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Identity and ideology in 20th Century of Turkish Architecture¹

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Abstract

Examining the architectural actions, Turks that have founded many states throughout the history are observed to have maintained the transfer of their culture, which has been shaped with different dynamics such as regime, ethnic diversity, geography, religion and has followed a natural flow even though factors has changed from time to time, to the early 20th century. The 20th century of Turkish architecture has come to a point where it serves to the efforts of creating a new identity that has strayed from its natural line as a result of an ideological movement worldwide. Even though the movement that was expressed as the National Renaissance of Turkish architecture and demonstrated its impact on public buildings during its period has later been called National Style, given its starting point, architectural components and references, how accurate it is to be called national is open to debate. In this study, the First National Architectural Movement and the Second National Architectural Movement that have impact on the early 20th century particularly is dealt with in terms of identity issues and ideological approaches of Neo-Classical Architecture in Turkey.

Keywords: Architecture, 20th Century, Identity, Ideology, Turkish Architecture

1. Introduction

Identity is an important tool that enables others to perceive the defining elements that indicate the characteristics of a person or an object in every aspect. Ideology is the integrity of thoughts that forms the behavior and at the same time constitutes a political or a social doctrine. While the concept of identity, being not limited to the indication of an individual or an object, provides the data to create a foresight of the future and to define the past, ideology serves to create a common consciousness. The basic principle that these two concepts differentiate, which cannot be considered separately from each other, is the intervening attitude of ideology towards the existing natural flow despite the fact that identity follows a natural line over time in spite of all interactions. While identity is in a position that influences ideology from time to time, ideology often turns out to be an attempt to change identity or to create a new identity. The main point that the identity and ideology which are the first indicators of the social culture merge is to shape the objects of life.

The concepts concretized on an individual basis with simple expressions such as clothing, posture, and greeting are demonstrated with large scale reflections by governments and countries'. Architecture, the main platform where the cultural and artistic actions that have occasionally been the means of political propaganda throughout the progress of history integrate with the objects of life and where national identity and ideology find the power of expression, has the representation power to keep the national culture alive and transfer its values.

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The beginning of Turkish art and its first evolution stages signifies the Pre-Islam era and East geography. After Turks whose motherland is Middle Asia appeared in the scene of history, they sustained an understanding of art in the light of their social values and lifestyles as with many other world civilizations. Turkish art that formed in line with the changing geographic location, religious believes, political structuring and socio-economic conditions during the emigration from Asia to Anatolia has demonstrated a systematic evolution with the influence of environment culture and the resources it has fed on. The systematic evolution at issue – in other words, culture and accumulations of art – has caused the identity of Turkish art to earn the element of being national by merging with the cultural heritage of ancient civilizations of Anatolia.

The fact that Turkish architecture has advanced preserving its national identity during its formation in Anatolian geography reflects the process linked with the political and ideological atmosphere of the era. As a natural result of conquest mentality, first Turkish principalities (Turkmen beyliks) founded after the Victory of Manzikert, which opened the gates of Anatolia to Turks, anticipated the Turkification and Islamification of the newly conquered regions, and produced architectural works that served this very goal. That the principalities produced monumental works in the construction of mosques and madrasahs despite the harsh geographic conditions of East and Southeast Anatolia Regions signifies the very existence of them in the region. Anatolian Seljuk State, which emerges as the next first political step in Anatolian chronology and established a truly political unity, maintained numerical and monumental architectural actions in the same direction. The architecture of many 14th century Anatolian principalities that spread to a large region after the dissolution of the Anatolian Seljuk State is observed to be open to the influence of geographical neighbours, and to have a style that integrates with its contemporaries and follows its processor in terms of architectural ornaments, types of planning, and construction techniques. The Ottomans, which acted with the ideology of holy war and conquest in the West Anatolia at the end of 14th century and thus improved its military and political power, before long advanced to become a state before long, and eventually becoming an empire, as the only ruler of Anatolia until the 20th century it engaged in such actions that have influenced Turkish politics and art even until now (Şafak, 2012:276). The Ottoman's transformation into an imperial power is an important turning point in terms of Turkish art and architecture since the vast geography and ethnic diversity reached with becoming an empire entailed institutionalisation for a political construction that consisted of citizens belonging to different religious believes, races and traditions. Political and ideological decisions that are the main incentives in forming a new system were expressed in architecture in the sense of reflecting onto life objects. The end of the constructions of mosques with zaviyah, which emerged in the Early Era architecture reflecting the state administration of the Ottomans and that included a multi structure feature in respect to function, with the influence of institutionalisation that occurred along with the evolution into empire is an important indication of the situation. As for the Classical Era architecture that is the representation of the empire, it has kept maintaining the Ottomans' monumental and ostentatious attitude that is such as to announce its growing political power and universal scale ideology to the whole world.

