RETHINKING NATIONALISM IN THE CASE OF 1453 CONQUEST MUSEUM IN ISTANBUL

Şeyda BARLAS BOZKUŞ

Marmara University,

Department of Radio, Television and Cinema

Istanbul

ABSTRACT

In Istanbul, monuments, parks, and consumption spaces such as restaurants, cafes, hotels that are intended to re-imagine and experience Ottoman cultural heritage have been shaping the relationship between the urban space and the citizens. This paper shifts attention away from the production of (national) identities—traditionally the focus of critical heritage scholarship—and onto the production of governance and territorial control within a transnational frame. My case study is the current proliferation of memory and particularly 1453 Conquest Museum in Istanbul which was opened with the participation of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 31 January 2009. The museum of the conquest, which opens a door onto Istanbul's history, is located across from the spot on the Topkapı - Edirnekapı ramparts where the siege occurred. I argue that the Adalet Kalkınma Partisi's Ottomanist style added on new ideological emphases to neo-Ottomanism in Turkey. I intend to show the ways in which the modern representation techniques work in creating a new class of citizens with a new relationship to Turkish-Ottoman national identity. This paper will show of visualization of cultural heritage of Istanbul in panoramic museum. Construction of national identity in the museum gives us co-defied image of Ottoman identity and reconstructed historical consciousness among Turkish citizens.

Keywords: Cultural Memory, Culture and Identity, Nationalism, Museum Studies

İstanbul 1453 Panorama Fetih Müzesi Bağlamında Milliyetçilik İdeolojisini Yeniden Düşünmek

ÖZET

Son yıllarda İstanbul'da inşa edilen parklar, şehrin sembolü haline gelen tarihi mekanlarda, restorantlarda ve kafelerde Osmanlı kültürel mirasının yorumlanması şehirdeki mekanlar ve vatandaşlar arasındaki kültürel bağların yeniden şekillenmesine sebep oldu. Bu çalışma eleştirel bağlamda kültürel miras çalışmalarına yeni bir bakış açısı kazandırarak milli kimliklerin inşasında ve kültürel mirasın bu ideoloji çerçevesinde yönetimi/kontrolü ele alınacaktır. Bu çalışmada konusu olan İstanbul 1453 Panorama Fetih Müzesi 31 Ocak 2009'da Başbakan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın katılımıyla halka açılmıştır. Fetih Müzesi İstanbul'un kuşatılması ve alınması sırasında savaşın geçtiği Topkapı-Edirnekapı arasındaki alanda kurulmuştur. Adalalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin kültürel alanda yürüttüğü Yeni Osmanlıcılık ideoloji bu müzenin de kurulmasında ana etkendir. Bu ideolojik perspektif sayesinde Osmanlı-Türk kimliğinin birarada modern mekanlarda kullanılarak toplumda yeni bir bakış açısının geliştirilerek ve milli değerlerin şekillendirilmeye çalışıldığı söylenebilir.Bu çalışmada Panorama 1453 Müzesi örneğinde kültürel mirasın Yeni Osmanlıcılık düşüncesi üzerinden görselleştirilmesi ele alınacaktır. Milli kimliğin müze mekanında yeniden kurgulanarak Türk toplumuna Osmanlı kültürel kimliğini ve milli tarih bilincini aşılanması süreci araştırılacaktır.

Anathar Kelimeler: Kültürel Hafıza, Kültürel Kimlik, Milliyetçilik ve Müzecilik Çalışmaları

Barlas Bozkuş

Introduction

In Istanbul, monuments, parks, and consumption spaces such as restaurants, cafes, hotels that are intended to re-imagine and experience Ottoman cultural heritage have been shaping the relationship between the urban space and the citizens. This paper shifts attention away from the production of (national) identities—traditionally the focus of critical heritage scholarship—and onto the production of governance and territorial control within a transnational frame.

My aim is not so much to propose an ideal design for the history museum, the paper will seek to analyze under what circumstances neo-conservative cultural policy integrated in Turkish museums after the 2000s. The museum politics in the early Republican area can be examined in terms of dominant ideologies of the period: nationalism, populism, and etatizm. The museum activities and the politics of aesthetics conservation and collection strategies operated in terms of Kemalist ideology. With the foundation of the Republic, the government was planning to open an ethnography museum, a museum of revolution, and an archeology museum was at last established in Ankara. Under the light of this perspective from the foundation of Turkish Republic, museums are the places where ideological practices examined through visualization of Turkish history.

