Full Length Research Paper

Postmodernism and consumer culture: Image-production via residential architecture in post-1980s Turkey

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Housing production in Turkey is mostly completed by merchant builders, with little or no involvement of architects. Those architects who do function in the housing industry try to satisfy state authorities, private enterprises and the customer, behaving according to these clients' intentions. This, in turn, succeeds because of the current era of flexible accumulation where a consumer society is ready to digest whatever is offered. That is, buildings that have some resemblance to historical examples or look different to what people would normally prefer are chosen by consumers. As a result, different social classes of society commodify historical, traditional and cultural values in the name of creating an identity. In this context, this essay focuses on the image of the house itself and its interpretations within the post-1980s Turkish residential housing industry. It shows that architectural styles, typologies, names and terminology are freely used according to the market desires throughout the two case studies. The housing development called Kemer Country is a clear example of the reconstruction of a traditional Turkish neighborhood (*mahalle*) but there is no substance behind their facades, it is only an illusion. While Kemer Country creates a fake traditional *mahalle* outside of the city center of Istanbul, the developers of the Bosphorus City housing development claim to have re-built a significant part of Istanbul's topography, as well as its unique architecture, outside of the city. This paper reveals that the architecture of the residential developments in post-1980s Turkey is lead by market forces and consumption-oriented construction rather than artistic, cultural or historical assets.

Key words: Postmodernism, consumer culture, image production, residential architecture.

INTRODUCTION

At present, the power of consumption affects various consumer items like cars, appliances, clothing but also architecture in Turkey. Space as a basic outcome of the discipline of architecture is a fact produced and consumed within social practices, and requires a framework for changing consumption activities (Yildirim and Akalin, 2009, 71). A long period of the aesthetics of high Modernism in Turkey was sustained from its founding in 1923 until the 1980s, when Turkey dropped its policy of nationalist or state-sponsored development. Important changes in economic policies, such as the adaptation of a development model based on international integration into global capitalism, started to cause new formations after a major military coup d'etat in 1980 (Özaslan and Akalin, 2009). The new economic model encouraged production for the domestic and world market but also promoted the emergence of a popular culture and consumer society in Turkey. Temporality and fashion were the dominant motives in all consumption patterns.

The early results of this popular culture were seen on architecture. Post-modern architecture prevailed in the country by the architectural press and influenced the design of apartment housing (Akalin et al., 2010) as well

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Figure 1. Residential buildings in Ankara. (a) An apartment building in Ankara; (b) A single family dwelling in Ankara.

single family houses (Figure 1). As argued by Öden (2004, 83) the production, perception and consumption processes of contemporary housing in Turkey are largely determined through the elements of consumer culture and the architecture that is produced reflects dominant cultural forms and values established primarily around the values of this specific realm. Residential areas designed with imitated cultural codes have become material for advertisements that promise new, privileged lifestyles. Popular tastes are determined by trends and fashion and developed according to these desired lifestyles (Oktay, 1993, 29). Collective signs and images are introduced into society by making them consumable and popular.

This has lead to an "aesthetic" hallucination of reality - the very characteristic of postmodern consumer culture. Dreamlike, hyper-real residential areas offer signs and images according to what the market demands. The limits between production and reproduction, real and image, temporary and permanent became blurred with each other (Güzer, 2001, 71-82).

Indeed, in the second half of the 20th century, "consumption" has performed a role that has defined almost the entire social system. In Turkey, after a period of Modern Architecture, the tendencies of eclecticism, populism, new classicism, kitsch and decontructivism affected the housing industry (Özdemir and Gencosmanoglu, 2007, 1450). This period, in which popular trends and Western images were used heavily, continued in a very colorful and dynamic way. Legitimization of use of both the new and traditional forms at the same time led to regenerated traditional urban schemes, pseudo-historic residential areas and popular tastes, which were new features of contemporary urbanism in Turkey. Design principles of the postmodern residential architecture were based on either eclectic references to traditional Turkish house or European examples. As a result, after the 1980s three main behaviors in Turkish architecture can be pointed out: firstly, to adopt architectural ideas from other countries; secondly to

concentrate on local, regional and Islamic themes of the past; and finally, to combine these two approaches by dealing with both the international development of architecture and the original conditions of Turkey as a whole.

