THE CITY THAT HIDES ITSELF:

Movement and Meaning in Urban Form

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the practice and perception of urban form in Urfa—an ethno-linguistically diverse city in southeastern Turkey, where in recent years state development and village-to-urban migration have brought rapid material change. Based on fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork and archival research, I argue for the significance of place—the material environment—in the formation, maintenance, and reorganization of communal identities. Here, urban form is not merely a neutral container for social life; it is a meaningful register of the diverse movements (personal, familial, communal) that have shaped the modern city. Each of five chapters examines the material transformation of a key locus of cultural reproduction in Urfa (ritual spaces, heritage sites, domiciles), and asks how identities associated with these loci (religious, ethnic, gendered) may become knowable, recognizable, and contestable in the process. Focusing on the politics and experience of these tense and often-disputed place-making projects, I illuminate a complexly contested hermeneutics of space, time, and social difference—which, in turn, sheds light on the ambiguities of “democratic opening” in Turkey’s political present.
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Introduction

The City that Hides Itself

“Cities are almost never single-minded” - Spiro Kostof

This dissertation tells a story about the city of Urfa (formally Şanlıurfa), and the people who inhabit, interpret, observe, and traverse it. It is because they were given to speak of “the city” that I myself am inclined to do so: At celebrations, a popular folk song calls Where are you from, where are you from? (Nerelisin, Nerelisin?) And the refrain, which the audience never fails to produce, is not Turkey, not one’s region or village, but Urfa: Urfalıyım, I am from Urfa.

A city of 900,000 on the Turko-Syrian border, Urfa is the capital of a province of the same

1 1991: 162
2 The city’s official name, Şanlıurfa, is a recent one, and is very seldom used by local inhabitants. In 1984, the Turkish parliament gave Urfa the honorific suffix Şanlı, meaning glorious, in recognition of its armed resistance to a short-lived French occupation after World War I. This pre-Republican uprising (carried out by Kurdish tribes interested primarily in preserving their own autonomy) was later officially interpellated as a front in Turkey’s “War of Independence.” As others have noted (e.g. Oktem), the suffix was added in 1984, when Kurdish separatism was gaining steam (the same year, in fact, that the PKK was founded), and when the loyalty of southeastern provinces was most in question. The suffixes were also given to two of Urfa’s neighboring provinces, Gaziantep (“Veteran” Antep) and Kahramanmaras (“Heroic” Maras).
3 In Turkish one’s locality is expressed by adding a simple suffix to the place name, (i, i, lu, lü, according the vowel harmony). Hence someone from Urfa is Urfalı and someone from Istanbul is Istanbullı.
name. Known as “the city of Abraham,” it is believed to mark the place where the prophet was born. At the heart of the city is an ancient ritual complex comprised of mosques, graves, and springs, which has for centuries drawn pilgrims from throughout the region. The province is bordered on the northwest by the Euphrates, which separates it from the Anatolian plateau; on the east by the foothills of the Taurus mountains, which mark the start of the Kurdish highlands; and on the south by the Syrian border, which opens onto the Mesopotamian desert. Urfa is thus a border zone par excellence, a place where three distinct cultural regions meet and, in meeting, terminate. The city center is tri-ethnic, a mixture of Turks, Kurds, and Arabs; the surrounding villages are inhabited by Kurds (in the north) and Arabs (in the south).

Urfa is, in many ways, the state’s quintessential “other”: Travelers have long chronicled the shock of crossing the Euphrates and finding themselves in a Turkey that they no longer recognize. In “mystical and pious” Urfa, a popular English-language guidebook observes, “you begin to feel you’ve reached the Middle East” (Lonely Planet 2009: 607). This pithy description condenses the various ways in which Urfa plays “other” to the West of the country – the “modern,” secular Turkey of the Turks, the one that could almost pass for Europe. Those “Middle Eastern” qualities touted as exotic touches in the guidebook – “women cloaked in black

4 The province, which has a population of roughly 1.6 million, is divided into eleven administrative districts, including the center: Akçakale, Birecik, Bozova, Ceylanpinar, Halfeti, Harran, Hilvan, Sanliurfa, Siverek, Suruç, and Viranşehir. Each district has its own municipality

5 By “cultural region,” I mean a geographical territory where an ethno-linguistic group claims autochthony and majority status, and where at least some members of that group have attempted to establish a corresponding political entity. These cultural regions are neither stationary nor particularly long-standing (they are mostly twentieth century configurations, and some are especially volatile right now - e.g. events in northern Syria at the time of writing). What I am referring to are certain correspondences among territory, language, ethnicity, and political entity, which, however fuzzy and contested, are nonetheless ethnographic facts.
chadors,” “the call to prayer as an essential soundtrack” – are precisely those which, for many Western Turks, single Urfa out as an object of cultural condescension. The “Middle East” is modern Turkey’s quintessential anachronistic other – the past that was disavowed in order that modern Turkey might become modern Turkey (Yavuz 1993, Akcam 2004, Gokce 2011, Altinyildiz 2007, Celik 1993, Oktem 2008, Bozdogan and Kasaba 1997).

Ubiquitous lavender scarves, worn by both men and women, and ranging in color from pale lilac to true purple, are among the city’s most visually striking features. Every visitor to Urfa, it seems, wants to know what the purple headscarves mean. One cannot be in public without seeing at least one purple scarf, usually several, and not uncommonly dozens. Most visitors have never seen anything like it, and it suggests to them an air of mystery or opacity. Coming often from Western Turkey or from Europe, many share a common-sense understanding of style as a matter of individual expression, and the sight of so many people wearing the same thing is, for many, perplexing. Since the purple scarves of Urfa are clearly not expressive of individual preference as such, most people assume that they express some form of collective identity.

Early in my fieldwork, I too had questioned one of my first contacts about the significance of the scarves: Were they worn as the “traditional dress” of an ethnic group? Did they signal membership in a particular religious sect? A certain tribe? What did they mean? My Urfalı companion had shrugged and said, “they like them.”

6 As is often the case, the exoticism of the guidebook has as its counterpart in everyday cultural denigration (Said 1978).

7 Consider, relatedly, that the Western media often depicts the moment when Muslims, kneeling in straight rows, bow their heads to the ground in unison: the moment of unity is the moment of maximal Othering. I owe this insight to Adam Becker.
As unsatisfying as I found this explanation at the time, I never found a much better one: The scarves are worn by men and women, from every ethnic group, from every district of the province. They do not mark a particular category of person, nor do they point to some meaning beyond themselves. Like much else in Urfa, these scarves confound our interpretive means: How to understand a form of collective expression that eludes the categories (religious, ethnic, gendered) within which we perceive difference? Most often, inscrutability is deemed a characteristic of the city itself. This is true not only in the words of casual visitors, but in wider discourses about Urfa—sociological, journalistic, developmental—that lament its “inward-looking or closed character” (Gökçe et al. 2010)—its self-containment and rejection of the outside world.

If Urfa is viewed as opaque or homogeneous, this may be because our conceptual and interpretive categories (e.g., ethnicity, sect) have failed to name the forms of difference relevant to its inhabitants. The dissertation is a meditation on this question, and an effort to elucidate an alternative hermeneutics of difference. Yet interpretation is not a question of simply replacing “our” categories with “local” ones: as implied above (“they like them”), alternative formulations of difference are not immediately legible, mapped out on the surface of things. How then might urban form serves as a meaningful register of identity? I begin by visiting the gendered knowledge that is tacit but indispensable to space and social life in Urfa.
One of the most common descriptors of the city, used by inhabitants and outsiders alike, is that it is “a closed society” (kapalı bir toplum), or “a city turned in upon itself” (içeriye dönən bir şehir), and even, I was once told, “a city that hides itself” (kendini saklayan bir şehir). This quality seems to inhere in the city itself, tangible in the shapes and sounds of its urban form. Urfa’s neighborhoods are tightly knit, composed of narrow, capillary, and irregularly oriented streets. Spaces for open congregation are few and far between, and the sole monumental definition is provided by minarets that rise a story or two about the stone houses of the old city. In Urfa (and other Islamic cities) neighborhoods, streets, and houses are commonly said to be “inward facing,” “involuted,” “closed off” (Kostof 1963: 50).

One of the things that interests me about these formulations is that they are already implicitly gendered. The layout of urban space is typically assumed to reflect the “cultural values of Islam,” and, specifically, a preoccupation with demarcating the realm of women from the realm of men. This linking of gender and the built environment is part of the language of architectural history, but it is also largely a language of common sense – in fact, the same word, kapalı, is used colloquially to describe a city that is “closed” (kapalı bir şehir) and a woman who is

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9 Questions about gender and space in the Middle East are inextricably and linked, in both directions. It seems fairly evident that when people comment on the “status” of Muslim women, spatial questions are of paramount importance (e.g., the issue of confinement, of veiling, of public presence and visibility). But the inverse is also true: when people talk about urban space in the Middle East, gender is often at stake, either implicitly or explicitly.

10 Nilufer Gole, for instance, has recently argued for “the centrality of gendered and related bodily regimens and spaces in the making of the [Islamic] public sphere” (2008: 123), and Akkoyunlu (1989) makes this case about Urfa specifically.
“veiled” (kapalı bir bayan).

Urfa’s distinctive architectural style does suggest a preoccupation with structuring relations between men and women. In the old city, for instance, houses are divided into two main parts, haramlık and selamlık: the former for greeting guests, the latter a domestic space for family only (the realm of women). The roofs of houses are the same height, so that no one can see into the inner courtyard of a neighbor’s house. Inside many of these houses, there are small windows cut into the stone walls that divide inner and outer courtyards, so that objects and food can be passed back and forth between people in different parts of the house without direct contact and visibility.

In the new city, both stores and restaurants are divided into two sections, one for men and one for “families” (meaning groups that include women). The family area is always lofted or otherwise removed from the main entrance, so that it is not immediately visible and accessible from the street. Similarly, clothing stores in Urfa have men’s sections on the entry level (and this includes chain stores like the department store YKM, which in other Turkish cities generally have women’s sections on the entry-level).

But the enduring forms of the built environment comprise only part of what I mean by the gendering of space: I refer also to ongoing styles of movement and interaction that permeate public places and public decorum. For Urfa women, there are certain ways of dressing, and certain ways of speaking with male doctors or shop owners. There are streets to avoid after dark, people to avoid being seen with, and things that one could not imagine wearing. In practice, observing these conventions appears less as adherence to a rigid set of rules, and more as a honed attentiveness to the movements of the body, and to the arrangement of bodies in space.

In a photograph I took one Ramadan afternoon in 2011, six women and two men stand
against the façade of a mosque. Inside, it is full to capacity, and there is a group of men chanting a *zakir* (remembrance). Their voices drift through the open windows, drawing men and women from the surrounding sites, and they stand outside the mosque, listening. One notices, in the photograph, that the men stand directly in front of the mosque’s windows, while the women have managed to arrange themselves along the edges and interstices (there are also two children, who sit on the threshold). There are no explicit divisions here – no walls, no signs, no “men’s” and “women’s” sections – yet each person has arranged their bodies just so.

Strangers in Urfa address one another by the familial terms *abi* and *abla* (brother and sister), yet there is a certain formality to interactions between unacquainted men and women. On the street, men do not approach unfamiliar women for any reason (and this includes foreign women, as I know firsthand). It is understood that to do so would make the woman *rahatsız,* “uncomfortable,” and this is outside the realm of cultural acceptability. This helps account for the near absence of even mild forms of street harassment (like catcalling or commenting on a woman’s appearance): I have personally only seen children commit such indiscretion, for which they can expect to be chastised or beaten by their elders. There is thus a certain communal vigilance pertaining to matters of gender, as well as other facets of social action and expression. Many of my interlocutors have described a sense of *being seen:* a male interlocutor in his twenties explained to me, “If I were to go outside wearing something crazy, what if someone in my family saw me?”

Thus descriptions of Urfa as tightly knit are not solely produced by journalists and “outsiders,” but also by inhabitants. Many women feel at home in this environment, favoring Urfa as safe (*güvenli*) and comfortable (*rahat*), and its people as respectful (*saygılı*). “I don’t like Istanbul,” Naile reported with a shrug. Her daughter had just moved there as a bride in a sight-
unseen marriage, and the wedding had occasioned Naile’s first visit to a major city of Western Turkey. “It’s very mixed there – there are all kinds of people, and you never know who will do what. There are people from all over the place, from different cultures. Here in Urfa, everyone is the same, and so one is more relaxed (rahat).”

Others feel constrained in this environment, and even hurt by it. Ceyda, a woman my age, was always about to leave Urfa. Over stealthy glasses of raki in my apartment, we would discuss her plans to move to Istanbul or Europe, away from the pressures she felt as a woman, a daughter, a potential wife. This pressure exerted itself in the minutiae of daily life (most immediately, in answering to her mother): Who she could be seen with, how late she should be outside, how thick her eyeliner ought to be. While Ceyda’s evaluation of Urfa is starkly opposed to Naile’s, her description of the city is not so different. On one occasion, she remarked that she was sure everyone in Urfa would go to heaven. I laughed and asked, “Because everyone’s so pious?” “No,” she replied, “because we’re already in hell.”

Things hold together: “Everyone is the same,” “everyone knows everyone”— these are “facts” about the city which most any inhabitant would aver. Such claims must be taken seriously, since they point to something phenomenologically distinctive about Urfa. But that distinctiveness turns out to be very different from “homogeneity.” Consider even Naile’s description—which did not indicate uniformity of language, or ethnicity, or even religion. Instead, she evoked the consistency of interaction and of practice in Urfa, a sense of being in public and knowing what to expect. The latter is processual, the recognition and response of socially relevant distinctions in time. In what follows, I draw on the phenomenology of perception to give a processual account of the shared norms of behavior and decorum that shape public life in the city. As we will see, consistent does not necessarily mean homogeneous – any
more than “everyone knows everyone” means that “everyone is the same.”

The “consistency” of culture

“The plane [of consistency] is not a principle of organization but a means of transportation”

- Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

In a city of nearly nine hundred thousand people, it cannot be true that “everyone knows everyone” – and yet in Urfa I heard this phrase continually, sometimes in approbation, sometimes exasperation. What can this mean, if not that everyone knows everyone individually? In order to further elaborate, my interlocutors would often conjure a hypothetical scenario – “Say you’re sick in the hospital”; “Say you’re visiting my house for the first time…” – thereby evoking reliability of action (“who will do what”) in a concrete situation. In order to elaborate the consistency public interaction in Urfa, I’ll borrow their rhetorical strategy:

Say you’re on a municipal bus in Urfa. Buses crisscross the city, linking disparate neighborhoods, taking on the most varied people, and so the passengers are not a stable group but an ever-changing, heterogeneous mix. And yet interactions in this space are highly patterned. When you step onto the bus, you are not just any individual who may choose any seat. Instead, you enter as a person of a certain age, gender, and physical capability, whose seating options are

11 I owe this formulation of the idea to Carol Greenhouse.
13 e.g., Evime ilk defa icin gitsen… “If you were to come to my house.”
delineated by the relative position of others.

Let’s say (for simplicity’s sake) that these are all of the seats on the bus:

```
M __
M __
W W
```

What happens when a single woman \([W^*]\) enters this scene? One of the men could be expected to switch seats, such that:

```
M __ M M M M
M __ —> ___ —> W* __
W W W W W W
```

As people enter and exit the bus, occupying and emptying seats, the relational field shifts, and people continually rearrange themselves in response to one another. Gender is only one of the relational criteria in play here; others include age, relative physical capability, and whether a person is encumbered (e.g., carrying children or heavy bags). No one of these distinctions categorically “trumps” any other. Rather the salience of any one characteristic is relative, elicited by the particular configuration of bodies at a given instant – so that now, if an elderly man enters the bus \([M^*]\), it would be reasonable to expect something like this:

```
MM MM
W __ —> M*__ (where [W] would find another seat or else stand).
W W W W
```

This choreography is remarkably fluid and consistent. It “works” because, as they say, “everyone knows everyone” – or, better, everyone knows his or her place in relation to everyone.
else. What is “consistent” here is a flow of perception and response, where people continually position themselves in relation to others and according to collectively recognized distinctions. Through this instance of highly patterned, reliable interaction, my aim is to depict “consistency” as a process of differentiation.

The key question, to my mind, is: What is the relationship between observable practices (the movement of bodies on the bus), and “collectively recognized distinctions” (norms)? This is another way of asking what “holds things together”: Do practices reflect/express norms? Do they produce/instantiate them? The choice of verb here is loaded, because it corresponds to traditions of conceptualizing practice within anthropology and related disciplines.

For many years, anthropologists considered movements of the body primarily in terms of what those movements symbolized or encoded. Practice was viewed as significant mainly insofar as it expressed a set of ideal “syntactical relations” among persons (Goffman 2005 [1967]: 1-2). For instance, “male” and “female” would be defined by their binary and reciprocal relationship within a formal structure (much as a pair of phonemes are defined by their reciprocal differentiation within a linguistic structure). The terms, M-F, derive their meaning from their opposition within a classificatory system, independent of their actualization in a given time and space. Men and women know how to dance because the mind (possessed of a culturally-specific choreography [Levi Strauss 1966]) mediates between the embodied subject and the world. Thus observable practice is a manifestation, a playing out in time and space, of an ideal, prior, and

_____________________

14 What eventually came to be known as the “symbolic approach” included a huge range of foundational work in anthropology, from the symbolic structuralism of Levi-Strauss to the interpretivist ethnography of Clifford Geertz, and in simplifying here I do not intend to endorse all criticism of it.
unconscious structure.\textsuperscript{15}

Viewed from a seat on the bus, however, it is impossible to ignore the compelling fact that we always perceive the world from an embodied (and thus partial and temporal) perspective. Here, the conceptual tools offered by phenomenology are illuminating. Merleau-Ponty suggested that—while there \textit{does} seem to be something in the world which precedes one’s being in it—it resides not in a cognitive structure but in bodily being in the world.\textsuperscript{16} For Merleau-Ponty, prior to and underlying conscious thought, there is an \textit{operative, pre-reflexive consciousness} that “situates” us in our life-worlds, “project[ing] round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results from our being situated in all these respects” (2004: 157). The first and central fact of this situatedness is our bodily insertion in space: the world is “curved” around the person, and who in turn “surges” toward the world. There is a kind of consciousness at work here, but it is pre-objective and pre-reflexive (“intentional.”) It manifests itself in the intimate, bodily knowledge that moves one confidently through familiar situations – around the kitchen, across campus – without the intervention of conscious thought: You see a doorknob and you are already reaching out to turn it; you see an elderly man get on the bus, and

\textsuperscript{15} Much like \textit{parole} [speech] is the manifestation of \textit{langue} [language]; the latter exists, fully formed, whether or not it is spoken (Saussure 1977 [1916]).

\textsuperscript{16} Over the course of Merleau-Ponty’s work, his understanding of being in the world would evolve, from “Gestalt” in \textit{Structure of Behavior} (1967); to “intentionality” in \textit{Phenomenology of Perception} (2004); and finally to the concept of “Flesh” in \textit{Visible & Invisible} (1968 [1964]) (Stanford Encyclopedia). These are significant distinctions; for instance it is clear that the concept of “intentionality” (\textit{PP}) is far more subject-centered (grounded in a perceiver) than the later concept of “flesh” (\textit{VI}). I rely mainly on \textit{Phenomenology of Perception} in this paragraph, but I move on from it pretty quickly, since what I’m moving toward in this chapter is impersonal (the milieu or assemblage, the city that hides \textit{itself}). I find the concept of flesh pretty confusing (plus the manuscript of \textit{VI} was never finished, including the chapter on “flesh”), and I rely more on Bergson and Deleuze/Guattari from here on out (I don’t know if you plan to keep this footnote or not? It needs to be cleaned up a bit if so. Also, are you citing the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy?).
you are already moving out of your seat.

For phenomenologists, space is not a neutral stage where relations play out — rather space necessarily enters into and shapes relations. Thus on the bus men and women know well how to dance, but not always as men and women. The relevant criteria are more, and more varied: age, gender, health, familiarity. These terms are best thought of not as intrinsic personal attributes but as extrinsic, relational properties, whose relevance is elicited by certain constellations and distributions of bodies at a given instant. Thus to know who you are, in an important sense, you have to know where you are. And the “where” is constantly changing: For space is not a neutral stage where action takes place, nor is it divided in a way that would dictate action (e.g. with static men’s and women’s sections). Instead, it becomes charged with implicit, differential values, its contours emerging according to the movements that map it. In this scenario – to paraphrase de Certeau - it is not so much that people’s movements are gendered; it is rather those movements that gender (2011: 97).

In arguing that gender inheres in sensible repertoires (rather than preceding those repertoires), I am drawing on critiques of symbolic / structural approaches which came out of the “critical turn” in Anthropology (which corresponds roughly to the “practice turn” in Religious Studies). Practice, it was argued, does not merely express meanings, but rather forms subjects through sensible action (e.g., Jackson 1989). This analytic came to the study of ritual largely via the work of Talal Asad (1993, 2003), whose studies of Islam and medieval Christianity relied heavily on the concepts of discipline and habitus, lending practice theory in these fields a distinctly Foucauldian bent. Ethnographers working in this vein began to address practice as the inscription or “inwardization” of norms, revising earlier approaches by “reversing the direction between outward bodily acts and subjective interiority” (Mahmood 2012: xvi). Thus “woman” is not a
discrete entity that exists and then comes into contact with the world. Rather, one becomes a woman through iterative practice in the world (e.g., Butler 1990, West and Fenstermaker 2002). This approach bears a clear relevance to our scenario, since one cannot understand the reliability of interaction in a space like the bus without understanding the sedimenting effects of repetition, habit and memory: one sees each bus ride through the lens of previous bus rides, and the repertoires of perception and action entailed therein resonate across social domains and contexts (for instance, the way that men and women might array themselves in an open room).

However, there are crucial differences between Foucauldian approaches to practice and the phenomenological approach I would like to propose. I discuss these differences at length in Chapter 4, but two points are particularly salient here and will help to articulate the phenomenological approach I’m developing. First, in conceiving of practice as a process of inscription, from (external) practice to (internal) subjectivity, practice theorists still promote a split between an inner subject and an outer world: in this rendering, outer action precedes or grounds the inner subject, but the latter is still conceived as distinct from the former. Second, they tend to conceive practice as a directed temporal progression, a telos. Ritual, for instance, appears as a process whereby norms come to be inscribed on bodies and souls: Charles Hirschkind describes the practice of “ethical listening” as “a process of sedimentation . . . the accumulation of layer upon layer within the soul of the listener, like lacquer applied to a wooden box” (2006: 26). Implicit in this analytic is an Aristotelian conception of “movement” as the movement of objects toward a given state – their final or correct “pose”) (Nichomachean Ethics 2011). “Time” is the time that it takes to travel that distance or achieve that end. In this teleological formulation, movement is subordinated to form.

Consider by contrast Bergson (2001 [1910], 2004 [1911]), for whom “form” is only ever a
temporary accretion, a zone of relative stability in a world of continual movement. Take his theory of perception, as a relationship between eye and color. For Bergson, “eye” and “color” are not discrete forms that then relate to one another – as, for instance, perceiver and perceived; subject and world; internal and external. Such distinctions are collapsed from the start. For color is “a pulsation of vibrations perceived [as color] only when it encounters the eye, and the eye [is a] series of changes in cells and movements, which becomes an eye only when activated as a power to see” (Colebrook 2013: 8). Rather than a relationship between inside and outside, subject and world, practice and norm, Bergson imagines a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements that connect to form certain configurations in time. These configurations can be relatively stable and enduring, but there can be no final or correct form (because there is nothing outside this unfolding-in-time, there is no term that is not immanent).

If we go back to our bus with Bergson in mind, we might hesitate to draw the line between “subject” and “world,” let alone determine the direction of movement between the two, and instead pause to consider what we are given: an unfolding of relations among perceiving minds, mobile bodies, and a responsive environment. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the term consistency to describe this “holding together of heterogeneous elements,” as they assemble to form diverse human and inhuman milieus out of the most disparate elements—linguistic, gestural, affective, normative—but without any one factor grounding or producing the others. Interaction on the bus is consistent, but it is not a function of structure, nor a final or correct form, but only a certain assembling.

Assemblages like the bus are thus composed of multiple “layers”: “Thinking, culture, identity, and ethics are stratified processes, involving relays and feedback loops between layers of perception operating at different capacities and speeds” (Connolly 2002). These disparate
components sometimes resonate together or reinforce one another; this is what gives perceptual formations their *thickness*, as well as their durability over time. Connolly’s “layers,” however, evoke a very different image of perception than do Hirschkind’s coats of lacquer. For the former, each perception is not only an accretion, but an uncertain conjunction, where habit might collide with thinking, or practice might not correspond to place. There are inevitably dissonances among these layers, which is why iteration does not always mean sedimentation, why *habitus* is vulnerable to disruption, and why no assemblage, however consistent, is ever at perfect equilibrium.

Thus although the gendered dance often *does* unfold seamlessly, the analytic should already suggest the potential for seams or slips: things hold together, but each moment is also in some sense fundamentally open. This ventilates the analysis, and opens it onto the variation of social life as it unfolds in real time. And, as ethnography continually reminds us, there are always lapses or misses (you see an elderly man enter the bus and pretend not to); as well as accommodations and creativity (you are a man and you find that the only available seat is next to a woman, so you improvise a variation, sitting with your legs in the aisle and your head angled slightly away – so that you bend the norms but no one doubts your normalcy). (Not even this bus situation would remain stable during my fieldwork: the system of seating and fare-collection would change, producing an almost vaudevillian disruption). 17

17 On any bus, there are two people working, the driver and the *muavin* (“assistant”). The *muavin*’s main task is to collect the fares from passengers, who may enter the bus through either a front or rear door (thus the toll cannot be collected upon entry to the front door, as in Istanbul). The assistant is constantly on his feet and mobile. He moves back and forth through the space of the bus (making use of front and rear doors, hopping on and off). He does not ask for the fare but, when he is collecting, calls out “yes!” (*evet!*) by which everyone understands to pay. He makes change for those who need it. Usually someone gives the *muavin* money and says the number of passengers it covers, e.g. “two people” (*iki kisi*). It would be
Thinking from the bus invites us to replace our conceptualizations of uniformity or opacity in Urfa with a more nuanced notion of *consistency*, which is not opposed to difference (but is rather itself a patterned play of difference). This has implications for our conceptualization of identity.

highly unusual for two or more people riding together to each pay a separate fare. One person would pay for the others, depending on their hierarchical relationship. For instance, I almost never payed: I am young, I am a woman, and, all else being equal, I’m foreign and thus a guest on the city bus).

The *muavin* also communicates critical information between the driver and the passengers. There are no pre-determined bus-stops and no automated way to send the message that a stop is needed (no illuminated “stop requested” sign for instance), and so the *muavin* asks “is anyone getting off?” (*inen var mı?*) If someone says yes, he calls to the driver “there is someone getting off” (*İnen var*); if not, he calls out “continue” (*devam et*). When the bus does stop, the *muavin* is responsible for telling the driver when all of the passengers have entered or exited and all is clear (“*Devam et!*”).

In addition to mediating between the driver and the passengers, the *muavin* also mediates among passengers themselves. As I mentioned, people usually rearrange themselves spontaneously. But, when the bus is crowded, the situation gets tricky. No one seated has a bird’s eye view, and this is where the *muavin* comes in, gesturing people out of their seats and into new ones, pointing someone who just got on the bus toward the place he or she should sit. This is done with a minimum of words: “Sister, you come…” (*Abla, siz gelin*) “You pass this way. Sit.” (*Siz buraya geç, Otur.*)

In July of 2011, the municipality decided to replace two routes (out of ten or fifteen) with new, government-owned buses. The major difference on these buses was the introduction of “The Urfa Card” (“*The Urfa Kart: For a Civilized City*”). This is a rechargeable fare card to be swiped on entry, which was now only permitted through the front door. Because the purpose of the *muavin* was viewed as collecting fares, the new buses did way with the position. Of course, *muavins* were not just collectors of money; they were also arrangers of space, and they communicated crucial information between passengers and drivers (where to stop, where to pick people up and drop them off, and when it was safe to continue driving.) While on the new buses the fare-collecting function was mechanized, these other functions were not.

In the weeks of the transition, processes that had always run smoothly (paying, getting on and off the bus, switching seats where appropriate), were thrown into chaos. Passengers would wait to board at the back of the bus, but the door would never open. A passenger seated near the back of the bus would shout “I’m getting off!,” and the driver would not hear, and so the entire bus would have to shout (“someone’s getting off!”) to the driver (and then shout “all clear!”) What had always been a smooth and largely pre-conscious set of movements was suddenly a cause for attention. People had to be alert, to step up and fill in gaps in action.

Furthermore, certain implicit norms became impossible to carry on. As mentioned, it would be highly unusual for two or more people riding together to each pay a separate fare. But the electronic cards could only be swiped once at a time, so each passenger now had to pay for him or herself (the model is one person = one fare). The example of the bus is perhaps a very minor one, but it dramatizes how ideas about community and difference inhere in the lived environment—and how changes in community and difference come about when this space is changed.
To say that identity is “relational” is by now commonplace. But I am suggesting, further, that the relational dimension of identity is realizable only in place. And, since “place” itself is never stable (but changes according to the movements that map it), there is no neutral ground to stand on. As ethnographers, we can only learn what the salient forms of identity are by tracing their emergence – paying attention to how certain forms of difference become relevant in certain contexts. Identity is knowable only in time and in space.