My case study is the current proliferation of memory and particularly 1453 Conquest Museum in Istanbul which was opened with the participation of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 31 January 2009. The museum of the conquest, which opens a door onto Istanbul's history, is located across from the spot on the Topkapı-Edirnekapı ramparts where the siege occurred. I argue that the AKP's Ottomanist style added on new ideological emphases to neo-Ottomanism in Turkey. I intend to show the ways in which the modern representation techniques work in creating a new class of citizens with a new relationship to Turkish-Ottoman national identity. This paper will show of visualization of cultural heritage of Istanbul in panoramic museum. Construction of national identity in the museum gives us co-defied image of Ottoman identity and reconstructed historical consciousness among Turkish citizens.

Theoretical Background

Cultural policy after 2000s has been shaped by the new museum trends in Turkey showed us both governmental and private museum enterprises which were established in Istanbul. The role of national history museums in a nation's "mythmaking process" is an increasingly important part of Turkish cultural policy. The process itself covers symbolic

power of national narratives, speeches of the great man's, and visual images of the ancestors. These three approaches were essential parts of the former national history writing in Turkish historiography and Republican history museums. Nowadays, the myth constructed in the Turkish history museum was based on early Republican intellectual development, gained a new form with the influence of Turco-Islamic identity. Turning the old glorious day in the Turkish history idealized the nation, the state and the history in neo-conservative and neo-Ottoman identity.

Starting from the Miniaturk: Turkish miniature theme park and the foundation of Islamic Science and Technology Museum by Kültür A.Ş.(Culture JS. Company) represents the neo conservative trend in Turkish museums. Miniaturk the world's largest miniature park in respect to its model area covers 60,000 square meters. It consists of 120 models. 57 of the structures are from Istanbul, 51 are from Anatolia, and 12 are from the Ottoman territories that today lie outside of Turkey. Miniaturk was visited by more than six hundred thousand in 2009, mostly Turkish visitors.

The nation building functions of these new museums, the Panorama 1453, Miniaturk Theme Park and the Museum of Islamic Science and Technology are essentially ideological. It should be considered that for the ideological function of the museum, the design of the newss museums has been facilitated with the representation of Golden Ages of Ottoman-Turkish as well as Islamic civilization with the support of new technologies- video, interactive tours, and virtual reality opens up a new way for communication.

According to Thompson, these new national museums construct at the symbolic level reality, a form of a unity which embraces individual collective identity. (Thompson, 1990: 64) In this regard, the tradition, nation, and canon articulated in an upper identity of the community in Turkish society. Museums as communication institutions tend to develop new strategies for imposing neo-conservative ideologies. Harvey argues that

> Institutions are produced spaces of a more and less durable sort. But they also entail the use of symbolic spaces. and the spatial orchestration of semiotic systems that support and guide all manner of institutional practices and allegiances. Insertion into the symbolic spatial order and learning to read semiotics of the institutionalized landscapes is an effect of power upon the individual that has a primary role in guaranteeing subservice to the social order. (Harvey, 1996: 112)

The experience of post-modern societies has generally resulted in the erosion of a sense of place and time. Due to the effects of industrialization and urbanization, the construction and reproduction of representations of our past have increasingly depended on the public

sphere. Since the beginning of modernity the past has been institutionalized in which a new form of rationalization of knowledge was constituted. In this regard, Walsh argues that virtual strategies in the museum spaces maintain a sense of place and various forms of time-space construction. By this way, creating a new sense of history is constructed in the formal museum space that brings to the "end of history." (Walsh, 1997:65)

From the perspective of museum visitors, the new technologies such as digital films, simulations, and visual/sound effects become a part medium of communication in the post-modern museums. The new museums have a range of resources including human interaction, interpretative devices, collection items, replicated environments and electronic media. From these resources, museum users construct meanings "through a constant process of remembering and connecting and through 'the accommodation of new information into existing mental structures and frameworks." (Volkerling, 1997:184)

The role, status and function of the museums are respectively national, regional and local. In this respect, the 1453 Panorama Conquest Museum established a symbolic national myth in which visitors experienced the greatness of Ottoman power and the spirit of Constantinople.

