# Istanbul's Worldliness

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Exactly ten years ago, Kevin Robins and I carried out a small-scale study examining the fragmentation of urban space in Istanbul, focusing on modernisation policies of the peripheral municipality of Esenyurt, and specifically on the relationship between its *gecekondu* area and its new »modernised« zones of Esenkent and Boğazköy (Aksoy/Robins 2000), Esenyurt's municipal leader, coming from a background of 1960's and 1970's radical left wing youth movements, was trying to impose a comprehensive order on the perceived disorder of the migrant urban space of Esenyurt. This modernising project was no less than »bringing a civilised way of life« to what was described as »a place with no architectural aesthetics, neither a city nor a village, lacking in trees, roads, water, infrastructure and social facilities« (Aksoy/Robins 2000: 345). After failing to introduce modern planning rules to the unruly and impoverished setting of the neighbourhood, made up of illegal settlements by migrants from the south-eastern regions of Turkey, the mayor then decided to tackle the problem of modernisation by means of a different strategy. He tried to re-locate the poor dwellers to the new satellite towns of Esenkent and Boğazköy, areas adjacent to Esenyurt, on the other side of the motorway. These satellite colonies were to be developed on a vast land that the municipality expropriated from its private owners, on the basis of a law permitting the seizure of property in order to halt the spread of illegal *gecekondu* settlements. The mayor was defiant, in the face of acrimonious court battles, defending his actions by saying »it is the first time that private land has been appropriated and distributed to the people« (Aksoy/Robins 2000: 347). These satellite towns were to be both modern and model cities, with green areas, and

parks, shopping centres, schools, and hospitals, and cultural and sporting facilities. The architecture of the new settlements was resolutely modern, though very dense, and intended to symbolise and sustain the lifestyle of ordered modern urban culture.

The satellite project was in the heroic tradition, and driven by a great modernising idealism. In its aspiration to re-order the city, or rather to constitute an alternative order beyond the imagined disorder of the migrant city, it constituted a utopian plan for the future of Istanbul. The municipality's avowed intention was »to transform the migrant populations, who had become marginalised as a result of the damage they had inflicted on the city, into citizens who would take care of the trees, the roads, and the green areas, and who would put pressure on the authorities with their democratic demands«. However, the people of Esenyurt – the people in whose name the project of Esenkent and Boğazköy had been undertaken – did not choose to come and live in these new areas, did not want to share in this utopian ideal city. Soon enough though, the satellite towns were inhabited by Istanbul's expanding middle classes looking for »homogeneity of a lifestyle cleansed of urban clutter – of poverty, of immigrants, of elbowing crowds […] a world of safe and antiseptic social spaces« (Öncü 1997: 68-9). This was in 1998. Our conclusion was that the utopian civilising mission which had encountered resistance, then had to rethink its approach to the city – to realise its objectives, not at the scale of the city as a whole but through the construction of small islands of modern urbanity at the outskirts of the city, in cleansed environments, made safe through the homogenizationing of residents' profiles. This was the basis of the fragmenting city – on one side Esenyurt with its poor migrant populations holding on to their squatter settlements, and on the other, Esenkent and Boğazköy with their upcoming moneyed middle-class residents in clean and orderly environments.

Back in 1998, the relatively few luxury and gated-housing developments for middle classes, such as Bahçeşehir, Kemer Country, constituted isolated and dispersed islands in the cityscape, next to or circled by large swathes of poor squatter areas (Kurtuluş, 2005). Now, in 2008, the city landscape looks very different, where high density and large scale commercial land development projects of residential and non-residential kinds squeeze out the informal settlement areas of the migrant poor. One after another, old squatter areas with mixed land ownership patterns are being targeted for urban regeneration. What urban regeneration here invariably means is the tearing down of poor housing areas along with their entire neighbourhood, and the incorporation of these cleansed out spaces into the development projects of large real estate companies. This

constitutes now the once and for all victory of the modernising vision – getting rid of informal housing settlements with their »squatter culture« and what recently our prime minister Mr. Tayyip Erdoğan said of one of these neighbourhoods being demolished, their »hideous-looking monstrosity«.