The question remains as to how this insight can be developed and pursued methodologically. Michel de Certeau’s classic essay, “Walking in the City,” begins when he abandons the observation deck of the World Trade Center, descending to the ground below. In giving up his bird’s eye view, in placing perception in a located and mobile body, de Certeau gives up reading the city as text (immobilized, orderly), and opts to apprehend it as texture (bustling, kinesthetic, “opaque”). Urban ethnography (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Ferguson 2008, Çelik et al 1994, Gmelch et al 2009) calls for a similar plunge, forsaking the illusion of neutral ground in favor of a qualitative landscape whose “orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 493).

*Ethnography in the city, step by step*

When I first moved to Urfa in September 2010, I was hard pressed to find an apartment. The city’s handful of real-estate agents responded to my queries about “furnished one-bedrooms” with quizzical looks; the standard minimum seemed to be three or four. After more than a month of searching, I found a small, one-bedroom flat tucked away in a blind alley that runs between the old and new cities. When the place was built, forty years earlier, there would have been no “new city” to speak of, so my building would have stood at the very edge of the old town. Today,
the street was as if forgotten, populated mainly by pigeons, and by men who ducked in and out of small offices throughout the day.

Only later would I come to understand that self-respecting women did not live in such places, and certainly not on their own. My friends in Urfa were dismayed by my choice of a home, which they regarded as an equal affront to both hygiene and morality. In Urfa, the idea of living alone is not only foreign but suspect: both men and women live with their parents until they marry and start families of their own. So of course the only one-bedroom flat I found was in an alley on the margins of town, and frequented by marginal types.

An ethnographer “learns” a city in a manner not fundamentally different from its inhabitants – that is, by moving around, responding to others, and being responded to. This process was perhaps expedited for me in Urfa, since inhabitants tended to be free with feedback: well-meaning strangers (always women) would correct my posture; button the top button of my shirts; and suggest that I stop drinking from water bottles in public (which I was told is unseemly). Always, they would begin with the polite, familiar preface Herhalde buralı değilsiniz – “I take it you’re not from here…” Still, learning to “get by” in Urfa was for me less a question of conformity than of developing an increasingly fine-tuned awareness of which situations called for which type of action.

To understand the city phenomenally—as a valued, inhabited, and differentially perceived landscape—I adopted a method that Ingold and Vergunst (2008) call “participative walking” (which is itself an ethnographic “take” on phenomenology’s long engagement with “walking in the city,” for instance in the works of Bergson, Certeau, and Merleau Ponty). By accompanying interlocutors through the course of their everyday movements, I gained a sense of how space was differentially perceived and experienced. I began to notice, for instance, how certain
interlocutors consistently gravitated toward certain parts of the city and avoided others. Or, how the same person would adopt varied repertoires of decorum as he or she moved across different places (imagine, e.g., how a man or woman might embody the transition from domestic space to the street outside; or from the sidewalk to the inside of a mosque). Gradually, I became of aware of how different quarters of the city call for different forms of sociality, proximity, visibility, consumption, and gendered interaction. Urfa’s “consistency,” that is, began to appear porous, and the city became an ever more finely differentiated landscape.

“Participative walking” was always, inevitably, an occasion for speech.18 “What time is it?” Naci Bey asked me, as we made our way through a long, narrow corridor (tetribe) in the old city, where he had once lived as a young man. (Tetribe, he explained, is a word unique to Urfa dialect). As we discussed urban form on the move and in context, specific features of our surroundings would open stories, memories, secrets. When I replied that it was 2 o’clock, Naci Bey tilted his head up, and gestured toward up the walls enclosing the narrow street:

A structural characteristic of these streets. In Urfa, these months—July, August—you understand how hot it is... But here [in the old city], no matter how tall a man is, the sun will not touch the top of his head. These streets are only wide enough for two people to pass side by side. They are so narrow that the sun is never quite perpendicular, it doesn’t shine directly down—see?—the structure is such that the sun doesn’t come more than three or three and a half meters down. The walls will deflect it.

This is how most of my ethnographic “data” came to me: in situ, occasioned by movement, narrated in bits, and very often apropos of something else (this street, that building, a recipe or a

18 Men and women who knew the city well became my key interlocutors. To know the city well is not to possess a mental map or encyclopedic knowledge, but to have a “finely tuned perceptual awareness” of one’s surroundings (Ingold 162), and to be able to convert that awareness to speech. “Walking” and “talking” are not two different kinds of information (e.g., “discourse” versus “practice”); rather talking was often a way of making explicit one’s implicit or embodied knowledge.
ritual object). Mine was an “education of attention” (Ingold 1993: 153), and it was only gradually, in time, that I was able to place these details in wider contexts of significance. These old city streets, for instance, were for Naci Ipek, and many others of his generation, “true” Urfa—the place he had lived as a young man, and which he’d felt compelled to leave for the new city (where, “anywhere you go at this time of day—this side, that side—the sun will hit you on the head at a 90-degree angle, and burn something awful.”)

Over time, certain objects and places emerged as particularly dense foci of association (Ho 2006), where the varied trajectories of people and discourses intersect, overlap, or sometimes contradict and displace one another.19 The streets of the old city, for instance, would emerge early on as a key focus of my research. The “old city” is that part of town which lies between the ritual center and the riverbed, and which used to be the only city. Most of the buildings are limestone and date to the nineteenth century. As I discuss further in Chapter 2, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, thousands of (mostly Kurdish and Arab) villagers, driven mainly by changes in land tenure and agricultural production, began moving to the (old) city; and its residents (mostly Turks), began to abandon it for the emerging high-rise apartments of the brand-new “new city.” The old city lies at the intersection of these divergent movements of people, whose comings and goings altered both its form and its meanings. It is around the old city that the drama of migration unfolded—and continues to unfold today, in the stories people tell.

By listening to such stories, I learned that communal life in Urfa (the “who”) is always a question of the where and the when. I learned, that is, the extent to which time and space serve as

19 The ritual center, Balikligol, is unsurprisingly one such bundle of dense association (as I discuss in chapter 4).
registers of affinity and identity in Urfa. Consider, for example, Naci Ipek, and others of his generation who identify themselves as denizens of a lost “neighborhood culture” (*mahalle kültürü*). The latter was grounded in the old city, and inhered in patterns of social life and their sensory touch-stones: the architecture of stone houses (equipped for multiple generations and with built-in guest quarters), the layout of streets (where extended kin groups clustered), the drift of familiar voices between courtyards, the smell of food wafting from home to home. Consequent to waves of urban migration beginning in the 1970s, many of these men and women moved from the stone houses of the historic “old city” to the burgeoning apartment blocks of the “new city.” In their accounts, to change one’s type of dwelling was to alter the kinds of tasks that organized life, the intertwining of these tasks with those of other people, and thus the rhythms constituting the very patterns of life. The severance of those patterns has made their generation, in their own telling, a lost one.

In these accounts, it is shared sensible repertoires, not stable characteristics, that comprise collectivity, and mark its boundaries. Today, nostalgia for the old city of yesteryear is often accompanied by a devaluation of the old city of today, which is described as cramped, dark, and unsanitary. One former resident of the old city, an upper-middle class Turkish man, lamented:

> People began to migrate to the city. Eyyübiye, Yakubiye, Bağlarbaşı: these [informal, para-urban] neighborhoods did not exist when I was growing up. When the agha came to the city, he thought that he could do whatever he wanted here. He thought he could raise a cow in the city, but you can't do that in the city. The city began to smell bad (H.H. 4/14/11).

It is by speaking about the old city and the changes it has undergone that self-described “original Urfalı” people distance themselves from the villagers who displaced them (and who were themselves displaced, as we will see in Chapter 2).

We might return now to the insight of the second section—that the relational dimension of
identity becomes visible only through movement (which is to say, in space and time). In Urfa, migratory movements, and the shifts in dwelling and lifestyle they provoked, prompted newly emergent social distinctions and incipient hierarchies. If we stay with the terms of description, we are invited to glimpse social tensions and cleavages, not as functions of identity, but as emergent. The same man continued:

We complain now that the youth have become degenerate. In the days of our youth, people wore ties and hats. The city population was only 30,000. There were a lot of people who read newspapers and books. People were cultured. There were no villagers [living in the city]. The city center was Turkmen. The villagers lived in the villages.

In following the contours of this description, we trace a movement across non-reciprocal categories: in the last sentence, a geographical distinction slides into an ethnic distinction and back again. The other of “Turk,” in this telling, is not in the first place “Arab” or “Kurd,” but “villager” (even though the villagers are 99% Arab or Kurdish). One might be tempted to treat instances like this as moments when the curtain is pulled back – when we discern that it is “really” ethnicity, for instance, that lies beneath the endless descriptions of buildings and streets and their qualities. Such an approach is intuitive for many (as suggested, e.g., by common assumptions about the iconicity of Urfa’s purple scarves.)

Instead of tracing phenomena back to a supposed underlying identity, we might approach the problem from the other side. That is, rather than concluding that H.H. is “really” talking about ethnicity, we can ask how the intertwined, context-dependent qualities he conveys – to live in the city in 1965, to wear a tie and hat, to read – came to be associated with being a Turk (for him and for others). Deleuze and Guattari use the term “coding” to describe the operations whereby a polyvalent quality is extracted from its function in a given milieu and becomes expressive of identity:
Take the example of color in birds or fish: color is a membrane state associated with interior hormonal states, but it remains functional and transitory as long as it is tied to a type of action (sexuality, aggressiveness, flight). It becomes expressive, on the other hand, when it acquires a temporal constancy and a spatial range that make it a territorial, or rather territorializing, mark: a signature” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 315).

The gist is that identities are coded from expressive qualities, and not the other way around. Thus in later chapters I explore how in Urfa today reading has been “coded” as upper-class, urban, male, and Turkish. This does not make reading a “symbol” of Turkishness (to put this another way, people do not read because they are Turkish, but because “they like it”). Yet over time reading became a quality differentiating original/non-original Urfa people—to the extent that today, especially among the sons of rural immigrants, reading has become a status marker whereby one proves oneself more than just a villager.

At the same time, it is plainly true that expressive qualities settle and ossify over time, and certain phenomena (places, objects, expressive qualities), regardless of their origins, become “shorthand” for identity. Today in Turkey, for instance, conflict is often galvanized around identity and the highly charged symbols thereof: The colors red, green, and yellow signify Kurdish identity; the wearing of a beard “means” one is a Muslim; and the hijab signifies Islamic gender norms. It is especially in such ossified cases that it is important to “back up” from identity and try to understand its composition. Let us take, for example, the colors red, yellow, and

20 This is to reverse the set of assumption that opened the chapter. To assert that the purple scarves of Urfa must “mean” something is to assume that they are expressive of an organizing structure dividing people into groups.

21 While conducting ethnographic research among Alevi organizations in Istanbul, Walton (2013) was introduced to an elderly man his interlocutors esteemed as “a truly authentic Alevi bard from the village. “I spoke with this ‘authentic bard’ for several minutes, querying his own understanding of Alevism; gradually I realized that despite (or, rather, because of) his authenticity, he had very little sense of ‘Alevism’ as an abstract identity at all. For him ‘Alevis’ were kin and neighbors within his village, defined by their ritual distinction in opposition to the ‘Sunnis’ in other villages; the notion of Alevism as
green, which in southeastern Turkey often appear on flags, scarves, and signs, and which are unmistakable markers of Kurdish identity. Rather than taking “Kurdish identity” as a focus of analysis, we might start with the combination of red, yellow, and green, and the processes whereby these colors became contested symbols of a Kurdish ethno-national project. We would look, for instance, at the Turkish state banning the color combinations (going so far as to change the traffic lights in the Kurdish city of Batman to red, yellow, and blue) – only serving to entrench and underscore the colors’ “Kurdishness.” This is keeping the horse before the cart. It is acknowledging Kurdishness not as an entity (a stable thing that persists through time), but as a process whereby certain qualities (geography; language; even certain color combinations) are coded as identity through specific histories of law and violence.

In what follows, the material environment is not merely a neutral container for social life; it is a meaningful register of the diverse movements (personal, familial, communal) that have shaped the modern city. These movements are not confined to the city, but extend beyond it and generate it; tracing them will entail many walks in many places—through villages, in and out of houses, along canals, around the ritual site. Each of five chapters examines the material transformation of a key locus of cultural reproduction (ritual spaces, heritage sites, domiciles), and explores how identities associated with these loci (religious, ethnic, gendered) may become knowable, recognizable, and contestable in the process.
You’ll have to know at least three languages…
Each word in the mouth of a lion
One by one, tooth and nail,
You’ll have to pull each word out by the root.

- Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu.\textsuperscript{22}

During the year I spent in Urfa, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited the city three times. Large crowds and warm slogans always greeted his arrival: “Welcome, Prime Minister Erdoğan, Şanlıurfa’s sweetheart.” In October of 2010, near the start of my fieldwork, I attended a rally in \textit{Yıldız Meydanı}, a square in a central part of the new city largely devoted to state functions. Nearby were the modern office buildings of the municipality and the governorship, as well as the public library and two museums. On this day, however, the ordinarly austere square was decked in red and white, with enormous balloon arches stretching across its length, and banners with bombastic slogans: “You brought us human rights and democracy. May they

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{22} From the poem \textit{"Üç Dil} ("Three Languages"). The English translation is my own. The Turkish is:
En azından üç dil bileceksin...
Her kelime arslan ağzında
Her kelimeyi bir bir dişinle tıraşınla
Kök sökercesine söküp çıkartacaksın
\end{flushright}
continue forever.”

Although the space was bursting with the signs of Turkish officialdom, most of the participants were not “Turks,” but rather Kurds and Arabs from the surrounding villages. They’d come in large groups, neighbors and extended families, children in tow, on buses organized by local party representatives. Most wore lavender scarves or checked kefiyes tied around their heads in the traditional style, and some had placed a white baseball cap with the AK Party logo incongruously atop them. They clustered together in groups of intimates: bearded men in şalwar gathered together in grassy areas, smoking cigarettes and passing around a thermos of coffee.

Historically, these are Turkey’s “others” – ethno-linguistic minorities whose very existence had, until recently, been officially denied. On this day, by contrast, they were the intended audience: as one banner read, Turk, Kurd, Arab; The result of brotherhood: 95%. Since coming to power in 2002, Erdoğan’s AK Party had pursued a policy of “democratic opening” (demokratik açılım), marking their unprecedented receptivity both to international investment and politics, and to the country’s ethnic and religious diversity. Distancing themselves from Turkey’s historical politics of denial and assimilation, the AK Party has sought to recognize Turkey’s diversity and convert it to democratic participation – and, they hoped, electoral consensus.

In Urfa, they counted themselves successful: “95%” refers to the proportion of Urfa voters who had supported Erdoğan in the previous month’s constitutional referendum.23 Of Turkey’s 81

23 The proposed changes to the constitution were many (see Hughes 2011). Most significantly, the AKP sought to change the law so that military people could be tried in civilian courts, instead of in their own special courts. The reason this was so important is because none of the people responsible for carrying out anti-government coups, or for extra-legal violence against Kurds, had ever been brought to justice under civilian courts. So this was a way of curtailing the power of the military in Turkey – which was both
provinces, Urfa had been one of the most supportive, with a “yes” rate of up to 99.3% in some districts (compared with a national “yes” rate of 57.9%). The AK Party touted their success in this ethno-linguistically diverse city as evidence that they had finally managed to transcend not only the state’s legacy of assimilationism, but also the divisive politics of identity. Hence the official banners, which both insist on the salience of ethnicity (Turk, Kurd, Arab) and on its pastness (Greenhouse 2009). This is the ultimate guiding myth of the party, and how they define their political moment. In Erdoğan’s words: “Times that a citizen of ours would be oppressed due to his religion, ethnic origin or way of life are over.”

Understanding why Urfa is such an important victory for Erdoğan’s government is crucial. The “Kurdish question” is the AK Party’s Achilles heel – the major challenge to its triumphal narrative of democratic inclusivity, as well as its EU aspirations (Hughes 2011, Pope 2005, Oktem 2011, Finkel 2010). Electorally, this challenge is evident in the fact that, in majority Kurdish provinces (all those east of the Euphrates), the vast majority of voters support the Kurdish nationalist party (BDP) over any other party, including the AKP. Urfa is one of the

something many civilians wanted, and a way for the AKP to strengthen their hand against the military so they could not be deposed. It worked. The following year, a lot of major generals would retire in protest.


26 In regular elections. This rally was held after a referendum, which makes it different from a normal election, since rather than a range of parties, voters can only choose yes, no, or abstention. Not one Kurdish province opposed the referendum (since a vote against changing the constitution would have been a vote for the Kemalist “old guard,” and the anti-Kurdish status quo). However, the Kurdish party, at this point dissatisfied with the AK Party’s policies toward Kurds, urged its supporters to abstain from voting in the referendum. Thus in most Kurdish provinces, support was ostensibly high, but participation was low. The provinces of Hakkari and Diyarbakır, for instance, each had “yes” rates of around 94%, but with only 9% participation, and 35% participation, respectively. Urfa had a 95% “yes” rate with 70% participation. “Referandum 2010 İl Sonuçları” (2010 referendum results by province). Haberler.com
only exceptions to this electoral trend, which is why it is so important as a model of unity. It
sends a message that, if Urfa can overcome the divisive politics of regionalism and ethnic
identity, so might the country at large. Another banner above the crowd announced: A message
to Turkey from the city of Unity, Brotherhood, and Togetherness: 95%. The banner, ostensibly,
spoke on behalf of those assembled; but just beneath it, the crowd was generating its own
messages, and they told a different story.

On that morning, the clocks had gone back, and so I’d arrived in the square a full hour before
the rally was scheduled to begin. I was evidently not the only person unaware of the change.
When I arrived, there was already a substantial crowd gathered, though over the next hour it
would double or triple in size, swelling to thousands of people. What none of us knew was that at
10:34 that morning, 600 miles away, a bomb had exploded in Istanbul’s Taksim Square, delaying
the Prime Minister (TAK, a Kurdish separatist group, would later claim responsibility). And so
Erdoğan, who’d been scheduled to appear before us at 1 pm, would not arrive until after 4.

The hours in between were a lesson in “what happens when nothing happens” (Perec 2010).
As the afternoon wore on, in the absence of a focal point of attention, the constitution of the
crowd began to dissolve: people shifted their weight from foot to foot, babies cried, disputes
erupted, and small children tugged at their mothers’ skirts. But now and then a traditional song or
a pop ditty would issue from the giant speakers on stage, inspiring singing and flag waving, and
photographers would snap pictures of the cheering crowd for the next morning’s paper.

http://secim.haberler.com/2010/
Throughout the afternoon, the mood waxed and waned this way, the crowd’s attention coming
together and falling apart. But almost everyone remained, in part because the density of the
crowd made exiting a daunting prospect. And so for two, three, and four hours we stood in the
sunshine and waited.

As I stood jotting notes, conspicuous in the crowd, I was approached by a woman in her mid-
forties. “Can you write?” she asked, “Write this down: ‘I am 45 years old, I got married…’” It
took me a moment to comprehend that I was to transcribe her words, and then I began to write
without understanding why. She said:

I am 45 years old, I got married, my husband went to Russia and never came back. I
live with an elderly mother and father in a mudbrick house, we do not have any
appliances but we need them.

Kepirce Village, Bozova District, Şanlıurfa
414-416-7414
Name: Şukran Elçi
Father’s name: Mustafa Elçi

A second woman approached me with a message to dictate, then another. They were almost
all requests for material aid: sometimes a school for a village, sometimes something like
medicine for a sick child. One woman placed a hand on my arm as she dictated this message: “I
have a son who is deaf. We live in the village; he doesn’t go to school. We need a new hearing
aid.” By her side was her ten or eleven year-old son, and she asked me to take a picture of the
two of them, the boy’s ear turned toward the camera.

I began to worry that I’d been identified with the state – or, at least, as someone with the
power to address or relay these requests. I kept repeating that I was not connected to the state,
not a politician or even a journalist. “I am just a student,” I explained, “a foreigner…” But the
messages were not for me: as I finished each note, I tore out the page and gave it to the asker.

The notes were folded and passed toward the stage, hand to hand, with the instruction

_Başbakana!_ (“To the Prime Minister!”) My eyes followed the notes through the crowd, until they reached the hands of security guards in dark sunglasses, and disappeared from view.

Likely a small crowd had begun to form around me, as three female agents of the state soon interrupted these transcriptions. They likely came from Ankara or Istanbul, as they resembled no one else at the scene: their hair was uncovered, they wore pants and watches and sunglasses, and had identification cards around their necks. They seized one or two of the letters, and as they did so the women around me fell silent. “Is she interviewing you?” the agents asked, and the women smiled and said no, no, no, but offered no other explanation. They asked to see my documents (identification, research visa, residency permit). After inspecting my driver’s license (which was all I had with me) and spelling my full name into a radio headset, they returned my notebook and the loose sheets of paper, and left us. I slipped my notebook into my bag, embarrassed, and no one asked me to write anything else.

There was an evident connection between the agents’ authority, their knowledge of Turkish, and their ability to write – the latter linking them to a bureaucratic machinery with its mystifications of scale (for whom did they spell out my name?) Most of the rally participants spoke Kurdish or Arabic at home, and Turkish to some variable degree, but typically they did not read and write (80% of rural women in Turkey are illiterate, according to Kudat and Bayram [2000]). Nonetheless, it apparently seemed to the audience that political participation, and their own participation in this rally, was a matter of and for writing. Theirs was a practice of

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27 I am reminded of Levi Strauss’s essay “A Writing Lesson” – in which a Nambikwara chief makes a
“grassroots literacy” (Fabian 2001) which, with the arrival of the agents, was brought to a sudden halt.

Nevertheless, elsewhere in the crowd, messages continued to be written and circulated. Many men had brought signs with them, printed out on white paper or hand-written on cardboard. Some bore only the name of a district, Akçakale; some named a particular village, Yamaçaltı Köyü; some had a specific message, *We are pushing for equality*; or a request, *We need soil*. Others displayed longer messages whose meaning I could not make out. At a certain point, the jumbotron came on, and as its crane-held camera swooped across the square, people cheered and extended their signs in the air, positioning them in such a way that the camera would capture them and project their messages onto the giant monitors. The men also asked me to photograph their signs, and although I continued to explain that I was neither a photographer nor a journalist, I took the pictures anyway. The images are striking: a handwritten sign against a sea of mass-produced flags, balloons and banners; one man’s gaze against a densely packed crowd.

In the following weeks, I shared these images with various interlocutors in Urfa, mostly educated urbanites (who, this early in my fieldwork, were my only interlocutors). Most regarded the images with a mixture of pity and condescension. While I’d assumed that my difficulty in deciphering the signs was mine alone, I soon learned that these messages also posed serious challenges to native speakers of Turkish. There were expressions like the following –

point of “writing” (drawing squiggly lines) in front of a tribal assembly (2003). Although he did not grasp writing systemically, he nonetheless intuited its power and bent it to his own use.
Our land was taken
We want rafolum

- where *rafolum* has no Turkish equivalent (it might have referred either to *reform* or *referendum*). It was not only the language of these letters that warranted pity, but the very form of a personal request to the prime minister.

*Yamaçaltı Köy*  
*Yamaçaltı Village*

*Toprak İstiyoruz*  
*We want soil*

*Sn = Başbakanım*  
*U = My prime minister*

*Biz = Mağduruz*  
*We = We were wronged*

Some considered such requests evidence that (in the words of one interlocutor) participants “do not understand how politics works.” That is: while national-level electoral politics generally do not work through citizens’ personal appeals to a powerful patron, local politics often *do* (as I detail further in Chapter 2). Hence, in penning appeals to the prime minister, the people seemed to be casting Erdoğan in local terms, addressing him via the personal chains of favor and loyalty that characterize local arrangements.28

These “local arrangements” – the singularities of Urfa’s electoral politics – would gradually reveal themselves to me over the course of the year, and would cast doubt on official claims that Urfa was a beacon of democratic unity. I would learn, for instance, that in most villages, women do not vote (this task is generally left to the male head of household). Nor, it could be said, do

28 This reading would suggest a fairly radical hiatus between official and local notions of political agency and efficacy, with the figure of Erdogan being interpreted very differently at the local level, like Captain Cook taken for the god Lono (Sahlins 2001, see also Birgit Meyer 1999, 2002).
individuals: instead, people tend to vote as networks, so that a given tribe (or a group of tribes, or perhaps an entire village or district) will vote as a “block” – that is why a certain district can produce a 99.3% consensus. Thus, what appeared in the rally as democratic participation was, for some, only a spectacle thereof. It was also pointed out to me that the participants had not come of individual accord, but had been bussed there en masse from the surrounding villages by local party representatives.

The fact of “collective voting” in Urfa is both well-known and much-lamented in the national press, where the continued impact of family and tribal structures are considered “the greatest obstacle to democracy in the region” (Schleifer 2007). In development discourse, too, electoral patterns are evidence of those “traditional family, kinship, tribal and rural structures” which “identify persons with social groups” such that “autonomous individual behavior and political participation are both very limited” (Gokce et al 2010: 4). Thus, if democracy is understood as an exercise in individual political agency, where 1 person = 1 vote, then local arrangements would appear to be its antithesis. It would also make electoral results a completely unreliable way of gauging “public opinion,” if the latter is reckoned as the “sum of a number of individual opinions”) (Bourdieu 1979). On the other hand, or so I thought, electoral results might be very useful in highlighting the contours of major political tensions and divides among social groups.

I found, however, that the patterns and contours of collective voting were nearly impossible to pin down. I gained a sense of the challenge early in my fieldwork, when I’d attempted, through interviews, to discern the city’s political layout in broad, initial strokes. In a meeting with Ebru Okutan, the chief editor of a local newspaper, Hizmet, I asked: what were the major local newspapers in Urfa (in terms of readership and reputation), and what were their political leanings? The question was shaped by my understanding of the Turkish national press, a field
composed of easily identifiable partisans: there are for instance “secularist” papers (*Milliyet, Hürriyet, Cumhuriyet*); “Islamist” papers (*Zaman, Yeni Şafak*); and left-leaning social liberal papers (*Radikal, Taraf*).

Ebru stopped me right there: to begin with, she said, “they open a new paper every day.”

Less than a decade ago, when she took over her father’s seat as editor-in-chief of *Hizmet*, there were only six local dailies. Now they had multiplied to become roughly thirty-three – or, rather, they had divided. It is common for the same person to own several papers – for instance, the owner of the local daily *Güneydoğu* (Southeast) had, with little imagination, started up *Güney* and *Doğu* (South, and East). His brother also has three papers, *Yeni Gün, Bugün*, and *Yarin* (New Day, Today, and Tomorrow). They feature mostly the same content, Ebru said, with the layout of the pages switched around.

According to Ebru, the reason for the proliferation of newspapers had little to do with increasing circulation or readership (“Urfa people don’t read anyway”). Instead, owning several papers increases the owner’s capacity to publish advertisements (*ilan*), which account for almost all revenue generated. For instance, Ebru explained, if the government wants to build a hospital, or a road, they must put out an ad in the papers announcing the project to engineering or construction companies (which will then bid on the project to win the government contract). If publishing one of these advertisements earns 4,000 lira, and you have three newspapers, you earn 12,000 lira.

And what about the political leanings of these various papers? “Generally, they don’t have any politics,” she reckoned, but rather report on matters such as “weather, traffic accidents, local happenings.” Urfa’s journalists, Ebru explained, have typically no training in journalism (she herself was trained as an engineer), and often little education. These journalists often accept
bribes to run stories on behalf of certain political interests (e.g., by accepting 500 lira for a front-page story). Thus when Urfa papers did deal explicitly with politics, it seemed to Ebru largely transactional: “If the AK Party gives you money, you become an AK Party newspaper.”

Observing my dismay, Ebru continued: “Urfa’s culture is very interesting, very different from [that of] Antep or Adana” (two other cities in southern Turkey). While her description of the newspaper business suggested a purely cynical or profit-driven situation, she offered the following anecdote, which struck a different note: Two relatives (of the same extended family) both ran for office in Urfa. One got more votes than the other, and because there were bad feelings about it within the community, the victor actually gave some of his votes to his kinsman. “Where else?” she laughed.

Over the course of the year, I would hear dozens of anecdotes like this one, detailing unexpected leaps and reversals in Urfa’s electoral politics. It seems that, although many people in Urfa do tend to vote as “blocks,” those blocks are often unstable, with groups frequently shifting allegiances and forming coalitions that appear counter-intuitive to outside observers. Thus it has happened that, in a given district, a certain party wins more than 90% of the vote in one election and less than 5% in the following cycle (the relevant candidate will have switched parties). At times, local leaders receive material compensation (as I understand it, a lump sum of cash) to produce a certain electoral outcome – and then fail at times to deliver that outcome. Or sometimes, the vote goes to a local notable, regardless of what party’s ticket he runs on (picture a Kurdish chieftain running on the ticket of the explicitly anti-Kurdish party [MHP], and winning).