Designing the Past: History, Ideology and Politics in Museum Space

The Panorama Conquest Museum is granted by the Municipality of Istanbul and supposed to mould the nationally shaped historical consciousness. Turkish cultural policy after the 1980 has been designed according to the promotion of national values such as Turkish history, eastern culture, traditions, Islam etc. (Ada, 2011: 198). The new tendency in Turkish cultural policy has reflected extrovert and participatory characteristics. By the way, educated young people and adults are able to transmit national values and symbols to the next generations.

In the last couple of years, the motto in the cultural policy namely "*culture for promoting*" was converted into "*culture for the public.*" Miniaturk Theme Park and the Museum of Islamic Science and Technology as well as the 1453 Museum of Conquest carry out spatial meanings in which visitors interpret and understand. Museum visitors engaged in the exploring of questions of national entity and social belonging to the community. In this regard the visitors have chance experience neo-conservative, Ottoman-Turkish cultural heritage rather than classic Kemalist nationalist one. The cultural policy role for museums is "recording and presenting identity." For this reason, the effects of national museum can be

regarded as ideological as well as cognitive. Mainly four main tendencies pursued in Turkish history museums in order to construct "true image" of the past. These are the adaptation of artistic values, universalized preservation practices, construction of the figure a mediator between historical truths, institutions and the visiting public and finally the use of fabricated exhibits. (Azoulay, 2000:86) These approaches have been played instrumental role in constructing a "monolithic image of the past" that prevailed in the most national history museum.

In terms of geographical position, the Panorama 1453 Historical Museum was located across from the spot on the Topkapı- Edirnekapı ramparts where the siege occurred and is run by Kültür A.Ş.(Culture JS. Company). After the official opening, every year more than seven hundred thousand in 2009 and nine hundred thousand in 2010 visited the Museum of Conquest which can be seen as neo-conservative museum practice. (Kültür AŞ.'ye Bağlı Müzeler Ziyaretçi Rekoru Kırdı, 2011) The place was chosen to establish a national museum is very strategic, because the museum was located in very central area in Istanbul attract both local and global tourists.

The selection of the place where the conquest museum was founded emphasized the real sense of belonging to the conquest area. In the museum catalogue, the area was described as: "This is Topkapı, the place where the fiercest battle of the Constantinople siege took place. This is the door that opened onto the conquest of Constantinople....Here you will witness the conquest of the city." (The Panorama 1453 Historical Museum, 2009:20)

Actually, the new trend in national history museums pushes towards time-space compression. The effects of globalization in nation states can be seen as in the museum space. In the Panorama Museum, visitors overlook the continuing importance of national traditions and experiences that often draw on long histories of ethnic memories, myths, symbols and values. There are still many people in Turkey for whom their ethnic heritages and national power hold. The national museum acts as "a bridge between past and future," in this respect, the conquest of Constantinople is a symbolic event for regaining spiritual superiority for Turkish nation. The organization and structural formation of the museum are designed according to reawake national feelings and remember this glorious day in Ottoman-Turkish history. The conquest day which is realized in museum space represents dramatic paintings, highly effective wall panels and sound systems. The representation of the conquest is here:

Constantinople once again and experience the moment when the soldiers entered the city, almost exactly as it happened. You will witness the explosion of the canon balls. The battle cry of Sultan Mehmed II's soldiers and the sound

the marches played by the Janissary band will accompany you. (The Panorama
1453 Historical Museum, 2009:2)

In modern times, as Foucault writes the museums are to be examined in the public sphere, because the modern museum space is regulated by the state's power in order to regulate the masses that was the strategy of representing the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. (Foucault, 1985:20) The Turkish bourgeoisie wanted to create a discourse of national culture in two different ways: the selection of memory and education practices, through these means provide visualization of the past in the present forms. (Shaw, 2004:306,307,308) Although a universal understanding of history in museum space features history and the movement of time and space, in the early Republican museums, it was setting on a single geography that moved across time.

In terms of cultural policy creation of new national museum depends on the ability to communicate to the nation's "mythmaking process" is achieved through these museums whose use of ideological and cognitive space of the Panorama 1453 "Conquest Museum". Mythmaking process in the Panorama 1453 is a part of glorification of image of Mehmed II and Ottoman-Turkish history. In the following part, the physical structure of the Panorama Museum will be analyzed according to museum strategies and current themes of Turkish cultural policy.