In the private Turkish housing market, not only the house itself but also the surrounding environment and accompanying lifestyle were offered to be consumed, usually presented as a secure, safe living environment formally solved in a group of buildings with common entertainment, sports and health facilities. New developments were surrounded by the walls and advanced security systems to ensure safety in the residential areas built for the upper classes of the 1980s. Using revived historic and traditional house forms, new residential areas were built outside the city centers and included certain amenities such as swimming pools, tennis courts and golf courses that were essential for the proposed life styles.

The image of a house was replaced with post-modern images of display and status as "image and symbolic values" became more important than "use value." All these particular housing settlements' primary role seems to be to fabricate a new function, which was the "symbolic value" that was also attached to translate its "exchange value" into "image value" as discussed by Cengizkan (2004, 28-43). After the 1980s, the image of "house" became a symbol of a privileged life and signified the social status of its owner.

Postmodernism in Turkey enabled a flexible production of architecture that demanded rapid changes in present consumption patterns and increases the competition among economic areas. This has resulted in the formation of an "upper class" as a new societal stratum.

The targeted consumer group was high-income families, whose numbers dramatically increased during this period. Research conducted by Özdemir et al. (2007, 1-12) has shown that even middle-income families responded favorably to the postmodern examples exemplified in this essay.

The mass media – magazines, newspapers, television,
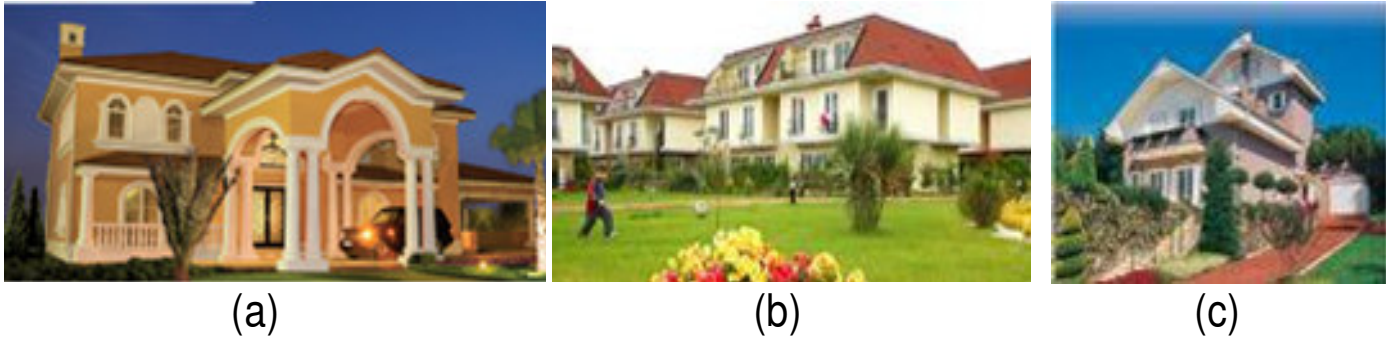
Figure 2. Western architectural styles imported into and implemented in Turkey. (a) "Alkent 2000," Laguna, Istanbul; (b) My Village," Samandıra, Istanbul; (c) "Beykoz Konakları," Istanbul.

and radio – were in the service of this consuming habit. Akcan (1996, 115) has indicated that the mass media changed opinions on architecture and also blurred the concept of locality, leading to an arbitrary combination of different vernacular and traditional styles, and the formation of pseudo-traditionalism and pseudo-regionalism as described by Kınıkoğlu (2001, 71).

The aim of this work is to reveal this populist architecture in Turkey in terms of consumed architectural styles, names, typologies and architectural terminology. With each new housing development and scheme, the competition was on for a better image to attract more and more customers.

The research questioned this image given to the customers because it was related mostly with styles, names, typologies and lifestyles. In the 1980s, Western images were used heavily, mixed with the reminders of traditional examples of domestic or public buildings. Thus, the models for residential architecture at this time were constituted both from European forms and traditional sources. This mix use of styles was the case in many residential complexes, especially located in the suburbs.