Together, these “electoral anecdotes” shed light on the fiction of the official sign, “Turk, Kurd, Arab; The Result of Brotherhood: 95%.” It is fictional not because the AK party had really failed to overcome divisive identities, but rather because in Urfa, those identities were not
At the time of my fieldwork in Turkey, between August 2010 and October 2011, there was a massive convergence on the question of “minority identity,” with strands in academic, political, and popular discourse. The AK Party’s “opening” toward Turkey’s ethnolinguistic and religious minorities – which in 2002 was an oppositional discourse with little precedent in national politics – was thoroughly mainstreamed less than a decade later (Ciddi 2009). In the run-up to the 2011 national elections, for instance, the AKP and their main rival, the social democrat CHP, were engaged in daily press battles over which party was more sincere in their outreach to historically oppressed groups.29

Among contemporary scholars of Turkey, there is a great deal of interest in the question of “minorities” – those non-Turkish and/or non-Muslim communities that have persisted despite 20th century assimilationist policies. More than two decades of major shifts within the Turkish academy made this interest possible. Historically, the university was “practically an arm of the

29 The remarkable turnaround of the previously staunch Kemalist CHP on issues pertaining to minority recognition is, in my view, evidence of how drastically Turkey has changed in the past decade. In 2005, while CHP’s hardline party chairman Deniz Baykal was referring to the Copenhagen Criteria as a “trap,” Turkish support for EU membership was well over 70%. The CHP’s electoral vulnerability – they had failed to gain more than 21% of the national vote in both 2002 and 2007 – was often formulated in temporal terms. Large parts of the electorate had begun to view their politics as “old fashioned” at best, “reactionary” at worst (Today’s Zaman, 2 June 2012; Keyman 2010: 99). So, in June of 2010, after a scandal within the CHP ousted the “apparently irremovable” Deniz Baykal from leadership, the party replaced him with Kemal Kilicdaroglu (Ciddi 2009). Kilicdaroglu himself, as was frequently touted, is an Alevi from the Eastern province of Tunceli, whose mother is said to be an “ethnic Armenian.” He promised a “new CHP” that would “embrace both Hagop and Rojin” (common first names for Armenians and Kurds, respectively), and quickly revised the party’s position on a number of other key issues. He spoke favorably of free markets and EU membership, and dropped the party’s long-held opposition to headscarves in universities.
state” (as one interlocutor put it), tasked with extolling the rise of the Kemalist nation over and against the despotic Ottoman past. In the last decades of the 20th century, however, critical and progressive scholars of Turkey began to deconstruct these ideological, state-centered narratives of Turkish history. Scholars began to criticize Kemalism as the imposed ideology of a “detached elite” (Gellner 1997: 194), which “undermined the normative order” and “negated the historical and cultural experience of the people in Turkey” (Bozdogan and Kasaba 1997: 8). While many of the early critical scholars paid for their dissent with dismissals from academic posts, jail sentences, and exile, progressive voices have over the past decade gained a critical mass.

If traditional Turkish history demanded the denigration of the Ottoman era and the elevation of the Republic, today’s scholarship marks an almost complete reversal. Many scholars are concerned with the discursive and material means by which the Turkish state managed to assert a single ethno-religious identity (Turkish, Sunni) over an empire that comprised a mosaic of religious and ethno-linguistic communities. The transition from Empire to Republic constitutes a major research trend, with over a dozen books published on this topic in 2011 alone. Scholars worked to expose a “violent underbelly” of ethnic cleansing, massacres, and forced migrations in the early 20th century (Gocek 2011). These studies have a range of emphases, including law and

30 This narrative was also embraced by modernization/secularization enthusiasts outside of Turkey, e.g. Lerner 1958, Lewis 1961.

31 “In Turkey, almost nothing in the lexicon of international politics provokes a more prickly reaction than the simple word ‘minority.’ The idea of ethnic and religious community divisions conjures up two threatening images for the majority of Turks: one of Christian powers plotting to divide, rule, and carve up the country, as happened after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the other of non-Muslim fifth columnists conspiring to stab the Turkish majority in the back” (Pope 2005: 95).

32 The edited volume of Kasaba and Bozdogan (1997) is a standard-bearer of this critical tradition.
justice (Dadrian and Akcam 2011); trauma and healing (Kadioglu and Keyman 2011, Gocek 2011), and recognition and truth-telling (Singer, Neuman and Somel 2010, Super and Klancher 2011, Svažyian 2011). They often share a (more-or-less explicit) moral imperative to “face up” to the past: to call the state to accountability, and call the people of Turkey to “consider the suffering inflicted in [their] name” (Akcam 2004: 2).

This difficult and denunciatory work on Turkish history has been accompanied by a reconsideration and revaluation of Turkey’s cultural and religious difference, past and present. Suppressed forms of social diversity have now entered the spotlight, as scholars transgress the “taboo” on Greek, Armenian and Syriac histories (Oktem 2011). Many focus on memory, identity, and trauma, uncovering those “voices” that were “ignored, muted, or distorted…by the creation of Middle Eastern modernity” (Singer, Neumann, and Somel 2010: 5; Svažyian 2011, Lemarchand 2011). The theme of revival and “breaking the silence” around identity has also entered the sphere of public media, as enthusiastic headlines claim: “Hidden Armenians in Turkey expose their identities” (Hurriyet 24 June 2011); “Van’s Jews visit their old homes five decades after leaving Turkey” (Today’s Zaman 15 May 2011); “Syriacs to Visit for Liturgy in Historic Church” (Hurriyet 1 July 2011).33

As these headlines indicate, the revival of minority identity in political and academic discourse was supposed to have a corollary in “civil society.” I saw examples of this in my own fieldwork – for instance, in Antakya, a Turko-Syrian border town some six hours west of Urfa,

33 The revaluation of Ottoman society has a corollary in the public sphere. Erdogan positions himself as a latter-day “Ottoman statesman,” and a practitioner of “Ottoman tolerance.” There is a thriving commodity market geared toward all things Ottoman, as nostalgic portrayals of the empire inflect modes of popular entertainment, architecture and urban space, and styles of dress and décor (Ozyurek 2006, Brink-Danan 2011).
where I conducted research on “faith tourism” (June-September 2009; January-February 2010). I stayed at an interfaith guesthouse for pilgrims run by a Catholic nun, Barbara. Barbara held devotions three times a day in a small room devoid of religious symbols, and she ran an interfaith choral group. From the perspective of Antakya in 2009, one could hardly doubt that Turkey’s strict ethno-nationalism was a thing of the past (picture a chorus of Sunnis, Alevi, and Orthodox Christians singing “Hava Nagila” beneath a giant Turkish flag, while suited members of Parliament clap along).

During a brief initial visit to Urfa in the summer of 2009, it seemed, on the surface of things, that faith tourism and multicultural heritage were burgeoning there, too: there were government-funded restorations of mosques and churches, collaborative initiatives to stimulate interfaith dialogue (e.g., the annual “Abraham meetings” or a then-young “Abraham’s Path Initiative”), and a growing infrastructure for tourism. Like Antakya, Urfa is an ethno-linguistically heterogeneous border city, and it too is home to a significant Christian history: Urfa (Edessa) was the epicenter of Eastern Christianity in ancient times, and at the turn of the 20th century, Christians comprised nearly half of the city’s population. For these reasons, I expected my fieldwork in Urfa to involve some of the same questions that arose in Antakya concerning the revival of ethnic and religious diversity in present-day Turkey.

But in Urfa, the cultural heritage initiatives I’d hoped to study were, for the most part, non-starters. As I discuss at length in chapter 5, they quickly failed or fizzled out. There was, for example, an “interfaith theme park” project that had enjoyed broad political support (Erdogan himself had cut the ribbon at the ground-breaking ceremony). But among the people of Urfa, the project was so unpopular that it was ultimately abandoned. For the project’s planners and backers, the failure was an embarrassment, and was largely dismissed as a relic of Urfa’s
intolerance and hostility toward social difference. This was a story I would hear time and again during my fieldwork—that the people of Urfa were blocking official efforts to recognize the city’s diversity. In contrast to the scholarly accounts listed above, which posit a state bent on denying local forms of difference, I found in Urfa a bizarre reversal: The state was presenting itself as protector and promoter of cultural difference, while construing the city’s inhabitants as homogeneous and hostile to social others.

It is this moment of reversal that opens a unique window onto the question of identity in Turkey, and its presumptive significance. We had assumed that the hegemonic state was suppressing difference in Turkey – and that, once constraints were removed, there would be an efflorescence of social diversity. But in Urfa, the curtain was lifted only to reveal an empty stage. The lacuna marked more than the failure official projects: I found, more broadly, that it was extremely rare for people to speak about social life and social difference in terms of identity categories (e.g., “Turk, Kurd, Arab”). In Antakya, it seemed that difference was on the tip of everyone’s tongue: “We, as Arab Alevis…,” “Sunnis tend to be like that…,” “This city has Jews, Christians, Sunnis, Alevi: we all get along.” But, while Urfa was every bit as ethno-linguistically heterogeneous as Antakya, diversity as such was rarely thematized or commented upon. In fact, it was sometimes overlooked entirely. In the words of one interlocutor, who disliked Istanbul’s cultural heterogeneity, “here in Urfa, everyone is the same, and so one is more relaxed.”

I do not think that the people of Urfa harbor any particular hostility to religious diversity, much less that the population is “homogeneous.” Rather, I was framing the question of diversity incorrectly. The fact that we can only see local formations as an absence or a lack (“non-preoccupation with identity”) indicates, rather, that our received categories are not registering the
relevant forms of social difference. The situation in Urfa might then prompt us to ask whether those categories – which circulate in official, popular, and academic discourse – may be already freighted with certain statist assumptions.

Paradoxically, the tendency in progressive Turkey scholarship to excoriate the state seems to have *set up* a tendency to think of difference as something that exists in/as necessary opposition to the state. According to this logic, the *significance* of difference lays in its potential to disrupt or oppose attempts at unity. *Especially* in those scholarly works that take a critical or progressive stance vis-à-vis traditional state historiography, state power is conceived as ideological. Thus Akcam (2004) portrays a Turkish history that is driven largely by the machinations of a hegemonic elite – a closed structure of domination that willfully ignores or distorts the interests of the people; and Oktem (2011) writes about clandestine anti-democratic forces aimed at preserving nationalist and corporatist interests, whose representatives are lodged within state institutions (the judiciary, the military, intelligence) as well as sub-state institutions (organized crime, extralegal armed groups). 34 The issue, to my mind, is not the empirical grounding of these assertions (the existence of political manipulation), but the use of manipulation as a *heuristic* for understanding social and political life. 35 As Mardin (1997) points

34 The specter of manipulation pervades Turkish political culture in a diffuse way. A glance at any newspaper uncovers a string of familiar allegations leading to and from every position on the political spectrum: The current AKP-led government accuses the Kurdish party, BDP, of using coercion and intimidation to control people’s voting patterns in the southeast. Secularists accuse the AKP of cynically professing a commitment to democratic politics in order to obscure a conservative Islamist agenda. Nationalist parties and politicians dismiss EU-oriented reforms as a “trap” of the West, intended to divide the nation.

35 For many, the top-down nature of Turkish politics demands a top-down conceptual model. As Yavuz cannily noted in his 2003 study of Islamic mobilization, “This analysis…will start with the state not because my approach is state-centric, but because Turkish political culture is state-centric” (Yavuz 2003: 9).
out, most prominent works of social science in Turkey tend to be marked by a “selective attention to the macro dimensions of social analysis, [which] takes as primordial the constraints of domination, power and coercion” (66). Because we are talking about a heuristic, an optic, we find it *even* in works that proffer a “bottom down” analysis, as the following two examples suggest.

Oktem (2004) asks how Turkey’s 20th century transition “from a multi-ethnic territory to a mono-ethnic ‘homeland’” played out in Urfa. At the end of the 19th century, Urfa was a thriving multi-cultural town with large populations of Syrianis, Christians and Jews. After their violent expulsion of these groups in the early 20th century, their heritage was absorbed, discursively and materially, within a “homogenising national narrative” (1). Oktem focuses on how local scholars (e.g., those associated with ŞURKAV, an organization I discuss in Chapter 5) work to “incorporate” local heritage (especially Syriani-built architecture) within Turkey’s “hegemonic historiography.” This meant erasing traces of diversity from public space (Syriani names, Christian symbols, inscriptions), and giving them Muslim names, histories, and interpretations.

Oktem posits a conceptual distinction between the state on one hand and the local on the other, with local historians in between; much like Herzfeld’s Cretan folklorists (2003), these local historians serve as “crucial cogs in the articulation of local sentiment with the discourse of national redemption” (296). In Oktem’s account, this articulation was successful: “The ethno-nationalist incorporation of the history and the material culture of Urfa appear to be largely completed” (5).

Other authors insist that hegemony – the effort to “forge unity out of disparity” (24) – remains always essentially incomplete. Cihan Tugal’s 2009 monograph *Passive Revolution* asks
how, over the past fifteen years, the AK Party managed to “absorb” formerly radical Islamists within its hegemonic (statist, capitalist) party-line. He considers how this process played out in a socially conservative, ethnically-mixed, squatter-majority district of Istanbul between 2000 and 2007. There, he focuses on the local workings of “political society” (teachers, courts, bureaucrats), and the role they played in reconciling (“articulating”) the beliefs, expectations and aspirations of “the people” (civil society) with an otherwise abstract state. In less than a decade, dissenting Islamist voices in the district had been all but silenced. Yet for Tugal hegemony cannot be smooth or seamless; it remains incomplete due to the un-absorbable fact of social difference – in this case, “ethnic polarization from below” (2009: 191). Tensions between Kurds and Turks within the district stymied AK Party aspirations to “build unity in the district,” since the latter “could not naturalize [i.e. reconcile, overcome] ethnic differences” (2009: 191).

Both conceptual formulations pit a hegemonic state (the one) against the sub-state collectivities (the many) which are its foil. This is a classically “subtractive” notion of difference, as that which thwarts the state’s claims to encompassment and unity – a remainder that has not or “not yet” been integrated within the national body. Furthermore, both conceive of “difference” (class and ethnicity in Tugal; religion in Oktem) as prior to the workings of the state. This is in part traceable to their view of state power as ideology; used heuristically, the latter suggests that certain ideas and representations are ideological because they distort reality. Implied is a “real” world, with real social differences, which can be more or less accurately perceived, and which exist apart from or anterior to their political formulations (“real” class or ethnic differences, real people with real histories)36. This neglects the extent to which state power is already immanent in

36 Consider how both Tugal and Oktem set themselves the task of how the “local” is linked to the “state”
peoples’ lives, as in perception, and is already working to shape the very terms and categories of difference.

The scholarly accounts considered above, however stringently they critique the state, stop short of challenging its monopoly on the significance of difference. They take for granted the existence and salience of identity categories (class, ethnicity, religion) rather than querying the processes by which such categories emerge, and come to seem relevant in the first place. To this extent, they participate in the state’s own myths, since premises about the anteriority of identity are embedded in the institutional formulae of states. As Greenhouse (1996) argues, modern states “construct themselves in terms of both the manageability of diversity and, therefore, its potential subversiveness or disruptiveness” (218). The slogan “Turk, Kurd, Arab...95%” does more than describe a perceived unity within difference: it is a naturalization of identity in categories articulated by the state itself, and an implicit assertion of their disruptiveness.

We are now in a position to understand why the banners insist (speciously) on the salience of

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(via local historians in Oktem, or “political society” in Tugal), as though the power of state was primarily a question of scale.

37 Recent historical work on the late Ottoman period sets out not to “uncover” state-suppressed identities, but to examine the processes by which those identities emerged, and became objects of state strategy in the first place. Studies show that the late Ottoman tanzimat period saw not merely a “ politicization” or heightened awareness of communal identity, but the very production, sometimes inadvertent, of the categories and distinctions that would eventually be recognized as “communal identity.” Dressler (2013), for instance, describes how 19th century Christian missionaries “discovered,” identified, and named the loosely-connected social group known as the Kizilbasi (today’s Alevis), and the corresponding efforts by the Ottomans to “declare the Kizilbasi nominal Muslims and make their Sunnification a political goal.” Usama Makdisi’s (2000) study of sectarianism in late-Ottoman Lebanon challenges the premise that sectarian violence is “fundamentally tribal,” “a disease that prevents modernization,” or a symptom of “failed nationalism” (3). Instead, he argues, sectarianism is “the modern story,” intrinsically connected to the formation of nation-states and the differentiating, disciplining, and normalizing processes entailed therein. See also Becker 2014.
ethnicity. In the modern state, difference can be acknowledged, but only in the terms already mapped out by extant legal and political formulas: “All the operations, electoral or otherwise, where you are given a choice, but on the condition that your choice conform to the limits of the constant...”) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 105; see also Greenhouse 1998: 4; Bhabha 1996: 133). “Recognition” can thus simultaneously be encompassment, an accommodation that leaves intact the axiomatic (Povinelli 2002). Consider how, at the rally, “Turk” remains the axiomatic or taken-for granted term – the implicit standard from which “others” differ. In the banners, Turk “appears twice” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987): once as an explicit identity (alongside Kurd and Arab), and once as an unspoken constant or standard (we need only observe that the sign is written in Turkish, not in Kurdish or Arabic).

With this in mind, let us return to the rally, and to the interpretive challenge it poses: On the one hand, the state’s assertions of encompassment (95%); on the other, the crowd’s resolutely particularizing counter-assertions. Yet at the rally the official writings cannot be neatly juxtaposed to the crowd below, as its other or foil. To view it as such would keep us within the same statist logic—i.e., by leaving intact the central opposition between the one and the many, where “the many” is only a “definable aggregate” in relation to the one (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 291). We need, in addition to hegemony and resistance, majority and minority, a third term.

In a way that calls to mind theories of hegemony in Turkish studies, many anthropologists have studied writing as a technology of political interpellation (Levi-Strauss 2003; Ong 2005;
Connerton 1989; Anderson 1983; Habermas 1991). Others, meanwhile, have examined writing as phenomena of resistance—a means for expressing one’s “own voice” (Abu-Lughod 1999). Yet the writings of the crowd clearly cannot be read primarily as phenomena of resistance: these are letters to Erdoğan, in Turkish, circulated at a national rally, with the express purpose of hailing the state.

For my purposes, the power of these letters is that they speak a language that is so deeply personal and so plainly not “their own.” As mentioned, most of the rally participants were speakers of Kurdish or Arabic, but in Urfa Turkish is the only language of writing. It is the language of schools, hospitals, banks, courts, identification papers, land deeds, and medical charts, and to the (variable) extent that people deal with these institutions and documents, they also deal with Turkish and with the written word. The effort this entails is evident in the inscriptions themselves, which refuse to simply direct us to their meaning (see also Fabian 2001, Biehl 2005). Rather than being “transparent” they remain stubbornly opaque, with, for instance, abbreviations and non-linguistic components that cannot be voiced as such:

\[
\begin{align*}
Eşitlik \textbf{Itiyoruz} & \quad \text{We are pushing equality} \\
\textbf{Umudumuz} & \quad \text{Our hope}
\end{align*}
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38 Thus many regard state literacy campaigns as, at least in part, attempts to extend central authority over wayward populations (Levi-Strauss 2003; Mitchell 1998; Abu-Lughod 2005).

39 Abu-Lughod has since critiqued this treatment of voice in her own work. For other critical treatments of this subject, see Scott 1991, Bhabha 1998, Hall 1985. For other anthropological approaches to writing, see: Biehl 2005, Fabian 2001, Rutherford 2000. In Turkey, a big part of the stated goal of “integration” has involved education and literacy in Turkish. Some entailments of this strategy: Men are more able to write than women; The young (under twenty) are more likely to write than adults, due to higher rates of schooling.
This is not a “minority” language (Kurdish, Arabic), nor is it simply the majority language (Turkish) used poorly. It is rather a *minor use* of the major language (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 106) – a use that grabs hold of its potential and bends it, tooth and nail, in a new direction. Minor uses “are not simply sublanguages, idiolects or dialects, but potential agents of the major language’s entering into a becoming-minoritarian” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 106). The remainder of this chapter will consider the possibilities opened if we conceptualize the notes *not* as a falling short of the standard (proper Turkish) *nor* as resistance to it – but as forms that place the standard in question, placing in question its very status *as* a standard.

I find in these letters a figure for politics in Urfa. Urfa’s participation in national political culture (e.g. standard electoral politics) can be deemed neither majoritarian incorporation, nor the “resistance” of minorities. Instead, it is a form of participation that enters into the system and subjects it “to a process of continuous variation” (Patton 2000: 48). For, if the people of Urfa are drawn into the system of national politics, national parties are simultaneously drawn into local arrangements and transformed by them. The AK Party, for instance, even as it boasts of democratic consensus in Urfa, is obliged to engage continually in local politicking: choosing candidates among powerful families; using bribery; even casting Erdogan as a benevolent

40 *Umudumuz siz* =s =b =m (the letters could possibly indicate *sayın baskıbakanımız*, our dear prime minister). So it would say, “you are our hope, our dear prime minister.”

41 To use a major language for minor purposes is to “enter into the standard” and “place it in a state of continuous variation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 105). Deleuze and Guattari write that the oft-mentioned “impoverishment” of minoritarian language is not a failure to attain the standard; rather it is an “ellipsis” which enables one to “sidestep a constant instead of tackling it head on, or to approach it from above or below instead of positioning oneself within it” (1987: 104).
personal patron, a kind of uber-aga. The strategies it deploys in Urfa are thus “parasitic” upon the latter’s networks and norms (Corrigan and Sayer 1985: 6). I have heard it said that the AK Party, in casting Erdogan as a benevolent patron (or allowing him to be perceived as such) is “taking advantage” of people who “do not understand politics.” But it is unclear who is taking advantage of whom.

For the grasp of national parties over local arrangements is extremely tenuous, and alliances are notoriously volatile. Thus dozens of anecdotes detail unexpected leaps and reversals – as Urfa’s most locally circulated “electoral anecdote” illustrates. In 2009, the AK Party mayor of Urfa, Ahmet E. Fakibaba, lost the support of his party due to an internal dispute. In that year’s municipal elections, the AKP put up a new candidate to oppose Fakibaba (now forced to run without party affiliation). The AKP assumed that they had Urfa “in the bag”: Erdoğan was so confident that any AKP candidate would succeed that he had remarked, “We could nominate a jacket for mayor of Urfa and still win.” But he was wrong – and when Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Urfa to attend one of the candidate’s rallies, “Şanlıurfa’s Sweetheart” was jeered by the crowd, who held up jackets in lieu of the usual flags and campaign signs (Erdoğan’s candidate lost).

The collectivities that produced this “surprise” and others do not correspond to ascribable identity or interest groups – a phenomenon commonly dismissed in the national press as the idiosyncratic behavior of a city “known for its conservative tribes, feudal social structure and surprising election results” (Bozkurt 2011). Some inhabitants of Urfa, too, understand its politics strictly in the negative: people “don’t understand” politics, or “don’t have any” politics. In the same way, the semiotic forms that mediate Urfa’s “public sphere,” like the letters to Erdogan, appear as corrupt approximations when evaluated against the norms of “print revolution, rational
deliberation, and impersonal modes of address” (Cody 2011).

But what if Urfa’s politics do not so much deviate from representative politics, as call into question the state’s claims to be representative? If the legitimate forms of political media (the individual vote, the free press, the party banner) represent or express the interests of individuals and groups – what, we might ask, do the illegitimate forms do (the personal request, the votes shared with one’s relative)?

The latter are, in my reading, not primarily representative but connective. Recall the women’s notes: were they individual expressions transposed onto material form? Or were they collective improvisations? – generated through, first, a relation struck up with me, the women’s voiced descriptions in an unfamiliar tongue, my listening and half-comprehension, the gestural movement of my hand marking words on paper; the movement of the paper from hand to hand, through the crowd. At the rally, practices of writing, signifying, and circulating, did not first represent a community – they were not second order images of something that already was – but were themselves the lines of connection among those assembled. If this is so, then we have to turn our attention away from ready-made publics, interests, and identities, and attend instead to processes of connection and alliance, the crowd’s coming together and coming apart.

The studies discussed above often present us with an opposition between a homogenizing state, and the identitarian communities that persist despite it. I’ve argued, however, that what makes politics tick in Urfa are not prior affinities or assignable identities, but these very connections, or rather the capacity to form divergent connections. Consider that at the rally the letters and home-made signs summoned various kinds of collectivities – from districts to villages to families – that are not of the same scale and are not even commensurable. But they are composable, capable of forming novel and unforeseeable alliances, whose force resonates at
times in national politics. If Urfa consistently confounds pollsters, if its electoral patterns appear idiosyncratic, it is perhaps not because Urfa is “anomalous,” but because it sheds light on processes of “capture” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 101): Just as the grammar textbook captures or crystallizes the ongoing flux of speech, so too do identitarian constants – Turk, Kurd, Arab – crystallize the flux of a social life that exceeds it. The latter may not present itself to us fully formed, legible on the surface of things, but it may yet reveal itself, in time.
Chapter 2

Place and Displacement: the view from the tell

The first time I visited Yuvacalı, we rose just after dawn, before the sun was too high, so that they could show me the view from the tell. Yuvacalı is a small Kurdish village 60 km outside the city, which is situated on and around a settlement mound (English *tell*, Turkish *höyük*, or *tepe* colloquially). The latter, I would learn, is a broad mound of earth formed by successive periods of occupation and abandonment of the same site over millennia. Tells are often covered in grass, and would appear to the untrained eye as natural hills. Yet as my host, Mehmet, pointed out as we ascended the slope at dawn, the hill contained cross sections of stone walls, pottery (sometimes smashed and sometimes whole), and flint tools – the unmistakable stuff of human dwelling. When we reached the summit, we were afforded a birds-eye-view of the straw-yellow steppe that stretched flat in every direction. Observing the surroundings from that height, it was difficult to see how this place could ever have been an attractive settlement site. I saw only fallow fields, and dirt roads dividing Yuvacalı from other isolate, non-descript villages, where all is earth-toned and nothing rises above a story.

What brought me to this village late in the summer of 2010 was this: Yuvacalı was preparing for an experiment in grass-roots tourism centered around “Kurdish village home-stays.” To call the project ambitious is an understatement. In Urfa, the most well-conceived and lavishly funded plans for cultural tourism had largely fallen flat. In late 2010, no one officially involved in “culture” (e.g. at GAP or the Ministry of Culture and Tourism) had even heard of Yuvacalı, and I know this because it was I who first told them about it. They were uniformly dismayed; no one
could believe that a village was mounting a culture project. What was there to see in a dusty village an hour’s drive from the city – and besides, who was there to show it? What did villagers understand of culture?

The people of Yuvacalı had decided to take a chance on tourism in the hopes of generating sorely needed income, since agriculture was barely supporting families. Yuvacalı was not among those villages to benefit from recent decades of state investment in Urfa’s agriculture and infrastructure. That investment was provided by the Southeastern Anatolia Project (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi, henceforth GAP) – Turkey’s largest-ever development project, aimed at socioeconomic restructuring for several provinces in the southeast. The project consists, for the most part, of thirteen hydroelectric dams (seven on the Euphrates and six on the Tigris). The largest is the Ataturk Dam, which lies with its corresponding lake on Urfa’s northwestern border. As of 2011, GAP’s major operations (irrigation, industrial infrastructure, urban renewal) were concentrated primarily in Urfa.

As the case of Yuvacalı makes clear, the benefits of GAP were not evenly distributed within Urfa – beginning with the benefit of irrigation. While certain villages received abundant water

42 Yuvacalı’s turn to tourism mirrors, in a strange way, the GAP project, which had in recent years itself retreated from large-scale technical intervention in Urfa to more limited urban renewal and cultural heritage initiatives (largely tourism). This connection deserves further attention. Biehl (2007) writes about novel and ultimately ambiguous formations of Brazilian civil society, agency, and creativity in the treatment of AIDS in response to the state’s retreat. It seems to me that the case of Yuvacalı is similarly ambiguous, insofar as it too is a form of creativity and agency that nonetheless marks the absence of state support and leaves open the question of further social effects (2007: 272).

43 The other GAP provinces, which form a contiguous block with one another, are Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Kilis, Siirt, Mardin, and Şırnak. All except Gaziantep are majority Kurdish provinces.

44 These are for irrigation but also for energy (together they supply some 22% of Turkey’s annual energy needs).
from the state, others were left high and dry – in some cases, drier than they had been prior to the GAP project. Take Yuvacali, which was once home to an abundant water source that had sprung up at the base of the mound and continued west for six miles before joining the Euphrates. (This is likely one reason that Yuvacali was such an attractive settlement site for so many thousands of years.) In the early 1990s, concurrent with the building of the Ataturk Dam, Yuvacali’s tributary had receded below ground level – its only trace now is a trail of green grass where the water had been, snaking west. Now, water was pumped to the village via underground tunnels, and distributed (often intermittently) by way of a tank marked D S I (State Water Works) atop the settlement mound.

In July 2011, nearly a year after my first visit to Yuvacali, the village hosted a woman named Rosemary, the director of the British Council in Turkey. She was researching the potential of cultural tourism as a development strategy in Southeastern Turkey, and had heard about Pero’s “homestay” experiment. The three of us sat beneath the family’s sole shade-giving tree, sipping tea despite the afternoon heat. Notebook in hand, Rosemary asked Pero (via my translation) what it was like to live in Turkey as a Kurd. When Pero hesitated, Rosemary clarified: “What demands do you have of the state?” At this, Pero replied “Water – continuous water” (devamlı su).

Looking around at the parched earth, Pero’s answer seemed eminently sensible. But Rosemary was not entirely satisfied, and pressed on: “So things like water are more important than your political and cultural rights?”

