

# Turkish Studies Symposium 2013

## Seventh Annual Turkish Studies Symposium: Ethnographies of Istanbul

**Symposium Poster**



**Friday, April 5, 2013**

**9:30 am – 5:00 pm**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Levis Faculty Center (Reading Room, 1st floor)  
919 W Illinois St.  
Urbana, IL 61801 ([map](#))

*Organized by:*

**European Union Center**

*Co-sponsored by:*

**Russian, East European and Eurasian Center (REEEC)**

**Center for Global Studies (CGS)**

**Department of Anthropology**

**Department of Urban and Regional Planning**

**Center for South Asian & Middle Eastern Studies (CSAMES)**

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**Special pre-symposium event:**

**Film screening: Ekumenopolis: City without limits** (a documentary film about Istanbul)

Introduced by and followed by Q&A Session

with [Deniz Ay](#), PhD Student in Urban and Regional Planning

Thursday, April 4, 2013

Time: 6 PM

223 Gregory Hall

810 South Wright Street

Urbana, IL 61801 ([map](#))

Film [website](#)

Watch [trailer](#)

*Film screening is co-sponsored by the University of Illinois Turkish Studies and Department of Linguistics Language Program Film Series (Less Commonly Taught Languages – LCTL – Movie Night)*

## About the Symposium

Global cities exert as much attraction on the inquiring minds of scholars as on casual travelers, and cities that lie outside the older hubs of domination of Europe and the U.S. do even more so, not chiefly because they add the lure of the exotic, but also because they arouse curiosity on where our world may be heading. Centers of art, business, entertainment, politics, and agents of synthesis



and change across sub-regions, they serve now as causes and beacons of major social and demographic shifts. Their chaotic energies can and have been scrutinized for insights into the vacillations and reorientations of our day or the likely shape of things to come.



Istanbul has been one of the cities contending for the title of global city since the 1990s. Its ascent predated and anticipated the growing visibility of the nation state, which it serves with increasing frequency as unofficial symbol, but it also gains visibility and influence from the sharper political definition of Turkey at the crossroads of the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe. The city sprawls over the meandering shores and low hills surrounding the two sides of an inner sea that antiquity took to be the geographic divide between Europe and Asia, its financial and multiplying housing high-rise

complexes standing at a respectful distance from the historic peninsula at the southeast corner of its European part that houses the heritage of its Ottoman and Byzantine pasts. This symposium will explore the theme “Ethnographies of Istanbul.” It aims to explore a number of contemporary issues brought together in the hyper-urban space of Istanbul from multiple disciplinary perspectives, opening up a possible ending meditation on the degree of historical contingency or determination in their coincidence for further dialogue with comparable work done in other world areas. The three panels will be anchored around a set of themes that together provide a framework for such reflection:

- The Allure of the Crossroads City: Cosmopolitan culture, immigration flows into/out of Istanbul, and the growth of international tourism
- Challenges of Urban Redevelopment: Property Rights, Population Growth and Public Spaces:
- Iconography and Islamic Fashion in Istanbul: The ‘art scene’ as cultural-business scene and Islamic fashion

## Schedule

9:30 am	Coffee
9:45 am	<p>Welcome and Introductory Remarks  <b>Bryan Endres</b>, Director, European Union Center; Associate Professor of Agricultural Law, University of Illinois  <b>Mahir Şaul</b>, Anthropology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign</p>
<p>10:00 am –  12:00 pm  <b>Panel I</b></p>	<div data-bbox="404 1159 1000 1530" data-label="Image"> </div> <p><b>PANEL I – THE ALLURE OF THE CROSSROADS CITY:</b>  <i>Cosmopolitan culture, immigration flows into/out of Istanbul, and the growth of international tourism</i>  Panelists:  <b>Derya Özkan</b>, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich</p> <p>Institute of European Ethnology  <i>“Gecekondu Chic in Cool İstanbul: A new enclosure of the urban cultural commons?”</i>  <b>Amy Mills</b>, Geography, University of South Carolina  <i>“Cosmopolitanism, Urban Friction, and İstanbul as an Actant City”</i>  <b>Mahir Şaul</b>, Anthropology, University of Illinois  <i>“An Immigrant Geography of İstanbul”</i>  Moderator: <b>Stafanos Katsikas</b>, Modern Greek Studies, University of Illinois</p>