METHODOLOGY

In the last two decades, however, the interpretation of Postmodern architecture has been transformed from hybrid appearances to pure distinguished vernacular-modern applications. To understand this point, two housing developments exhibiting nostalgic, eclectic and revivalist tendencies, rather than just a single house example, were selected as case studies for this research. Kemer Country is the earliest project of the Postmodern housing developments in Turkey. It influenced later developments and is surrounded by similar residential areas. It is located in a former village of Istanbul just outside the city center.

As a recent example of a Postmodern residential settlement, Sinpaş Bosphorus City in Istanbul, made from land reclaimed from the Bosphorus Straights, was offered to the consumer as a symbol of an "ideal place to live." It is located in a part of Istanbul that is far from the sea. Before these case studies, however, as a theoretical background, what is consumed through this consumption process needs to be explained.

Consumed architectural styles

In this consumption process, traditional architectural styles of the country as well as styles from other countries, mostly Western, are imported and consumed as a sign of status (Figure 2). Historic and regional styles were the formal sources of new postmodern projects regardless of their context and time.

Consumed names

In addition, the naming of these developments often strived to have English or English-sounding titles, such as "Kemer Country", "Elites Gold Residence," "My City Ataşehir," "Apple Town Villas," "Aqua Manors," "Uphill Court," and "Bosphorus City" to impress the customers. Foreign designers were even commissioned to attract the buying public.

Consumed typologies and terminology

Some traditional Turkish housing typologies and architectural terminology were used to indicate a privileged status in the society. The Turkish word 'konak' –meaning a mansion, or large single-family dwelling –was used in housing developments not necessarily with its original meaning (Özaslan and Akalın 2009). In this way, apartment buildings became accepted as 'konak' in the housing market (Figures 3 and 4). Another linguistic term that began to be used in the housing market was 'saray,' which means "palace" in Turkish. As can be expected, such buildings actually have nothing to do with royal palaces, European, Ottoman or otherwise. Instead, they are either apartment buildings or houses. Therefore, in the name of forming identities, architectural terminology has also been consumed in Turkey (Figure 5). Such terms used for the consumed product of architecture seem like "temporary stickers" that have nothing to do with architectural meaning – their job ended after the product was sold.

CASE STUDY 1: KEMER COUNTRY, ISTANBUL

The Kemer Country development is an important case to understand the process in which residential areas and houses became consumption goods offering a new life style and image to the clients. It is the earliest example in Turkey launched in 1986. It is located in a former village of Istanbul, near to a historic aqueduct (*kemer* in Turkish)

Figure 3. Traditional 'Konak' examples in Turkey from the early 1900s. (a) Havuzlu Konak (early 1900s), Safranbolu; (b) Beyaz Konak, Büyükada (early 1900), Istanbul.

Figure 4. Apartment buildings in Turkey marketed as 'Konak'. (a) "Altunize Hilal Konakları" Istanbul; (b) "Yasemin Konakları," Istanbul; (c) "Beykoz Vadi Konakları" Istanbul; (d) "Ataköy Konakları" Istanbul.

in the Belgrade Forest. The idea of the project was based on a nostalgia for social and urban characteristics of neighborhoods in old Istanbul (Arredamento Dekorasyon, 1993: 117 – 121). The developers aimed to reflect a traditional Turkish urban character addressing modern necessities at the same time (http://www.kemercountry.com/20.10.2010). The first project was designed by the planning firm Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, the representatives of 'New Urbanism' (Ozaslan and Akalin, 2010: 58) and developers

Figure 5. Different definitions of "Palace". (a) Beylerbeyi Palace (1861-65), Istanbul; (b) Sinpaş Beylerbeyi Palace (2000), Istanbul.

Figure 6. Traditional houses in Safranbolu, built in the early 1900s.

developers of the contemporary planning philosophy inspired by American pre-war urban conditions (Ellin, 1999: 94-95). Informed about the traditional Turkish town and the house, they employed stylistic elements of vernacular forms such as projecting bays and wide eaves (Figure 6).