If we remember that the present AKP government came to power with the decisive support of the urban poor, how do we interpret the switch in their policy and rhetoric, their explicit gentrifying logic that targets the urban poor with their informal economies, housing and coping mechanisms? AKP policies take the form of cleansing operations where the aim is gentrification of the city space and culture, and in this they join in forces with the old »elites« of Istanbul, that is the secular elites whose interests now lie with the positioning of Istanbul as a globally open city with all its required accoutrements. In what follows I will elaborate on the urban regeneration policy of the present AKP government as it is implemented in Istanbul by central and local authorities and on the recent city branding initiatives by the top business elites of the country. Both urban regeneration programmes and city branding initiatives reveal a decisive strategy of modernisation through the production of regulated, purified and homogenised spaces. And they are accompanied by a similar idealism to that of the mayor of Esenyurt – that being a profound conviction that, be it the residents of squatter settlements, or self-run informal businesses, they would like to »develop« and modernise. The present day local governments march on with equal determination and top-down authoritarianism to what amounts to »changing the society« by the production of gentrified space. We may also note that the programme of gentrification is very much linked to their desire to use Istanbul as a stage to demonstrate their modernity and globalism. AKP is compelled to tidy up this stage, to eradicate what seems premodern and erect gentrified spaces to the norms of global cities as their décor. But, perhaps what is significant is that relating to Istanbul as a stage forces the ruling Islamic-origin AKP to constantly revise its position towards global openness. This is because global openness is an uncontrollable process whereby conflictual images of Istanbul find fertile ground for articulation and reception. The Roma of the devastated and threatened neighbourhood of Sulukule are invited by the Green Party of the European Parliament to a conference in Strasbourg in support of their cause. Istanbul's liberal nightlife culture makes headlines in prestigious international magazines such as Newsweek. The marginalised poor get all kinds of ideas from social movements elsewhere in the world. Global openness helps sustain the kind of diversity that is being threatened by the double onslaught of authoritarian and elitist gentrifica-

tion in the city. The public culture of the city then feeds on the AKP government's neo-liberal politics of globalisation, developing a disposition towards what I term worldliness, finally leaving behind inward-looking, self-obsessed import-substitution modality that has hitherto marginalised the city, condemning its people to what Orhan Pamuk aptly describes as provincialism and isolation.

However, the murder of Hrant Dink, the journalist, writer and civil rights activist of Armenian origin by a youth of ultra-nationalist connections, in front of the office of the newspaper he edited in Istanbul, put into perspective how the new cultural orientation in the city is tentative and fragile. Dink's murder demonstrated that, if there has been a certain opening up, diversification and reinterpretation of the mental maps of the citizens over the last two decades or so, this has also been accompanied by a parallel convergence of a range of reactionary positions, whose common denominator seems to be precisely the fear of openness. As Orhan Pamuk recently said, during his tour in Germany from his residence in the US, »we may have been mistaken in thinking that we have become liberal and open to the world« (Pamuk 2007). What has surfaced is the precariousness of the culture of openness, now increasingly challenged by the very tensions it has given rise to. In the coming sections, I will also try to highlight how Istanbul's worldliness is being threatened by a widespread and endemic disavowal that we see in the AKP's thinking and in the urban elites of Istanbul concerning the implications of a roll-out neo-liberalism for issues concerning social justice and cultural diversity.

## Deep cleansing of Istanbul

Very recently, the National Directorate of Privatization Administration oversaw the selling of 100, 000 square meters of the National Highway Authority's land in Zincirlikuyu Istanbul to a Turkish business group for 800 million US dollars, raising the price per square meter of land in this central business area to 8,000 US dollars. Then, a couple of months later, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality finalized the bid process for a 46, 000 square meter warehouse space belonging to the Istanbul Transport Authority, situated immediately adjacent to the Highway Authority's land. It was sold to a Dubai-based real estate company for 705 million US dollars, with declared plans to build what have been dubbed the »Dubai Towers«, at an estimated cost of 5 billion US dollars. With this municipal sale, the per square meter value of property in the area rose very quickly to 15, 000 US dollars, surpassing average central

business district prices in London or Tokyo. What was shocking was the speed with which the land price almost doubled, indicating the appetite of global real estate investors for sites in Istanbul.

And there is plenty of land, for sure. The transfer of land to global commercial interests is no longer limited to one particular area of the city, as was the case in the mid-eighties in Istanbul. Public spaces dotted around the city are coming into focus, one by one, for large-scale privatization and development initiatives. The Galataport and Haydarpaşa areas, situated at the two key entrance ports to the city from both sides of the Bosporus – the Anatolian and European sides – are now being considered for redevelopment, involving massive stretches of land. Considering that there is also the political will to get on with privatization – as Prime Minister Erdoğan recently confirmed, declaring that his duty is to market his country – Istanbul is going to witness more and more global capital pouring into the beleaguered urban space.

