

*The Case Study and the Survey: A Review of T. Elvan Ergut, Making a National Architecture: Architecture and the Nation-State in Early Republican Turkey (State University of New York-Binghamton, USA, 1998) and M. Haluk Zelef, A Research on the Representation of Turkish National Identity: Buildings Abroad (Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 2003)*

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These two doctoral dissertations, completed within four years of each other on separate continents, are both concerned with the architecture of The Republic of Turkey in the 20th century. However, while Ergut and Zelef are essentially examining the same topic, they are doing so in different ways and from different points of view. Ergut's focus is on the discourse of nationalism, as it affected architecture built in Turkey between the late 1920s to the 1950s: "The overall aim of the study is to analyze the construction of 'national architecture' in a reciprocal relationship with the construction of the 'nation', whereby architectural production is a constituent of, as well as being constituted by, the specific process of 'nation'-building."<sup>1</sup> Zelef's focus is the discourse of identity, as it affected architecture "representative of Turkey" built outside of the country (exhibition pavilions, cultural centers, monuments, religious centers, but mostly embassies) between 1923 and 2003: "Buildings built abroad with the purpose of representing the home country have been focused on with a particular emphasis on those used by diplomatic representatives."<sup>2</sup>

That is, whereas Ergut investigates the forces behind the discussion and making of a "Turkish national architecture," Zelef investigates the forces behind the representation of "Turkishness" in architecture outside of Turkey, thereby examining how people were able to see "Turkishness" in architecture outside of Turkey. Implicit in

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1 Ergut, T. Altan, "Making a National Architecture: Architecture and the Nation-State in Early Republican Turkey", State University of New York-Binghamton, 1998, s. 8-9.

2 Zelef, Haluk, and M. Haluk Zelef, "A Research on the Representation of Turkish National Identity: Buildings Abroad", Middle East Technical University, 2003, s. 21-22.

both these studies is that it is not only Turks but also non-Turks (foreigners) who are searching for an architectural definition of “Turkishness.” The biggest contrast between the two dissertations is the time periods involved. While Ergut’s dissertation is focused on the period between the late 1920s and the early 1950s, Zelef’s encompasses the entire period from 1923 to 2003, the entire history of the Republic of Turkey up to when the PhD was completed. More on this time period difference will be discussed later.

In terms of philosophical foundations, Ergut writes for 90 pages – 38% of the dissertation – on “Forming the Nation” and “Dissemination of the Idea of the Nation,” the latter of which is both a literature review of the classic works on nationalism by Anderson,<sup>3</sup> Gellner,<sup>4</sup> Greenfeld,<sup>5</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger,<sup>6</sup> Said,<sup>7</sup> and Smith.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Ergut explains how these concepts and historical analyses relate to the situation of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Specifically, Ergut highlights the “messages of nationalism” that were relevant to the Turkish situation: the dichotomies of “past/future,” “East/West” and “national/international.” Although some scholars believe that these dichotomies are inherent to nationalism in general and not just the specific situation of Turkey, they prove to be very useful in Ergut’s further explanation of the formation of the nation-state of Turkey.

Zelef, on the other hand, writes for just 19 pages – 8% of the dissertation – on “National Identity,” “Formal Representation of National Identity by Buildings Abroad,” “Identity and Otherness in Foreign Affairs,” “Identity and Architecture,” and “Identity and Architects.” Ergut’s dissertation has a much more solid theoretical grounding than Zelef’s – perhaps maybe too much – but at least it can be said that she understands the background to her research. Zelef may also have such a solid background to his research, but it does not come through in the introductory part of the dissertation where, for example, four pages on “Identity and Architecture” would not even be acceptable for a master’s thesis. In truth, an entire doctoral dissertation could be written just on this topic alone.

In terms of the methodologies and research techniques used by each author, Ergut “slices” or “dissects” her topic into various layers (“The Capital City,” “The National Style,” “The International Style,” “Architecture and the State” and “Architectural Professional - ization”). Ergut mentions 20 buildings in her dissertation, but primarily focuses on one building: Şevki Balmumcu’s 1933 Ankara

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3 Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

4 Gellner, Ernst, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

5 Greenfeld, Liah, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge, USA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992.