In 1992, the project won an award at the 'A Vision of Europe' exhibition in Italy for being the first-ever application of the new approach to city planning in Turkey (http://www.kemercountry.com/20.10.2010). The area has continued to develop by successive projects creating an urban area for 4.000 people. Sixteen neighborhoods were designed by more than 20 mostly non-Turkish architectural firms mostly being international based (Figure 7). The aim was to reach to a quality of a timeless architecture as a blend of modern necessities and traditional Turkish architecture (http://www.kemercountry.com/ 20.10.2010). The project was marketed by its three basic characteristics. The first claims that Kemer Country offers a harmony of global and local in the globalizing world and feeling of 'belonging'. The second guarantees the security of the

family and the third emphasizes the investment value of a house there as a commodity in the real estate market. Kemer Country has been a model for gated communities in Istanbul offering a wealthy model village with all the amenities for sports, health, recreation, shopping and education. It has been followed by endless new projects around the Kemer Country as well as at different parts of Istanbul.

CASE STUDY 2: BOSPHORUS CITY, ISTANBUL

This project, which will be constructed on an area of land spanning 446,000 m^2 owned by Sinpaş GYO, will include a total of 2,086 apartments over several phases beginning in 2004. Although the area has nothing to do with Istanbul's Bosphorus Straights, the project does contain a small water channel on its grounds that is only 1.5 m deep, and advertises itself as offering a life on the Bosphorus with phrases like

"Living Across the Bosphorus," and "It's the Bosphorus

Figure 7. Kemer Country Villas, Istanbul, 2000s.

Both in and Out!"

If you are a resident of Bosphorus City, indoors or outdoors, wherever you are, at all times you will *feel that you are* living on the Bosphorus. (http://www.bosphoruscity.com.tr/en-US/20.10.2010) (Figure 8).

The Bosphorus City project has modern and classic architectural styles such as Saraybahçe Houses, Yeditepe Towers, and Waterfront Villas providing different lifestyles. It contains the characteristic features and urban spaces of Istanbul such as "Bebek Park," "Istinye Koyu," "Yeniköy", "Paşabahçe", "Emirgan Çınaraltı", "Kanlıca", "Anadolu Fortress," and "Rumeli Fortress," and "Kandilli and Çengelköy Squares".
   Sometimes these spaces have no physical similarity with the original and only the names are consumed. Other times, the copy in Bosphorous City strives to faith-fully duplicate the original, at least in spirit. For example, in re-interpreting the unique values of the original Ortaköy of Istanbul, known for its lively public square full of cafes and jewelry stands, the area in Ortaköy of Bosphorus City is described as:

The Heart of Fun

Would you like to eat the famous baked potato of Ortaköyin one of the cafes surrounding the public square? How about visiting the jewelry stands or resting in a tea garden? You will encounter a colorful and dynamic world in Ortaköy of Bosphorus City, where many of the unique values of the original including the lively public square and the historic fountain are re-interpreted. Moreover, from market to day care center, many service and activity centers that will cater to your needs are located in Ortaköy. (http://www.bosphoruscity.com.tr/en-US/, "Districts," then "Ortakoy," 20.10.2010) (Figure 9).

Similarly, in re-interpreting the unique values of the original Istinye of Istanbul, an area known for its secluded cove off of the Bosphorous, the area in Istinye of Bosphorus City is described as:

A Port to Seek Refuge

The serene and peaceful environment of Istinye with its woods full of wild flowers, pier, and resting area near the water will energize your soul. (http://www.bosphoruscity.com.tr/en-US/, click "Districts" then "Istinye," 20.10.2010) (Figure 10).

And, in re-interpreting the unique values of the original Çengelköy of Istanbul, an area known for its small gardens that produce delicious cucumbers, the area in Çengelköy of Bosphorus City is described as:

Experience the Greenery of Mother Nature

Çengelköy is one of the most attractive corners of Bosphorus City with its Çınaraltı Square, small greenhouses, and viewing area…

Figure 8. Bosphorus, Istanbul and Bosphorus City. (a) Kanlıca,Amcazadebey Yalı, Istanbul; (b) Bosphorus City; (c) Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul; (d) Bosphorus City; (e) Bosphorus, Istanbul; (f) Bosphorus City; (g) Bosphorus, Istanbul; (h) Bosphorus City.

