environment, quality of life and the sense of belonging to Istanbul, remain major issues among these migrant communities, along with the rapid destruction of the eco-system in and around the city that results from the ever-expanding geographic borders of greater metropolitan Istanbul.

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¹ Feyzan Erkip, “Global transformations versus local dynamics in Istanbul, Planning in a fragmented metropolis,” *Cities*, Vol. 17, No. 5. (2000), pp. 371-377.

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