The new round of globalisation in Istanbul is then primarily real estate driven. As Çağlar Keyder remarks, »land has finally become a commodity« (Keyder 2005: 130). It is within this context that we should evaluate the recent political initiative to push through large-scale urban regeneration programmes all across Istanbul, targeting neighbourhoods with low-quality housing, or with derelict but historically valuable properties. Politicians, from the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to the prime minister, are now frantically drawing up metropolitan-scale visions and plans to help prepare the infrastructure for the coming wave of investments. Kadir Topbaş, the metropolitan mayor, has masterminded a new concerted planning initiative, setting up the Istanbul Metropolitan Planning office (IMP), with around 500 employees. Cash-strapped municipal authorities are finding solutions for their problems in area development, through large-scale projects undertaken by powerful investment and construction companies. In a recent interview, the head of TOKİ, the Prime Ministry Housing Development Administration, declared that half of Istanbul's housing stock (3 million in total) would have to be replaced in the coming 20 year period and that they will start this operation in twenty slum housing areas from 2008 onwards (Alp/Şentürk 2007). Residents of many areas in Istanbul – Sulukule in the old Istanbul; Süleymaniye, again in the old part, within the city walls; Tarlabaşı in the Pera district; Zeytinburnu next to the city walls, towards the west of the city – are now subject to municipal programmes, involving the expropriation of private properties in return for cash compensation or a share in new far-flung developments. Thus, the historic Tarlabaşı district in Beyoğlu, with its abandoned Greek Orthodox churches and its rows of dilapidated nineteenth-century houses – now occupied by Kurdish popu-

lations from the South East of Turkey, living side by side with local gypsy populations and illegal African immigrants – is being targeted to be cleaned up by a development corporation that will turn the rows of houses into »attractive« residences with parking spaces and shopping areas, of course keeping some of their unique character by retaining their facades. And construction companies are about to move in to start pulling down their neighbourhoods. All these regeneration and redevelopment projects are driven by an explicit agenda to turn city spaces into money-making assets, through becoming sites for heritage tourism, for real estate development tailored to the expanding moneyed classes, and for shopping, entertainment and congress tourism.

In this new round of globalisation, real estate investments are flooding into the most profitable sectors, which have nothing more to do with the industrial profile of the city. What is attracting investors is the skyrocketing consumer demand in Istanbul for high-quality housing, recreational and retail facilities, and, perhaps not so surprisingly, for cultural tourism. The city authorities are planning to transform industrialised areas of Istanbul one by one. In the words of Kadir Topbaş,

»Istanbul should shed its industrial profile [...] Istanbul should become a city with a qualified workforce, a city with a different attitude towards the world [...] Istanbul should, from now on, become a financial centre, a cultural centre, a congress tourism centre.« (Boztepe 2007)

We are already seeing the results of this turn in Kartal, a heavily industrialised area with over 100 factories along the seashore, occupying 550 hectares of land and situated on the Anatolian side of the city. The local mayor of Kartal recently announced their plan to attract 5 billion US dollars from foreign investors to develop a yacht harbour with a capacity to accommodate 1000 boats, plus hotels, residences and plazas – a project to be undertaken by, nobody less than Zaha Hadid. Companies with factories in Kartal are moving their production base and turning their much sought after plots into shopping malls and recreational centres.

What in fact started back in the mid-eighties – the project of globalising Istanbul, turning the city into an internationally competitive city, attractive to investors, businessmen and tourists – is now being fully realised. This is the reason for characterising this new moment of urban change as the new round of urban globalization. In the eighties and throughout the nineties, the global vision achieved partial and piecemeal results in practice. The global city, as Murat Güvenç remarks, had been grafted on the existing urban fabric, thus, leading to the emergence of two Istanbuls.

»One that had been expanding in an unregulated fashion and with its own internal dynamics and the other designed to accommodate the actors of the global world, aiming to secure them attractive and secluded living and working environments.« (Güvenç n.d.)

