

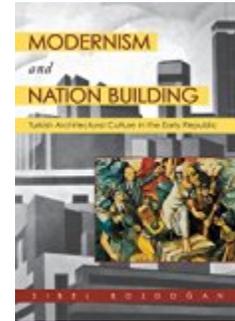
# H-Net Reviews

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Sibel Bozdogan. *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001. xii + 367 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98152-9; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98110-9.

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The founding of the Turkish Republic was for a long while told as a narrative of national modernization. A people and a country arose from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire following the Great War. Guided by a military leader who was also a political visionary, a nationalist movement brought an end to foreign occupation and implemented a revolutionary program of secular reforms. With the suppression of backward imperial traditions and the adoption of progressive national institutions, a democratic and prosperous future was secured.

Since the 1980s, narratives of national modernization have been viewed as twentieth-century mythologies, suitable for deconstruction. Does modernity refer to any specific set of ideas and practices? Or is it always an official fiction whose top-down programs feature inherent contradictions? And as an official fiction, to what extent is modernity implicated in tendentious oppositions, such as Westernism versus Orientalism, or, even, civilization versus barbarism? Questioning narratives of modernity has inevitably led to questioning its exemplars. The telling of the founding of the Turkish Republic has consequently become more contentious, but also more interesting.

Sibel Bozdogan faces the conceptual disorder left in the wake of postmodernist critiques and arrives at a new, more precise, understanding of modernism and nation-building in Turkey. She does so by examining architectural modernism as a cultural vision employed as a political instrument. Following the irregular course of architectural modernity in the early Turkish Republic, Bozdogan exposes a drama of modernities, more than one and no less than three. And while each of these modernities

made important contributions to nation-building, none was entirely coherent or enduring.

Bozdogan introduces her study with a discussion of “modernity at the margins,” a phrase that carries analytic rather than geographical meaning. Ideologies of modernity accompanied the industrialization of Western Europe and North America. So the commitment to modernity—constructing the future with a readiness to jettison the past—came in the company of impressive political, technological, and economic resources. Ideologies of modernity were no less current in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic. But for both entities, the commitment to modernity could only anticipate rather than mobilize an industrialized society. The crisis of representation that accompanies all ideologies of modernity was therefore more palpable and more destabilizing.

In the six chapters that follow the introduction, Bozdogan examines three successive phases of architectural modernity in the early Turkish Republic: (1) The First National Style of the 1920s, (2) the New Architecture of the 1930s, and (3) the National Architecture of the 1940s. To provide some idea of the structure of the study, I shall give a summary description of the three phases, each of which featured a distinctive problematic of contrary forces.

The First National Style was at first an imperial architecture that only later became a national architecture (ch. 1). During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans were refashioning the relationship of state and society. This process of imperial modernization had an important architectural dimension. New kinds

of structures and spaces functioned both to implement and to represent the realignment of rulers and subjects. By the 1900s, Ottoman architecture had come to parallel Western architecture just as Ottoman statecraft had come to parallel Western statecraft. The Central Post Office at Sirkeci in Istanbul (1908) was the first major project of what came to be known as “Ottoman revivalism.” The ferry stations at Beşiktaşı (1913), Haydarpaşa (1915), and Beykâda (1915) are other examples familiar to contemporary visitors to Istanbul. These buildings feature central domes, roof overhangs, pointed arches, and crystalline capitals. They cite the palaces and mosques of the classical imperial past even as they anticipate a new imperial state and society. After the founding of the Turkish Republic, the First National Style perpetuated the architecture of Ottoman revivalism but gave it a new meaning. The nationalist movement had saved an imperial Muslim population from foreign conquest and occupation. An architecture that referenced classical palaces and mosques continued to be appropriate for national rather than imperial reasons of state. Examples of buildings in the First National Style include the Ankara Palas (Ankara, 1924-27), the Ethnography Museum (Ankara, 1925-28), and the Agricultural Bank (Ankara, 1926-29).

The advocates of an architecture of revolution began to challenge the First National Style during the later 1920s (chs. 2-5). Unlike Ottoman revivalism, this second phase of architectural modernity directly imitated, rather than indirectly complemented, Western architecture. During the 1920s and 1930s, Le Corbusier came to be associated with an architectural modernism that laid claim to “a revolutionary aesthetic canon” and “a scientific doctrine” (p. 4). The so-called Modern Movement, also associated with Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, relied on the “use of reinforced concrete, steel, and glass, the primacy of cubic forms, geometric shapes, and Cartesian grids, and above all, the absence of decoration, stylistic motifs, traditional roofs, and ornamental details” (p. 4). In Turkey, the radicalism of the Modern Movement opened up the possibility of an architecture that refused to legitimize the imperial past. By the early 1930s, this New Architecture (as the Modern Movement came to be called) had assumed a dominant position in an architecture of revolution. Some of the familiar structures of this phase include the Youth Park (Ankara, 1935), the restaurant-casino at İsmet İnönü Dam (Ankara, 1936), and the Faculty of Humanities (Ankara 1937-38). Other projects were launched in provincial towns as well as Istanbul and Ankara, including leisure parks, apartment blocks, private residences, villages, schools, institutes, banks, and

factories.