<p>12:00 pm – 2:00 pm</p>	<p>Lunch (for presenters and invited guests)</p>
<p>2:00 pm – 3:15 pm</p> <p><b>Panel II</b></p>	 <p><b>Panel II – CHALLENGES OF URBAN REDEVELOPMENT:</b> <i>Property rights, population growth and public spaces</i></p> <p><i>Panelists:</i></p> <p><b>Tolga İslam</b>, Urban Planning, Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul “The Evolution of Gentrification in İstanbul”</p> <p><b>Asu Aksoy</b>, Cultural Management/Communications, Bilgi University, İstanbul “Improvised City: Adil Kebap Dürüm [short documentary screening with introduction/discussion by project collaborator Asu Aksoy; project by Asu Aksoy, Kevin Robins, Kaan Çuhacı]”</p> <p><i>Moderator:</i> Ercan Balcı, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign</p>
<p>3:15 pm – 3:30 pm</p>	<p>Break</p>
<p>3:30 pm – 4:45 pm</p>	 <p><b>Panel III – ICONOGRAPHY &amp; ISLAMIC FASHION IN ISTANBUL:</b> <i>The ‘art scene’ as cultural-business scene and Islamic fashion</i></p> <p><i>Panelists:</i></p> <p><b>Asu Aksoy</b>, Cultural Management/Communications, Bilgi University, İstanbul “Global City Looking for an Identity: Reshaping and Reimagining of İstanbul”</p> <p><b>Anna Secor</b>, Geography, University of Kentucky “The veil, desire, and the gaze: turning the inside out (by Anna Secor and Banu Gokariksel)”</p> <p><i>Moderator:</i> Valerie Hoffman, Department of Religion; Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign</p>

4:45 pm –  
5:00 pm

Wrap-up and Q&A

## Abstracts

Derya Özkan, **“Gecekondu Chic in Cool Istanbul: A new enclosure of the urban cultural commons?”**

Amy Mills, **“Cosmopolitanism, Urban Friction, and Istanbul as an Actant City”**

Mahir Şaul, **“An Immigrant Geography of Istanbul”**

Tolga İslam, **“The Evolution of Gentrification in İstanbul”**

Asu Aksoy, **“Improvised City: Adil Kebap Dürüm”**

Asu Aksoy, **“Global City Looking for an Identity: Reshaping and Reimagining of Istanbul”**

Anna Secor, **“The veil, desire, and the gaze: turning the inside out (by Anna Secor and Banu Gokariksel)”**

**Derya Özkan**, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich Institute of European Ethnology  
*“Gecekondu Chic in Cool Istanbul: A new enclosure of the urban cultural commons?”*

My paper discusses the changing imaginations of the gecekondu in Istanbul by focusing on the changing relationships between urban culture and cultural capital from the 1970s to today. One major aspect of this change is a shift from an understanding of the gecekondu as a negative signifier of “crude urbanization” (considered from a developmentalist point of view as typical of third world cities) to a reconsideration, affirmation and then celebration of the “crude” characteristics of urban culture as exciting and potentially positive features of a creative, cosmopolitan, “cool” city (seen from the perspective of neoliberal globalism). A fascination with the informal aspects of the gecekondu in particular and urban informality in general is increasingly replacing the earlier denunciation of urban irregularities and disorderliness. This is not only apparent in Istanbul but also cuts across urban cultural processes at a global scale. My examples come from several domains of urban cultural production, namely, practices of contemporary art and design, urbanism, tourism and the museum. In this paper I analyze a fashion collection titled Dolmuş and discuss how the urban social and cultural history of the gecekondu and the working class cultures of the 1970s in Istanbul are reappropriated and an aspect of local urban culture is turned into cultural (and eventually economical) capital by a fashion designer. To what extent do these practices function as a normalization of the urban social history of the gecekondu in Istanbul? In

what ways can we consider these emerging practices of affirming the gecekondu as an enclosure of the urban cultural commons?