Hence, central business districts with multi-storey ultra modern office blocks and gated communities were initiated in the early nineties. These projects were undertaken by the large and diversified holding companies that dominated the Turkish economy, and were serving the needs of their professional workers. For the affluent populations of Istanbul, many new residential projects were being built at the outskirts of the city, such as the Alkent 2000, on a 7,000 square meter land, in Büyükçekmece, advertising itself as being only eight minutes away from the airport, or the Kemer Country in Kemerburgaz, on the green belt of Istanbul. New highways, transportation infrastructures, shopping malls, and five-star hotels, like the Swiss Hotel, the Four Seasons, Hyatt Regency, were all being erected. What distinguished this phase of globalisation, though, was that all these developments did not so much touch most of the city; and did not penetrate the life world of its citizens. Instead, they remained secluded preserves of the globalizing elites of the city, driven mainly by Turkish-origin conglomerate capital. Istanbul entered the new millennium as a »dual city« (Robins/Aksoy 1996).

However, now, in the new millennium, every part of the city is exposed to radical change as more and more land is pulled into the market sphere, catapulting the whole of Istanbul into a non-reversible process of large-scale urban change. It is an overwhelming and all encompassing change, because of the alliance of national and local political wills and economic interests and of course because of the scale and scope with which global capital has entered the scene.

## Cultural Gentrification

This new round of urban globalisation though is not just real-estate driven and we are not only talking about global investments in bricks and mortar either. It is also a cultural project. As life practices and cultures of existence in the public domain are increasingly falling into the orbit of global businesses that develop and manage large swathes of public space, »our very existence itself, our public experience«, as İhsan Bilgin argues »starts having a life of its own as part of a pre-designed consumption experience« (Bilgin 2006: 173).

As public spaces fall one by one within the ambit of design and management businesses, which are invariably extensions of global property development projects, the city's public space becomes a business proposition, in which public experience is conceptualised in terms of consumption and recreation. The Kanyon shopping mall, recently opened in Istanbul's central business district of Maslak, is a good illustration of this incorporation of public space into the culture of hyper-consumption. In as much as it covers nearly a 38,000 square meter area, the mall literally turns a huge public space into an affluent middle-class consumption space, but one that has been designed as more than just a mere shopping experience. As the four floors of the winding structure wrap themselves around a canyon-like open-air environment the feeling that is evoked is that of being on a street lined with up-market retail outlets, with well-groomed street vendors selling traditional food from designer carts, and with arty street lighting and furniture. The aim of the designers – the Los Angeles-based Jerde Partnership who created Tokyo's Roppongi Hills – is »to not only offer Istanbul folk a chance to stroll outdoors (with sliding store windows that can be opened in summer), but also a planning scheme that makes each of the four levels seem like individual streets« (Menkes 2006).

However, as the publicity material puts it, unlike a city street, most walking areas are covered and climate controlled, blending natural light and open air with comfort that allows visitors to enjoy every season without suffering its excesses. What Kanyon offers then, is a new interpretation, a new culture, of what the experience of a city and its variety of streets should be like.

In not so dissimilar a fashion local authorities too are putting into place large-scale programmes to regenerate city quarters using culture as a vehicle. The Beyoğlu Municipality was the first to give permission to private developers to actually turn a whole street in the run-down part of the old Pera district into a themed street. The theme was French street lifestyle, so the name of the street was changed from Algeria Street to French Street. From street furniture to wall paintings, from street sculptures to the design of the interiors of the cafes and restaurants, everything was styled to evoke a Montmartre atmosphere. The street, which had once been a public space, has now become a commercial area managed by a business association, dictating the outdoor music, the architectural features, and advertising placements. At one point, there was even an attempt to install security guards at the entrance to the street in order to monitor the flow of »customers«. There are further plans to turn more streets into themed spaces – an Italian street, a Japanese street, and so forth. The Müze-Kent (Museum City) project of the metropolitan mu-

nicipality on the other hand, is unveiling its cultural leanings in its drive to replace the informal and neglected housing and workspaces with residential quarters designed in »the Ottoman style«.