Rosemary’s response was one I witnessed time and again from journalists and tourists who, upon visiting an “authentic Kurdish village,” were disappointed to find that Kurdishness as such was of little interest to its residents. (Not long ago, it would have been considered strictly radical to even raise the question of someone’s experience “as a Kurd” – and many guests asked me
privately whether the family’s reluctance to discuss ethnic identity was not, in fact, a dissimulation.) For Rosemary, it seems, the question of the environment was “background,” subordinate to the question of the villagers’ cultural identity and rights (“as Kurds”). That it did not occur to her that land and water are “cultural and political rights” is striking, if not surprising: As we will see, official planning in Urfa has often been marked by the neglect or misunderstanding of the relationship between identity and the sensible environment.

This chapter is, in part, an answer to the question “What do villagers understand of culture?” The answer has to do with the relatedness of culture to the material environment. In the sections that follow, I will bring out the distinctiveness of local formulations of this connection by juxtaposing them against those of GAP. It will become clear that the latter persistently misconstrues the relationship between social and material life in Urfa, to sometimes disastrous effect. To understand how, we will have to begin in another village.

**GAP: landscape engineering as social engineering**

The village of Sultantepe lies south of Urfa, in the uppermost reach of the Harran plain. Most of its land belongs to M. Erkan, a high-ranking chairperson in the city’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Şanlıurfa Ticaret Ve Sanayi Odası, ŞUTSO), and someone, I was told, who could teach me about GAP. Sultantepe lies in an area prone to sandstorms that blow north from the Syrian desert, darkening the sky and covering cars with a filmy dirt. But on that afternoon, from Erkan’s spacious white veranda, the desert was nowhere in sight. The house opened onto an orchard of pomegranate and olive trees in neat rows, and nearby were equally tidy stables with two Arabian horses, pure-breeds, plus a cow with a new calf, and a snow-white Swiss goat. We sat around a picnic table in the thin winter sunlight, just a few hundred yards from a broad slope
of hill called Sultantepe – where, Erkan tells me, in 1952 the British excavated a library of cuneiform tablets that were inscribed with the Epic of Gilgamesh. All around, in every direction, were green plains – a sight so rare in Turkey’s southeast, and so stark, that it is discernible even from space (in satellite images, the Harran plain appears as a tiny square of green surrounded on all sides by sunbaked beige).

This was a state-made oasis. In 1982, when Erkan first inherited this land from his father, Harran was fallow, he recounts, “bone dry,” and there was no money to be made in agriculture. The local residents, primarily Arabs, had practiced animal husbandry and farmed a few dry crops (lentils, bulgur, barley) for subsistence. “At that time, one could not even find water to drink in Harran,” a former resident recalled. “Water was more valuable to us than pure oil.” Water came to Harran in the mid-1990s, transported 100 km from the Ataturk dam, by way of a wide concrete canal. Erkan told me that the fields surrounding his home were all sown with cotton for export markets – as was 93% of irrigated land in Urfa. “Doesn’t cotton require a lot of water?” I asked, “We have a lot of water,” was the answer.

Although Erkan was born in the Urfa city center, he had made a life for himself as a businessman in Istanbul. Like many children of the very elite, Erkan was sent to lycee and University in Ankara, after which he pursued postgraduate studies in the United States. In 1982, he inherited his father’s land in Urfa. Although GAP was still largely in its planning stages, Urfa beckoned to Erkan as an investment opportunity, and he was drawn by the buzz (“hype,” he now says) concerning its development. The promise was that irrigation would transform Urfa into an agro-industrial export basin. As Olcay Ünver, former president of the GAP Regional Development Administration, had forecasted in 1997:
Early in the next century, GAP’s physical facilities will have been completed. Nineteen power plants will be humming to produce 27 billion KW of electricity annually, and farmers will be tilling 1.7 million acres of irrigated land, producing beautiful crops. Agro-industrial factories will dot the land, some 10 million people will be living in the region, mostly in the towns, and there will be employment for almost everyone who asks for it. Extremes of misery will no longer exist, and prosperity will be evident for everyone except the most prejudiced and opinionated (Ünver 1997, quoted in Harris 2008).

Through environmental management, planners sought to de-enclavize the region, to make it economically productive, and to integrate it into “national culture” (“GAP: Social Policy Objectives” 1997). Early on, the project had focused almost solely on technical intervention. As a water scientist at Harran University explained to me, GAP had initially been planned according to “an old school engineering perspective,” without the input of social scientists, let alone local inhabitants. The terms of planning were “all kilowatts and metric tons.”

In its early stages, GAP embraced the developmentalist premise that “new subjects would be created through the making of a new nature” (Raffles 1999: 330). In southeastern Turkey, it seems, this was a more-or-less explicit attempt to erase the question of identity. Reinventing southeastern Anatolia as “the GAP region” was, as one Turkish academic said in conversation, primarily “an attempt to rebrand Kurdistan.” 45 With GAP, the “problem” of southeastern Turkey was rewritten as a question of “regional development disparities” (Gökçe et al. 2010: 1). “As a result of climatic conditions and topography, the cost of transportation and communication services were too high and this was the reason why the region was neglected until the planned

45 When the GAP administration was assembled in 1989, it was during a period of major ethnic violence: For nearly a decade, southeastern Turkey had been a war zone between Kurdish separatists and Turkish forces (military and irregular). The PKK was formed in 1984 (an umbrella for various separatist groups); the GAP Regional Development Administration was formed in 1989 (as an umbrella for various individual projects that preceded it).
period” (Gökçe et al. 2010: 3-4). When Kurdishness is mentioned in official documents (referred to variously as “terror,” “PKK case,” “Kurdish problem,” “ethnic problem,” “Kurdism”), it is said to “have [its] root cause in the economic underdevelopment of the region” (Gökçe et al. 2010: 4). The problems it presented for the state could therefore be solved by development (with a proviso: “for everyone except the most prejudiced and opinionated”).

The confidence of planners notwithstanding, my conversation with Erkan that afternoon revealed that he, like many others, had begun to feel that GAP had been a failure. Erkan was joined that day by four relatives visiting from the Western city of Izmir; they were from Urfa, but had left in the 1970s (like many of the elite), and Erkan had not seen them since. All were elegant, well-mannered professionals, and had come to investigate prospects for agricultural investment in Urfa. While I do not know what formal advice (if any) Erkan offered these relatives, in my presence that afternoon, he dissuaded them. He expressed his frustration with the slow pace of change in Urfa, its failure to make good on its economic potential, which he pinned to the fact of Urfa’s stubborn provincialism. He expressed this view not with bitterness, nor with overt prejudice, but rather with an exaggerated, droll fatigue – as he said at one point, “Oh, gosh, why even get involved?”

Still in the midst of this conversation, Erkan turned toward the house we now sat beside, and told us what an aggravation it had been to even get it built. He had imagined the house being done all in white stone, in the style of the old city’s limestone mansions. On the morning when the contractor arrived in Sultantepe, he and Erkan had breakfast, then a cup of tea. “Then one more cup of tea.” Finally, the man began his work, and, after placing the corner stone of the doorway, said, “the stone loves its place – let’s have another cup of tea.” Erkan’s guests laughed. “Finally we only did the doorway in the white stone,” as he could see that otherwise building the
house would take forever. This ostensibly innocuous anecdote – an example of what one has to “deal with” around here – is striking in the way it links one worker’s supposed idleness and apathy to a problem of broader cultural recalcitrance.

Throughout the afternoon, Erkan would say much more about this recalcitrance. Later, lamenting that Urfa people did not seem interested in business, he asked, “What are they interested in?” – gesturing as though putting a piece of bread up to his mouth – “food!” “They never stop talking about it.” When I looked surprised, he said “Oh, you must not spend a lot of time with Urfa people” (an unsettling suggestion, but one that highlights the confidence with which Erkan typified the people of Urfa). Everyone does it, he said. Recently, he’d been having a meal in Urfa and was foolish enough to mention that the meat was good. “That started half an hour of conversation about the animal: ‘How was it cooked? Was it from the north of Urfa or the south? Was it male or female? Which part of the animal was it?’ Who cares!, I said, it’s good, let’s eat it!” After that whole conversation is over, he added, they will start in again on what they are going to eat tomorrow.

For Erkan, this was evidence of a “mentality” that he perceived in all levels of Urfa society,

46There is some kernel of truth here. Among the first questions I was asked as a foreigner in Urfa (and not uncommonly the very first) was, “Do you like spicy things?” (aci seviyor musun?) The question was about whether I liked a special kind of pepper called İsot. İsot is a local variety of pepper that produces an earthy, lasting heat. It is a food staple that every village household grows, prepares, and stores. İsot is eaten in various forms: fresh, roasted whole over open fire, as a paste for cooking, or as crushed flakes for seasoning. There is almost no meal in Urfa that does not feature some form of İsot, including breakfast. I am told it is an excellent source of vitamin C. If, as a foreigner, one demonstrates cultural competency in Urfa, one might receive the high complement “Tam bir İsotçu oldun!” which means, literally, “You’ve become a total pepper merchant!”

The peppers are also the subject of various poems and myths. For instance, when the French occupied Urfa in the early 20th century, the people were reportedly unconcerned until the French trampled their İsot fields, at which point, the story goes, they rebelled and drove them out. This is a humorous and quasi-subversive take on Urfa’s “Independence War,” which was officially fought to defend the Turkish nation.
from construction workers to the political elite. When one of his guests told me that Erkan was a powerful man in Urfa, he laughed, “Behind the scenes only,” and remarked in mock contrition that he’d recently had the former president of the Chamber of Commerce fired – “Well, he had a fake degree!” That man, like many others in leadership positions in Urfa, lacked the education, know-how, and cultural capital required to steer the province into the international political economy. “You must be educated, you must speak some Kurdish or Arabic; in addition you must speak a European language, either English or German or French, because we have international dealings.”

Even those who are educated—for instance, who go to university in Istanbul, will live in apartments with seven other like-minded people, people from this region. The whole time they are there they will never have gone to the cinema or the theater. Then they return to Urfa and are put in leadership positions: what kind of foresight or vision can they be expected to have?

Erkan’s frustration here echoes, as we will see shortly, a wide range of sociological commentary on Urfa that highlights local social relations as hostile to the functioning of rational systems, from electoral politics (Bozkurt 2011) to water-user associations (Kadirbeyoglu 2008). These local ties – understood as nepotism, tribalism, corruption, etc. – are understood to hinder those institutions, from bureaucracies to businesses, which are intended to function according to more abstract principles of fairness or merit.

Erkan’s understanding of GAP’s shortcomings (as an effect of Urfa’s endemic resistance to progress) resonates with assessments that were underway in higher levels of officialdom. At the turn of the century, Ankara was beginning to acknowledge that the “basic hypothesis” that, through material intervention, “[social] change was inevitable,” required revision (Kudat et al. 2000: 263). As GAP’s own internal assessments (carried out by the Sociology Association of Ankara) revealed:
While there is some dissolving of feudal structure and culture [in the GAP region at large], some backward relations still persist. Especially in Urfa, which gets the lion’s share in GAP investments, these relations are relatively stronger [than in neighboring provinces] (Gökçe et al. 2010: 42-43).

In other words: Urfa is the only province that received significant state investments through GAP, and it is the province that has “modernized” the least.47 This sense of failure and frustration was echoed in local comments. In Erkan’s words, “The only thing that’s changed is the brand of their tractors.”

Thus, in the early 2000s, “the social fabric”48 emerged as an object of inquiry among planners and developers, and social science was mobilized to find it out. The language of kilowatts and metric tons was replaced by that of “social assessment” and “human development” (Gökçe et al. 2010).49 According to a 2000 “social assessment” (Kudat et al. 2000: 7) conducted by The World Bank:

The southeast appears to have a complex social fabric, but no in-depth studies are available. Within the GAP region itself, there are a large number of sub-regions that have different mixtures of socially distinct groups. The ruling tribal families that were nomadic some two centuries ago have become landlords. The tribal leaders used their social position to obtain exclusive rights to land, and the ordinary members of the community became landless tenants or sharecroppers. The low level of mechanization [has kept] the landless dependent on tribal leaders and landowners for many decades. Despite permanent outmigration to other parts of the country, a large portion of the population continues to be landless; this is rare in the rest of the country (Kudat et al. 2000: 236). The researchers found, that is, that Urfa’s system of land tenure differs radically from that of

47 Here, this failure to modernize is gauged by the continuing strength of tribal relations, but elsewhere it is gauged in terms of gender – as I explore more in the next chapter.

48 Claire Nicholas has pointed out to me the conceptual conflation of “culture,” “social fabric,” and social structure” that are operating both in Erkan’s comments and in the social scientific and development discourses.

49 This turn to a “softer” approach also has to do with the turn to culture and tourism, mentioned in the first section.
wider Turkey. Land in Urfa is concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy land-owners, who hold disproportionate personal, political and economic power over those with little or no land. In the literature, this is referred to as “feudalism” – a system wherein “social and political power derives from land ownership” (Gökçe et al. 2010: 5).

The importance of “feudalism” in these studies is that it explains the failure of GAP to reach development goals. Several studies (e.g., Moravidi 1990, Harris 2008) correctly note that the investments of GAP (e.g., irrigation) were land-based, and that their primary beneficiaries were thus large land-owners, like Erkan. Development had thus been extremely uneven, with a few land-owners reaping most of the benefit and with little appreciable change in the distribution of wealth. Significantly, in these studies, the prevailing situation (uneven land ownership) is understood as “background” (nature, “age-old”), thereby disavowing any role the state might have played in the genesis of those relationships. The failure is thereby understood as simply not “planning” adequately for the conditions. Even independent studies, and studies that are critical of GAP, tend to understand the latter’s failure in terms of the anti-democratic, inequitable conditions of the southeast – as though these always just existed. As the World Bank Study concludes its discussion of “feudal” relations in Urfa: “It was against this background that GAP was conceived” (Kudat et al. 2000: 236).

I want to challenge this idea that Urfa’s social and material conditions were the “background” of state power. Silverstein has pointed out how scholarly understandings of culture as grounded in land/agrarian practice often work to detemporalize and “naturalize social forms,”

50 I have benefited from conversations with Carolyn Rouse regarding the interdependencies of scholarly and developmentalist discourses, particularly concerning the construction of identity.
casting them as a “background” or prior to power (2004: 553). The tendency is wider than the GAP project: in his 1992 ethnography of Kurdistan, for instance, Martin Van Bruinessen bases much of his analysis on the “primordial loyalties” that shape Kurdish society and the ongoing puzzle of their persistence. For both scholars and planners of GAP, social relations are understood as grounded in the land, and land, in turn, is understood as natural, prior: “It must be readily underlined that imbalanced land distribution, the age old problem of the region, still persists” (Gökçe et al. 2010: 31). In the following section, I argue that the social and material arrangements prevailing in Urfa prior to GAP were neither “primordial” nor prior to the exercise of state power. In fact, there is no point at which Urfa’s social-material structure can be rightly construed as the “background” of state power, no matter how far back we go.

Land reform: a closer look at “primordial loyalties”

At the top of the settlement mound, Mehmet began to describe and demarcate the land below, which still appeared to me like an undifferentiated stretch of steppe. He pointed out houses and herds and rectangular plots of land, and began to tell me how these various pieces related to one

51 Van Bruinessen’s Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan” (1992; adapted from a doctoral dissertation that originally appeared in 1978) is perhaps the most well-known and widely read ethnographic account of Kurdistan. Equipped with anthropological training and a Marxist theoretical vocabulary, Van Bruinessen sets himself the task of explaining why Kurdish political movements are “conservative” rather than “revolutionary” in character: “The Kurds, to put it simply, seemed to be right wing, whereas peasant revolutionaries are supposedly leftists” (1). He posits that this is because Kurds are under the sway of “primordial loyalties” (the term is after Alavi 1973)—those “group ties” which “prevent poor peasants perceiving class contradictions” and “make them act against their objective interests” (6). In Kurdistan, these loyalties are primarily those of kinship and religion (represented, respectively, by the titular “agha” and “shaikh”

52 Van Bruinessen’s ethnography, in spite of some of his own terminology, effectively bears out this point as well.
another. At first, I was unsure what to make of this lesson in land-tenure (perhaps, like Rosemary, I’d thought that I was there to learn about Kurdishness). Yet over time, the residents of Yuvacalı would impress upon me that the question of land and water was not the “background” of social life – it was social life, and it was what I needed to know.

There are three types of land in the village. The first is grazing land, which is communally held. In the village, animals belonging to different households are sent out to graze as a collective herd, under the supervision of a village shepherd, who guides the animals among the scattered and irregularly shaped plots of grazing land. The second type of land is residential land, which is also communally held. Thus, if one wants to build a house, one need only ask one’s neighbors for permission. No one owns a deed to the land they live on, and no one pays property tax. The third type is farmland, which is deeded and privately owned. There is no communal farming: each household grows its own food staples and generates money through one cash crop. Land ownership in the village is highly uneven, with some families owning large plots and some having no land at all. This pattern was not “primordial,” but the outcome of a state land reform project – a history so recent that Mehmet could (and would, in time) recount it all from memory. The genesis of Urfa’s land tenure – which falls easily out of scholarly accounts – was for the residents of Yuvacalı proximate and necessary knowledge.

Prior to reform, land registration in Urfa was partial and spotty, yet both records and memory confirm that ownership was uneven. Land seems to have been concentrated in the hands of a few – not uncommonly, for instance, one man, an agha, would “own” (either de jure or de facto) an entire village, or even several villages. The residents of that village were his dependents. Some
residents were kin, or were members of the same tribe (aşiret).\textsuperscript{53} “Tribe” and “village” are by no means co-extensive,\textsuperscript{54} and so some of the agha’s dependents belonged to different tribes, while others were not tribally organized at all. Tribal affiliation seems to have been the chief indicator of prestige and social rank, with non-tribal inhabitants being of lowest status (Van Bruinessen 1992). The villagers (men and women) tilled the land, giving a certain percentage of products to the agha and keeping a certain percentage for themselves.

In official discourses, aghas are essentially described as thugs or tyrants who exercise unjust power over their dependents, e.g., by exploiting their labor. The agha represents what the state must overcome for the sake of equality. An excerpt from a 2010 sociological study reports:

The agha lived in a luxuriously built house with a large garden and deep-water well, and all the remaining villagers lived close together in a compound settlement. A constant stream of village women and children kept coming to the well of the agha to fetch water. I asked the agha whether there was need for safe water in the community. He responded with a question, ‘Why would the esir (slaves) need water when they have been getting it free for all these years?’ I had no way of telling whether he really meant to refer to the villagers as slaves or as sharecroppers. At home he spoke Arabic and I was unsure whether ‘esir’ had the same degrading connotation for him as it did for me (one of the field-workers quoted in Kudat et al. 2000: 245).

Urfa inhabitants paint a different picture. Those who remember life prior to land reform recall a world in which aghas played a broad range of social, economic, and political roles vis-à-vis their constituents, from arbitration to social justice and physical protection. In the words of one elderly resident of Urfa, “An agha did not eat until his neighbor, those who worked at his

\textsuperscript{53} Tribe does not necessarily indicate blood kinship; sometimes groups and individuals switched tribes, sometimes tribes merged, etc. (Van Bruinessen 1992).

\textsuperscript{54} Tribes can be extremely big and span not only villages but national boundaries among Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. A tribe can have various aghas and villages might be home to several tribes. Moreover, not every village has an agha. Yuvacalı, for instance, has three tribes and no agha. See Van Bruinessen 1992.
side, were fed... For that reason our system, which they call “feudalism,” is actually very
different – one hundred and eighty degrees different” (N.I. 6/3/2011). (He told me the following
story, of which I collected more than one version):

In Ottoman times, there was an agha’s house. It was winter and snow was falling. The
door was huge. A caravan came, with horses, donkeys, camels. They looked at the house,
and the door was so big that they went inside, thinking it was a han. They brought their
bags and their animals and everything inside. The agha put them up for a week or ten
days. They ate, drank. He gave the animals as much as they wanted to eat and drink. The
weather let up. “What do we owe you?” the guests asked. The agha replied, “What do
you think this is, a business?”

This might be a romantic picture, but it is difficult to reconstruct what ordinary people
thought, due first to the absence of written records by the non-elite, and also because today in
Urfa, as we will see, the agha has become a completely different figure.

According to Mehmet and others with whom I spoke, the principle aim of land reform was to
break the power of the aghas through the redistribution of land, thereby establishing uniform
control over the region.\(^{55}\) The Land and Agricultural Reform Law was passed in 1973, and in
Urfa it was implemented, unevenly,\(^{56}\) between 1973 and 1978 (Bilgen 2007). In the memory of
one resident of Yuvacalı, large tracts of land were expropriated “for the price of a chocolate bar”
and then re-allocated and registered to individual households in small plots. In the immediate
aftermath, social relations were thrown into disorder, to the extent that they had been mediated

\(^{55}\) The Turkish state was extremely nervous about the autonomy of the Kurdish provinces at this point,
especially in light of the independence struggle waged under Barzani, just across the border in Northern

\(^{56}\) “Under the rationale that land was unsuitably distributed for sufficient economic production, the
government decided to redistribute 3.2 million ha to 540,000 households [in Urfa], thereby providing land
for landless farmers or those with extremely small holdings with the intention of raising per capita
incomes. In fact only 230,000 ha were distributed to 1218 landless and smallholding families over the
three year period up to 1978 (18.9 ha per family).” (Moravidi 1990: 303).
by agrarian relations. “It was a social disaster,” I was told by the son of a former agha, who evoked a sense of unraveling ties:

Let’s say that if I am an agha in a village, my power comes from the land: I have material means, I have credit in the bazaar, with the grocer, the butcher, the craftsmen. I’m in debt to them, and I pay them at the time of the harvest. If my fields go, [I cannot meet these obligations]. My reputation goes, it diminishes to nothing. This was the state of things. Many men fell into depression. They lost their mental balance. Some of our people became paupers who could not bear to ask for help (dilenemez dilenci, literally a beggar who cannot beg). Many of them fled Urfa (kaçtı), so as not to be reduced to begging here. (N.I. 6/3/11)

One might consider the sudden losses inflicted upon land-owners (and merchants) to be redeemed by the fact that ordinary villagers were granted land, many of them for the first time. Yet the effects of the latter were ambiguous: “I was granted 30 dönüm, it wasn’t worth anything,” one former villager told me. (1 dönüm = 1000 square meters, which is equivalent to roughly a quarter of an acre). The comment was puzzling, since today 30 dönüm is an average-sized tract of land for a family. At the time, however, single households were not accustomed to growing their own food on their own tract of land. Under the old system, agricultural production tended to be integrated, so that large quantities of a given staple were reaped, sown, and produced collectively at the same time of year (e.g., bulgur in the fall, lentils in the spring), and with the use of shared equipment.

After land reform, some families of small land-holders developed more-or-less nuclear household economies, meaning that they produce their own food on their own tract of land, and/or practice small-scale animal husbandry (subsistence). This was the case, for instance, in most households in Yuvacali. More often than not, these arrangements were insufficient to support large families – especially because land parcel size (inherited by sons) diminishes with each generation, while the large family size remains roughly consistent. In Yuvacali, the effects
of diminishing tracts started to become evident in the 1990s, which is when most young men of the village began migrating to the Aegean coast to work for 3-4 months per year in the tourism sector. But many other families were at a loss for how to utilize the land they were given – “what can you do with a piece of land the size of a handkerchief?” – and so many sold it more or less immediately.

The buyers were, naturally, those with cash-in-hand, which often meant aghas and landowners. In Yuvacalı, Mehmet’s father (who was a land-owner but not an agha), had managed to buy up 350 dönüm in the wake of land reform – a sizable tract that today would place him among the top 5% of land-owners in Urfa. (After his death, the land was distributed among his nine male children, and was thereby significantly diminished per household – yet his sons, due to their pedigree, are still relatively elite within the village and relatively well-connected beyond it, and are thus better positioned than most to find a living outside of agriculture). At other times, the post-reform buyers of land were Urfalı urbanites – this was how Erkan’s father acquired his land, for instance (and that is why Erkan is a Turkish landowner in an otherwise Arab district). As we know, Erkan is among the political elite in Urfa. These two instances (Mehmet and Erkan) reveal some of the rippling effects of land-reform, and the way it continues to shape fortunes in the present.

The failure to equitably redistribute property via land reform has led observers to comment that, “land reform in the area has been of little significance” (Moravidi 1990: 309). In 1970,

57 I am told that some buyers were people from outside Urfa, although I have no first-hand knowledge of this.

58 “[Urfa’s present-day] pattern of landownership has been consistent over time. Any transformation of the relations of production has largely been stimulated by technical change and the commercialization of
55% of households were landless (Bilgen 2007); in 1998, it was 56% (Kudat et al 2000). From these numbers, one might well conclude that with land reform, little had changed. But from the perspective of Urfa’s inhabitants, everything had changed. If aghas had once been protectors as well as owners, the former function seems in many places to have dissolved. To begin with, some of the new landlords bore no relation, kinship or otherwise, to the villages they now in effect “owned.” At the same time, many land-holders began moving from villages to the city, thereby becoming absentee landlords. The relationship between the agha and his dependents thus shifted closer to a purely “economic” relation – in many cases, that of an “owner” to a “laborer” (or, at best, share-cropper). Under these conditions, according to one resident, “the agha became a tyrant, a local agent for foreign business, a usurer, an oppressor.”

The asymmetries of this relationship were exacerbated by two factors: the “intensification of commodity relations in agriculture” (Moravidi 1990: 307, 310) (e.g., a shift toward commercial crops and away from small family farming), and the introduction of mechanized agricultural equipment (VanBruinessen 1992). An Urfalı urbanite who today owns a considerable amount of land in villages recalls the time before mechanization and the shifts brought on by the latter:

In our time there were no agricultural machines. We lived according to feudal relationships. In the 50s the first tractors came, then the combine harvester… But prior to that, agriculture had been done by man-power. Villagers were your partners [Köyde yaşayan insanlar sizin ortağınızdi]. They worked the fields, reaped and sowed. It took a long time. There was no transportation, everything was transported by camels. Then the machines came. People were left without work, since the labor they had done began to be

farming. Land reform in the area has been of little significance” (Moravidi 1990: 309).

VanBruinessen, who conducted his fieldwork in the 1960s further east, noted “the rapid change of the economic relations between the aghas and their villagers. The mechanization of agriculture made the aghas less dependent on the villager’s labor… Social ties between the villagers loosened rapidly” (1992: 84). The relationship thus became more purely economic and more baldly exploitative.
done by machines. People began to migrate to the cities. (H.H. 4/14/11)

As H.H. indicates, the introduction of mechanized agricultural equipment (purchased by land-owners) drastically decreased the need for human labor. The result was that masses of villagers, who had either no land or too little to be productive, were forced to leave their villages.

Many families left Urfa altogether, moving to shantytowns in Western cities like Istanbul. Others remained in Urfa, either in the old city or its margins. Some of the newly-urbanized inhabitants worked for wages in the fields around Urfa, but these opportunities were meager compared with the demand. Furthermore, remaining in Urfa for agricultural labor is disincentivized from an economic point of view: since agricultural equipment is owned by the landlord, he is entitled to 70% of the profit, and the laborer to just 30% (elsewhere in Turkey, agricultural workers may be paid up to 50%). Thus many families who have “permanent” residences in Urfa spend several months of the year moving from province to province throughout Turkey, following crop cycles: Konya to harvest sugar beets in the spring, Adana to pick cotton in the late summer. The families who lead this life (at present, over a quarter of Urfa’s population) spend their months outside Urfa in mobile “camps” for farm workers, where they are exposed to extremes of poverty and ill health. As Zeynep Simsek, a medical researcher at Harran University, explained to me, seasonal labor affords almost no chance of upward mobility, even for one’s children – who, when they attend school, do so discontinuously, moving from city to city; many do not speak Turkish, and nearly all are socially ostracized (Simsek interview 5/24/11).

The first major wave of village to urban migration came in the mid-1970s. Those villagers who had lost their land and livelihood picked up and moved to shantytowns on the margins of the “old” Urfa. The city mushroomed – not as a cloud swelling from the middle, but as spores
clinging to the city’s edges, multiply centered and metastatic. Clusters of informal housing crowded in around the mosques and mansions of the old city, and, outside the city walls, makeshift neighborhoods (gecekonîdar, shantytowns) sprung up rapidly. The once-compact city lacked the basic infrastructure (let alone employment infrastructure) to support these waves of migration, and for the first time, there were people in Urfa who did not have enough to eat (A.K. 5/5/11).

We are now in a better position to understand why the implementation of GAP made things worse for almost everyone. As mentioned, GAP’s land-based investments enriched a few but made no appreciable change in the general distribution of wealth and land. In fact there are now slightly fewer land-owners overall; this is because a lot of farmable land in northern Urfa (e.g., in the Kurdish districts of Bozova and Birecik) was submerged by dam waters. Moreover, despite the boom of agriculture in Urfa, the province’s migration predicament did not budge: Studies show that today, as was the case just before GAP, around 28% of the population work as seasonal migrant labor (and up to 47% in rural areas) (Simsek 2012). This is partly because in Urfa, the government heavily subsidizes the growing of cotton for export markets, resulting in widespread monoculture (cotton is planted in 93% of irrigated land). Landowners in Urfa thus have a need for intensive agricultural labor only once a year, during the late summer harvest (at which point migrants from throughout Turkey come to Urfa) (Simsek interview 5/24/11). For the rest of the year, Urfalı agricultural workers are still obliged to migrate.