Ideological Function of the Panorama 1453 Conquest Museum

In 2010, Istanbul's selection of the three cities along with the three cities along with Essen/Ruhr and Pecs celebrated in 2010 as "European Capitals of Culture" demonstrates Turkey's Europeanness. Istanbul offers a new identity towards the formation of the "imagined identity of a cosmopolitan, post-religious and post-national Europe. In this regard, the Panorama 1453 is emphasized Turkishness of the city and reflects highly national and religious values.

The title which is used in the exhibition catalogue "You are invited to the conquest of Constantinople" is a highly effective slogan to invite Turkish people to the Conquest museum. (Panoroma 1453 History Museum, 2009:22-23) Topkapı is the place where the fiercest battle took place. Firstly, the national history museum, through its ideological use of space seek to construct visitors as citizens as a collective identity. It seeks to construct visitors as ideological agents who carry the inner meaning of the exhibits.

Secondly, the Panorama Conquest Museum is regarded as a door that opened onto the conquest of Constantinople. The new museum building has sought through its 360 circular external architectural form, to embrace global landscape and to arise from and stand for specific landscapes. The architectural type also represents a "denial of locality" and promotes global aspect. By the way, through this ideological use of space, the visitor was constructed as the beneficiary of the canon of national history knowledge.

Figure 1. The Dome Area of the Conquest Museum
(Source:www.tr.visit2istanbul.com/panorama-1453-fetih-muzesi/)

Thirdly, the effect of the presence of new communication technologies is to graft different kinds of spatial orientation together. Wall panels and documentaries have been prepared to inform and enlighten visitors on their way to the panoramic drawing. In the exhibition, the wall panels in the museum starts with the history of Constantinople and ending with the death of Fatih Sultan Mehmed the Second. This is a very limited time orientation for the city history. These panels discuss different aspects of Constantinople/Istanbul, the Conquest and the Sultan Mehmed the Second. In the exhibition, place has been given to photographs of original miniatures, engravings, plans, sketches, drawings and original objects. The panel texts provided most basic information for the visitors as well as contemporary description, perceptions and interpretations.

The panel corridors called as the "Corridors of Conquest" are symbolically designed to visit the dome section of the museum. In the panoramic space, the visitors are informed about the scene that is surrounding them on all sides. Construction of the visual spaces in the dome of the museum started in 2005 and was completed in 2008. 10.000 live models were employed in the project and realized by eight artists. In the dome section, Mehmed the

Conqueror on his white horse was described and soldiers who are surrounding the Sultan carried four flags that have symbolic meanings. The dome painting shows several war scenes including the fall of the some part of the city wall, using guns and the cannon bulls.

Figure 2. Fatih Sultan Mehmed on his white horse
(Source: http://www.panoramikmuze.com/gallery.php)

The importance of the canon in the conquest of Constantinople was understood by a number of historians. In this regard, the role that firearms played in the siege for the first time was of greater importance than the conquest itself. In historiography, the use of firearms and canon balls are the turning point for world history.

Figure 3. Firearms and Canon Balls in the dome section of Conquest Museum
(Source: http://www.panoramikmuze.com/gallery.php)

With the siege of the city, Europe realized the power of the new technology as well as the power of Ottoman army. The dome painting also represented stories in which were written in chronicles. Well-known historical figures such as Ulubatlı Hasan (who was the first Ottoman soldier to reach tower and raised the Ottoman flag), Akşemseddin, and Molla Gürani (spiritual and academic teachers of the Mehmed II) were also showed in the scenes. Visitors can see eagle figures, used as a symbol of the East Roman Empire, the Byzantines. On the left side in the picture, destroyed segment of the wall symbolized fall of the city. Most of the figures depicted in the dome area showing how the Ottoman army conquest the city after fifty-three days.

Figure 4. The fall of *Constantinople*
(Source: http://www.panoramikmuze.com/gallery.php)

General Director of Kültür AŞ. (Culture JS. Company) Nevzat Bayhan argues that "the 1453 Historical Panorama looks from today to this historical "moment" and then it present it to the future. In a moment when fate and history coincided, the numbers rest at 1453 and the tidings are "glad." This is the concrete form of the idea of a "conquest" that took as its basis a civilization that established peace and the happiness of people……Let us embark on this long journey through history and remember the history that started in this city with the conquest." (The Panorama 1453 Historical Museum, 2009:8).