6 Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger (haz.), *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

7 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

8 Smith, Anthony D., *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986

Exhibition Building, which was changed into The Ankara Opera House by Paul Bonatz in 1946. Zelef, on the other hand, chronologically groups 184 buildings into 4 time periods, giving a theme for each time period: 1923-1950: Representing Turkish Identity (the role of the government); 1950-1980: Designing Turkish Identity (the role of designers); 1980-1990: Constructing Turkish Identity (the role of construction companies) and 1990-2003: Post-Modern Turkish Identity (the role of history). Ten of these 184 examples are then highlighted throughout the dissertation to bring out the theme of each chapter. That is, Zelef's dissertation is a survey that attempts to pick out certain themes and organize the buildings according to those themes, as compared with Ergut's dissertation, which is much more limited, and focuses on the discourse, rather than the production, of architecture.

What is interesting about this contrast is that these methodologies do not match with the institutional contexts in which the dissertations were written. While Ergut's research took place within an Art History Department under the guidance of an art historian with architectural interests and expertise (Prof. Anthony D. King), Zelef's research took place within an Architecture Department (and Architecture Faculty) under the guidance of an architect with an interest in the theory of architectural form (Prof. Selahattin Önür). That is, the more traditional art-historical methodology (Zelef) did not take place in an art history department.

Similarly, the two dissertations adopt opposite approaches to the topic of architecture history. Ergut adopts an interpretive/historical outlook to architectural history that sees it more as a cultural history of the built environment rather than a description of building styles. Ergut's conclusions take the form of a critique, or re-interpretation, of the traditional architectural history of early Republican history that classifies 1923-1930 as The First National Style, 1930-1940 as the First International Style and 1940-1950 as the Second National Style. The problem, Ergut points out, is that such a classification, as the period names suggest, relies merely on formal stylistic grounds and does not examine the ideas of the social agents involved in the creation of those buildings - namely, the architects and the clients (mostly the Turkish State).

When these social agents are taken into consideration, Ergut reveals another interpretation of the National/International Style classification: putting stylistic differences aside, all three periods were attempting to achieve the same thing: they were all trying, through the means of architecture, to express the ideas and ideals of the Turkish nation - they were all trying to represent "Turkishness" in architecture. The fact that different forms were chosen to achieve the same goal proves the relativity or contextuality of meaning in architecture, as shown by Ergut's example of the classical forms of Washington, USA and Nazi-era architecture, with the same forms functioning to represent both democracy and dictatorship. These conclusions about the First National Style, etc., are very refreshing in breaking away from the traditional "story" of Early Republican Architecture, yet still understand the dynamics of the time period. These conclusions are equally valid for non-Turkish cases, too. Ergut was able to do such an interpretation because of the previous pioneering work

by Aslanoğlu,<sup>9</sup> Tekeli, Yavuz-Özkan, Batur, Alsaç, Tapan, Yücel and Sey,<sup>10</sup> who first proposed such a classification.

In contrast, as has already been mentioned, Zelef adopts a traditional art-historical “historical survey” approach that attempts to understand a large time period by breaking it into dominant themes (whether they be movements, styles or other ways of thinking). Although Zelef never lurches into simple descriptions of the works, referring instead to the topic of identity and its role in shaping that particular building, there are certain parts of the dissertation when so many buildings are mentioned that it becomes overwhelming. Zelef is writing a history that has never been written before. In that sense, his text is pioneering, as can be seen from its ambitious time-scope. Zelef has no previous texts to interpret or comment upon like Ergut does. As a result, everything is mentioned in both text and extensive footnotes, with an average of 25% of most pages being taken up by notes. In fact, a large majority of pages consist of 50% footnotes and 50% text. Although it is possible to read an alternative narrative running through these footnotes, it is this reviewer’s opinion that the notes are too extensive and should have been re-examined before final publication.