**Amy Mills**, Geography, University of South Carolina

*“Cosmopolitanism, Urban Friction, and Istanbul as an Actant City”*

This paper brings a materialist and sensorial urban perspective to studies of cosmopolitanism and national identity in Istanbul. Urban encounters condition local imaginations of what it means to be urban, and to be a Turk. Urban life involves reverberating interactions among things, people, and ideas that link urban situations to national and geopolitical processes. Inspired by Anna Tsing, I examine the “friction” of the city, the “grip of worldly encounter” that produces unpredictable and shifting connections with others. Urban encounters, connections, and interactions are interpreted by Istanbulites with images of a European modernity and words like ‘cosmopolitan’ (kozmpolit) and ‘civilized’ (medeniyet). These images and words, in turn, reproduce a particular understanding of an Istanbulite urbanism. Oral histories and satirical representations of urban encounters also employ nationalist discourses in an effort locate Turkish identity in Istanbul, and Turkey’s identity as European. I examine Istanbul as a material site of encounter that generates processes that reverberate beyond the city itself. This paper is based on two bodies of research: my previous ethnographic project on the formerly multiethnic neighborhood of Kuzguncuk, Istanbul; and my current research on representations of the city in Republican-era satirical journals. More than the theater for social interaction, the complex material and social elements of the city make it a generative space, an actant element in the processes of imagining and debating with whom, and where the nation’s future lies. This approach has interesting implications, for it demands that we consider processes such as rural-urban migration and the processes of urban renewal, urban development, or urban dislocation as having a bearing on geographic imaginations of Turkish national and geopolitical processes.

**Mahir Şaul**, Anthropology, University of Illinois

*“An Immigrant Geography of Istanbul”*

Migrants may typically occupy spaces abandoned by locals, but the volatility of emergent ethnic enclaves and the restlessness of socio-spatial transformation in Istanbul calls for commentary. In less than two decades sub-Saharan immigration has already gone through an eventful history of movement through the urban landscape. Theses based on fieldwork conducted ten years ago read as descriptions of a bygone era. The driving force of African neighborhoods in Istanbul is unregulated migration flow and the economic dynamism of the migrants, but state and now municipality set the

parameters of urban morphology. National policy determined the fate of the earlier communities whose expulsion opened up inner city space for the new migrants; in the past benign neglect and electoral politics facilitated title transfer and de facto occupation, as it also allowed rural migrants occupy peripheral public domains for shantytown development. But the international migrants of our day come to a new climate. Not only the bustle of financial and export sectors, but unwritten rules of law and order set the boundaries of housing for the aliens. As rent-seeking replaces political patronage immigrant housing evolves around the contours of private and public gentrification projects under the logic of the market. The presentation provides an overview of the successive and diverse sub-Saharan neighborhood making efforts in Istanbul with questions on their stability in the near future.

**Tolga İslam**, Urban Planning, Yıldız Teknik University, İstanbul

*“The Evolution of Gentrification in İstanbul”*

It has been more than three decades since the first signs of gentrification are seen in Istanbul. In thirty years, the meaning and scope of the process has changed dramatically. This presentation describes the evolution of gentrification in Istanbul by examining the process in three consecutive eras with different dynamics: pre-2000s, early 2000s and post 2005, and highlights the discerning characteristics of each era. The presentation gives a special focus on the post 2005 era of state-led gentrification under the guise of regeneration projects and tries to depict the dynamics of this new gentrification wave and address the similarities between and differences from cases taking place in the “global north”, as well as discussing its current and possible impacts on the local residents and the city as a whole.