2. 19th century and westernization in Turkish architecture

Architectural interpretations of the Eastern and Islamised Turkish art produced throughout its centuries-old adventure went through changes as from the 18th century when the Ottomans turned toward the West. Efforts to create a new identity in the political and ideological milieu of an era that first began with the Tulip Era and called Westernization Period anticipated the betterment of

the ordinary norms regarding martial, administrative and social life and in this regard The West was taken as a role model. Baroque movement that was prevalent in the West during that period was the determiner of the Ottomans' inns, mosques, pavilions, and mansions stylistically. However, toward the end of the century, the liberal thought that effected in the entire Europe with the French Revolution replaced Baroque movement that was the symbol of monarchy with the Neo-Classicism that repeated forms of temples of Ancient Rome evoking democratic life. Empire, surely an imperial style of the period for the Ottomans as well, was considered a functional tool in order to reach an imperial image. In this sense, it would not be right to state that Empire which expresses the Neo-Classicism of the West corresponds to the Turkism Neo-Classicism. Even though the Ottomans dealt with the French Empire with its own forms, it could not go beyond being a Turkified version of the classical elements of the West in itself; that is a Turkish Empire.

In the 19th century, life that changed with the reforms of Mahmud II as well as with the Tanzimat Period prevailing in the second half of the century contributed to the Turkish architecture with new building types. Implementing several regulations to the current system or revolutionizing the system increased the need for designs of functional places and buildings constructions. That Ottoman architects who were trained in Ottoman Guild of Architects (Hassa Mimarlar Ocağı) were not accustomed to the Western styles caused construction phases and designs that met the needs to be given to foreign architects or non-Muslim architects who had been trained in the West but were adhered to Ottoman subjects. (Kuran, 2000:234).

That foreign architects trained abroad were familiar with the classical architecture of Europe and their knowledge of style precluded the self-taught education of the Guild of Architects that depended on the mentor system. Theatre buildings, arcades, hotels and particularly constructions of schools and military barracks that increased in number with the change in military order and education system and many other buildings were produced by foreign and/or non-Muslim architects and thus Ottoman architecture gained a new –Westernized – aspect in the 19th century. In addition to this, that foreigners were given the right to property in line with the West oriented politics caused another dynamic as important as foreign architect. Henceforth, an architectural milieu that was no longer merely limited with the decisions of implementers and in which the demands of the foreign capital owners accustomed to the Western culture and lifestyle were included in the developments plans in construction was dominant. Moreover, that Abbas Halim Pasha, then the governor of Egypt, was against Westernization caused the wealthy who were pro-Westernization to move to Istanbul. Many houses, palaces and pavilions built by the Egyptian noble who were pro-Westernization and moved to Istanbul are among the factors influencing the period architecture.

“Besides, from the mid-19th century and onwards, there occurred an influx of foreign architects to Istanbul. In line with the planned changes in parallel to the West, some styles, techniques and new materials tardily imported to our country were implemented by these architects and accepted in a short time on an incredibly large scale. In reality, the introduction of engineering with new materials and techniques and revitalizing historical styles particularly on the facades of the buildings played an important role in this relative acceptance. Among the historical styles that were applied on the buildings as though masks, Neo-Greek, Neo-Byzantine, Neo-Renaissance, Neo-Gothic elements were used freely, without limits. “Baroque”, “Empire”, “Rococo”, and “Art Nouveau” to which Ottoman architecture was no stranger were also included in this practice.” (Sönmez, 2006:233).

As seen, the movement to return to the architectural elements of the ancient era which was dominant in Europe in the 19th century was unavoidable for the Ottomans taking Europe as an example in cultural aspects during that period. The need for new functions paved the way for an eclectic approach that was limited to the exterior facade of buildings due to the fact that classical understanding was not functional in the interior arrangements of buildings. This period has taken its place in the history of Turkish architecture as the cladding buildings with the synthesis created without disregarding the East-Islam elements that Ottoman architecture included; that is eclecticism (Tapan and Sözen, 1973: 54).