The preceding stories might be understood as stories of displacement – but not if the

60 Prior to GAP 37.3% of Urfa inhabitants were landed, and 62.7% were landless; as of 2010, 36.6% are landed and 63.4% are landless (Gökçe et al. 2010: 96).
contrary, *emplacement*, is taken to mean a timeless or “age-old” rootedness in the land. As we have seen, the very idea of the rootedness of culture – and the corresponding assumption that manipulation of the material environment would “unravel” (and “modernize”) social ties – is integral to Turkish state planning. To reproduce this tale, even in a critical or lachrymose mode, is to accept certain premises about the anteriority or naturalness of cultural forms. But the Urfa inhabitants with whom I spoke did not share such premises. “Land reform was good in its aims,” said one elderly resident, the son of a former agha (N.I.). “The logic of it was just, but in practice terrible mistakes were made.” Although N.I. is discontent with the city’s present, he does not dream of a return to the agha system of the past. Instead, his nostalgia takes the form of a still-recoverable sense of alternative: “Had [land reform] been implemented correctly,” he said, “Urfa’s fate in Turkey might have been different.”

*A homespun hermeneutics of culture and place*

Despite their experiences with land reform and GAP, the inhabitants of Yuvacalı did not understand their predicament as a lost cultural integrity that was disrupted by state intervention. That understanding would ultimately confirm the aim of official projects (to unravel the “social fabric” via environmental manipulation). Instead, villagers’ long experience with various forms of state intervention had given them a much more complex understanding of culture, and its relationship to the material environment. To understand how, we can return to the cultural tourism project in Yuvacalı, which came to be known as Nomad Tours.

Nomad Tours invites guests to learn about the culture of the village – which was, as we have seen, simultaneously to learn about its history and material setting. Thus every visitor to Yuvacalı is led on a “walking tour” around the village and the *tepe*, guided by a local inhabitant.
This inhabitant guides the attention of the group, pointing out details, telling stories, and linking up elements of the landscape to one another. The tourism project, and this walk in particular, prompted inhabitants of Yuvacalı to make explicit some of their implicit hermeneutics of identity, space, and time. This section will guide you, the reader, through some of these formulations by inviting you on the “walking tour” of Yuvacalı, as presented to me by inhabitants over dozens of walks.\(^{61}\)

We begin at ground level – by the path of green that marks the flow of Yuvacalı’s former water source. This abundant water source was likely one reason this was such an attractive settlement site for so many centuries. Tiles from a Roman bath, found right next to the source, support this conjecture. All of the land that rises, sloping, above ground level is part of the settlement mound (*tepe*). The latter (as mentioned) is a hill formed by successive periods of occupation and abandonment of the same site over millennia. Urfa’s otherwise totally flat terrain is dotted with thousands of these mounds, only a few of which have been excavated (e.g., Göbekli Tepe, and the aforementioned Sultantepe).

The residents of Yuvacalı estimate that this *tepe* dates several millennia: the artifacts it has turned up include cuneiform tablets, flint arrowheads, pieces of Roman mosaics, Persian coinage and figurines. In theory, the mound’s layers of history form successive strata, one atop the other, with the oldest at the bottom. But in fact, the mound resists such neat periodization, because all

\(^{61}\) Mehmet was my guide the first time I took this walk, but over the course of the year I would repeat it again and again, with guests or inhabitants of the village. We would walk with our eyes cast down, searching for bits of flint or pieces of mosaic, since the story of the tepe was always liable to revision. The ethos was open-ended – “what can you find?” – with an understanding that each new find might prompt us to reconsider the space, draw new maps and improvise new stories. In this way, the project in Yuvacalı resonates with interpretivist approaches to archaeology (see Hodder 2003, Tilley 2004).
of its layers have been dredged up and reused. That is how a tell becomes a tell: because a group of settlers finds and redirects the elements left behind by a previous group. And that is why the tour proceeds as it does, by following matter, linking up elements of the landscape to one another, and to the life worlds in which they participated.

We proceed along the base of the mound, observing the foundations of large defensive walls that once encircled it. Mehmet would teach me how to differentiate the foundation of walls from other rocks in the surroundings (“Nature does not make straight lines”). The defensive walls encircling the mound can, moreover, be easily distinguished from the walls of residences, since the former are large (the work of many people cooperating), and roughly cut (generally, the better the rocks are cut, the more advanced the technology, and the newer the wall).

We come to a part of the village where a family of nomads has set up tents where they live and where they shelter their sheep. These Kurdish-speaking nomads spend most of the year around the Karacadağ mountains, near present-day Armenia. In the winter, when that area is covered in snow, they make their way south to Urfa, where they stay until the late spring. In Yuvacalı, nomads rent land from the village on which to graze their sheep (land which, in the winter, the residents of Yuvacalı do not use intensively for agriculture.) This seasonal nomadic cycle of animal husbandry thus complements the sedentary agricultural cycle of village life.

Mehmet’s family, like most present-day residents of Yuvacalı, also used to be nomads, whose annual migratory cycle ranged from the highlands near present-day Armenia down into present-day Syria and Iraq. “Seven generations ago,” they settled around the northeast region of Urfa (today’s Hilvan district), and converted from Yezidism to Islam. (Their settlement and conversion seven generations ago would have coincided with late Ottoman settlement policies and conversion policies, both part of an effort to gain more centralized control over the region.
We arrive shortly at the former Armenian residential section, the remains of which consist of the stone foundations of houses. We note the comparatively small size of the rocks that comprise these foundations, and the precision with which they are cut: this is the kind of residence appropriate to a modern society where households are made by and for one family. An exception is the corner stone of one house, which is much larger and more roughly cut, and, Mehmet reasons, must have been incorporated from the ancient defensive walls. The foundations of these Armenian houses reveal that, in terms of size, structure, and layout, they were nearly identical to houses in the village today.

Mehmet relates what he knows of the oral history regarding the Armenians and their expulsion. Like many villages in the region, Yuvacali was predominantly Armenian (Mehmet’s great grandfather was one of the first Kurds to settle in the village). As the similar house structure suggests, Kurds and Armenians lived close to one another and with much cultural overlap (see too Van Bruinessen 1992). Mehmet recalls (as do many Kurds) family stories about the expulsion of Armenians in villages throughout Urfa. In many places, Kurds (both irregular forces and regular inhabitants) actively drove Armenians out. “They were told,” Mehmet recounts, “if you’re not a Muslim you’re not a Turk, and if you’re not a Turk, you can’t live here.” This displacement is recorded in the village’s name: “Yuvacali” (“Hilun” in Kurdish)

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62 A second wave of Kurdish and Arab settlement came in the early 20th century, when nomads were driven to settle due to the drawing of national boundaries disrupting transhumance cycles, and by the availability in Turkey of good land evacuated by Christian communities.

63 Other traces of the Armenian residents include the foundation of a large building (perhaps a church), and graves that could not belong to Muslims since they do not face toward Mecca.

64 See also Dressler (2012), Makdisi (2000), Becker (forthcoming 2013) regarding the effects of ethno-
contains the root “nest,” because, it is said, the Kurds “nested” in the homes and land evacuated by Armenians.

The settlement mound provides a figure for cultural life as forged in time, through the intertwining of people’s profoundly material lifeworlds (Ingold 1993, Hodder 1999). The entire history is of shifting configurations among identity, territory, and state power. The tour presents the environment in a state of dynamic flux – and a social life that is intimately intertwined with it. From this, we might draw a parallel between the relative fluidity of identity and the dynamic flux of the environment. Indeed, there is a general acknowledgment that many Christians in Urfa converted to Islam, changed names, and began speaking Turkish, Kurdish or Arabic. Somewhat more remarkably, people often speak about tribes crossing over from one ethno-linguistic identity to another, in response to changing political circumstances. A certain tribe will be said to have “become Kurdish” (Kurtlaşmak) or “become Arab” (Araplaşmak). This is readily acknowledged, usually as a matter of fairly distant oral history.

Sometimes, though, it shows up in present-day surprises. One interlocutor told me this light-hearted anecdote: “My grandfather İbrahim came (to Urfa) from Istanbul with his six siblings. One of his brothers moved to Syria, where the family still lives, and are known as Kurds. One is nicknamed ‘Kurdish Ali.’ When we went to visit him in Syria,” he laughed, “we told him he was a Turk from Istanbul” (H.H. 4/14/11). Interestingly, Christians who converted to Islam and continued to live in Urfa are sometimes referred to as sâbiî (also written subbi, subbâ), which means something like “crypto” (with the connotation that they converted, but are “really”

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nationalism on late Ottoman communal configurations.
Armenians or Syrianis). Conversely, the ethnic switches are described with the Turkish suffix -laş, meaning to become (with no connotation of a group “really” or “still” being something else).

To conclude the tour, we climb the settlement mound. We walk along a dirt path, plowed relatively recently by the DSI bulldozer that installed the concrete water tank atop the mound. This part of the tour thus links the time of the settlement mound to the time of state planning. As mentioned, Yuvacalı’s water began to dry up in 1995, concurrent with the completion of the nearby Atatürk dam. Several years later, the State Water Works installed a concrete tank atop the settlement mound, which is connected to the Atatürk reservoir, and now supplies all of the village’s water. In installing the tank, the bulldozers cut a spiral path around one side of the mound. Inhabitants lamented the destruction, but they also looked eagerly to see what, if anything, the bulldozers had turned up (many residential walls and pieces of pottery).

The partial destruction of the mound was just one of the cascading consequences that came from the drying up of Yuvacalı’s water source – and Yuvacalı was just one of the villages whose water source had dried up. As I gathered anecdotally, this was a relatively common story in many villages in the northern part of Urfa. There was, for instance, the small, dusty village of Höyüklu (meaning “with a tell,” i.e. another big settlement site), whose residents say that water used to be so close to the surface that one had only to strike one’s heel, like Ismail, to find it. And then there was Gölpınar, “Forty Springs,” so called because water used to flow out from under rocks in the nearby foothills. Today that water has ceased to flow, but the lake created by the Atatürk dam, eight miles away, is visible from the village: as one resident remarked, “We can see the Euphrates and yet we have no water.”

The areas where water has recently dried up are all, to the best of my knowledge, inhabited
by Kurds. It is ironic that GAP ostensibly intended to erase the question of identity, but has (at least in Urfa, and at least to some extent) exacerbated it. This is because many of the benefits of GAP have fallen to the Harran plain (inhabited by Arabs), while most of the costs have fallen to the northern districts (inhabited by Kurds). Not only were Kurds bypassed for the benefits of GAP, they were also displaced in large numbers by the construction of dams in the mid-1990s: dozens of villages close to the Euphrates were simply inundated. Also, after irrigation came to Harran, many Kurdish families started going there to work as wage-laborers, a source of some resentment. Today, when Kurds speak negatively of “Arabs” as such, it is always related to being rich, lazy, or undeserving (e.g., the insult, “You’re as lazy as a Harran agha!”)

At present, however, the drying up of water is for inhabitants far less a question of cultural discrimination than it is a practical and interpretive problem. The interpretive question is why did the water dry? Although it seems plausible (and to my mind, likely) that the dams changed the water table (such that water sources in lower-lying areas around the dam fell below ground-level), I don’t know anyone in Urfa who claims this with real conviction. Officially, there is a vehement denial of state responsibility (Erkan, for instance, told me that some springs had dried up due either to natural causes, or ignorant (bilinçsiz) drilling of wells on the part of villagers). More pressing are the practical problems of how to get by with less water. In Yuvacali, for instance, water initially had to be brought in from other villages in mobile tanks, which were improperly sanitized and led to a sudden rise in water-borne illness. Or, in Gölpınar, patterns of agriculture had to be changed so that families could grow crops using only a drip-system.

**Conclusion**

It seems appropriate to end here on the mundane, chronic problems that villagers face in the
absence of state support. It is fitting because – as Pero’s remark in the opening emphasized – these have been the main concerns of Urfalı villagers vis-à-vis the state. In the walking tour at Yuvacali, the story of state-led destruction of the landscape comes last – but not because it is an end-point or denouement. The drying up of Yuvacali’s water – like land reform, like the out-migration of young men – was not a definitive break in the culture of the village, but “another moment of historical change for a social form and structure that is always already hybridized and subject to a multiplicity of external influences and internal differentiations” (Silverstein 2004: 564). State time may emphasize ruptures (any school child can tell you the date of the Republic’s founding, the dates of coups, etc.), but the settlement mound links us to a different time, in which the past cannot but enter into and shape the present. Social time, however it is periodized and punctuated, is never “finished,” and “there are no breaks in it that are not integral to its tensile structure” (Ingold 1993: 160).
Chapter 3

“Nothing Will Ever be the Same Again”: the place of women and the pace of change

“In order to make it possible to think through, and live, [sexual] difference, we must reconsider the whole problematic of space and time” – Luce Irigaray

If you had visited Urfa in the mid-1990s, you would not have seen any women on the street, nor in the shops, buses, restaurants and cafes that they occupy so visibly now. In any case, this was a common refrain in 2010, when I first arrived in the city. From my perspective at that time, it was difficult to imagine: Urfa’s urban space, as I knew it, was so suffused by gendered relations—from the architecture of buildings to the experience of walking down the street—that the city without women was almost unthinkable. Yet I was prompted to think it, and often: hadn’t I noticed, for instance, that “new city” shops and restaurants have separate sections for women built into their architecture, whereas “old city” establishments lack designated sections for women? This is because “back then” (eskiden) women were simply expected to remain “in the home” (evde). As one interlocutor told me, “It used to be that a man would buy ten pairs of shoes, bring them home for his wife to choose one, and return the other nine pairs to the store the next day.”

These remarks call to mind those official discourses that mobilize the “place” of women in Urfa—their presence or absence in the “public sphere”—as an index of the city’s modernization.

Irigaray (1993: 8)
With GAP, the progress of Urfa women (or lack thereof) has been a major point of concern. The status of women is a major preoccupation of developmental discourses, a factor that confirms “backwardness” and justifies government intervention (Abu-Lughod 1998, Escobar 1995, Ahmed 1992). In Turkey, “gender-differentiated statistics” often serve as “evidence” that the southeast remains ‘backwards’ and ‘underdeveloped’” (Harris 2008: 1704). Studies of Urfa often cite statistics related to women’s low rates of literacy and knowledge of Turkish, low rates of property ownership and formal employment, and high rates of natality. While changes in gender norms are often regarded as particularly slow and problematic, the studies report limited improvement over time (e.g., Terzi 2010, Gökçe et al. 2010).

In official studies of (/by) GAP, the progress of women (however modest) is understood largely as an effect of urbanization. Recall that during the GAP years, Urfa families were moving—either from the villages to the city center, or from the stone houses of the historic “old city” to the burgeoning apartment blocks of the “new city.” Whereas in villages women are considered to be under the sway of “patriarchal traditions” that “exclude them from public life” (Kudat et al 2000: 209; see too Moravidi 1990), in the city women are perceived as more free: “Migration is the most important of the many factors that dilute [traditional gender norms] and create countervailing forces, since migrants know little of the local traditions and tribal relations” (251). The hypothesis is that, as women move from the village to the city, or from the “old city” to the “new city,” they are also emerging from a domestic interior to the public sphere outside; from traditional to modern accommodations; from the past into the future. We are thus invited to “visualize temporal movement in terms of the transformation of [space]” (Grosz 2004).

This strategy is a familiar one in Urfa, where changes in physical space are commonly mobilized as evidence of modernization: take, for instance, the banner near the new bus station
stating “Urfa has a new bus station,” or the placard in the center square which reads, simply, “Nothing will ever be the same again” (Artık hiçbirşey eskisi gibi olmayacak). Implied is a constant subject who observes these changes in space from the “outside,” from a stable point of view (Colebrook 2001). Without this constant subject, there could be no linear sequencing of objects in space, and no effect of a directed, irreversible time: Nothing will ever be the same again.

As the opening paragraph suggests, the question of gender and space is not solely an official preoccupation: the people of Urfa likewise draw on gendered discourse as a temporal discourse, a way of understanding change over time. To say that “there were no women on the street” twenty years ago is to draw an implicit comparison with today’s streets, where women and men appear in roughly equal numbers. (In fact, it is a statement that can only be made in the past tense: it is doubtful that the same people, fifteen years ago, were saying “there are no women here”). Yet the significance of these local accounts is very different from the official ones. For while official discourses rely on a constant subject, “woman,” who is extracted from lived spatial contexts, local accounts insist that to be a woman is always to be a woman somewhere, within a specific set of social and material relations. Take the fact of urban migration: local accounts make it clear that women did not simply change where they were without changing essentially who they were. They show us, rather, that to change one’s type of dwelling was to alter the kinds of tasks that organized life, the intertwining of these tasks with those of other people, and thus the very rhythms and patterns of life.

We might therefore start by considering the broader context within which spatial discourse is bound up with discourses of identity, gendered and otherwise, in the context of migration. Consider those elderly men and women who today speak in fond, nostalgic terms of the “old
city” of their youth. Their descriptions of “neighborhood culture” (mahalle kültürü) are always tied to the lived environment and, in particular, to the interconnectedness (relative to modern apartments) of houses—the openness of the home to neighbors, guests, animals, and others. These men and women mention the drift of familiar voices between courtyards, and the smell of food wafting from home to home. *Koku hakkı*, the “right of smell,” describes an informal understanding that, if one’s neighbors can smell the food one is cooking, one is obliged to share with those neighbors. A similar sharing takes place with communal feasting of sacrifice meat, and the less formal but no less reliable distribution of leftovers.

They also strongly emphasize the house’s openness to non-human elements. This was often to do with climate: “Those houses stayed cool in the summer, warm in the winter. In the winter it snowed. But the walls did not let out the heat. The walls were thick. That’s how we grew up. As kids, we’d collect the snow in the courtyard, we melted it” (C.I. 6/17/11). They also commonly mention animals: “In the 60s, we had race-horses in the house. Our house had two sections. It was like a mansion. One part was for animals, the other for people. My father was very fond of animals. He raised horses, donkeys, peacocks, even gazelles. They became domesticated, accustomed to humans. They'd eat candy from his hand…” (H.H. 4/14/11)

With the arrival of villagers, the porous boundaries of traditional Urfa homes seem to have become a point of concern among residents—a shift noticeable even within the narration of individuals. Take the exposure of the house to weather elements, a characteristic mentioned fondly

66 Interview with Cevher Ilhan, 6/17/11.
67 Interview with Hasan Hayirli, 4/14/11.
in old city accounts, which becomes the precise characteristic that is no longer tolerable:

People can no longer live in the old houses. [Although I appreciate the houses aesthetically and support their restoration], even I can’t live in them. I mean, it’s honestly more comfortable to live in an orderly, cozy (kutu gibi, literally “box like”) apartment with climate control. The old city’s winters were difficult. The houses were nice in the summer but unlivable in the winter. We used to live there. In the winter you would sleep in the rooms, and they stayed warm, but—I beg your pardon—if you need to go to the bathroom, where is it? You would have to go down into the cold, the snow, the rain. It’s not easy. One can’t live in those houses (C.K. 7/6/2011).

We can see how the arrival of villagers prompted a reorganization of the senses (involving visibility, proximity, the olfactory). There emerged among the urban elite new concerns with cleanliness, privacy, and domestic comfort: old houses began to appear unsuitable because they made “private life” too visible, because animals were too proximate to the (now only-human) domestic sphere, and because occupants were too much exposed to the elements.

The preoccupation in these narratives with the question of domestic boundaries indicates that, although these boundaries were shifting and unstable, they were no less significant for that. On the contrary, it seems that the boundary’s instability made it a point of particular attention, an “incitement to discourse” (Foucault 1978: 17). During the decades of migration, as the space of social life contracted, boundary questions became a way of differentiating people suddenly side-by-side, a way of drawing status contrasts between one’s family and others. This differentiation was deeply gendered from the start:

My father died in 1973. We lived in the old city, in one of the big stone houses with a courtyard. The surrounding edges of the courtyard were lined with rooms for all of the

68 Interview with Cihat Kurkuoglu, 7/6/11.

69 Relatedly, see Wendy Brown 2010 on the building of walls as expressive of cultural anxiety. She discusses, for instance, the desire among some conservatives to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexican border in the context of anxieties about the presence of Mexican immigrants in the U.S.
people in the family. My mother wanted to move to an apartment. I did not want to. In
the summer, we used to sleep outside on platforms made of cedar wood. Then my mother
said: “My son, we have young girls, people around us can see them. It’s a shame for us.
Let’s move to an apartment.” And so in 1975, we moved to Bahçelievler [Urfa’s first new
city neighborhood] (H.H. 4/14/11).

One’s sleeping daughters were presumably no more visible in 1975 than they had been in
previous years, but by 1975 that exposure had become shameful. (H.H. recalls it as the factor that
precipitated the family’s move.) In an interesting counterpoint to the official narrative, wherein
the confinement of women marks “backwardness,” H.H.’s mother views her daughter’s
confinement as requisite to their status and respectability. This theme will be drawn out over
the course of the following ethnographic sections.

While the question of domestic boundaries arose in the context of migration, it remains an
important point of concern in Urfa today, where changes in dwelling, class, and gendered
relations continue at a rapid pace. Each of the following discussions centers on a type of
contemporary dwelling—a mudbrick village house, an apartment in a neighborhood of recent
urban migrants, and a new city apartment. In each instance, we will examine how the line
dividing inside and outside is drawn, and ask what modes of dress, activity, visibility, and
sociality are delineated to each sphere. By asking about phenomenal boundaries – that is, the
boundary not as “real” but as experienced and constituted (or not) by inhabitants – my aim is to
draw space and time out of the background, and ask how they might in some ways be
constitutive of gender. We will find that the refiguration of domestic boundaries in Urfa is deeply
implicated in the ongoing refiguration of gendered relations – and that the latter simultaneously
implicates class, upward mobility, and even ethnicity.

70 And also their relative “modernity” with respect to villagers; this point will become clear later.
The Village House: Pero

When Pero got married at age 21, she moved from her father’s house to her husband’s house – a distance of roughly 200 meters. With her husband Halil, who was also her paternal cousin, she built a new home and established a new life. But it was as though this new life, as mother and homemaker, had been rehearsed: as a girl, Pero had helped to raise her nine younger siblings, in lieu of going to school – a common trajectory for first-born females. With Halil, she raised three children of her own (a fourth died in infancy). Her two teenage boys, Fatih and Faruk, even physically resembled the younger brothers she had raised, and this was a continual source of doting commentary among relatives. If you were to ask Pero, as I sometimes did, about what might have been – for instance, had she remained in school, or married someone else, or had the chance to travel – she would brush off the question as irrelevant, senseless even (“Who doesn’t want to travel?”). One could get the idea that Pero had neither choice nor mobility, that the life of a village woman is a seamless unfolding of expected events and relationships.

This, in any case, was the conclusion reached by the teams of social scientists dispatched to southeastern villages by the Ankara Sociological Association, in conjunction with the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP). Armed with surveys and statistics, they set out to discover those factors that subordinate village women, keeping them essentially “stuck” (only 24% are born outside the village where they currently reside) (Kudat and Bayram 244-252)71. Among the

71 Harris points out how “Kurdish and Arabic speaking women” are particularly singled out in the developmental discourse of southeastern Turkey, and how their being “stuck” is temporal as well as spatial: “It is these (rural, minority, religious, veiled) women that stand in as the multi-ethnic Anatolian village women of Turkey’s past, in contrast to the ‘modern Turkish woman’ (urban, middle class, secular) of Turkey’s future” (Harris 2008: 1704).
factors considered are women’s inability to speak Turkish, lack of formal education, exclusion from property ownership, and lack of remunerative employment. Together, these factors “add up” to women’s exclusion from public life, and mandate intervention on their behalf (Harris 2008). Yet the same factors that place village women in need of intervention also makes them difficult to reach: “[With the GAP Project], male members of the society were able to interact with a large number of new actors over the decades whereas women were confined to their homes” (Gökçe et al. 2010: 242).

I want to pause on the way that “confinement to the home” serves as an emblem of village women’s subordination. Consider the following domestic scene, included as an ethnographic excerpt in a sociological study by the World Bank:

The room in Harran was almost empty, there were only a large kilim [carpet] on the floor and several pillows on which you can lean back, rest your arm or sleep. We were chatting with a young man with shiny black eyes about this family and living conditions in the village. A baby was sleeping in the cradle and another one was playing with a plastic car with a missing wheel. The mother, who had a nice face with smiling eyes, was in a long, bright green dress. She moved briskly in and out but did not join the conversation. After a while, I realized that she did not know Turkish and her husband translated into Arabic for her (Nedret Durutan, task team leader, in Kudat and Bayram 2000: 242).

In this scene, the domestic space embodies the exclusion of village women from social life. It takes as axiomatic a juxtaposition between a sub-social domestic interior and a social world “out there.” This is a widely held social scientific assumption, as Strathern (1988) points out: “The anthropological compulsion to identify what is crucially ‘social’… assumes that the indigenous models promote a split between a society so perceived and elements that might be regarded as
asocial, antisocial, subsocial” (76).\footnote{72}

This imagination of domestic space as a separate realm may rest, in part, on a common and under-examined understanding of “place” as a container or enclosure (Irigaray 1993, Colebrook 2001, Grosz 2001, Ingold 2011). As Ingold (2011) argues, the notion of place as a container is a product of a particular Anglo-American thought tradition which divides something called “place” (as a specific enclosure) from something called “space” (as a boundless totality); while this distinction is not “immediately given to our experience,” it nonetheless pervades social science. Consider Bourdieu’s famous study of Berber village homes (1970). The essay begins with a diagram of the house’s morphology, noting the paramount and unambiguous significance of the line dividing its interior from the world outside. In Bourdieu’s account, the threshold of the house is the master organizing line for a set of binary, homologous oppositions that organize Berber culture: nature/culture; inside/outside; female/male. It is a “magic frontier” that divides, “on the one hand, the privacy of all that is intimate, on the other, the open space of social relations; on the one hand, the life of the senses and of the feelings, on the other, the life of relations between man and man, the life of dialogue and exchange (1970:155).

Bourdieu’s diagram fixes the threshold of the house as a static boundary that holds apart two essentially distinct spheres. He conceives of movement as the movement between those two spheres, and emphasizes in particular “the movement toward the outside, by which man affirms

\footnote{72 Strathern’s account “makes explicit one common implicit practice: extending out from some core study certain problems that become – in the form derived from the core study – a general axis of comparative classification” (1988: 45). Strathern challenges the anthropological project which takes the question of relations between “men” and “women” as a universal one – as though the only task were to discover the culturally specific relation between two axiomatic terms. One discovers the character of this relationship in given societies, but the terms themselves remain fixed, unchanged by the specific relation.}
himself as man, turning his back upon the house in order to go and face men” (170). The diagram sets up a picture of movement as *transitive*, between place A and place B (Ingold 2011). If, however, we approach space not as static and already given, but through processual ethnographic description, a different sort of movement becomes visible—not a directed movement from point A to point B but a continuous, intransitive movement that is productive of space itself.73

Pero became my “host-mother” in Yuvacalı, a small Kurdish village that lies along the road to Diyarbakır, 60 kilometers northeast of Urfa’s city center. I stayed in Pero’s house for two or three days at a time, for two or three weeks each month, while teaching English to her seventeen-year-old son, Fatih, who hoped to work in tourism. Our communication was difficult at first: like nearly all women in Yuvacalı, Pero had received no formal education in Turkish. She picked up the language from television and music, from her husband Halil and later from her children, but it was still basic and heavily accented (which would have presented no difficulty if my own Turkish had been more fluent). Language barriers aside, Pero was singularly concise with words—she preferred, for instance, to utter an emphatic “hmph!” in place of the word “yes,” *evet* (her infant niece would eventually pick up this habit of speech, to everyone’s delight).

Much of my time was thus spent shadowing Pero, accompanying her through her daily tasks, and relying on bodily participation to reveal to me a “familiarity with the world born of habit, that implicit or sedimentary body of knowledge” of everyday life (Merleau Ponty 277). I helped

73 The transitive/intransitive distinction is from Ingold (2011): “Imagine a river, flowing along between banks on either side. Suppose that the banks of the river are connected by means of a road-bridge. We could then cross by road from a location on one side to a location on the other. Thus the bridge establishes a transitive connection between the two locations. But the river, running under the bridge in a direction orthogonal to the road, does not connect anything to anything else. Rather, it just flows, without beginning or end, scouring the banks on each side” (Ingold 14).
serve and prepare meals, clean, and manage bedding. In the beginning, of course, my presence only slowed Pero down, as I lacked not only skill but strength, but eventually I could be relied upon to serve tea for guests or cut vegetables (if not for more complicated work like milking sheep or constructing tents from mosquito netting). I worried, of course, that my field-notes from the village consisted primarily of mundane ephemera: recording the day a lamb was born, instructions on how to make a fire. Over time, however, these seemingly isolate activities began to take their place among an ensemble of tasks, which were themselves keyed to other tempos, both human and inhuman, that interwove to give the days their rhythm and shape.