Kanyon introduces to Istanbul the culture of the »modern, metrosexual consumer« (Dyckhoff 2006), as its managing director puts it. New urban regeneration projects and residential developments all come with a cultural approach to urban living. Culture is used by property developers to promote lifestyles. As İhsan Bilgin has argued, the city is »fragmented into self-sustaining enclaves, each with their swimming pools, jogging tracks, cinemas and shopping arcades, all built side by side but in no communication with one another« (Bilgin 2006: 175). As the marketing concept of one massive residential development project on the Anatolian side of Istanbul called »My World Ataşehir« expresses it, the new urban culture is informed by a dream of a world perfectly thought through; one where »you will find the life you are looking for«. Residents can now live perfectly happily within their own environments, with their own kind of people, without having to rub shoulders with others, even the next-door neighbours; they need only leave their enclaves to go to work, and, at weekends, to go downtown to enjoy a bit of heritage or arts.

Culture – in its anthropological sense as a way of life, in its economic sense as a business opportunity, and in its symbolic sense as a seat of power and status; is shifting in terms of all of these meanings. Investing in art and culture has become the fashion of the day in Istanbul, and major business conglomerates and their foundations are competing with one another for suitable spaces to build arts and cultural centres. After the opening of Istanbul Modern, founded by one of the prominent business empires, the Eczacıbaşı family, a recent announcement has come from the Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation – a husband and wife enterprise closely connected through both descent and marriage to the conglomerate Koç business family,. They have launched a bid to turn what is known as the *Tüyap* area in the heart of the city – an area that belongs to the metropolitan municipality – into an international centre for culture and arts. There are plans for a new cultural complex, to be designed by none other than Frank Gehry, and costing 160 million US dollars (the Kıraç Foundation put aside in total 500 million US dollars for arts and culture). For the first time, global capital involvement in the traditionally unprofitable arts and culture sector is also taking place, through joint venture agreements and collaborations. Thus, a five-year protocol has just been signed between the Sabancı Museum and the Louvre for artistic and scientific cooperation – whereby the Louvre will be bring cultural capital in the form of exhibitions, know-how and net-

working to Istanbul. Laureate Education – one of the world's leading international providers of higher education – recently struck up a partnership deal with Istanbul Bilgi University, one of the top private universities in Turkey, and became a strategic partner in Bilgi's new cultural initiative, Santral Istanbul.

Culture is implicated in everything now. Companies use culture for their image building capacity, not just for the sponsor, but investment in arts and culture pays itself back through affording profile and stature to the city – which then, of course can help to boost its overall profile for the investors, visitors and residents alike. The central government as well as the local municipalities are now undertaking huge cultural infrastructure projects. The cases of the Atatürk Cultural Centre in Taksim or the Muhsin Ertuğrul Theatre Hall in Harbiye, both in the city centre, are good illustrations of this trend. Both these existing cultural facilities are being targeted for demolition in order to allow for the building of supermodern, prestigious and multi-functional cultural spaces. The Istanbul Metropolitan Plan recently completed by the Metropolitan Planning Office makes a great deal of projecting a contemporary image of the city for competitiveness through investing in culture (IMP 2006).

The development of policies and infrastructure for cultural industries, for cultural tourism and for conservation of historic and cultural heritage are key policy elements of the metropolitan planning office's recommendations. Istanbul's international arts and cultural festivals are highlighted as very useful mechanisms to promote the city and demonstrate its attractiveness globally. Culture is seen as capital to be exploited in the global competitive game, by now a familiar vision of most globalizing cities. However, this cultural turn in public policy and discourse for Istanbul is something quite new and tremendously significant in its implications.

## The end of »import substitution« modality

As a recent feature article in the New York Times puts it, Istanbul is a city enjoying a renaissance. Istanbul is regarded as one of the most dynamic cities in the world, open to change, and, indeed, changing fast. And not only that. As the front cover of a Newsweek (2005) magazine put it, what we have is a »Cool Istanbul: Europe's Hippest City«. The picture on the cover displayed a scene from a very western looking night club with a scantily dressed young man and a woman dancing to dimmed red lights – not like the old and what may be regarded orientalist depictions of Istanbul with whirling dervishes or squatter areas. What

has changed in Istanbul? The key to understanding this lies in the shift in public culture away from an inward-looking stance in parallel with the globalization of the city. A new round of urban globalization forcing open the city's urban spaces and cultural practices has brought with it a parallel process of cultural openness. The city is finally relinquishing what we may call the modality of import substitution, a post-second-world war economic policy of protecting the local market from imports from the industrialized markets and producing these imported products locally. This policy was used by most developing countries to redress disadvantages in international trade, condemning them to permanent poverty against the industrialized producers of the North.