The third phase of Turkish modernity arose as a reaction to an ideological inconsistency inherent in New Architecture. The esthetic of architectural modernism—cubic forms, geometric shapes, and minimal décor—had been the basis for a radical architecture of revolution; however, the formalism of the Modern Movement assumed a different significance as Turkey was exposed to fascist influences from Germany and Italy. Toward the close of the 1930s, the proponents of National Architecture began to criticize the symbolic emptiness of “cubic architecture.” They favored nationalistic decorative elements adapted from Anatolian, Seljuk, Ottoman, Hittite, and Sumerian styles and motifs. The buildings of the New Architecture, notable for their openness and lightness, became subjects of anathema. By the 1940s, a more classical architecture that aggrandized state power and authority had gained official favor. Examples from this period are the Faculty of Science of Ankara University (1943), the Hittite monument on Atatürk Boulevard in Ankara, the Memorial Tomb of Atatürk in Ankara (1942-55), and the Taşlıca Coffee House in Istanbul (1948).

Bozdoğan approaches the three successive phases in terms of the personalities, studios, academies, manifestoes, propaganda, competitions, and projects that comprised them. Each modernity is examined as an uneven process of invention and application in a changing national and international environment. To illustrate the kinds of issues addressed, I shall offer examples taken from the analysis of the New Architecture during the 1930s. Of the four chapters devoted to this topic, two examine the way in which radical European modernism became an architecture of revolution in Turkey, and two describe the professionalization of architects and architecture in Turkey.

The New Architecture imported the Modern Movement into the Turkish Republic. Nonetheless, its cubic forms and geometric shapes came to have purposes and meanings that they did not have in France or Germany (ch. 2). The New Architecture was a vehicle for implementing and legitimizing nation-building. New kinds of structures and spaces were instruments for cultivating a new kind of public thinking and practice. At the same time, these structures and spaces also served as visual expressions of revolutionary ideals and material confirmations of revolutionary successes.

In a similar way, the relationship of architectural modernity with industrial society was transformed in the Turkish context (ch. 3). The New Architecture achieved

the “look” of the Modern Movement by means of skills, methods, and materials available in an agrarian rather than an industrial society. Cubic forms and geometric shapes were constructed by means of brick and plaster facades rather than steel, concrete, and glass. Architectural modernity was a charter for a new industrial order rather than the harnessing of its power and wealth.

German, Swiss, and Austrian architects were appointed to carry out large state public projects from the later 1920s (ch. 4). These included the Ankara master plan (Hermann Jansen, 1927) and the Grand National Assembly design (Clemenz Holzmeister, 1937). Germans, Swiss, and Austrian architects also directed the institutes that trained Turkish architects both inside and outside Turkey. The reception of European modernism together with the formation of professional architects and architecture passed through a German-speaking channel.

Since foreign architects were usually appointed to carry out large state projects, Turkish architects turned to the planning and construction of apartments, residences, and housing developments (ch. 5). In designing private dwellings, Turkish architects created domestic structures and spaces that re-configured the relationships of men and women as well as parents and children.

Here again, architectural modernism featured inconsistencies. A new concept of individual independence and responsibility came in the company of architectural prescriptions of a domestic ideal.

Bozdogan concludes with a retrospective comment on the high point in the drama of Turkish modernity. Many of the exemplary buildings of the New Architecture, she tells us, have been neglected or abandoned, and so have fallen into ruin. Somehow its cubic forms and geometric shapes never fully succeeded in capturing the hearts of the citizens of the Turkish Republic. But perhaps this study will open eyes, both inside and outside the country. Bozdogan teaches us how to view a lost modernity that very much mattered even if it did not prevail. We are left with the thought that its most exemplary artifacts deserve no less careful attention than those of the classical imperial past.

Bozdogan skillfully guides the reader through a large body of evidence, including photographs of buildings, design plans, wall posters, and magazine illustrations. The presentation of visual artifacts is consistently punctuated with concise but telling analyses that reference contemporary theorists of modernity.

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