The number and frequency of illustrations in each dissertation also adds to this analysis: Ergut uses 55 illustrations, but 23 of them (42%) are only about the Exhibition Building/Opera House, showing contemporary interior and exterior views. In addition, 8 of the remaining illustrations (15% of the total) do not show specific buildings, but compare and contrast the development of Ankara in the 1920s and 1940s with “before” and “after” views. Similarly, Zelef uses 66 illustrations, with 31 of them (47%) about those buildings that reinforce his chapter “themes.” So, whereas Zelef is mentioning a huge (and daunting) amount of buildings in his text and footnotes and Ergut is mentioning very few, we are reminded in both cases about the “important” ones by their illustrations.

In terms of the dissertations’ socio-economic objectives, both are searching for larger conclusions outside of the discipline of architecture and architectural history. In both cases, the authors are relating social phenomena (exhibitions or buildings abroad) to larger issues (nationalism and Turkish identity). Ergut does not discuss nationalism in an abstract manner, but relates nationalism and the process of exhibition inherent in the multitude of museums, galleries and exhibition halls that arose parallel with nation-states throughout the 19th century. It is specifically through the programmatic and stylistic change of Balmumcu’s Exhibition Building into Bonatz’s Opera House, along with short discussions on the annual Izmir International Fair,

9 Aslanoğlu, İnci, *Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Mimarlığı 1923-1938*, Ankara: Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları, 1980.

10 Tekeli, İlhan, “The Social Context of the Development of Architecture in Turkey”; Yavuz, Yıldırım and Suha Özkan, “The Final Years of the Ottoman Empire” and “Finding a National Idiom: First National Style”; Batur, Afife, “To Be Modern: Search for a Republican Architecture”; Alsaç, Üstün, “The Second Period of Turkish National Architecture”; Tapan, Mete, “International Style: Liberalism in Architecture”; Yücel, Atilla, “Pluralism Takes Command: The Turkish Architectural Scene Today”; Sey, Yıldız, “To House the New Citizens: Housing Policies and Mass Housing” in Holod, Renata and Ahmet Evin (haz.). *Modern Turkish Architecture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.

Republican-era People's Houses (*Halk Evleri*) and other smaller exhibitions, that Ergut attempts to analyze the conception of "national architecture" in a close relationship with the construction of the nation: nation-building, both figuratively (the creation of nations) and literally (the use of architecture to create nations). Zelef thoroughly compiles a list of all buildings (as many as he could find) outside of Turkey with some sort of Turkish connection and at the end of the dissertation, provides three very comprehensive tables that list all Turkish embassies, both projects and realized works, from 1923–2003; all the works of Turkish architects abroad (not just embassy buildings) from about 1950–2003; and also a chart of projects (not just buildings but also civil engineering) realized by Turkish Construction companies outside of Turkey from about 1995–2003.

In terms of their use of sources, both dissertations very solidly use primary sources to their advantage – in Ergut's case architectural journals, governmental publications, and newspapers of the time period and in Zelef's case 23 personal interviews with diplomats and architects, a review of 15 diplomat personal memoirs, architectural journals, governmental publications, and newspapers of the time period. Ergut's use of primary sources is particularly useful in the section concerning the discourse of the architectural profession during this time period. Her use of secondary sources is also equally impressive, limited only by the date of the submission of her PhD (September 1998) – there have been more works on these topics published after that date, most notably Bozdoğan.<sup>11</sup> The major strength of Zelef's dissertation is his use of primary sources, especially the interviews that he specially conducted for this work. Because his topic continued up until the handing in of his submission, he also took advantage of Internet sources.

In the end, both dissertations are very valuable contributions to the writing of the history of Turkish architecture, albeit in their own different ways: while Ergut successfully challenged the classification of 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish architecture within Turkey, Zelef successfully creates a classification of 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish architecture outside of Turkey. It remains for future scholars to challenge Zelef's classifications.

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<sup>11</sup> Bozdoğan, Sibel, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001.