From looking at the Conquest Museum in this perspective, the idea of conquest in Ottoman-Turkish civilization turned a very positive civilize-maker position. The city Constantinople became a world city where people have been lived in peace and harmony. The faith or conquest belief in Turco-Islamic civilization idealized in museum space and the day when the Constantinople fall was regarded as the day of freedom for people. This is very

Barlas Bozkuş

controversial description of the conquest belief. Intellectually, the organizing committee regarded Istanbul as "Payitaht-ı Zemin –the center of Universe" (Yeryüzünün Merkezi). For this reason, the museum due to its location is the heart of the city as well as the world. Istanbul centered, neo-conservative tendency is the starting point of the 1453 Panorama Conquest Museum. This tendency led to reflection of limited vision in the museum space. As an ideological debate, the 'conquest' or 'fall' of the city was taken place in construction of museum space as well as information panel that give massages to the visitor.

Figure 5. Ottoman Army at gate of the city
(Source: http://www.panoramikmuze.com/gallery.php)

Conclusion

In the formation of nation states, the shaping of museum in modern times provided "material" for display, symbols of national identity and sites of civic education for the masses. History museums have extensively played a major role in newly emerging public space in Turkey. The main subject of this paper introduces an example of the constitution of public space through the 1453 Panorama Conquest Museum which is dedicated to the conquest of Constantinople. The conquest is one of the turning point of Ottoman-Turkish as well as world history.

In the case of the contemporary museum practices, Panorama 1453 is a ritual space for Turkish-Islamic sense of history, control the representation of a great ancestor Mehmed the II and also the national highest values and truths. Looking at the Panorama Museum from Foucaldian approach, the representational and governmental practices doesn't make the

museum as an authoritarian institution. From the different point of view, the controlling power in the re-constructed partly digital museum space is not to described as a destructive force. The relationship between objects, structures and ideological persuasions are sometimes constructive for post-modern museums. It should be noted that contemporary museum practices does not always has negative impacts on persuasion of reality, and symbolic structure of museum space, in this regard, does not always carry out authoritarian practices.

As can be seen as this study examines the Panorama 1453 is a national history museum, museums have in fact contributed to a form of institutionalized rationalization of the past which served to legitimate national identity, history as well as modernity. The post-modern structure in Turkish museums brought a new understanding of national history and rationalization of the past. In the case of Panorama 1453 History Museum, heritage representations are not directly related to classical museum display, rely heavily on the re-constructed virtual reality rather than the aura of the historical object.

The Panorama 1453 considered as a national history museum is to address issues of Ottoman-Turkish identity effectively. The museum concentrates on articulating a neo-conservative ideological spatial regime which covers individual in a spiritual collective entity named as "faith". The faith discourse in the museum attempts to create some kind of cognitive space which creates a hegemonic discourse of national identity. The dome shaped section named as the heart of the Panorama Conquest Historical Museum is a monumental ideological space that covers the empire, the city as well as the Turkish nation. Thus the dome shaped section of the museum is an interesting technical and construction exercise but a failure in intellectual engagement.

References

Ada, S. (2011) *Turkish Cultural Policy Report: A Civil Perspective*. İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınlar: İstanbul

Boswell, D. and Jessica E. (1999) *Representing the Nation A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums.* Routledge and The Open University: London and New York.

Erkal, S. (2009) *Panorama 1453 History Museum*. İBB Yayınları: İstanbul

Foucault, M. (1985) *The Order of Things,* Tavistock: London

Harvey, D. (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Blackwell: Cambridge Massachusetts.

Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000) *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. Routledge: London and New York.

Karp I. and Lavine, S. (eds) (1991), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Smitsonian Press, Washington and London.

McDonald, S. (1998) *The Politics of Display: Museum, Science and Culture*. Routledge: London and New York.

Barlas Bozkuş

Shaw, Wendy M.K. (2004) *Osmanlı Müzeciliği: Müzeler, Arkeoloji ve Tarihin Görselleştirilmesi.* İletişim Yayınları: İstanbul.

Sherman D.J. and Rogoff I. (eds). (2000) *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses and Spectacles*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.

Volkerling, M. (1997) *Watch this Space Ideological and Cognitive Dimensions of Spatiality in New National Museums*, International Journal of Cultural Policy, 4(1)183-199.

Walsch, K. (1997) *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World.* Routledge: London and New York.

Online sources: http://www.panoramikmuze.com/gallery.php (Access on December 10, 2013)

"Kültür AŞ.'ye Bağlı Müzeler Ziyaretçi Rekoru Kırdı" http://www.miniaturk.com.tr/haberler.php?id=192 (Access on December 10, 2013)