

In the popular historical perception

of Turkish nationalism and Islamism, Istanbul is the promised land: Muhammed the Prophet had announced that one day Constantinople would be conquered by "a great commandant and his soldiers" and almost described the Ottoman sultan Mehmet the Conqueror. Istanbul is thus considered a blessed city, "the apple of the eye of the world and the Islamic realm", The Islamic City. But, according to Islamic and nationalist-conservatist thinking, this Istanbul is also a lost Istanbul. Modernism and Occidentalism has dissipated the identity of Istanbul. Having lost her physical beauty, Istanbul is also seen as dependant on the process of westernisation.

This degeneration and estrangement of Istanbul are represented as a tremendous loss in the eyes of cultural conservatives who follow in the footsteps of the poet Yahya Kemal. In this line represented by the literary critic and historian-columnist Nihad Sami Banarlı, the architect Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi and the novelist Samiha Ayverdi, defeatism and melancholy gradually increase. The "purist" conservative viewpoint of Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi who, by the criteria of urban aesthetics, opposes the Bosphorus Bridge, contrasts with the right-wing mainstream which has a passion for public improvement and technology. Beşir Ayvazoğlu, today's conservative critic and writer who can be counted on taking the same line, cannot find any other foundations but the yearning for

the past which he sees as a "sign of sanity".

The Islamic movement is modern enough not to share the melancholy mourning of conservatism: The programme of the Islamists is the *reconquest* of a degenerate Istanbul. The reconquest of Istanbul during the 1950s during which the Islamists and the fascist nationalists were locked together in an anti-communist alliance is a favourite theme. One of the elite centres of the right-wing intelligentsia in the 1950s, the Istanbul Conquest Society, spurred on by the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul in 1533, can be seen as the pioneer of the discourse of reconquest which transforms the yearning for the old Islamic city into a sort of *interior-irredentism*. On the nationalist and Islamic wing, from the 1960s to 1980, "the waiting for the generation who will save Istanbul (Mehmet the Conqueror's generation)" was propelled as a motive; and the poem entitled "the March of Conquest" by Arif Nihat Asya, with its "You're as old as the Conqueror when he conquered Istanbul" refrain, has been one of the favourite clichés of the right-wing youth agitation. R. Tayyip Erdoğan from RP who is now the Istanbul Mayor was similarly, before the elections, talking about "the second conquest of Istanbul" in the sense of transforming "darkness into light".

RP, which has held local power in Istanbul since March 1994, aims to extend the reconquest into the social and cultural spheres to make Istanbul once again "*the Conqueror's Istanbul*"...: this aim is to emphasise the Islamic character of Istanbul. The project of building a mosque or an "Islamic Culture Center" at Taksim is the best known aspect of this effort. (It is also one of the symbolic events taken as a pretext by the Army to force the RP to abandon power...).

Istanbul of the Conqueror has two symbolic aspects. First, it is the symbol of Ottoman (that is Islamic) hegemony. Secondly, it is the symbol of the justice and the multiplicity of Islam. From the viewpoint of some Islamic intellectuals we might call "liberals", Istanbul is "the ideal city of the multiple civil society". Intellectuals of this tendency imagine Istanbul (e.g. Çarigrad) as a Balkan metropolis dominating the Islamic and Orthodox world. This is a patronising notion. Within this discourse, Istanbul is the proud example of Muslim-Turkish justice which offers

protection to the foreigner-non-Muslim members. On the other hand, the patronising multiplicity (of the master!) gives low value to the pre-Conquest Istanbul. This is the same among cultural conservatives: Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi has defined even Hagia Sophia, in which Mehmet the Conqueror worshipped for the first time and which still is quite important symbolically in the Islamic conception ("the temple which after the gloom of church recieved the blessed light of the mosque"), as an insignificant monument which cannot be compared to the serene simplicity and interior harmony of the Ottoman-Turkish architecture.

The Patriarchate and Hagia Sophia debates are examples for all seasons of the conflict between two aspects of the "Conqueror's Istanbul" imagination. In the nationalist and Islamist perception, the Patriarchate is, on the one hand, the pride of Turco-Islamic justice; it is even a diplomatic argument for turning Istanbul into the Orthodox world's centre - during his period of presidency, Turgut Özal also tried to make this case. On the other hand, the Patriarchate is a means for the revanchisme of the Christian and Orthodox world which "still cannot admit their loss of Istanbul"; it is a fifth column institution. About three months after the visit of some RP representatives to the Patriarchate during the election campaign, in the Fatih quarter, the chant of "bump, bump, make it tremble, let the Patriarchate with fear tremble" was heard in RP meetings. This is an indication not only of the conjuncture or the real political tactics, but also of a schizophrenic perception. The Hagia Sophia debate is much more turbulent. Mehmet the Conqueror converted only a few of the churches into mosques, first and foremost Hagia Sophia. The request to reopen Hagia Sophia as a place of worship - it has been a museum since 1935 - is part of the pro-reconquest discourse. In Istanbul, nationalism in the Islamic discourse becomes crystal clear. Exposed to the permanent threat of a Western conspiracy aimed at the 'last Turkish land', one hears the anxious discourse of a paranoid syndrome.