**Asu Aksoy**, Department of Cultural Management, Department of Communications;  
Director, Cultural Policy and Management Research Center, Bilgi University, Istanbul

*“Improvised City: Adil Kebap Dürüm”*

The reflections in this paper start from the once-upon-a-time existence of Adil Kebap Dürüm, a small informal kebab business run from a roadside wooden shack in the gecekondu (slum) district of Paşa Mahallesi in Istanbul. The shack was built by Adil Tekirdağ, a one-time migrant from Urfa in the southeast of Turkey. Adil is a carpenter and gecekondu builder, and a talented musician playing saz and singing for many years in the clubs and bars of Beyoğlu in Istanbul. For Adil, the shack was for some considerable time his “bread basket”. But in recent years, Istanbul has been in a process of dramatic urban transformation. Those gecekondu areas within the central districts of the city have become development zones for real estate companies and investors. As a result the gecekondu land parcels began to be replaced by rising

apartment blocks. Adil, alongside with the owners of the parcels in his neighbourhood, was compelled to (or wanted to profit from) the growing interest of real estate developers and decided to replace his old gecekonddu house with an apartment. With the building of the apartment the kebab shack was dismantled as well. With this transformation, what has been termed the informal urbanization period, is coming to an end. As the informal city structures are razed to the ground in a manner that denies them any social or architectural or other significance, their place in the collective memory of the city is also being totally driven to extinction.

Our intention in this paper is to explore new ways and new modalities of addressing the significance of this fast disappearing (and extinguished) gecekonddu culture for Istanbul's self-understanding – ways that aspire to transcend the prevailing condition of blame and effective closure on the issue of informal urbanization. The predominant discourse treats informal urbanization at best as a transitory phase towards modernization, undermining the creative labour of the self-made city. Seen by many as a block to modernization, to planning efforts and to city's attractiveness in the global age, informal urbanization is counterposed to modernity. With the uptake of the neoliberal policies, the path towards globalisation is seen to reside in the superimposition of urban renewal projects that claim to root out any remnants of pre-modern relations and reinstall modernity. What we shall be questioning is first, whether it is correct to characterise informal urbanisation as lacking in modernity, and second, analyse the kind of modernity that is being envisaged by the neoliberal urban renewal logic and then to see if this is the kind of modernity that we would like to inhabit.

*"Global City Looking for an Identity: Reshaping and Reimagining of Istanbul"*

Istanbul is at the heart of Turkey's cultural and artistic production. The majority of cultural and creative industry companies and art institutions are based in Istanbul and with its centuries old urban history, it is one of the richest heritage sites in the country. Istanbul is therefore key to understand the politics of culture in the country. In this talk I shall be first, looking at the major cultural institutions and analyse what their cultural programming consists of, where they are situated in the city and how they constitute their audience. We shall see that there has emerged parallel cultural universes, one concentrating in the centre of the city, in the historic Pera district (the non-Muslim neighbourhood of the Ottoman period) and offering a diet of contemporary art to an international audience of highly sophisticated art circles and global cultural tourists; and the other, in the 'peripheries', that is to say, districts of Istanbul's now fifteen million large metropolis, shaped by the municipal cultural centres offering socio-cultural programming that is being very much shaped by the present government of the AK