Orhan Pamuk, in his speech accepting the Nobel Prize, characterized this shift very well:

»In the 70s, I too, began, somewhat ambitiously, to build my own library. I had not quite decided to become a writer – as I related in *Istanbul*, I had come to feel that I would not, after all, become a painter, but I was not sure what path my life would take. There was inside me a relentless curiosity, a hope – driven desire to read and learn, but at the same time I felt that my life was in some way lacking, that I would not be able to live like others. Part of this feeling was connected to what I felt when I gazed at my father's library – to be living far from the centre of things, as all of us who lived in Istanbul in those days were made to feel, that feeling of living in the provinces[…]
As for my place in the world – in life, as in literature, my basic feeling was that I was 'not in the centre'. In the centre of the world, there was a life richer and more exciting than our own, and with all of Istanbul, all of Turkey, I was outside it. Today I think that I share this feeling with most people in the world. In the same way, there was a world literature, and its centre, too, was very far away from me. Actually what I had in mind was Western, not world, literature, and we Turks were outside it. My father's library was evidence of this. At one end, there were Istanbul's books – our literature, our local world, in all its beloved detail – and at the other end were the books from this other, Western, world, to which our own bore no resemblance, to which our lack of resemblance gave us both pain and hope.« (Pamuk 2007)

The image of import substitution in cultural terms refers to this feeling of isolation and provincialism that characterized Istanbul's public culture up to the late eighties, and maybe even into the nineties. Relinquishing the import substitution modality in the field of culture can be translated as the liberalisation of the cultural field. As business conglomerates compete with one another as to who undertakes bigger investment in museums, art collections, galleries and exhibitions, the old model of centrally controlled cultural provision is becoming obsolete. State-run

cultural organisations, such as the State Painting and Sculpture Museum or the Atatürk Cultural Centre in Istanbul, are now having acute difficulties in maintaining their place in the new cultural scene – difficulties in attracting both audiences and sponsors, and management and financial difficulties as a consequence of being state-controlled. Sponsoring commercially-funded events like the Istanbul Biennale now commands status and image for companies, and, hence, Istanbul's Biennale is flourishing, and has now become one of the key artistic events in Europe. The fact that the non-state sector relies on trans-national connections with art institutions across the world pushes toward making the old, closed and inward-looking modality in cultural provision a thing of the past. I have already mentioned the Sabancı-Louvre collaboration. Additionally, Santral Istanbul, the new arts museum initiated by the Istanbul Bilgi University is talking to the Tate Modern in London about collaborative programming; Istanbul Modern is signing a deal with the Pompidou Centre; and we hear that there will be more to come in this type of trans-national cooperation.

The appetite for joint projects and internationally ambitious artistic undertakings is translating into growing openness in the arts sector. The hiring of British art historian and curator David Elliot, formerly in charge of both the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, as the director of the Istanbul Modern Art Museum illustrates the shift in Istanbul's cultural scene towards global openness. And this global openness demands self-confidence and vision. Hence, in his first major interview with the media, Elliott's formula for Istanbul Modern comes across in a confident tone, as one of centring Istanbul, »looking at the world from Istanbul« (Onat 2007). As Andrew Finkel, an experienced journalist and commentator on Turkish affairs puts it: »Istanbul Modern under his watch is not going to be Orhan Pamuk's Istanbul of nostalgia, melancholy and regret«. It seems, rather »to make the city aware of its own capacity for change« (Finkel 2007). Liberalisation in the cultural arena comes with a desire to shed some things of the past, and with an urge for change. Now, as we approach 2010, when Istanbul will be the European Capital of Culture, this yearning for liberalisation, seems to be finally taking hold.

This turn towards greater openness and interconnectedness is an outcome of and is ultimately driven by the project of gentrification of the city. The city space itself is being mobilised »as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices« (Brenner/Theodore 2002: 368). The »projected city« is a collection of gentrified spaces, and cultural imaginary is being increasingly shaped by this very project of gentrification. In this projected city there is no more