The nightmare-dream dichotomy of Istanbul in the Islamic political imagination reflects that tension between dazzling promises and the cruel, chaotic urban jungle. The conservative approach which sees in the metropolis nothing but a "false

society", "a world of loneliness", "people who without any social bonds left are intertwined by mechanical relations", is constant in all Islamic categories. Furthermore Istanbul is not just any metropolis; somewhere inside hides the "djinn" of Byzantium, the nest of many vices. But the sources of degeneration are not always so archaic: Istanbul, as well as being the "last and only one capital of Islam", is also the capital of Turkey's modernisation/Westernisation adventure.

The Fatih-Harbiye conflict of the 1930s is reproduced by political Islam. The RP, in the process of winning control of Istanbul, called to the "losers" of the big city on the periphery of Istanbul. The poor people of the "betonvilles" experience the fear of disappearing within the metropolitan labyrinth. The social democrat party, revealing remorse for past populism, has been directed towards the RP in expressing exclusion, fear and anger. Tayyip Erdoğan's little rascal "Istanbul boy" act completed this profile which appeals to Istanbul's suburbs. He comes from Kasimpasha, a poor but traditional districts of *Deep Istanbul*; he took part in an important ritual of *Volk-Istanbul* by playing football in the amateur league in Camialtı and on IETT teams (his nickname used to be "Beckenbauer"). In contrast to the "global city" image, offering an identity to people and districts excluded or marginalised around a *volk-Istanbul* and a *deep-Istanbul* theme has been an important part of RP's Istanbul strategy.

Tayyip Erdoğan is one of the leading representatives of RP's innovative wing coloured by social democratic characteristics. Among the practices of local administration politics of the RP in Istanbul is the provision to the poor of social services. So long as this RP discourse focuses on a *cultural* reaction aiming at the modern life style and cosmopolitanism, such speech can easily have a fascist character. For example, the international art-cultural activities, an aspect of the "global city", are considered as the signs of both "hedonist" degeneration and foreign cultural invasion. Or, as in 1994/95, the celebrations of New Year can be accompanied by an air of menace. During the 1970s, the idealist-nationalist movement tried to channel, as a sort of new migrants' provincial reaction, a blind "national" anger against an urban life interpreted as alien and degenerate.

Within the Fatih-Harbiye conflict, RP's winning control of

the Beyoğlu district has a specific importance. Beyoğlu, in nationalist and conservative literature, is traditionally considered the fortress of cosmopolitan degeneration and of foreign cultural invasion. The popular Turco-Islamic agitator from the 1940s-1970s, Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti described Beyoğlu as a fifth column enclave organised in order to put an end to the Turco-Islamic presence, and as a "nest of microbes", a whore who, in order to seduce "him", enters the bosom of the Turk, a "male" being. RP's victory in the elections for this "nest of microbes", using votes of the poor "bidonville" districts never seen on Istiklal Avenue, emphasises the conflicts. During the first three and a half years of RP's Beyoğlu Mayor Nusret Bayraktar, its pubs, bars and other fun places off Istiklal Avenue have been allowed to carry on as normal; on the other hand the new conquerors, while granting freedom to the "neo-Genoese" whom they think will soon be marginalised, enjoy making a coherent imitation of the Conquest mythology!

Is the tolerance of RP's local administration a temporary compromise reflecting its political dominance, or has modernism seduced the Islamists in the big city jungle? Having won control of Istanbul, RP members began to see the city as an economic enterprise. The fact that Tayyip Erdoğan, who won by appealing to migrants and "bidonvilles", began talking after only six months of "creating a vista in order to prevent migration to Istanbul as in the days of the Ottomans" is the most evident expression of this change. Among RP technocrats there are many believers in the "global city" project. Süleyman Karagülle, one of the ideologists of the party's "Just Order" phraseology says that Istanbul "instead of being an industrial city, can be made into an international trade centre; can become an international scientific centre as in Ottoman and Byzantine times; and can have the world's greatest stock exchange". Mustafa Kutlu, an Islamic ideologist, offers concrete proposals. He says that Istanbul, as "the centre of attraction for the Balkans, the Black Sea basin, the Middle East and Turkic states", can become a "second level" world city like Los Angeles, Chicago, Paris, Frankfurt or Hong Kong.

Islamist writer Davut Dursun, while diagnosing the fact that we are not face-to-face with one Istanbul but with "Istanbuls",

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differentiates Byzantine Istanbul, Islam-Ottoman Istanbul, modern Istanbul and provincial Istanbul. While emphasising that "the real Istanbul is the part which reflects Islam-Ottoman identity", he demands that the city's walled heart be preserved.

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