Party's politics of improvement of cultural services in the peripheries. The second issue to examine is the more general discursive climate that these cultural institutions find themselves in. We find that the 'global city' discourse has become central in AKP's vision of Istanbul in the new millennium. Istanbul figures as the financial capital of the nation and of the region at large, a metroregion of increasing population composed of multiple centres reigning over a huge territory around the Marmara Sea, a global hub of communications, transportation and logistics, a major tourism destination competing with Paris and London and a global centre for congress business, fashion and cinema industry. This vision translates to museumification of heritage sites, gentrification and cleaning up of historic inner-city areas, total transformation of certain central districts for recreation and global tourism and, of course, to massive new infrastructural projects such as new airports, city districts, bridges, and so forth. Istanbul in its entirety is being reshaped in the image of a global city of hyper mobility of capital and consumers. In this recounting of the making of the global city image, there is one aspect which needs closer scrutiny. In the third part of my talk, I shall concentrate on this aspect, that is to say, on the theme of 'the reconquest of the city'. I shall clarify this by focusing on the recent plan to transform Taksim Square at the symbolic heart of the city's republican history of modernization and secularization. As Taksim Square is being targeted to be re-ordered as a pedestrian zone flanked by a massive structure of the reconstructed Ottoman military barracks (the Topçu Kışlası) as a shopping mall and an entertainment area, this constitutes not just another step in making Istanbul closer to the desired global city image. It is, I shall argue, a significant move by the government to shape and re-balance the cultural and artistic identity that is now concentrated in the centre. The 'open space' idea of the Taksim Gezi Parkı – the public park in Taksim – will now be re-fashioned as a functionally defined space of shopping with its architecture that harks back to an imagined Ottoman past. The contemporary art scene concentrated in this area will be facing new competition from a recreation (an ice rink) and perhaps more significantly a new symbolic language of neo-Ottomanism. What will Taksim square say of Istanbul with this new image?

**Anna Secor**, Geography, University of Kentucky

"The veil, desire, and the gaze: turning the inside out (by Anna Secor and Banu Gokariksel)"

If clothes are the image of the self, then what kind of self is mapped upon the veiled surface? Veiling has inspired much political, social, and psychoanalytic critique, but the perspectives of women who veil are rarely the impetus for these theories. Our work is based on focus groups and interviews with over 80 veiled (tesettürlü) women in Istanbul

and Konya. In the context of the rise of fashionable veiling in Turkey, we argue that veiling is not simply about blocking the gaze but instead about mobilizing a particular visual regime, one that enacts its own aesthetics and ethics. Veiled women are not invisible; they are visible in a particular manner and they are active participants in producing that visibility. We argue that for veiled women, the clothed body is the site of a project to map an ideal of harmony that has both aesthetic and ethical registers. This ideal of a unified, harmonious appearance (which, we will suggest, exists somewhere between the psychoanalytic ego ideal and an Islamic ideal of the self) is ruptured by materialist and corporeal desire, what women call *nefis*. Veiling-fashion, we argue, both incites *nefis*/desire and works as a means of governing it.

## Speaker Bios

**Asu Aksoy**, Department of Cultural Management, Department of Communications; Director, Cultural Policy and Management Research Center, Bilgi University, Istanbul

**Tolga İslam**, Urban Planning, Yildiz Teknik University, Istanbul

As a researcher, Tolga İslam has been working on gentrification for the past 10 years, mainly focusing on the gentrification processes taking place in Istanbul. He has written his PhD thesis on state-led / urban renewal based gentrification in a Roman neighborhood, Sulukule / Istanbul (2009), and master thesis on (classical) gentrification and gentrifiers in Galata / Istanbul (2003). He has published a number of articles on gentrification, urban renewal and urban discourse. He is currently working as an assoc. prof. at the Urban Planning Department of Yildiz Technical University (for more info: [tolgaislam.com](http://tolgaislam.com)).

**Amy Mills**, Geography, University of South Carolina

Amy Mills is an urban cultural geographer with a master's degree in Middle East Studies and a doctorate in Geography from the University of Texas at Austin. Her research lies at the intersections of critical human geography and interdisciplinary Middle Eastern studies. Her book, *Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul* (University of Georgia Press, 2010) was the winner of the 2011 Jane Jacobs Urban Communication Foundation Book Award. Her new project on satire, urbanism, and Istanbulite nationalism is supported by a Josephine Abney Fellowship in Gender and Women's Studies at the University of South Carolina and the American Research Institute in Turkey. Dr. Mills also has a research interest in the production of geographic knowledge and has collaborated with the Social Science Research Council on a project on disciplinarity and Middle East studies. Dr. Mills has held leadership positions in the Turkish Studies Association, and the Middle East/North Africa and Political Geography

Specialty Groups of the Association of American Geographers. Her research has been funded by various sources, including the Institute of Turkish Studies and the Fulbright-Hays Foundation. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of South Carolina.