3. 20th century and modernism

A Renaissance in real sense started at the beginning of the 20th century in Turkish architecture. The inefficient aspect of eclectic approach in creating an identity – even the identity chaos it created – and the Pan-Turkism movement prevalent in the country brought about the necessity of intervention in architectural practices. The idea of creating a national identity motivated by the Pan-Turkism ideology was obvious in each branch of art, particularly in literature, art and architecture. Furthermore, what must be stated is that the training of Turkish architects in the country with the opening of School of Fine Arts (Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi) in 1883 was of great importance.

Early 20th century when efforts were made to purify Turkish architecture from foreign influences and creating a national architecture was aimed is essentially seen a time “Ottoman Renaissance” sprang to life. The approach that covered the first quarter of the century can be summed up as an approach in which the religious architectural forms of the Ottomans and of the Seljuk that Ottomans fed on appeared and traditional details such as saw moldings, lancet arches, tile adornments, and domes were used on the facades of post offices, libraries, ferry ports, train stations, banks, and state buildings. This approach that would not become universal and was limited in itself emerges as an expression of a Turkish Neo-Classicism on the other hand. The return to the old that belongs to its own identity and culture just as in Western Neo-Classicism and whose intellectual principals emerge in line with national ideology surely presents a consistency as a stance taking the Seljuks and the Ottomans as references for the 20th century Turkey despite West’s Ancient Greek and Rome centred starting point.

“... at the beginning the the century Ottoman intellectuals, artists and architects occupied themselves with protecting the Ottoman State they identified primarily with the sultan and the emperor. For them, Ottoman Renaissance in architecture symbolized the heritage of the Ottoman State left to us by our fathers: a “patriotic” architecture appealing to the Ottoman “people” that was heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and religion. However, this interpretation did not last long. Just as many historians pointed out, last traces of Ottomanism were lost during the tragic losses in Balkan Wars and especially in the World War I; Turkish nationality came into existence as a triumphant ideology that would carry Turkey from the fronts in Gallipoli to the republic period (Bozdoğan, 2008:33-34)”.

The movement, which was called National Architectural Renaissance when it emerged but was later named First National Architectural Period, was considered a spirit in contrast to the national identity notion that was strived to be created after the declaration of the Republic. The ideology to create West-oriented and secular Turkey did not correspond to the Ottoman’s mindset

of Islamic Empire that constituted caliphate and dynasty. In other words, in addition to any modern progressive regulations necessary for the republic ideology established in Turkey and strived to expand, everything related to the Ottomans were rejected and became a symbol of decline. That the First National Architectural Movement, between 1908 and 1930, was the determiner of the architectural literature of the Republic of Turkey in terms of forms starting in the Ottoman period and during Republic's founding years demonstrates possibly the most ironic aspect of the 20th century architecture. Yet, while the movement in question was welcome with enthusiasm during its start and progress as it was considered an expression of the national stance, it was rejected towards its end "in order to create a national stance yet again" since regarded a notion in contrast to the new identity and ideology.

Revolutionism prevailing in the aftermath of the declaration of the Republic brought about the advances in replacing the old with the new in every aspect of life. Rather than innovation for progression for the time being, innovation so as to refrain from the old was of great motivation. Established with a new regime, the young country was in the process of improvement and strived for accepting modern life and all sorts of objects it represented in order to realize her ideology: the goal to become contemporary. In the changes done for this goal of modernism which without cutting ties with the past would have caused problems in the essential dynamics of life or failed completely, perhaps ensuring change rather than progress was a driving force of top priority for the ideal of new Turkey. Efforts to be able to differ from the old in the identity created under the influence of the Revolutionism ideology treated the notion of change as the equivalent of progress and improvement. In an interview with Professional Architect Şemsa Demiren, Le Corbusier's statement:

"If my biggest faux pas was not the letter I wrote to Atatürk, today I would be occupied with the redevelopment of the beautiful Istanbul, not my major rival, Prost. In that letter, I advised the grand revolutionist of a revolutionized nation to leave Istanbul as the way it was, the way it had been for centuries. I later understood such a big mistake it was (Demiren, 1949:230)." exemplifies the very situation.

In his paper describing the Turkish Pavilion in Budapest Exhibition in 1931, S.H. Eldem associates the country's failure in Paris Exhibition with the pavilion building, attributing it to the pavilion's mosque plan that was designed by a foreigner who could not understand the Turkish culture and expresses that the design did not reflect the image of new Turkey (Eldem, 1931: 187). When the one in Paris Exhibition is compared to the Turkish Pavilion project in 1939 New York Expo which Eldem himself designed, the difference between traditionalist and modernist architectural approaches can be clearly observed.