room for the squatters or their culture. What is significant, in the context of Istanbul, is the relentless rise to ascendancy of this imaginary. Squatters should be »modernised« (or in other words, tamed). They should accept to give up their squalor and inhabit the mass housing schemes developed for them. As many media columnist these days openly express with no hesitation, the squatters should not be allowed »to occupy our common land and build illegal and ugly constructions that start off as single storey buildings and then get higher and higher« (Özkan 2008). We are urged to »stop migrants lowering further down the city's life standards and its image« (Uras 2008). And behind it we find a previously unanticipated coalition of urban elites of Istanbul. This coalition involves what Orhan Esen calls the »North-Istanbul elites« (the post-eighties generation of secular, middle-class and professional workers) and the rising commercial elites of the Islamic-oriented traditional circles, politically represented by the »innovative group« in the ruling AKP (Justice and Progress Party). These two elite groups, who had, until now, remained polarised, now share a common aspiration, which informs their actions and their discourses (Esen 2005). What is held in common is a vision of Istanbul as a city that is globalized and gentrified, providing orderly and clean public spaces and residential quarters, with an attractive public image and world class services and goods. We may argue, then, that the opening of the cultural field is underwritten by the gentrified class base of the neo-liberal regime. Cultural liberation progresses in the direction of what suits the needs of the rising elites of the city, in ways that respond to their expectations of higher living standards.

## Worldliness in danger

What I have described so far is the global opening up of Istanbul along neo-liberal lines. Istanbul has become a stage for the unfolding and relentless reproduction of the neo-liberal dynamic. Having found a convenient argument in globalisation as a way of building a political programme that served to answer anxieties from both the secular Republican political camp and also the conservative Islamic side (Çınar 2003), the ruling AKP government have shown little hesitation about the way ahead in terms of opening up Istanbul to market-driven global forces. In this respect, Istanbul's transformation has been a state-led project. The pro-globalisation position of the ruling AKP government has turned the state, as Neil Smith puts it into »a consummate agent – rather than a regulator of – the market« (Smith 2002: 443).

This restructuring of the city along neo-liberal lines suits the aspirations of – and is being driven by – its globalising elites and the city's propertied classes. At the present moment, the property-owning residents of the city have too much to gain from the opening up of Istanbul to market-driven capitalist growth. And considering that according to the latest census results of 2000, 58% of the households, out of around two and a half million households in total, have declared that they are living in their own property, we are talking about a considerable proportion of the city population whose fortunes are directly implicated in the changing economy of the city. The scale of real-estate focused market activity is far more extensive today, touching and transforming even the slum housing that has been legalised over the years. It is perhaps not surprising, then, to witness a lack of interest – and sympathy – for the social exclusionary outcomes of the transformation that is being unleashed in the city. There is a broad consensus behind this project for the globalisation of Istanbul, a confluence of interests with an interest in remaining silent in the face of the new exclusionary dynamics. Hence, when Kadir Topbaş announces his views on curbing internal migration into the city by »increasing the cost of living in Istanbul to the level of Paris« (Topbaş 2007), there is generally no protest. He seems to be echoing the desire of the growing base of urban elites for Istanbul's gentrification.

The forceful evictions that are beginning to be rolled out in various urban gentrification projects undertaken by one municipality after another in the city are meeting with no major resistance from the city's urban elites. In the historic inner-city area of Sulukule, for instance, almost all of the 690 households – some of which are Roma, and where at least six residents live per household – are targeted for evictions, as most of them do not hold property deeds despite the fact that they have been residents in this area for a century or so. The same fate awaits the recent Kurdish immigrants from the south east of Turkey in the Tarlabaşı district. These residents are very poor, but, more significantly, they do not hold the deeds which would enable them to take part in Istanbul's increasingly market-oriented housing economy. It seems that those who are not in a position to use their land deeds to bargain their way into the new economy of Istanbul will be quietly relegated to the status of the invisible. They will be no longer heard of in the public sphere except when they become junkies, dealers, criminalised youth.

And, with lack of welfare state structures and the increasing collapse of informal and identity-based incorporation mechanisms in the city – as Çağlar Keyder remarks, »the older mechanisms of social integration that helped incorporate the migrants into the urban world of Istanbul no longer provide a remedy« (Keyder 2005: 130) – we begin to see exclu-

sionary dynamics operate on a much larger scale than ever before. With high levels of unemployment, an unqualified labour force and the continuing influx of immigrants from the rural areas of Turkey – as well as from neighbouring countries, and now from Africa – social exclusion find fertile ground in Istanbul (Behar/Islam 2006). Considering the extent to which Istanbul's population increased in the last seven years – from around 10 million in 2000 to over 12 plus million in 2007 – almost all through new migrations, the scale of the social problem becomes clear. Yet, Istanbul's new elites lack a social vision to begin to engage in the exclusionary dynamics of market-based relations. They are woefully lacking in any self-reflexivity to those processes that feed their own self-interests. On the contrary, if anything, all the different elite constituencies vie for power in order to maximise their benefits from the new economy of the city. This is the generalised state of disavowal in the city that I am referring to.