Figure 9. (a) Ortaköy, Istanbul; (b) Ortaköy, Bosphorus City.

Figure 10. (a) Istinye, Istanbul; (b) and Istinye, Bosphorus City.

(http://www.bosphoruscity.com.tr/en-US/, click "Districts" then "Cengelkoy," 20.10.2010) (Figure 11).

The project uses the very characteristic feature of Istanbul, Bosphorus, as the main concept of the development by which undeveloped land far from the Bosphorus Strait gains economic value making the houses marketable. The Bosphorus with its water and historic waterfront houses becomes an image for the production of a fake but marketable gated community residential area for the clients.

Conclusion

After the 1980s, simulation has replaced reality in all aspects of life, including architectural design. According to Nesbitt (1996, 4), this is defined as the "appropriation of the past for present purposes." Similarly, Urry (1995, 20) defines Postmodernism as a cultural condition where the symbolic limits between academic culture and popular culture dissolve. Arguing mainly on the symbolic meaning and the communicative role of architecture, Venturi (1992: 10) has claimed that architecture should
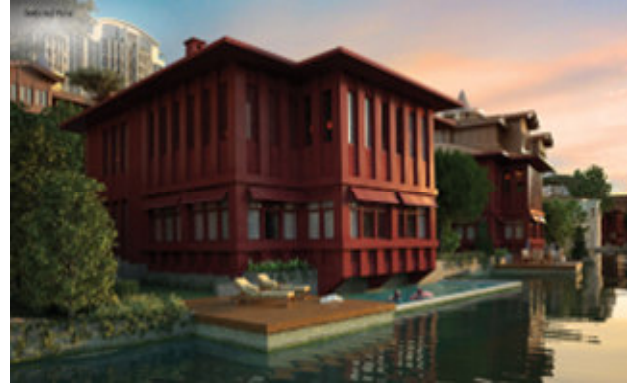
(a)   (b)

Figure 11. Çengelköy Istanbul and Çengelköy Bosphorus City. (a) Çengelköy, Sadullah Pasha Yalı, Istanbul; (b) and Çengelköy Bosphorus City.

not be exclusivist and elitist, but should communicate the values of different classes with different tastes. According to Venturi, elitist architecture in this context is an oxymoron, while the "cliché," the ugly" and the "ordinary" have more of a potential to communicate. In contemporary Post-modern Turkey, such cliché, ugly and ordinary buildings do more than communicate, they scream for attention.

The two case studies of this study are heavily influenced by the post-modern urban design reaction to the economic and cultural changes of the 1980s described above. While the world was globalizing itself through advanced transportation, communication and construction technologies, differences were reinforced and "the past" became an inspiring repertoire.

The examples of Kemer Country and Bosphorus City are the results of postmodern urban design approach which, as Ellin (1999: 1) describes, includes historicism, regionalism, theme-ing, and defensive urbanism, attempting to satisfy longings for community and security on the one hand, and for intrigue and adventure on the other. Both Kemer Country and Bosphorus City are located far from the city center of Istanbul and create new suburbs. They are both representative of a collage that includes traditional architectural images, illusions and metaphors but also shopping malls, highways, pseudo-public spaces, security systems, and sport halls. This collage far from providing a sense of place is rather a commodity that has only an economic value.

However, what distinguishes these two case studies from each other is the "consciousness" or intentions of their design actions. While the residential developments of the 1980s, like Kemer Country, were reacting to a perceived generality, blandness and non-specificity of Modernism – and therefore, not quite conscious of their borrowing from the past; the residential developments of the 2000s, like Bosphorous City, purposefully and consciously copied existing successful past models in

order to commercially repeat their success. That is, while the developments of the 1980s were proposing an alternative future, the developments of the 2000s are proposing an alternative (or duplicate) past.

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