**Derya Özkan**, Institute of European Ethnology, University of Munich

Derya Özkan studied Architecture, Sociology and worked as a professional editor of journals on architecture and urban culture, before she went back to academia to pursue a Ph.D. In 2008, she completed a dissertation titled “The Misuse Value of Space: Spatial Practices and the Production of Space in Istanbul” and received her Ph.D. degree in Visual and Cultural Studies from the University of Rochester. She joined the Institute of European Ethnology at the University of Munich in 2008 as a Postdoctoral Fellow. Since 2011, she has been holding a DFG Emmy Noether Fellowship and leading the Research Project “**Changing Imaginations of Istanbul. From Oriental to the ‘Cool’ City.**” Her research interests are situated at the intersection points of urban studies, cultural studies and migration studies.

**Anna Secor**, Geography, University of Kentucky

Anna J. Secor is Professor of Geography at the University of Kentucky. Her research focuses on theories of space, politics, and subjectivity. She is author of over thirty articles and book chapters that have appeared in journals such as *Area*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Antipode*, *Environment and Planning A*, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *Gender, Place and Culture*, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, *Political Geography*, *Review of International Political Economy*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, and *Urban Geography*. Her research on Islam, state, and society in Turkey has been funded by the National Science Foundation. Her most recent work in Turkey is a **collaborative NSF-funded project with Banu Gokarikel (UNC) on the production and consumption of Islamic fashions in Turkey.**

**Mahir Şaul**, Anthropology, University of Illinois

Mahir Şaul spans in his research two world areas, Africa and the Middle East; thematically he carried out work on household organization, economic and political history, the transnational movement of people and ideas, and language and visual arts in their social context. His current project concerns south-south migration, based on a year of fieldwork among West and Central African immigrants in Istanbul. At the same time he publishes on African cinema and on his earlier research in West Africa. He carried out most of his fieldwork in Burkina Faso, with three separately funded extended periods of residence, and a large number of shorter study visits. Questions about intra-

household relations, agricultural work schedules, and gender roles informed these research episodes. During his second stay in 1983 he began his long-term engagement with Bobo-speaking villages, continuing his earlier focus on farm organization, but extending it now to community ritual calendar and masquerades. His approach gradually took a more pronounced historical turn. He spent time in the colonial archives in France, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and the archives of the White Father missionaries in Rome. He published an anthropological history of a violent African resistance movement in the early colonial period, and essays on the polycephalous political order of the late nineteenth century Volta region, economic history, older moneys and transition to colonial currency. He participated in a large multi-country project on environmental history, collaborating for the purpose with Burkinabe colleagues. He followed work on rural, urban, and cross-border trade with surveys on the same topic in Mali, Senegal, Benin, Togo, and Ghana. His current sub-Saharan immigrants research builds on this background; it foregrounds trade connections, self-employment, and aspirations for self-betterment as against prevailing themes in the literature, such as helplessness, precarious existence, and transitory movements. The second world area where Şaul conducts research is Turkey in its Middle Eastern and European settings. He wrote on Judeo-Spanish sociolinguistics, has an abiding interest in Turkish oral literature and folklore, and gave lectures on Turkish nationalism and modernization process. He held teaching and research positions in various European institutions. On the heels of an African film festival in Urbana, Illinois, he curated in 2012 a high profile African film series for the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art in Turkey. He teaches on anthropological social theory and Marxism, economic anthropology, transnational migrations, Islam, African cinema, African ethnography, and Sephardic culture.