A new period, in which First National Architectural Movement now lost its influence and a new intellectual milieu where efforts were made to keep traditionalism at bay prevailed, and yet another architectural stance called national flourished, started. The national features in the modernist stance of the Second National Architectural Movement that lasted between 1939 and 1950 stem from the fact that building materials and functioning bear local features, though architectural techniques are West-oriented that is regarded a more universal platform. In the very period which was under the influence of Fascism in Italy and National Socialism in Germany, excessive nationalist government ideologies preferred national approaches in every field so as to affect masses of people. Traditionalist approaches in effect in whole Europe led to the abandonment of universal

practices in architecture. These impacts spreading to Europe also had influence in Turkey; however, this time instead of First National Architectural Movement that fed on the Classical Ottoman style, traditional Turkish House became the indicator of designs.

Held at the Academy of Fine Arts, National Architecture Seminar (Milli Mimari Semineri-1934) focusing on the model of “Traditional Turkish House” was one of the factors playing a role in the emergence of the Second National Architectural Movement. The movement in which elements of the local domestic architecture were practiced with contemporary methods displayed folkloric and modernist features together. Its primary difference from the First National Architectural Movement is that forms inspired from the examples of civil architecture were reemployed rather than religious buildings of the old. For building materials required for construction were local materials, a national architectural approach in which localness was the most important issue instead of standard practices prevailed in the country. In the Second National Architectural Movement in which more plain designs are observed; the frame house models of the traditional Turkish domestic architecture are free of elements of traditional ornaments, and stone facades based upon symmetry principle are featured with a monumental and contemporary interpretation. When Eldem, one of the pioneers of the movement, reflects his views on the architectural style of the period, he declares that in order to call a building style “local”, architectural acts should meet local needs, while expressing the necessity of the material and moral conditions such as the construction of the building being carried out by local workers with local materials within the scope of local climate. Eldem further states that the moral-based ones of the above mentioned conditions are a matter of regime, and emphasising the important duty falling on governments in this regard, he points out that realizing such practices “are possible only by powerful regimes and powerful nations” (Eldem, 1940:69).

4. Conclusion

It is known that art and architecture have been used as a means for propaganda by governments through the ages in the world. That urbanism, residential buildings, state buildings and health facilities buildings were a means of debate on political platforms particularly after the 18th century increased the influence of the political power on architecture in terms of city and single building. To illustrate, when Second National Architectural Movement that took place at the first half of the 20th century in our country is compared to Europe, it is observed that government ideologies bear same features “in terms of using architecture as a means in the context of creating an identity”, as in the art life in Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy (Yeşilkaya, 1999:20).

In this study, the issue of identity and ideology in the 20th century Turkish architecture is narrowed down to Neo-Classicism due to numerous factors stemming from socio-cultural and political reasons in the second half of the 20th century. As for the second half of the century remaining out of scope, it is clearly seen that the influence of political life on architecture continued while also growing. With the beginning of multi-party period in Turkey, dynamics such as liberal political approaches, international expansion, and urbanism led to the start of an important evolution in architecture. Modernization acts prevailing as of the Republic regime brought on a political stance offering migration from rural to urban after the second half of the century, and thus a structure that could not meet the needs for shelter in the rapidly increasing urban populations. First actions to meet shelter needs of the urbanized identity caused the rise of problematic structures in terms of urbanism such as slums, and afterwards brought along the sprawl of apartment

buildings existent even today though systematic and well-organised in the beginning (TMMOB:23). Industrialization and factory construction, which came along with the need for employment that arose not only with the need for shelter but also with the growing population especially in mega cities, are other factors affecting urbanism and architecture adversely. With globalisation, that the tourism sector in Turkey has been satisfying international standards as of 1980s and serving employment in addition to tourism's socio-economic return led to a rapid increase in the construction of touristic facilities. Henceforward, not only cities, but also the coastal regions, nature areas and historic fabric of the country have started to have their share of the distortion regarding architecture.

As observed, that the works of art, particularly the architecture that constructs the physical environment where life is experienced, are each dealt with as a material object on the basis of art pieces causes the fact that they are an expression of the life in the period to which they belong in every aspect to be ignored. Not establishing an interdisciplinary cause and effect relationship results in the disregard of the moral aspect of work, hence the narration of history of architecture in which architecture is assessed as merely a building and a style. It is crucial to regard history, geography, ethnography, anthropology, theology, archaeology, economy and many other disciplines such as sociology and political science as essential fields in studying art and architecture, as well as to make assessments of architectural periods accordingly.

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