Unless a corrective to this self-interest focused neo-liberalism can be invented, there is a strong possibility that the exclusionary dynamics that are building up will eventually find their expression in social fracturing, division and conflict. In a context where the division between the excluded and the included is dramatically increasing sharpening, and where the familiar mechanisms of incorporation are increasingly being weakened, religious and ethnically-informed identity positions can become ready ciphers for frustration and anger. This new round of urban globalisation is characterised, moreover, by the sheer scale and power of global capitalist dynamics to undermine small-scale and individual efforts of urban constituencies to determine the basic conditions of their everyday lives. Before this neo-liberal programme turns into a grim scenario where powerlessness feeds a backlash of political conservatism and authoritarianism, there is clearly a need for a new politics of openness – a new perspective, as Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore argue, »for imagining and ultimately implementing strategies for pushing back the current neo-liberal offensive« (Brenner/Theodore op.cit.: 376). Istanbul's new urban elites need to capture »the sense that a different global is possible« (Smith 1999: 105). This is a project requiring, above all, a prolonged process of negotiation, with an explicit agenda about the kind of globalisation and openness that might enlarge public spaces of interaction, engagement, and mutual responsibility – against the grain of the fragmentation and commercialisation in city spaces that underscore growing social inequality and exclusion. This is what I have in mind with the concept worldliness – a disposition not to reject openness, but to think, as Çağlar Keyder argues, »about new modes of embedding the market« (Keyder 2005: 103).

Is this all just a dream? Would it ever be possible for Istanbul to embrace worldliness? As I have argued above, apart from isolated and increasingly marginalised voices of opposition, globalisation of the city is embraced enthusiastically. However, in the context of the killing of Hrant Dink, in a context where Orhan Pamuk, Turkey's first Nobel-prize author, is not able to walk freely in the streets of his beloved city, in a context where the hundreds and thousands of people flocking to an anti-government demonstration in a central square in Istanbul are giving out very confused signals about where to vent their anger and look for solidarity, the prospect of worldliness keeps appearing and disappearing. In a context where even the commissioning of internationally renown architects like Zaha Hadid and Ken Yeang to undertake some of the public projects in Istanbul is facing mounting anger, with protestors posing the issue as a confrontation between local (re: Turkish) versus the international (re: Outsider), the vulnerability of even the neo-liberal project of openness becomes clear. The »old order« may be dismantling on the ground, where traditional and non-formal structures are no longer able to act as incorporating mechanisms, but it is clearly not being written off at the discursive level. From privatization projects to architectural commissions, to international arts prizes, calls for privileging the local (re: the »national«) values are finding eager reception. Defensive and fearful responses to what are in fact »complex, confusing and often highly contradictory implications of this ongoing neo-liberalization of urban political-economic space« starts slipping easily and seamlessly into an exclusionary language, to the rejection of difference and diversity and ultimately to nationalistic fanaticism.

The task, then, is to address the widespread disavowal that is threatening Istanbul's worldliness. The real challenge to the AKP government and to the new urban elites is, first, to confront the urgent need for a corrective to deepening social exclusion. As Ayşe Buğra and Çağlar Keyder remark in their report titled »New Poverty and the Changing Welfare Regime of Turkey« for UNDP, »[t]he risk of social exclusion becomes all the more severe in a situation where traditional support mechanisms have ceased to be effective along with the decline of formal employment opportunities and the rise of permanent poverty« (Buğra/Keyder 2003: 49). In this context, where also the gentrification of urban space and culture underscores the increasing disempowerment of the urban poor to shape the urban space for their survival, it is crucial to pose worldliness as a strategy to reconstitute the neo-liberal project for socially just outcomes; to pose worldliness as a framework for demanding »democratic re-appropriations of city space« (Brenner/Theodore 2002: 376). The second, and perhaps even harder challenge to take on board, is the dis-

comfort towards the idea of diversity, plurality of life forms, and plasticity of spaces, in short towards the uncanny – qualities that seem to be most threatened by the utopian idealism of modernist visions.

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