When I recall the time I spent in village homes, there is one morning toward the end of my fieldwork that I remember with absolute clarity, because it seems to galvanize and bring to focus dozens of mornings like it. It was breakfast time, and everything was absolutely familiar: the brightly colored plastic tablecloth spread on the floor; the plates piled high with roasted peppers and eggplant; fresh tomatoes and cucumber; and homemade yogurt and cheese. To an outside observer, a meal like this one would appear haphazard or chaotic, since seemingly everything is in motion: the reaching of arms and passing of food; the multiple and cross-cutting conversations in Kurdish (typical among adults) and Turkish (either with me or with the children); the constant movement of children, up and down from their seats and in and out of the room; the second and third cousins who drop by to assume their place at the table. But for those present (and now for me), everything was in its place: I knew how each item would be consumed, how the tablecloth would be rolled up, how the bread would be collected and stored (never thrown away). I could imagine (as could anyone there) the trajectories of each item before us: when each was sown, reaped, and processed, and how, and by whom (because it is this productive activity that gives shape to days and seasons, synching the lives of individuals and households).
What does this descriptive scene tell us about the space of the house that a map or a diagram does not? Whereas the diagram makes the space of the house static—a container in relation to which bodies move—a descriptive account allows us to grasp how place itself emerges through a flow of continuous activity. In this light, it is strange to even speak of Pero “in the house”: this formulation implies that the house contains her, when in fact the house is only a particularly dense meeting point for the various trajectories of her productive activity (see Ingold 2011). With this in mind, we can turn to the house itself – not first as a place that confined Pero, but a place she was constantly bringing into being.

Halil and Pero built the house in 1974, shortly after they were married. They chose an area of the village where three of Halil’s brothers had already made their homes, thus building up a kind of “neighborhood” or fraternal cluster in one corner of the village (brothers tend to dwell in clusters this way, while sisters move away with their husbands when married). Pero and Halil did not need a building permit, because residential land in villages is communally held and widely available, nor did they need a special building material, because this village happens to be on the site of an ancient settlement mound or tell, whose constitutive material is adobe. Adobe makes for an especially cohesive and durable building material – but not a permanent one: the walls of the house retain their integrity for about one year, at which point they must be reinforced; otherwise the wind, rain, sun and seasons would cause them to give way. The house’s walls are thus never ultimately “built” or finished, but have to continually be remade through human effort.

In any case, it is not clear that the walls themselves constitute the outer limits of the house – for many of what we would consider “domestic” functions lie outside of these four walls. For instance, several meters from the front door, there is an open fire where the daily bread-making and
most of the cooking is done (the indoor kitchen is used mainly for storage); twenty meters beyond that is an outhouse and, beyond that, there is a pit where garbage is periodically incinerated. We might call this outer domestic space a “courtyard,” except it is not marked off from the rest of the village by a tangible boundary like a fence. Instead, the outer limits of the courtyard must be continually made and remade: At night, while people sleep, this outdoor area is given over to the family’s chickens and sheep. When Pero wakes up in the morning, her first task is to sweep the area with a straw broom, brushing away the dust and animal refuse that collected during the night, and reclaiming it for human use. Once again, we can appreciate how boundaries are constituted through movement, rather than marking movement’s “outer limits” (Ingold 2011: 149).

The boundaries that mark the house off from the outside – and from other houses – are relatively permeable. Rather than being turned in upon itself, the house is connected to a “meshwork” of homes (Ingold 2011). This lattice is formed by the constant visitation of relatives, by children moving in and out of homes and backyards, and by the sound of voices distorted by wind and walls. On one occasion, I was present at a rooftop meal, when we heard someone shout out “Has anyone lost a goat?” In the village, animals belonging to different households are sent out to graze as a collective herd, under the supervision of a village shepherd, and at dusk the animals return to their respective homes. My host (who knew someone whose goat did not return that evening) stood up from the meal and shouted back “It’s Haci Ihsans!” They told me that in the days before cell phones, this was a very common mode of communicating in the village.

This “meshwork” is also made up of relations of production and exchange that weave village households together. In the last chapter, I explained how, after land reform, the nuclear household became the primary unit of agricultural production and economic integration. Still, no
household is self-sufficient. Consider the case of bulgur wheat, a dietary staple of which each household grows, produces, and stores its own annual supply. Nonetheless, the production of bulgur takes a village: Loosening the chaff, for instance, is a labor-intensive process requiring the work of three grown women and shared technical equipment (an old, giant rock, whose large size and porosity make it ideal for threshing wheat.) Because there is only one rock, and because everyone is threshing wheat during the same week (and at the same time of day – before the sun is too high), the work requires coordination and cooperation. Households are also integrated through the exchange of certain products: some households specialize in particular goods like bee-keeping and honey, or (in Pero’s case) yogurt and cheese.

We have seen that the boundaries of a village home, rather than setting up a stable divide between two definitive realms, involve an ongoing process whereby “inside” and “outside” are perpetually redrawn in relation to particular kinds of activity and movement. We can now see empirically whether and in what way this boundary-making is gendered. Pero’s daily activities require her to move constantly in and out of the house: the tasks of cooking, washing, and tending to animals constantly expose village women to the gaze of others, undermining the notion that the home’s walls instantiate a divide between the interior world of women and the exterior world of men. Indeed, women do not mark the threshold in a way that suggests a gendered transition at all; rather, they observe the threshold of the doorway in the same way as men do, by taking their shoes on and off. All else remains the same: a loosely-tied headscarf and a long skirt are called for inside as well as out (women do not take off their skirts, even while sleeping).

That women remain publicly presentable inside the home suggests that, just as the outside contains elements of “domestic” life, so too is the inner space pervaded by a sociality which
cannot be labeled strictly domestic or private. Nearly every village house shares a basic interior structure: it is made up of two rectangular rooms, separated by a foyer. The rooms are formally identical: each one is carpeted and lined with hard, rectangular cushions, but they are otherwise devoid of furnishings: there are no tables, chairs, beds, or desks that would designate the function of either room in an enduring way. This is an important point of contrast for those of us who are accustomed to inhabiting “finished” spaces (as our homes and apartments are conventionally called). A “finished” dining room is one whose essential elements – table, chairs, etc. – are in place; it is constituted independently of whether or by whom it is occupied at a given time. A village room, by contrast, is never “finished”: each of the day’s activities – eating, socializing, sleeping – calls for a different array of objects, which are brought into the room and arranged provisionally for the task at hand.

At mealtimes, for instance, a brightly colored plastic tablecloth is spread lengthwise in the center of the room. Its full length is several meters, but it is only extended to accommodate the number of people present for the meal, with the excess length folded underneath. Plates of food are spread along the length of the tablecloth, portioned not for each individual, but so that dishes are evenly distributed along its length. If a meal consists of yogurt, cheese, cucumbers and tomato, the important thing is that each person can reach each one. Everyone drinks from one cup. Silverware is not typically used, and it is common for everyone to share one or two cups, which are filled and refilled with water or ayran. The setup is exceptionally responsive – for instance, a newly arrived person is easily accommodated (everyone just shifts down).

The same room is used for sleeping. Again, there is no furniture that divides up the space and pre-designates who sleeps where (e.g., a parents’ room with a queen sized bed, a children’s room with twin beds, a guest room). The “beds” are thick mats (that women make by hand from
sheep’s wool). In the daytime the mats are kept folded and stored in a recess of the wall, and at night they are unfolded and arranged for sleeping. How they are arranged depends on who is present – and guests being so common, there is much variation. It might be, for instance, that the family unit (man-wife, and small children) form one cluster, and non-family guests past a certain age are divided by gender. These divisions sometimes entail a physical boundary (as in the winter, when people are distributed between the two rooms); sometimes it just entails putting as much space as possible between clusters (as in the summer, when everyone sleeps on a flat, rectangular roof with no subdivisions). As is the case with dining arrangements, people do not inhabit an inert or already built space, but rather “contribute through their movements to its ongoing formation” (Ingold 2004: 329). The distribution of people and of objects responds to the task at hand, and on who is present – in short, on the relational context.

Gender is thus instantiated in the house processually. Although the two rooms of the village house are conventionally referred to as haremlık and selamlık – women’s and men’s spaces – I have never seen anyone in the village refer to them, or use them, as such. But that does not mean that gender is unimportant or is not “marked” spatially. For instance, when one enters a room, one does not enter as any individual who may choose any seat. One enters as a gendered, aged, relatively known or unknown person, whose seating options are delineated by the distribution of social others. As people enter and exit the room, the relational field shifts, and people continually rearrange themselves:

Over the course of the afternoon, men and women (myself included) tended over time to drift apart, not all at once, but almost imperceptibly, gravitating either to opposite sides of the room, or sometimes into different rooms altogether. For instance, at a certain point all we women found ourselves in the kitchen, chatting, and the men were in the sitting room. I had left my phone in my bag in the sitting room, and entered in order to fetch it. The men, who had been sitting comfortably (legs extended in front of them), immediately tucked their legs underneath themselves. We women, too, performed the same ritual:
when any of the men entered the room, we’d promptly fold our legs beneath us (field-note excerpt).

The above description captures some aspects of the micro-dances of proximity, familiarity and distance that characterize gendered relations in the village. The village home is a responsive environment, one whose organization is not fixed or intrinsic but is assembled and disassembled according to an ongoing movement of bodies. Here (as in the bus scene that I described in chapter one), space is integral to the construction of gender, and gender to the construction of space.

Although the village is not, it seems, the strictly carceral space described by developers, it is nonetheless true that many women hope to see their daughters (and sons) grow up to live in the city. Pero and Halil, like many parents, seem to view urbanization as a natural component of upward mobility: they imagined that their twelve-year-old daughter, Aylin, would complete primary school and then begin high school, and that advanced education would lead (as was often the case) to a transition from village life to city life. For Aylin, the village would be the place where her parents live, a place for weekends and visits, but not the center of life. This seems to be regarded by all as desirable, largely because village life is seen as physically grueling. When I asked Pero why she regarded urban life as desirable for her daughter, she replied as though the answer were obvious, “She’ll get to stay inside.”

In this section, I have shown that the house’s threshold, rather than an architectural “given,” is a variable product of practical activity. Pace Bourdieu, it does not hold apart two ontologically distinct spaces, nor is it a figure for binary, reciprocal relations between men and women (as his homology between inside/outside, female/male implies). The domestic sphere is far more than the “inverse” or negative of the public sphere, just as woman is far more than the inverse of man.
(Irigaray 1993). In the next section, I suggest that the non-“givenness” of the domestic threshold needn’t make it less significant; on the contrary, I show how it has become a fraught concern in neighborhoods of village-urban migrants.

The Para-Urban Home: Fatma and her sisters

In the summer of 2011, Fatma and Ahmet were newlyweds – and also newly acquainted, having agreed to marry after a brief meeting (a görüşme, or “go-see”) in the presence of their parents. A few days later, the two were married, and a few days after that their new home was ready. When I visited, shortly thereafter, the apartment had not yet been lived in, and so its form reflected not the exigencies of daily life and livelihood but rather the couple’s imagination of what their lives would look like. In it were things that neither of them ever had growing up: the bed with its layers of frilly linen, the couches that smelled of new fabric, the appliances they’d not yet figured out how to use. Everything was as they had specified – or almost. The walls of one room were painted two noticeably different shades of pistachio green, so a margin of contrast ran horizontally around the room (the painter had said don’t worry, it would be the same color when it dried). The new house was located in Eyyübiye, the same para-urban neighborhood where the two had grown up, and it was thus physically close to their respective family homes. However, as Ahmet had told me with a grin, the new house was at once “both near and far” from their families (hem yakın, hem de uzak).

If, for Ahmet, marriage and a new home meant more independence and greater personal freedom, for Fatma this was less clear. Prior to her engagement, she told me, she “hadn’t even thought” of getting married. “My family didn’t pressure me, plus my life at home [with them] was comfortable (rahat).” When I asked why then she chose to marry when she did, she
shrugged. The shrug was vague and, to me, suggestive of an unspoken context: At twenty-five, Fatma was at a precarious age. It is the age past which one’s prospects for marriage dwindle, and when neighbors may begin to whisper of a woman that she has “stayed at home” (evde kalmış).

The term evde kalmış kız, a “girl who stayed home,” refers to an unmarried woman who lives with her parents, and whose chance to marry is thought to have passed. For instance, Fatma’s unmarried older sister Emine, now 29, is understood to have stayed home. The opposite term for a girl who stayed home is not (as might be expected) one who “left” home. Instead, when a person is married, she (or he) is called evli (“with home”), and a housewife is called an ev hanım (literally “house woman”). In marrying, the critical distinction is not that a woman “leaves home” or is “outside the home,” but rather that the home in question shifts from that of the father to that of the conjugal pair.

When I met Fatma, she was poised between ev hanım and evde kalmış – between being a “housewife” and a “girl who stayed home.” That these were Fatma’s only two options was not simply because she was a twenty-five-year-old woman, but because she was a twenty-five-year-old girl who stayed home.

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74 Given the implication of advanced age, it is significant that the phrase designates a “girl (kız) who has stayed home,” rather than a woman (kadın, bayan). The difference between kız and kadın (girl and woman) is virginity. Thus, regardless of age, someone who has stayed home is presumed to be a virgin, and is referred to as a “girl.” The girl-woman terminological distinction has been criticized by Turkish feminists and others, who have encouraged the use of the more neutral term “bayan” (woman). Today the kız-kadın distinction is both widely used and regarded by many as politically incorrect. Prime Minister Erdoğan, for instance, was heavily criticized by progressives when, at a rally in 2011, he said of a female heckler that he did not know whether she was a girl or a woman (thereby raising the question of her virginity and morality).

75 This is not specific to either the para-urban context or to Urfa; the phrase is used all over Turkey.

76 It should be noted that ev hanım lacks the pejorative connotation of the English “housewife” - it is a neutral term. With evde kalmış, the implication is of having been “left behind,” and it typically draws sympathy (or cruelty: a Google image search of the term turns up caricatures of “unmarriageable” women).

77 I owe this way of putting the point to Claire Nicholas.
old woman at this precise time and place. For Fatma’s youngest sisters – nineteen-year-old twins away at university – twenty-five would be something else entirely. This speaks to the fact that, over the past three decades (and especially for the children of migrants), gendered norms and roles were rapidly changing. In Urfa, where the age-range among siblings can regularly span twenty years, one can often discern generational shifts even within nuclear families. Thus Fatma and her sisters, though born just a few years apart, led lives with vastly different sets of constraints and possibilities. Fatma’s three older sisters had never been educated (two were housewives, one stayed home); the two married sisters lived in the neighborhood, and with their children visited their parents almost daily. The two younger sisters, as mentioned, had finished high school and had recently begun university in another city. Fatma was on the precise tipping point. She had not attended high school, but was working gradually toward a diploma through correspondence courses (açık öğretim), and she studied Ottoman with the local Nur chapter.

It is tempting to write the story of Fatma and her sisters (a story shared by many families) as a progress narrative—to see, from oldest to youngest sisters, a progression from least to most mobile. From that perspective, we might view Fatma as having just missed the cut-off: if she’d been born a few years earlier, she might have shared her sisters fate as an evde kalmış kız; a few years later, and she might have gone to university. But if we pause instead on Fatma’s present, on the choices open to her within this particular set of contingencies, we can see that it was not that simple. It was not clear to Fatma that her situation was better than the former, or worse than the latter.

Fatma, like her husband Ahmet, had grown up in Eyyübiye – an informal, para-urban neighborhood on the southern margin of the city. The quarter had risen up over the past thirty
years in order to accommodate urban migration from the rural districts of Harran and Akçakale – Urfa’s only two predominantly Arab districts, which lie along the border with Syria. These are among the least socioeconomically developed districts of Urfa (Kudat and Bayram 2000), whose inhabitants remain relatively distinct from the rest of the city: they tend to marry within the tribe and have low rates of Turkish. Among adult women, 82% cannot read or write, and only 16% are primary school graduates (Kudat and Bayram 2000: 252). Furthermore, the dialect of Arabic spoken in these districts, because it is not connected to the written language and only partially connected to a wider Arabic-speaking community in Syria, deviates further from Modern Standard Arabic with each generation.

When, beginning in the 1970s, changes in land tenure and agricultural production disrupted long-standing patterns of land tenure and livelihood in Harran and Akçakale, many families picked up and moved en-masse to the old city – or, rather, to the city’s southern margin, where they gradually built up the quarter of Eyyübiye. Eyyübiye is named for the neighborhood’s famed shrine of the prophet Job (Arabic: Eyyub). The official, Turkish name of the neighborhood is Eyyüp Peygamber (Prophet Job). Although migration to Eyyübiye began several decades ago, the neighborhood retains to this day an ad-hoc, unfinished quality, with unpaved roads and bare cinder block houses. There are no parks or planted trees, and so there is no shade and nothing to hold down the dust during windstorms. This apparent lack of investment reflects, in part, the fact that each family hopes to only be passing through, that Eyyübiye will be a temporary stop between the village and an apartment in a comparatively upscale new city neighborhood like Bahçelievler or Karaköprü. Yet the concrete homes of Eyyübiye, whose flat roofs are pierced by metal rods pointing up toward the sky, suggest that such mobility is uncommon: as one resident explained, “As each son in a family is married, you just build another floor on top of the building.”
Fatma’s father had come to Eyyübiye in the 1970s. Mahmut was a stern, hard-working man, whom I met when a then newly-wed Fatma invited me to dinner at his house (where she had lived until very recently). There had been land in Akçakale, Mahmut tells me, but at the time it wasn’t worth anything. He had come to the margins of Urfa looking for work, and had been more fortunate than most: with the small electronics store that he’d opened in the bazaar, he earned enough to support his family. His brother, who had opened a toy store around the same time, was now head of the multi-million dollar chain Toru Toys – a point Fatma’s father reported with both distance and undeniable pride. “They’re rich, we’re not rich,” he smiled; still, things were good for them in the city. The boys were professionals: two worked for the toy company, one was a teacher, and one a doctor “who lives in Karaköprü”; “even the girls go to school.”

Fatma’s father’s house reflected both the family’s origins in Akçakale, and the geographical and social distance they’d traveled. The rooms of this house bore an unmistakable village aesthetic: the walls, painted that shade of green called “pistachio,” were decorated sparsely with religious-themed posters and a few artificial flowers, and the windows were covered with gauzy white curtains. Unlike village houses, however, these rooms were furnished and divided into separate functions. I was received, for instance, in a room lined with couches – and yet we all sat on the floor, drinking tea and leaning our backs against the couches as one would lean against a cushion-lined wall in the village. Or again, there were designated bedrooms with air conditioning, but during the summer everyone slept on wool mats on the roof.

The important point is not simply that Eyyübiye houses are “hybrid,” with characteristics of both urban and village homes, but that these characteristics register social status. Recall in the opening of this chapter, how former old city residents distinguished themselves from recent migrants by their preference for “modern” dwellings—those which are furnished, climate
controlled, and have indoor plumbing. The accoutrements of urban life were not just comforts but status markers: thus the couches in Mahmut’s house, even if they were rarely put to practical use, nonetheless served a crucial social function, marking the family’s distance not only from the village but from other less fortunate families in Eyyübiye, many of whom did not have furniture. (Take, for instance, Ahmet’s family home, which was unfurnished save for his desk, and where activities like mealtimes and sleeping were carried out in the same manner as they might be in the village). When one has become accustomed to eating at a dining table, it becomes embarrassing to eat on the floor “like a villager.” There are shifts in sensibility (where, e.g., eating with one’s fingers comes to seem rude) and even in physiology (the elite don’t squat, and they probably can’t).

Furniture also plays a crucial role in setting up enduring distinctions among rooms, designating what is to be done in each space and by whom – with consequences for the gendering of space. To clarify the contrast, recall the absence of designated bedrooms in the village: there, “beds” are woolen mats which can be arranged infinitely, distributed between different rooms, or arranged in various “clusters” according to the relations among those gathered (gender, age, familiarity). The spatial organization is such that gendered sleeping arrangements remain situationally dependent. Furniture, on the other hand, designates the function of space in a more enduring way, often instituting a more permanent divide between gendered domains rather than a situationally dependent one. For instance, in a house which (like Fatma and Ahmet’s new home) has a master bedroom, a couple is separated as a couple from their children and from guests. The sleeping arrangements for children raise further questions: Do all of the children sleep together? Are they separated by gender? Only after a certain age? These are boundary questions and gender questions, which arise when, in an urban context,
spatial differentiation is no longer so situationally dependent.

Like the boundaries among rooms, the home’s external boundaries were also in question. In the village, as mentioned, there are relatively permeable boundaries between the house’s interior and exterior, and also among different houses. In villages brothers tend to build their homes near to their father’s home, building up “neighborhoods” or fraternal clusters within the village which are more or less socially and economically integrated. In para-urban and urban contexts, where the layout of space is typically more fixed (by roads, or other extant buildings), this clustering has to take other forms: one common arrangement, as mentioned, is for male siblings to occupy different floors of their father’s building. This was the pattern in Ahmet’s family – his brothers and their wives occupied the upper floors of the home where he grew up. This arrangement both moves toward increasing nuclearization and retains the village atmosphere’s relatively permeable boundaries among fraternal groups.

This novel arrangement (vertical fraternal clusters) can be seen as a solution to one of the many new dwelling questions that arise for migrants in urban contexts. What constitutes a family unit? Where should the boundaries of the home be drawn? For those designated non-family, how close is too close? One improvises answers to these questions by observing others, and by being an example oneself; thus everyone is reading everyone else’s home. Boundary questions, far more than an anthropological preoccupation, are an important way that families position themselves in relation to one another.

Thus Fatma’s mother Ayşe had told me, pointedly, that when her sons were married, she had bought each of them a new home in which to start a new (nuclear) family. Some men move into the building of the husband’s parents, she explained, albeit in a separate apartment on a different floor. Worse, some men continue to live at home with their parents after marriage, with the bride
moving into the family home. Both situations were too close for comfort, in her opinion, and they often led to tension between the new wife and her mother-in-law. Through the kitchen curtains, Ayşe gestured toward the apartment across the street, whose kitchen windows faced their own; sometimes she could hear them arguing. Her feel for the proper degree of visibility, audibility, and proximity vis-à-vis the neighbors indexed new social sensibilities—in turn a mark of her own positioning within the social field. That is why she had insisted on a separate home for Fatma and Ahmet after they were married (Ahmet was the first man in his family to move out of the building where his father lived).

Ayşe’s comments about dwelling patterns indexed her anxiety about the social distance between her family and Ahmet’s, and what this might mean for her daughter’s status and her own. This anxiety revealed itself in other comments, too— as when she told me about the various other men who had sought Fatma’s hand, including three teachers. Or again, in parting, I said how nice it had been to meet them, and that Ahmet was fortunate to marry into such a good family. “Of course,” I added quickly, “you are also lucky.” Without missing a beat, Ayşe asked “Who do you think is luckier?”

Fatma’s family considered themselves not simply more elite but more modern, and their ways of marking gender and space were an integral part of that self-understanding. If we revisit Fatma’s father’s remark, “even the girls go to school,” we can see now that the word “even” (bile) does not indicate an afterthought but an emphasis. The fact that “even the girls go to school” is a marker of the family’s upward mobility, a point of differentiation from families of lower status. It was also a point of differentiation within the family; recall that not all of Mahmut’s six daughters had been educated – only the two youngest.

Mahmut’s comments make it is clear that teleological notions regarding gender, mobility,
and modernity are discourses “in the scene.” As a matter of experience, however, that telos was not unambiguous or evident to Fatma and her sisters. Consider the position of Fatma’s sister, Emine, who “stayed at home.” Emine could not read or write, but was introduced to me as the usta, master, of the house. She could single-handedly run a household – expertly prepare all of the food, look after the animals, milk the sheep, and make dairy products like yogurt and cheese. This is all highly skilled and specialized knowledge, which Fatma too possessed to some extent, but which the younger girls had never learned (they were teased mercilessly for their inability to execute even the simplest tasks, like cutting a cucumber, with any efficiency). Echoing Fatma’s stated ambivalence about marriage (“I hadn’t even thought of it”), Emine said: Girls often imagine that getting married and moving out of their family’s house means freedom.” She described her situation as different: “A lot of families pressure girls to get married early, but that wasn’t the case for us. Why would I want to get married? My life here is comfortable (rahat).”

When Fatma was married, she moved out of the domestic space she had shared with Emine, to a building several blocks away. As a married woman, she ostensibly enjoyed greater mobility than she had at home: the freedom to travel with her husband, to shop alone or to attend classes. Yet her newfound mobility was predicated upon certain types of enclosure—enclosure, for instance, in her new apartment. It entailed the disruption of those forms of movement and relationality deemed indecorous or déclassé. This new living situation befit her status, and that of her family, and yet she found herself bored and isolated. Her husband, Ahmet, was a professional teacher who worked outside the house, and so she stayed alone for most of the day. She no longer saw the range of social others (e.g., extended family) who had been constantly in and out of her parents’ house. She missed the sociality of that place. During her afternoons at her new apartment, she tried to busy herself with studies, and she spoke with her mother on the
phone several times a day.

It was during these long afternoons that Fatma and I came to know each other. Largely cut off from her quotidian social life, she was eager to make friends and invite guests to her new home. This surprised Ahmet, who had assumed his marriage would end his friendship with me (he was told that women are jealous). Instead, Fatma related to me in a guileless and direct manner, and with curiosity (“Is it hard living alone?” “Do you love what you do?”). One night, the newlywed couple invited me over for dinner, along with my friend Nazim (who, as a single male, would never have been invited on his own). After dinner, Ahmet left the room to set up a slide-show of photographs for us to watch, and I went after him, thinking I might be of some help. It did not immediately occur to me that I had left Nazim and Fatma alone, and that this might be awkward or inappropriate since they were only newly acquainted. I returned to the room immediately, and was surprised to find Nazim explaining to Fatma why he had never been married (he hadn’t found the right person, etc.). As Nazim later explained, Fatma had asked him earnestly why he’d never married, and she had confessed her own reluctance to marry, saying for instance “I hadn’t wanted to marry an Arab.”

There are several surprising things here. One is Fatma’s willingness to reach out like this to a new person, and a man. This raises the question of what forms of sociality become possible in this new context, away from the family (in addition to what forms of sociality are cut off). Also, given that Fatma is herself is “an Arab,” what do we make of this sudden distantiation from Ahmet in terms of ethnicity? We should not understand from this that Fatma would have preferred to marry a “Kurd” or a “Turk.” Instead, I think, she meant someone not specifically marked as an Arab – for instance, someone whose status was high enough that his (and her) ethnicity no longer mattered. Thus in my reading, at this moment, “Arab” suddenly stood in for
much else: the neighborhood, the house she grew up in, the house where she found herself now, all of it.

The new city flat: Betül and Nur

I learned about the gendered dimensions of urban dwelling largely through interacting with my roommates in my city flat, two women slightly my juniors named Betül and Nur, who were studying Islamic philosophy (Ilahiyat) at Urfa University. Both came from mid-size cities in southern (but not southeastern) Turkey. Like many of their unmarried classmates, Betül and Ayşe had previously lived in housing established by Nur, an Islamic revival movement active throughout Turkey. (Nur has dormitories which provide housing for members who are away from home, e.g. at college). Betül and Nur, who were roommates in the dormitory, had grown tired of some of the house’s rules, like restrictions on internet use and on visiting family. And so after the first semester, during winter break, the two moved in with me.

In the Nurcu dormitories where Betül and Ayşe used to live, each unit had an abla (a “big sister”) who was in charge – that was Betül. She continued this role even in our new living situation, and it suited her, as she was responsible, nurturing, and fair-minded. As I mentioned previously (chapter 1), the building where I lived was marginal and morally ambiguous – on the fuzzy border between old and new cities – and it thus required work to make it an appropriate dwelling for young women. When Betül and Ayşe moved in, their first work was to remove all of the carpets, clean all of the floors, and then replace the carpets again. They immediately had our electric meter rewired so that we would have to start paying for electricity (before it had been illegal, kaçak). The transformation of my apartment, the work Betül did to make it habitable, opens up what is distinctive about new city dwelling, what its values are, and how it differs from
village or para-urban life.

The dwelling type of the new city is the high-rise apartment complex. Apartments in Urfa typically have four or five bedrooms (I was unable to find a one bedroom apartment, period). This is because “families are so big,” as is often said – but also because, unlike village homes, it is taken as axiomatic that these large families ought to be distributed across (generally furnished) rooms with separate functions (e.g., a dining room, private bedrooms). When Betül and Ayşe moved in, the boundaries between different rooms of the apartment were drawn in new ways. One did not wear shoes past the front door, but changed into cloth house slippers. These cloth slippers were not worn on un-carpeted surfaces within the home, such as the kitchen and the bathroom, each of which had its own designated plastic slippers, kept on the threshold. Betül and Ayşe coached me on observing these new thresholds, which to me were far from intuitive (I’d often find myself wearing the plastic “kitchen” shoes in my bedroom, for instance). My efforts to observe these spatial distinctions were earnest, but I sensed not quite adequate: for instance, they eventually placed pieces of linoleum around the front door and bathroom door thresholds, to compensate for the fact that I often absent-mindedly crossed the threshold before making the necessary footwear changes.

Other boundary work involved insulating the apartment, shoring up the frontier between its interior and the world outside. In new city residential buildings, visibility is often restricted or directed in specific ways: High-rise apartments are removed from the street, and, while most have balconies, these afford one-way vision (you can see down to the street, but it would be difficult for others to see “up” to you). Our flat, by contrast, was on the first floor—and on a street so narrow that there was fairly direct visibility from the building across the street. Upon moving in, Betül and Ayşe replaced my sheer curtains with opaque ones, and they covered one
high-up irregular window that I’d not even noticed (where an AC unit might once have been) by taping thick wrapping paper over it. They relocated my desk away from the window, where it had overlooked an editing room for a newspaper office across the way.

New city dwellings are for one generation only, the nuclear family, and extended families very often live in separate sections of the city (rather than clustered together in one neighborhood or one building). (Thus an upper-class newlywed couple I knew moved to a neighborhood that was expressly away from extended family, because what are they, villagers?). One effect of this separation is that one’s day does not involve necessary and continual contact with a range of social others (family, neighbors, animals, and so forth). In marked contrast to my village home, where guests could be easily and instantaneously accommodated, I would not have thought of bringing guests into the city apartment without giving my roommates ample notice. They would need time to prepare the house and themselves. To begin with, their clothing differed markedly depending on whether they were inside the house (with only women) or outside the house (/in the company of men). Inside the house, Betül wore pants; outside, she wore a skirt (or a floor length jacket). Inside, either a bare head or a loosely tied cotton scarf; outside, a silk scarf tied tightly and secured under the chin with pins.

In all, there was a strong sense of disjuncture between the inside of our home and the world outside. I once returned to our apartment from a stay in the village, on the third or fourth day of a heat wave that had slowed the pace of city life to a crawl. Walking home from the bus stop, I saw men sprawled out under the shade of trees in front of the municipality building; on the main street, a seller of watches was fast asleep behind his cart of wares. I was greeted at home by Betül – who, genuinely surprised by my bedraggled appearance, asked me whether it was hot outside. Betül’s sedentary lifestyle was, in part, a matter of personality: She looked forward to
Ramadan, because it meant that staying inside all day and not moving was normal and expected. “I’d like to be a koala,” she said to me one day, hugging her arms to her chest, “just hold on to my branch.”

But this preference for the indoors also takes part in a broader spatial sensibility that is distinct to the new city, which on the whole seems to have been built with the expectation that life happens inside of four walls (see too Kapchan 2011). We might contrast, for instance, the aesthetics of commercial activity in the old and new cities. New city stores are much like the stores you might find on any American main street: they are enclosed in glass, climate-controlled, and their contents are carefully organized and spread out in space. Any chain stores or banks would be in the new rather than old city. In the bazaar shops of the old city, it is as though the modern store were turned inside out. The contents of the shop are turned out toward the street. While these shops normally have a small inner room where the seller stands or keeps some of his wares, contents are generally displayed toward the street, whether it is spices, leather, plastic toys, clothing, fabric, or vegetables. These distinctions involve density and spacing variations, as well as different implied viewer orientations.78

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Urfa’s old city stores and restaurants do not have explicit gender divisions. Sometimes women really avoid these places, sometimes gender is observed situationally – through the positioning of bodies, for example. In the new city, by contrast, both stores and restaurants have explicit gender divisions. In most restaurants in the new city, the part of the restaurant on the entry level is the men’s section (although it is not

78 The spatial and aesthetic distinctions between new city shops and shops of the bazaar was brought to my attention by Sam Williams. See also Geertz 1979.
marked as such); there is a separate “family section” (*aile kısım*), usually upstairs, that is marked with a sign. The entry level is intended for groups of men only; the upstairs section is intended for groups that include women (whether they are “families” or not). Similarly, clothing stores have their men’s sections on the entrance level. This includes chain stores like Benetton or LC Waikiki, which outside of Urfa would generally have the women’s section on the entry level. In both instances, this marks a concern with marking off the realm of women from the wider urban context, both spatially and visually.

The apartment I shared with Betül and Ayşe was not, as mentioned, up to the standards of new city propriety—a fact evidenced by the complete absence of other women or families in the building. We had to work to delineate a domestic interior from the outside (e.g., by covering our windows), yet this boundary was still vulnerable to infraction. A man who also lived in the building swept the stairs of the hallway (unsolicited) and he came to our door each month to demand money for the service. Seeing as we were three young women, his approaching our door (after dark, no less) was in itself a disturbing breach of boundaries, and enough to make us all leery of him. One evening the three of us gathered to coordinate our responses. “Just slip the money through the slots if he comes,” Betül instructed, “do not open the outer door”\(^79\) (which was a thick metal door with down-turned slots so that no one could see in). While the doorman was an exception, a marginal individual, my roommates’ response to him sheds light on a more general, and deeply gendered, sense of the street and its dangers. As a woman, one had to observe certain precautions: don’t walk around by yourself after dark; don’t open the door unless

\(^79\) I must contrast Betül’s response with that of my friend Seda from the village of Golpınar, who, when visiting me in the city, said she hoped our landlord would come to the door while she was there, because she would straighten him out.
it is someone you know. “I’m not opening this door for anybody,” Ayşe had said. “It could be my own father out there, I swear I’m not opening this door.” Before I retired to my bedroom, Betül told me that if I was afraid I could come and sleep with them. And she promised to get me a bottle of the pepper spray that she carried in her purse, and which her father, a policeman, had given to her.

Gender in the new city is not “more” or “less” marked than it is in the other contexts I described, but it is marked differently. Recall that in the village home, the gendering of space is not fixed or intrinsic but is rather assembled and disassembled according to the movements of people. In the city home that I shared with Betül, by contrast, gender tends to be inscribed in space as such, and in a more enduring fashion. Thus living in the new city apartment, we observed a strong binary distinction between inside and outside, male and female, rather than those micro-dances of familiarity and proximity that characterized gendered relations in the village home. Thus spatial organization is not only reflecting a more formalized relationship between men and women, but is helping to instantiate that formalization. This formalization enabled some forms of mobility (for instance, the educational mobility that Betül, or Fatma’s twin sisters, enjoyed) and constrained others. For instance, it was in part because getting dressed to go outside was so time consuming that Betül preferred to order her meals delivered, and preferred to have guests over to the house rather than visiting them. “Usually, people from big cities [like Adana] don’t like Urfa,” she told me, “but I don’t mind because I don’t like going out anyway.”

Conclusion

This chapter opened with the observation “there were no women on the street” – a claim
evidenced by the lack of designated enclosures for them (e.g. “family sections” in restaurants). My ethnography suggests the possibility that certain forms of enclosure, like family sections, make certain kinds of movement visible as such (e.g., Fatma’s upward mobility), and leave other kinds of movement imperceptible (e.g., Pero’s home-making). I cannot say for sure that twenty years ago there really were women on the street, and that their presence is simply not registered as such, but I strongly suspect this is so. One week toward the end of my fieldwork, I hosted in my home a woman from Western Turkey, a professor of anthropology. Over breakfast at a café on her last morning in Urfa, she told me (in English) that she liked “the setting” of the city, but thought it “still needs twenty years.” When I asked why, she replied “The role of women. The absence of women in the public sphere.” Puzzled, I gestured to the street outside, where there were plenty of women. “But they are all covered,” she said, “It is not in a modern sense.” Her comment reveals the complex notions of “presence” and “absence” in gendered discourse: what seem like self-evident binaries (inside/outside, present/absent) are coding much else.

There is a second and related line of argument in this chapter. The official narrative has it that, as women move from the village to the city, or from the old city to the new city, they are also emerging from a domestic interior to the public sphere outside; from traditional to modern accommodations; from the past into the future. The idea is that women are ever less confined. Yet I find, moving from village to urban contexts, a certain thickening of the boundaries of the home, and an increasing emphasis on the interiority of the home as against the world outside (this resonates with the findings of Kapchan 2011). Thus while urban life increases “mobility” in some respects, this paradoxically entails a broader separation of women “at home” from various social others such as extended family, neighbors, guests, strangers, and especially men (who tend to be regarded as suspect, especially if they are single). In the contemporary urban context, the
space of dwelling in some ways becomes the separate domestic sphere of women that it was assumed to be all along.

This chapter has highlighted some of the unexpected constraints produced by the formalization of gender in urban life. But my aim was not simply to reverse the official timeline (to say, for instance, that women are really less mobile in the city than in the village). It is clear that in urban life gender is more formalized in space—yet, as I explore further in the next chapter, the significance of this formalization is far from clear. There is nothing inherently enabling or constraining about it—like the home’s boundary, it is meaningful only in context. The next chapter picks up here, and explores how religious reformers in Urfa carved out a new space for women in religion, often through the literal carving out of “women’s space.”
Chapter 4

Of Form and Reform: the transformation of ritual place and ritual practice

Night of Power

In the hours before dawn on August 27, 2011, some thirty thousand men, women, and children had gathered at Balıklıgöl, the ritual complex at the heart of the city of Urfa. This was Kadır Gecesi (Leylat al-Qadir, Night of Power), the night of the Quran’s revelation. 80 Kadır Gecesi is the holiest night of the year, “Better than a thousand months” (97:3), when prayers are heard and forgiveness is extended, and many people spend the night awake in worship. That so many had chosen to do so here, at Balıklıgöl, points to the site’s dense significance: each of the mosques, graves, and carp pools in the ritual complex is mythically tied to the prophet Abraham. This is where, according to local belief, Abraham was born; where he opposed the pagan king Nimrod and destroyed his idols; and where he was saved from a fiery death by the grace of God. For many, these associations place the site in special relation to the divine (for instance, the carp are known as kutsal balıklar, “sacred fish,” and it is widely believed that the spring water has healing properties).

On ordinary days, Balıklıgöl is clean, spacious, and organized. A seven million dollar restoration project carried out in the 1990s aimed to refashion the complex as a three-dimensional postcard, with its mosques standing serene and monumental among manicured

80 “Leylat al-Qadr” falls during the last 10 days of Ramadan, although the exact day is not fixed; it is conventionally celebrated on the 27th day of Ramadan.
gardens and paved walkways.\textsuperscript{81} The effort entailed cleansing the space of its noisy vernacular elements; gone were the houses that had crowded in around the mosques, the oddly-spaced trees and crab grass, and sundry social activities like picnicking and swimming, so what remained were clean lines and broad vistas.

On this night, however, it was as though all of the efforts to preen and organize had been undone. The density of the crowd made the paths difficult to walk, and the grassy areas were covered with families seated or reclining on blankets. They passed the hours of the night moving back and forth between the blankets and the mosques and shops; they strolled, picnicked, shopped, slept, and prayed. Though disorderly, the scene was also intimate, almost domestic: remnants of iftar dinners, simmering teapots, children asleep at their mothers’ sides. Most of the women’s scarves were cotton instead of the more formal silk variety, and they were tied very loosely around the back of the neck rather than pinned underneath the chin (that is, in the style usually worn in the home or in the village, but not in the city among strangers).

My companions that night, Seda and Zuhal, had come to visit me from their homes in a nearby Kurdish village. The two women usually came to the city only for the formal errands of grocery shopping or visiting relatives, so the chance to spend a night out solely for pleasure was an exciting and novel prospect. Later, in the village, they would describe the evening over and over, recounting each detail. Yet on the night itself, I had watched their amusement turn to agitation at the crowding, the movement, and the garbage strewn across the sidewalks. \textit{Kalabalık}, they repeated—a word for uneasy-making crowdedness. And, when I took out my

\textsuperscript{81} The transformation of Balıklıgöl correlates to the transformation of the city as a whole during the same years: a massive reorganization of space, with the intent to “clean up” and modernize.
camera to photograph the scene, Seda and Zuhal became embarrassed, exchanging nervous glances and trying to guide my attention elsewhere. I realized then that what I had first taken to be mere physical discomfort also involved, for them, a degree of moral discomfort.

As I would later realize, the rite had indeed come to seem morally ambiguous. In recent years, the practice of Islam in Urfa had been subtly transformed by the presence and influence of theologically educated, textually trained men and women: serving as imams, radio hosts, and hocas (religious instructors), they aimed to reform local practice, bringing it in line with foundational texts of the Islamic tradition. Much of this work entailed redefining the significance of “sacred” spaces and objects, thereby raising questions about central and enduring features of the ritual landscape: from this point of view, there could be no healing water, no sacred fish. But reform also went hand-in-hand with less easily ascribable shifts in sensibility: changing conventions regarding cleanliness, privacy, and the appropriate way for women to appear in public.

The ritual—certainly one of the oldest in Urfa—suddenly threw into relief the fact that, for many, senses of ritual propriety had changed decisively. But the shift was incipient, and for most people, not precisely ascribable: in subsequent conversations, many people with whom I spoke expressed profound ambivalence about the rite, yet struggled to pinpoint its source, their responses blending concerns with theology, gender propriety, and middle class respectability. To me, their ambivalence suggests something crucial about the nature of religious change in Urfa, and how it is reflected, unevenly, in everyday practice. The process is replete with “asymmetries” and “discrepancies” (Connolly 2002)—moments when sensibilities, religious norms, and lived environments do not line up.

This chapter pursues the significance of this insight, and places it in relation to recent
anthropological studies of Islam. Many of these studies have sought to displace the model of secular “public spheres” (Habermas 1991) with that of thickly-textured “life-worlds,” where embodied selves are attuned to Islamic virtues (e.g., Hirschkind 2006, Gole 2008). Drawing on my ethnography of ritual in Urfa, I will ask whether this formulation—of thick, embodied traditions—might be too thick, overstating the correspondence among the places, practices, and dispositions that together constitute lived religiosity. To understand a rite like the one described above, it is necessary to understand not only the continuity and coherence of religious traditions, but also moments of dissonance and ambivalence, which direct our attention to wider processes of transformation. In what follows, therefore, I want to ask whether it is possible to think simultaneously about the consistency or durability of ritual formations, and the dissonant movements that traverse them. I will suggest that paying attention to these dissonant movements is necessary if we are to view the question of change—both personal and collective—as a genuinely open-ended one.

An enduring ritual formation

Ramadan. Each year, for one month, the city runs as if synched. If you were to observe life on the street from a hotel window (as I did in August of 2010, being newly arrived), you might feel that you are watching the same movie unfold, scene by scene, day after day. Early mornings are for conducting the necessary business of bill-paying or grocery shopping; the shady side of the street hums with activity, with vendors, hagglers, and fruit-carts, while the sunny side stands glaring and empty. By noon, the streets are deserted, and even businesses present a facade of locked doors and drawn shades. During these hours the city is given over to young boys—those who, still too small to observe the fast, move pack-like through the city, shouting to one another.
In the long shadows of the late afternoon, men doze on the lawn of the municipality building, and a seller of watches sprawls sleeping behind his cart of wares. At dusk the narrow streets are empty and still, and when the cannon sounds, signaling sundown, the only thing that moves is a flock of pigeons startled from a minaret. The smell of smoke rises from grills lit in every home.

Urfa’s urban space is thoroughly suffused by Islamic norms and sensibilities, which are embedded in its architectural forms, styles of dress, and modes of public interaction. The skyline is dominated by mosque domes and minarets, which are so densely concentrated that no resident can fail to hear the five-times daily calls to prayer. Religiously approved forms of association and leisure, like tea-houses and Islamist book stores, are very common, whereas forms perceived to be immoral are literally marginalized (there is one narrow alley of bars, at the very edge of the old city; I do not know one person who ever went into one, or so much as mentioned it). As detailed in Chapter 1, gender differentiation is observed, both as formally inscribed in space, and as norms of visibility, proximity, and decorum in everyday interaction. Transgression of these norms is, in my experience, rare. Religion is thus central to ways of life in Urfa; it is an urban

82 While there is no formal ban on alcohol in the city, it is generally not available, with the exception of the aforementioned bars, plus one or two large chains—the luxury hotel Dedeman, the nation-wide grocery store Ismar. At Ismar, the shelves where alcohol is kept are concealed behind a curtain, and when you purchase a bottle they wrap it in newspaper and place it in an opaque bag.

83 In the first chapter, I described how I was initially advised about appropriate feminine behavior in Urfa. In time, such behavior became second nature. One day, walking on the city’s main street, I saw the extremely unusual sight of a woman wearing a mini skirt. My response surprised me: I started to laugh. Immediately I caught the eye of another woman on the street, then another, and each bore the same pink-faced surprise, the complicit almost-laughter. This moment was revealing on several levels. My embarrassed laughter revealed the extent to which my perceptions and expectations has been conditioned—“habituated”—by months of living in Urfa. But that habituated response was inseparable from my embarrassment at that response (since when do I laugh at what women are wearing?). This is an instance of what I mean by a discrepant experience—a non-correspondence between habit and deliberation, between perception and action. In section iii of this chapter, I discuss the significance of such experiences.
environment which “animates and sustains a substrate of sensory knowledges and embodied aptitudes” (Hirschkind 2006; see also Tugal 2009b on Islam and urban space).

To observe the “centrality” of religion in Urfa is more than a manner of speaking: the city is literally built around an ancient ritual complex devoted to the prophet Abraham, whose name “cling[s] to the city and its environs to the present time” (Segal 2001: 1). The originary locus for “the city of Abraham” is a cave carved into a foothill of the Taurus mountains, at the city’s southernmost point, where Abraham is believed to have been born. This is the node from which the town plan radiates northwards: first the mosques and gardens of the ritual center, then the bazaar, then the residential quarters of the old city, and, finally, beyond the riverbed, the recent apartment blocks of the new city. It has been said that “sacrality is, above all, a category of emplacement” (Smith 1978: 104)—that which establishes differential values in space and makes orientation possible (Smith 1987, Durkheim 2001, Mauss 1964, Eliade 1959). The Turkish term for holy place—ziyaret yeri (site of visitation) or ziyaret (visitation) for short—draws our attention to the movements that lie beyond these places, and generate them; for it is only through human movement that place—as a valued, inhabited, landscape—comes into being (Casey 1993, Merleau-Ponty 2004, Massey 2005, Ho 2006).

As a place of pilgrimage, Balıklıgöl stands at the center of a “moral geography” (Ho 2006). On any given day, the site teems with groups of villagers from the surrounding districts; with Arabic-speaking families from Syria or Iraq; with groups of Iranians, seventy or a hundred at a time, visible by their distinct dress, moving to or from the parking garage (where they sleep on buses, rather than in hotels). They intermingle with occasional tourists from Europe or Western Turkey, many of whom don the local purple scarves in awkward quasi-turbans. While Balıklıgöl contains countless ziyarets (religious visitation sites), the most significant is the cave of
Abraham, whose low, pockmarked ceiling bears evidence of stones chipped away as souvenirs or relics. If one looks closely, tiny pieces of balled-up paper – supplications – can be seen tucked into the crevasses. Water flows up through a stone fountain inside the cave, and women press in around it; some fill empty Pepsi bottles to take the water home. The source that feeds this spring—a tributary of the Euphrates—also feeds Balıklıgöl’s two large, reflective pools that teem with fat grey carp. It is strictly forbidden to catch the carp (and there are numerous tales of the unfortunate people who have dared to do so); conversely, those who feed them accrue blessings. When one approaches the edge of the pool, the fish swarm to the surface, splashing, mouths agape, anticipating a meal of peat pellets which are sold by vendors beside the pools.

Balıklıgöl is a dense focus of myth, meaning, and ritual—“a compound of place, text, person, and name” (Ho 2006: 24). The site’s various ziyarets are woven together and animated by the myth of Abraham. The most commonly rehearsed version of that myth—which any man, woman or child of Urfa can deliver at a moment’s notice—is as follows: In Abraham’s time, Urfa was ruled by Nimrod, a pagan king famed for his skill as a builder. Nimrod ruled from a castle high above the city (whose twin pillars still stand imposingly over the ritual site). In a dream, he saw that a child born in his kingdom would come to end his rule, and so he ordered all male children born that year to be killed. But Abraham’s mother managed to hide her pregnancy, and she gave birth to Abraham in a cave near the foot of Nimrod’s castle, where he passed the first seven years of his life in hiding.

Abraham’s father was a sculptor, who made idols for Nimrod and sold them in the bazaar. This struck Abraham as wrong (ters dustu), although, this being a time prior to revelation, he did not know exactly why. One day at dusk, Abraham saw a single star. “Is that my God?” he wondered. As the evening wore on, more stars began to appear, and Abraham realized that his
God could not be just one among many – “My god is one” (Allahim bir). Then he saw the moon, which was unique in the sky, and wondered “Is that my God?” But when dawn came, he saw the sun, which was bigger and brighter. “Perhaps that is my God.” But at dusk the sun set, and Abraham could not worship something that was temporary or changing. “My God does not set” (Allahim batmaz). Abraham is unique among the prophets in that he deduced the oneness of God, prior to being visited by an angel. (“Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian but a 'Hanif', a Muslim, one who is not among the idol-worshippers” [3:67]).

One day, Nimrod held a festival outside of Urfa, and all of the city’s inhabitants attended (this site [not pictured] is known as “the throne of Nimrod” – there are 3rd century ruins there). With the city empty, Abraham descended on Nimrod’s idols, and destroyed all but the largest one. When Nimrod returned, he was enraged. He asked Abraham who was responsible for the idols’ destruction. Abraham feigned ignorance, and suggested that Nimrod ask the largest of the statues, for perhaps it had destroyed the others out of jealousy. Nimrod retorted that it was only a statue, and could do no such thing of its own power. Abraham replied: “You yourself have said it. If the statue is powerless over the other statues, what power can it have over you?”

An infuriated Nimrod prepared an enormous fire on the ground below. He made a catapult of the castle’s twin pillars, from which he cast Abraham into the pit of fire. But where Abraham landed, God caused a spring to gush forth (this is said to be the same spring that flows up into a fountain in the Halil ul-Rahman mosque). The spring also feeds the two lakes of Balıklıgöl, Ibrahim Golu and Ayn Zeliha. The sacred carp that swim in the Pool of Abraham today are said

84 The word “hanif” means “friend of God.” This translation says that Abraham was a “hanif, a Muslim,” thereby equating the two, but it is a point of debate as to whether Abraham can be called a “Muslim.”
to have been turned from firewood into fish. Many of the mythic and material elements of this scheme have endured for millennia, notwithstanding major religio-cultural shifts, as well as abrupt changes in the city’s government and population (which I discuss in the next section).

In the early 20th century, Turkey transitioned from Empire to Republic. During this time, the “leveling of social difference” (Weber 1978: 983) was carried out in an extreme and explicit way, producing, for instance, a new writing system, a new calendar, a new modernist capital in Ankara (see Akcam 2004, Altinyildiz 2007). These changes were especially radical in the less-integrated provinces of the southeast like Urfa, which were only nominally under Ottoman control, if at all (Dressler 2012; see too Becker 2013, Makdisi 2000). In Urfa, the process was violent and protracted (see Oktem 2008). It involved directed efforts to dissolve the pre-national forms that had held together social collectivities: trans-national languages (Arabic, Ottoman); “intermediary” forms of authority and loyalty (kinship, religion); and, finally, religious regimes of space and time (Anderson 1983; see also Corrigan and Sayer 1985). Major changes were made in the planning and layout of the city, many of them seem intent on creating, apart from the ritual center, alternative spaces for congregation and civic life.85 (And, in the 1930s, Balıklıgöl itself was briefly renamed “Republican Park” [Cumhuriyet Parki]). These efforts

85 Said Nursi was a prominent early 20th century Muslim thinker and writer, whose influence in shaping Turkish Islamism is unparalleled (something like Said Qutb was to Egyptian Islamism). Nursi is the figurehead of the most significant nation-wide Islamist movement in present-day Turkey, Nur (followers are called Nurcus). Nursi died in Urfa in 1960 (he had been visiting). There was an immense procession for Nursi’s funeral, and he was buried in Balıklıgöl, adjacent to the cave of Abraham. A few months after Nursi was buried, there was a military coup in Turkey, which ushered in a strictly secularist government, who initiated a campaign designed to eradicate the seemingly subversive influence of Nursi and his followers (Mardin 1989). The leaders of the coup feared that his gravesite would become a galvanizing point for his followers. Soldiers were sent to Urfa to remove Nursi’s body and move it to an unknown location. (There is a separate tradition claiming that his followers found and reclaimed his body, and moved it to a third unknown location). Today, the place he was buried is still there, marked with a simple plaque bearing his name (one finds pilgrims stopping at this site today).
notwithstanding, Balıklıgöl remains the heart of Urfa today, the center of both ritual and civic life. While government buildings are located in the new city, Balıklıgöl is still the principle locus of everyday sociality: It is a stage for festivals, a place to gezmek or wander about; a picnic site in the afternoon and a promenade on cool evenings.

The enduring ritual significance of Urfa, coupled with its everyday Islamic sociality, make it an apposite place from which to address the growing body of scholarship on “Islamic public spheres.” In many sociological and anthropological accounts of Turkey, the primary question is how Muslims living in an aggressively secularist state manage to create and maintain the conditions to live piously. The authors take as a point of departure the question of how people are disciplined and produced as pious subjects through inhabiting certain kinds of urban and spatial formations. Gole, for instance, argues that in Turkey, contrasting “secular” and “Islamic” subjectivities are “constituted through…repetitive performances, including language styles, dress codes, modes of habitation” (2008: 123). Leaving aside, for now, this bold juxtaposition between “secular” and “Islamic” modes, I’d like to query Gole’s emphasis on the disciplinary dimension of place—its capacity to sediment modes of perception and subjectivity. We might ask: What do people do with place besides being “constituted” by it? To respond to this question, I’ll suggest that we may need to think differently about \textit{place}, and the ways people inhabit, interpret, and engage it.

\footnote{For instance, Nilufer Gole (2008) has written at length about the emergence of “Islamic public spheres” in contemporary Turkey, and Cihan Tugal (2009) has examined how contrasting constructions of gender, visibility, and public sociality play out in struggles over urban space in Istanbul.}
Let us return to the scene that opened this chapter—the annual rite of Kadir Gecesi, which draws thousands of worshippers to Balikligol. Kadir Gecesi, often translated as “Night of Power,” marks the night on which the Quran was revealed (in its entirety, to Gabriel, then, in its first verses, to Muhammad). As I described in the first paragraphs of this chapter, the rite presents a striking scene: From dusk until dawn, people spend the night at Balikligol, camped on blankets that are particularly concentrated around the cave of Abraham (the epicenter of the complex). Kadir Gecesi also provides visitors a rare chance to glimpse the beard of the prophet (Sakal-ı Şerif): during the final days of Ramadan each year, the müftü (mufti) of Urfa displays the beard to pilgrims, wrapped in fabric and cased in glass. Hundreds of people line up to view the case each day. The scene is noisy and chaotic, as people press in to touch the glass case, and ideally to kiss it. There have been scenes of shoving and fighting, and many instances in which people faint—if not from zeal, then from the intense heat and the press of bodies.

Kadir Gecesi is, in terms of numbers, the largest ritual in Urfa. It is considered the most holy day of the year, a day when angels descend to earth (97:4). And yet, as I noted in the opening to this chapter, the rite is for many people a point of ambivalence—even for attendees, like my companions, Seda and Zuhal. While I never heard anyone in Urfa explicitly condemn the ritual, most of my city-dwelling friends preferred to keep their distance from the scene (and the wealthier elite would not be caught dead here). In the year I’d already spent in the city, I had not once seen the rite depicted or advertised—a striking omission given its scale, and given that faith and ritual in Urfa are so commonly thematized, photographed, and discussed.

The ambivalence surrounding this ritual suggests something crucial about the nature of religious change in Urfa. The process is replete with asymmetries and discrepancies—moments
when sensibilities, religious norms, and lived environments do not line up. Consider the animating myth of Balıklıgöl, Abraham’s triumph over Nimrod and the idols—whose moral, ostensibly, is that objects can have no power as either independent or intermediary religious forms. Yet at Balıklıgöl, as we have seen, this story is embedded in a series of places and objects that are implicitly ascribed some religious efficacy: sacred carp that bestow blessings on those who feed them, healing water (şifah su) that cures illness. This present-day discrepancy, I will suggest, arises in part from the layered histories of Balıklıgöl. As mythic and material schemes succeeded one another over the centuries, some meanings and materials were displaced, while others were re-signified or re-incorporated into new ritual constellations—at times, uneasily.

Urfa’s earliest attestations call it “Orhay,” a Syriac name most likely derived from the Greek Orrha – “the city of beautiful flowing water” – or the Semitic root r-w-‘ “to bring water” (Segal 2001). These names evoke a river that ran through the city’s center—a tributary of the Euphrates aptly called “Daisan,” or “Leaping River,” for its tendency to flood capriciously. Under Seleucus Nicator (d. 281 BCE), its flows were harnessed through underground channels, and diverted to springs and pools within the city walls. These pools—known today as the pools of Abraham—became foci of healing and sacrifice for regional pagan cults, touching off an efflorescence of architecture, poetry, art and ceremonial in honor of the “fish goddess” Atargatis.87

When Urfa adopted Christianity—in the second century CE, it was the first city to do so—the

87 One finds other examples of cults very much like this along a north-south trade route that connected Urfa to Diyarbakır to the north and the lands of Mesopotamia to the south. There were “sacred fish” cults in Palmyra and Hierapolis (in present-day Syria), both of which were connected to Urfa via caravan route (Segal 2001).
sites of the ritual center were put to new use (Guscin 2009). Key Christian sites like the Mother Mary Church (363 CE) were built atop Urfa’s old cultic centers, incorporating them materially while displacing their significance (Guidetta 2009). Still, the displacement was only partial. As the Syriac chronicler Bar Daisan wrote in the early third century: “In Syria and in Edessa the men would castrate themselves in honor of Atargatha [Atargatis]. But when King Abgar became a Christian, he commanded that anyone who emasculated himself should have a hand cut off” (cited in Segal 2001: 56). This makes it clear that, despite the admonitions of the elite, popular Christianity in Urfa was thoroughly inflected with the practices and sensibilities of ancient Near Eastern cults. As Peter Brown (1981) has argued, the influence of the latter on early Christianity is particularly manifest in the “cult of the saints”—one major example of which was the cult of St. Thomas, whose martyr was located at Balikligöl (on the spot where the Rizvaniye Mosque stands today). There is ample evidence that Christian pilgrims to Edessa continued to regard its waters as curative — there is even record of a Christian king who was healed by the water of the Well of Job (in present-day Eyyübiye) (Segal 2001).

It was not until the Middle Ages, under Muslim rule, that Urfa came to be associated with Abraham: the result of an apparent conflation of the name “Urfa” (previously Ur-ha, Orhay, etc.) with Ur of the Chaldees, the birthplace of Abraham according to Genesis (Segal 2001). While contemporary historians tend to identify the latter with a city in present-day Iraq, its identification with Urfa was a culmination of various local mythical and ritual strands. First, there was a long-standing association between Abraham and Harran (today a district of Urfa). Harran is named in Genesis as the dwelling-place of Abraham and Sarah before they set out for
Canaan, and it had long been a pilgrimage site for Christians.  

There was also a long-standing Christian association between Edessa and Nimrod (the Syriac scholar St. Ephraim wrote in the fourth century that Nimrod “ruled in Erekh which is Orhay (Edessa)”). The story of Abraham’s confrontation with Nimrod, and specifically of the fire pit, was an ancient Jewish story (chronicled by Josephus, among others), and picked up by Muslim scholars, including Ibn Kathir (2009). The strands of the Abraham/Nimrod myth that concern the salvific springs and sacred carp seem unique to Urfa.

Balıklıgöl’s history (and that history’s continued presence) reminds us that change happens unevenly, at different paces—and there is always the possibility that, at any moment, habit might collide with reflection, or practice might not correspond to place. Consider, again, my friends’ participation in the rite at Kadir Gecesi, and their embarrassment when I tried to photograph it—how they were at once open to the moment and reluctant to have it cast as an enduring emblem.  

We cannot pinpoint the source of this reluctance (as I mentioned at the outset, the ambivalence surrounding Kadir Gecesi concerned at once theology, gender propriety, middle class respectability, etc.). This is precisely what makes the ritual’s ambiguity so productive: it points

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88 It is clear that Christians did not associate the city of Urfa with Abraham because pilgrims like Egeria, who visited the Martyry of St. Thomas in Edessa, and the Abrahamic sites of Harran, do not mention anything about Abraham having been born in Edessa (Segal 2001).

89 These two friends were students of textual Islam (as I’ll explain more in the next section). Nonetheless, we can never pinpoint the source of this reluctance—as I mentioned at the outset, and elaborate further in the next section, theological reforms were part of a wider context of urbanization, gentrification, and shifting gender norms.

90 Several articles in the local press referenced Kadir Gecesi, with oblique commentary: An article about the Sakal-ı Şerif titled “Teacher, is this religiously permissible?” (Hocam, bu caiz mi?) never addresses that question, but instead quotes a doctor’s opinion that to have so many people kissing the glass case, and in this heat, is unsanitary and could spread disease. In the same article, another unnamed expert urges people to approach the beard in the way they would “a display at a museum”: you can just look at it, there is no need to touch it or kiss it.
to that fuzzy zone where tectonic plates are shifting, where traditions are in motion.

Today, as in the past, these shifts are inseparable from points of theological contention. In recent years, a new generation of religiously-educated, textually-trained men and women – serving as imams, radio hosts, and hocas (religious instructors) – have sought to reform local practice, bringing it in line with textual guidelines. This has entailed distinguishing, within Urfa’s ritual landscape, the practices and values of “religion” (din) from those that belonged to “folk tradition” (gelenek)\(^91\) (or, more pejoratively, “superstition,” batıl inanç).

In light of this distinction, Urfa’s Kadir Gecesi ritual presents an ambiguous case. It is a recognized Muslim holy day, on which it is customary for men and women to spend the night awake, praying or reading the Quran, often in a mosque. But at Balıklıgöl, the rite was celebrated in a way that exceeds the prescribed observance (and bears some clear relation to pre-Islamic rituals at the site).\(^92\) According to one local belief, mentioned only in the absence of imams or scholars, spending Kadir Gecesi at Balıklıgöl three years in a row is equivalent to one visit to Mecca.

\(^91\) The word gelenek is typically translated into English simply as “tradition” (not “folk tradition”). However, in this ethnographic context, the word was used to designate local folk practice (gelenek) as opposed to those practices specifically sanctioned by the texts of the Islamic tradition (which was locally referred to as din). I have chosen to translate “gelenek” as “folk tradition” in order to clarify this distinction, and also in order to avoid confusion with scholarly work on Islam as a “discursive tradition,” which is often abbreviated to “tradition.” In that conversation, “tradition” refers to textual interpretation and transmission.

\(^92\) Segal shows that the practice of sleeping at Balıklıgöl on holy days goes back to Christian Edessa, and he interprets rites he observed there in the 1960s as continuations of ancient rites of “incubation” (the practice of sleeping at holy places): Edessa “was celebrated for a well of healing waters that was…a holy place in the Christian period and later. Rites of incubation are performed there, indeed, to the present day” (Segal 2001: 54). I spoke with two religious teachers in Urfa, who thought the suggestion was interesting and plausible, but did not comment further on it. It should also be mentioned that there is something like “incubation” in Islam called istikha. See chapter 3 of Iain R. Edgar. *The Dream in Islam: From Qur’anic Tradition to Jihadist Inspiration*. Berghahn Books, 2011.
From a theological perspective, the points in question concerned mediation (tawassul — can anyone or anything mediate between a believer and God?), and assistance-seeking (istigatha — may a believer seek assistance from holy men or sacred objects?). Most Sunni scholars agree that the answer to both questions is no: there can be no religious power associated with saints or stones, and it is wrong to seek intercession. Most any religious teacher in Urfa would thus agree that there is no particular merit attached to camping out at Balıklıgöl or viewing the beard of the prophet. Whether there is harm in these practices depends on what a person thinks he or she is doing—on one’s intention. A local muezzin responded to my questions about Kadır Gecesi with the following analogy: “Look, when a relative dies, you go to visit him or her in the cemetery. You do this out of respect, and because you feel close to your loved one, but you know that he or she is not literally there, that you cannot ask (istemek) anything from that person.”

I spoke with Emin, a local imam and a reformer, about the rites at Kadır Gecesi. He responded with a half-smile, “You know, there’s nothing about the Sakal-ı Şerif in Islam” (meaning it has no textual foundation). “It is not ‘sacred’ (bir kutseyitin yok).” “The prophet said, ‘I gave you the Quran as my trace,’ not his beard, or his coat.” But in the Urfa where Emin lived and worked, such sensibilities were an indelible feature of the ritual landscape. At last he sighed and shrugged: “Our people are very mystical… It seems they want something they can connect with, something they can touch” (yaşayabilecek bir şey, literally “something they can live”). Thus, as a reformer, he called not for the abandonment of extant sites and rituals, but rather for subtle shifts in the intentions and sensibilities of believers: for instance, he explained, one should revere Abraham

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93 These questions are among the principle points of division between Sunnis and Shi’as. Urfa is about 99% Sunni; there is one Alevi village.
(saygı göstermek), but not “ask” anything of him (istemek).

In order to make this distinction a meaningful one to practitioners—in order for reform to be effective—teachers like Emin had to find ways to intervene in people’s habits and sensibilities, transforming the way they perceive and relate to ritual places and objects. This involves work on that fuzzy or indeterminate zone of intentionality. In the final ethnographic section, I turn to the question of reform.

Reform as a project of place-making

“WELCOME BACK, we love you,” the sign read in capital crayon letters, as our car pulled into the village of Gölpınar and we were surrounded by some fifteen or twenty young women. The message was intended for Rabia and Emin, a married couple, who had brought me to Gölpınar as their weekend guest. The two had lived and worked in the village for seven years (he as an imam and she as a Quran instructor), and had reluctantly moved back to the city center just a few weeks before. Their former students crowded in, brimming with news to share: the new imam had not yet arrived, they told us, and the house adjoining the mosque sat empty. Without Emin’s voice announcing the ezan, or call to prayer, there had been no audible punctuation in the day, and they found the silence odd.

In Gölpınar, which would become one of my regular fieldsites, I was accepted with a warmth and receptivity that is typical of the region, but an energy and alacrity that was absolutely singular. The women (among whom are Zuhal and Seda, my companions at Kadir Gecesi) wanted to know everything about my life, and wanted to share everything about theirs. On a walk through the village that first day, they guided me through houses and gardens, the corner
store, the mosque; they described who was related to whom, this long-standing feud, that set of artifacts. *Her adımda bir anı var*, Seda remarked—“a memory with every step.” All the while the younger girls accompanied us through the streets, amusing one another, occasionally playing at description themselves. At one point, a group of the younger girls passed by us, waving, and pushing a wheelbarrow with a toddler in its trough. “We don’t have strollers, so we wheel our babies around in these!” they shouted, laughing.

As I would come to learn, the distinctive character of Gölpınar and its residents had much to do with the presence of Rabia and Emin, who during their years in the village had established themselves as a vital presence in the lives of many inhabitants. They formally introduced the practice of Islam—which included praying, visiting the mosque, studying and discussing the Quran and *hadith*. Religious instruction explained certain characteristics which marked the young women of Gölpınar as atypical within their cultural context (e.g. compared with those in other villages): They spoke Turkish fluently (some better than Kurdish); Most could read and write, and some had learned to read the Quran in Arabic; They started veiling at comparatively young ages, and in a more “religious” style than is customary in villages (scarf tied under the chin instead of around the back of the neck). What was most striking was their eagerness to provide meta-commentary on all aspects of village life (a practice I’ll describe in further detail below).

Rabia and Emin’s students were exemplars of “ethical practice,” in the sense that many anthropologists understand it: those iterative processes by which believers create themselves as pious subjects in accordance with the texts of the Islamic tradition (see e.g., Mahmood 2005). Understood in retrospect, their piousness may look like the product of a teleological movement: Under Rabia’s guidance, the young women acquired certain habits and capacities, over time
transforming themselves as women and as Muslims. But if you look at this process as a process, as it is happening, solid trajectories begin to appear porous; other possibilities present themselves as little turning points or roads not taken. Examined up close and in motion, the “work of the self,” I suggest, appears not in the first place as a matter of discipline, but a “practical experiment in living” (Grosz 2001: 5).

Seven years earlier, when Emin and Rabia arrived in the village of Gölpınar, the new imam and his wife found little that they recognized as religion. Although Gölpınar was equipped, like all villages, with a state-built mosque, the residents had mostly ignored it. It was not that there was no religion, but that religion was elsewhere—for instance, around the tombs of Muslim saints and sheikhs, which are situated atop tells that punctuate the region’s flat terrain. In Gölpınar, the most significant ritual had taken place each spring at the hilltop shrine of one Haci Mehmet, a Muslim sheikh, on the first Wednesday in spring after the sheep stop being stabled at night (it is understood when the weather is warm enough for the sheep to remain at pasture through the night, winter has ended). Men from several villages walk with one or two sheep to the shrine, circumambulate it, and share a meal. The purpose of the rite, it is said, is to ensure a bol or “abundant” year (in terms of agriculture and livestock). As this rite suggests, the ritual life of villages draws on Islamic personages and symbolism, but it is largely organized around socio-

94 Why Wednesday? Very few people in the scene could provide an explanation, but it might have to do with Wednesday being the holy day of Yezidism, a highly esoteric and syncretic religion that was at one point common among Kurds in northern Mesopotamia. I am told (via oral history) that most Kurds in the region were Yezidi until seven generations ago, when they were forcibly converted to Islam (this would coincide with moves to gain more central control over the region in the late Ottoman period, e.g. the policy of settling of nomads, and so it seems at least historically plausible) (Dressler). Today in Urfa the word “Yezidi” is mainly used as an insult among Muslims (to imply something like “heathen”). There is one remaining Yezidi village in Turkey, located in one of the southern districts of Urfa, and there is also a significant practicing community in Northern Iraq.
agrarian rhythms, and it is common for villagers to show little regard for mosques or Fridays or imams.

The feeling is often mutual. The imams assigned to Urfa’s villages have seldom sought out the post: much like the reluctant village schoolteachers, they generally find themselves in Urfa due to an unlucky pick in the nation-wide lottery that governs the appointment of state employees. In theory, the task of imams, as theologically trained Islamic leaders, is to promote the textually prescribed practices of “religion” (din) and advise against those practices labeled “syncretic,” “folk,” “rural”—in a word, traditional (geleneksel). However, the imams often have little contact with villagers, starting with the fact that they rarely speak Kurdish or Arabic, and so they are scarcely aware of village religiosity, much less in a position to reform it. Most leave after completing the mandatory minimum of two years.

Rabia and Emin stayed for seven. The two both grew up in Kurdish villages north of Urfa, and were among the first generation of formally educated religious instructors in Urfa. Soon after arriving in Gölpınar, the two built a mosque—or rather, they totally refashioned the one-room, concrete structure that used to serve the purpose (for instance, by installing classrooms, and planting pistachio trees in the courtyard). By the time I arrived in Gölpınar, the mosque had become a major center of social life in the village. In the afternoons, the classrooms were full of children in and out of lessons. And, in the courtyard, a seven-year-old tree cast its shade over a picnic area, where adults gathered to chat and drink tea. If one stood on the roof of a village house at dusk, just before evening prayer, one could see people streaming from all corners of the village in the direction of the mosque.

In Urfa, it is highly unusual for women to attend village or neighborhood mosques—a fact reflected in the near absence of designated women’s sections. As Rabia explained to me, there is
nothing in the Quran or hadith to prohibit women from going to mosques; that they did not do so in Urfa was an effect of a regional gelenek, tradition. And so, despite there being little interest at the time, Rabia and Emin installed a women’s section in the new mosque in Gölpınar, in an area lofted above the main floor. In this instance, place preceded practice, but practice soon followed. For the women who began attending Quran lessons, the mosque became the main point of social life in the village (in fact the sole point, since unlike men, women did not congregate in shops and street corners). It became a center of sociality, education, and enjoyment; it subtly worked its way into the cadence of their days, the call to prayer serving as a measure of time by which they meted out their other tasks.

In Gölpınar, then, Rabia and Emin worked to reform the habits and patterns of life—which necessarily entailed a disruption and redirection of existing ways of life. In Gölpınar, adopting Islam meant recognizing and reconsidering those practices and habits that would come to be known as “tradition” (gelenek). The latter comprises countless habits of speech and action that permeate village life throughout southeastern Turkey: For instance, keeping talismanic objects (like stones chipped from holy sites); healing practices that involve the tying of strings and drinking of curative water; prohibitions against bathing on Wednesdays; common speech forms like maledictions; etc. If these practices sound odd or unrelated in list form, it is precisely because they are non-systematized, part of daily life, the mostly unremarkable stuff of habit. As Emin explained, “When we learned to read [the Quran], we realized that such things had no religious basis.” The principle was straightforward, but the process itself was not: for it entailed, first, a disarticulation of the ongoing flow of life and practice—a process of dehabituating and becoming-aware.

On one occasion, I was present at a village meal when Rabia’s uncle angrily told his wife,
“May you go to the blue lake.” Rabia, who had been immersed in a flow of conversation, paused and turned to me, and repeated the comment in Turkish (it had initially escaped me because it was in Kurdish). She asked me if I knew what a *bedua* was (I did not). A *bedua*, she explained, is a curse or malediction (e.g., “May your car tip over”). *Beduas* were once very common among Kurds, but were less so today (due in part to the influence of reformers). This particular comment—“May you go to the blue lake”—had caught Rabia’s ear. She asked her uncle the meaning of the phrase, and he shrugged, saying that it was only an expression and he didn’t really think it meant anything. It had piqued Rabia’s interest because she thought the lake in question might refer to Lake Van in eastern Turkey, which is considered the ancestral home of Yezidis,95 for whom the color blue is prohibited. That was the end of this particular exchange. While this incident appears minor, it exemplifies how Rabia and Emin differentiated “religious” from “traditional” practices—by reflexively engaging habits that might otherwise have proceeded seamlessly. (Furthermore, I wonder if, from then on, the phrase “blue lake” might have begun to ring a little strangely in the ears of those present).

A momentary rift in ongoing practice can be—and often was—an occasion for reflexive commentary on, and intervention into, the *habitus*. I find a revealing example in a short video clip that one of the girls in Gölpınar took with my camera. The scene is a picnic, and around twenty people are singing a devotional song. Immediately after the song ends, there is a hiatus, where a few people clap but most hold back. Then everyone claps. Several of the girls begin discussing whether or not it is forbidden (*yasak*) to clap after a song that mentions the name of God. All of them were *familiar* with such a prohibition, but there was confusion among them as

95 And possibly of the Kurdish people, cf Van Bruinessen 1989.
to whether the prohibition was *dini* (religious) or whether it was one of the *eski* or *batil* (“old” or “false”) beliefs. (It turned out to be the latter).

For some women in Gölpınar, habits like this one no longer passed below the threshold of attention: instead, they presented themselves as moments of doubt, minor disruptions in the ongoing flow of life. In the video clip, for instance, one can actually see that hiatus between the inclination to clap and the decision to do so, the hesitation that spreads through the group before being resolved in the fullness of applause. In this instance, we can grasp how a seemingly minor perceptual discrepancy lies along a major social fault line. The question about clapping is not a random or isolated exchange, but part of a patterned discourse about the permissibility of the aforementioned habits of speech and action, which is itself part of the gradual separation of “religion” from “tradition.”

Reforms often took part in shifts in gender norms in Urfa (as discussed in Chapter 3). For instance, in terms of ritual activity, “tradition” had always prohibited women from sacrificing animals, but “religion” permitted it. Or, in many villages it is considered *ayıp*, shameful, to send your daughter out of the house. It was partly through emphasizing that the practice of keeping girls home was not religion, but tradition, that Rabia and Emin encouraged families to send their girls to the village school—and even to secondary and high schools outside of the village. In moving between the village to the city for school or for driving lessons, the women marked the transition in their clothing. The women jokingly described this to me as *resmi-sivil*, “official”

96 The latter takes part in a major historical shift, beyond the village and beyond Urfa—pointing to wider historical shifts in Turkish Islamism. This is beyond my scope at present. See Tugal 2009.

and “civil” distinction: new ways of marking gender on the body.

Often enough these new practices generated major tensions in the social field: tensions between husbands and wives, among siblings, between generations. For instance, Seda and Zuhal went to driving school and received licenses. In doing so, Seda explained to me, çığır açtık, “we opened a path,” or blazed a trail for other women. Doing so was not without its drawbacks. Seda explained, Köylüler tepki gösterdi, “The villagers reacted (negatively).” This formulation caught my ear because people who live in villages don’t typically refer to their neighbors as “villagers.” In this momentary distantiation from her neighbors, Seda emphasized a movement of divergence—her ethical practice as a means to stake out a path or prise an opening.

For Rabia, too, religious practice had never been a question of following a path already paved, but always a matter of improvisation and redirection. She had grown up in a Kurdish village not far from Gölpınar. In that milieu, the life choices available to Rabia were entirely different than those that would have been possible one generation, or even ten years, earlier, and her biography unfolded amid deeply gendered tensions and contradictions. In her telling, these tensions present themselves at key moments—whether to remain in school, whom to marry, how to dress—which she narrates as rifts in her biography, and often enough as risks. There was, for instance, her refusal to marry her paternal cousin, which caused a permanent divide within the family. Such choices were never simple refusals of her family context; they were powers of connection that were opened to her by her religious education (see Rouse 2004). The latter linked

98 For instance, Rabia was the first girl in her family to attend school, and thus to learn Turkish. A cousin of Rabia’s described to me being taken out of school in the first or second grade on the pretext that a teacher had hit her. Her father went to the school and yelled at the teacher and then took his daughter out. “But that was only an excuse,” she said, “he told me, go look after the sheep, go to work” (e.g. the main problem was not being outside the house, but putting her labor power to productive ends).
her to new people and new ideas, new models of inspiration and emulation, and a new sense of personal possibility.

The contingency of Rabia’s path as a religious instructor was made even plainer by the paths taken by her sisters: Her older sister was a village housewife, and her younger sister was a Kurdish rights activist. It seems reasonable to think that Rabia’s proximity to such differences pluralized her attitudes toward diverse ways of living. (This was evident in her friendship with me, her receptivity to my ideas and attitudes, our connection across deep differences). Rabia’s broad-mindedness also marked her sensibilities as a religious teacher. On one occasion, a mother in Gölpınar brought her son to see Rabia. He had a wart on his back, around which Rabia tied a string, and then read a verse of the Quran. When I asked what the string was for, she told me that people believed that if you tie a string around the wart, when it falls off so does the wart, and she saw no harm in trying it. [“I was curious”].

In highlighting the contingencies of Rabia’s religious trajectory, I am trying to draw attention to the fact that even for a religious instructor, and even as she narrated it ex post facto, ethical practice looks less like a telos and more like a series of major and minor forks in the road. The same must be said of wider currents of change, like the reformist-driven transformation of religious practice in Urfa. While Rabia helped shape that transformation, she nonetheless conveyed ambivalence about it at times. I recall that as she and I walked through the ritual site one day, she expressed nostalgia for the days when, as a child, she would visit the site with her mother: “We would chip stones from the cave of Abraham, and bring them home, and put them in water and drink it to cure illness.” “This place was more beautiful then, people had more of a connection to religion.” Still, she said, “one has to be careful not to ask for anything from anyone other than God. It’s very dangerous.” She paused a moment. “One has to always be careful.”
Although Rabia’s religious trajectory (and those of her students in Gölpınar) does involve the reorganization of practice in light of textual guidelines, the process only appears teleological if you establish an analytic viewpoint outside the unfolding of events. From that perspective, it is easy to dismiss dissonant experiences or hiatuses in practice as mere hiccups on the way to habitus. If, on the other hand, we take up an immanent position, and look at practice as it is happening, the “work of the self” looks less like a linear trajectory than a multi-layered unfolding with time, space, and social others. What is foregrounded here is not the ability to progress along a conventional path but a power to relate, a power to forge divergent connections and open new possibilities. From this point of view, ethical practice is not a linear trajectory toward a given endpoint, but a form of creative relating to oneself and the world—in short, a way of living.

Conclusion

Particularly since the start of the “war on terror,” scholars have cast critical light on how the putative non-freedom of Muslims (and especially Muslim women) has been harnessed to political ideologies, development projects, and military interventions (Abu Lughod 2003 and 2005, Rouse 2004, Mahmood 2005, Gole 2008). It was partly in order to counter this specious mobilization of freedom that some sought out an alternative model of agency and self-

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99 This is in part a methodological point. No one would say they are against an analytic that incorporates change: but that is not the same as having a methodology that can comprehend it. “Processual” ethnography involves “follow[ing] actions as they occur, or, in the case of past actions, giv[ing] oneself the means to imagine them in the process of occurring” (Hammoudi 2009: 202). While ethnography is an apposite method for this type of work, it is certainly not the only one. My own writing e.g. is assembled out of records: fieldnotes, pictures, video clips.
realization: not a movement of liberation from the strictures of religious norms, but a movement of cultivation, of striving to inhabit and attain those norms. Yet I have suggested that the resulting “thick” conception of religion might be insufficiently porous to capture the dimensions of change that I’ve tried to elucidate in this chapter. In what follows I specify this critique as it pertains to the conceptualization of a) communities and b) ethical practice.

Today in Turkey, there is a great deal of scholarly interest in diverse communal formations that are not encompassed by the state, whose “overlapping patterns of territory, authority, and time collide with the idea of the imagined national community” (Asad 2003: 179-180). Nilufer Gole, for instance, emphasizes the contrast between the disciplinary powers of Islamism and secularism as the major line of tension in Turkey today, and that most in need of scholarly elucidation. As she recently wrote, “The battle continues between two sets of values, two Turkeys, two kinds of women, veiled and unveiled” (37). In my view this “contrast effect” (Hirschkind and Scott 2006) tends to flatten both of the terms it juxtaposes, occluding variations in the social field that do not map onto a master distinction between, on the one hand, Islam and, on the other, “the powers of the secular modern.” This formulation makes Islamic tradition appear more coherent than it is, glossing over the tensions and ambivalences internal to it.

With respect to ethical practice, leading accounts consider practice as an irreversible process of “sedimentation” — of bringing movement, space, and sensibility into alignment. For those who adopt a Foucauldian notion of this process, it is explicitly teleological: the means by which “a subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being” (Mahmood 2005: 100). In the workshop “Religion, Ethics, Politics,” Jeff Stout pointed out that what Mahmood and others call the “Western” view of freedom—as personal liberation from norms—is neither the canonical nor most widely held view in the western philosophical tradition.
28). I have argued that, in placing such emphasis on the disciplining and sedimenting aspects of religiosity, many have embraced a theoretical project that is too conservative to account for the full potential of practice. This analytic is “conservative,” I suggest, not in that it is opposed to standard political liberalism, but in that it conceives practice uni-directionally, as a progression toward a state of being “delimited in advance” (Mahmood 2005: 29).

In both cases, the shortcomings have to do with a failure to think the openness of change and time. When we observe practice in retrospect or at a distance, it is easy to regard change as coherent and directed. What I have tried to do in this chapter is to talk about change at a different register, and to demonstrate a particular vantage on change that ethnography can afford. By taking up a position in an immanent or ongoing field, we notice countless dissonances in the flow of daily life, wherein one might question one’s relationship to conventions, change one’s mind, and take things in new directions. These moments may not look like grand projects of resistance or motivated cultivations of a different kind of self—but they point to those places where traditions are in motion, and where ethical practice matters most to those who undertake it.

From this perspective, we can appreciate how the past exerts a “layered effectivity” (Connolly 2002: 39) on the present, and draws people into a fundamentally open future. Given that we each find ourselves in a socio-historical field, among materials not principally of our own choosing, how do we redirect those materials with some creativity? Seda’s formulation continues to resonate: çığır açmak, “to open a path,” suggests the possibility of “thinking freedom concretely” (Merleau-Ponty 11)—as a path charted or a position staked, always using the materials at hand.
Chapter 5

Restoring Faith in the Republic: collectivity, materiality, and time

In 2003, the Şanlıurfa Ministry of Culture and Tourism was planning an interfaith theme park to celebrate and promote Abraham’s common significance to Jews and Christians, in hopes of expanding Urfa’s appeal to non-Muslim visitors. The park, which was to be built immediately adjacent to the main ritual center, would feature scale replicas of a mosque, a synagogue, and a church. The project enjoyed broad political support—including that of Prime Minister Erdoğan, who attended the ground-breaking ceremony, yet among local inhabitants, there was enough opposition to the plans that they were ultimately abandoned. The theme park is one of several high-profile, state-backed multicultural heritage initiatives to be stalled or abandoned in Urfa over the past decade.

In 2010-2011, when I conducted my fieldwork in Turkey, there was unprecedented official investment in cultural heritage, and especially in “minority” heritage. In the Turkish press, one found almost daily stories about state-backed restorations of Syriac churches or Jewish tombs, the building of Armenian-Turkish friendship monuments, etc. Material heritage, which in the twentieth century was strongly associated with Turkish ethno-nationalism (Altinyıldız 2007, 101

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101 Investment in “minority” heritage was not entirely unprecedented. As Brink-Danan (2012) points out, the Jewish community served as an exemplar of “good minority,” both in the Ottoman period and in the Republic, that government could point to in order to demonstrate tolerance. Today, restorations have expanded to historically mistrusted groups, e.g. Armenians.

102 Some sample headlines from 2011: “Hidden Armenians in Turkey expose their identities” (Hurriyet 24 June 2011); “Van’s Jews visit their old homes five decades after leaving Turkey” (Today’s Zaman 15 May 2011); “Syriacs to Visit for Liturgy in Historic Church” (Hurriyet 1 July 2011).
Oktem 2008) was in the twenty-first century put in the service of “pluralizing pasts” (Ashworth, Graham and Turnbridge 2007). These restorations signaled a wider moment of “democratic opening” in post-2002 Turkey, which saw a series of major legal reforms including constitutional amendments, the lifting of restrictions on Kurdish broadcasting, and a revision of the penal code. Heritage projects were in many ways the public face of this reform process, that which was reported and discussed in the international press. With Turkey’s reputation (and EU membership prospects) increasingly tethered to its perceived treatment of minorities, the success of these heritage projects was both a political imperative and a market matter. Thus the theme

103 2002 is widely considered a watershed in Turkish history. With a single national election, Turkish voters wiped the political slate nearly clean: the AKP had received the first single-party mandate since 1987, and with that 90% of sitting MPs lost their jobs. Moreover, the AKP was the first elected party in history that was “outside” of the Republican secular establishment (Akcam 2004). It was a stunning and unprecedented blow to the “old guard”—the republican Kemalists who favor strict secularism, centralization, and geopolitical isolation, and who had for decades steered Turkish electoral politics. The newly victorious AKP was a moderate offshoot of a previously-disbanded Islamist party, but they did not present themselves primarily in an Islamic idiom (let alone an Islamist one). Instead, they defined themselves as champions of democracy, free markets, and expressive freedom. In the language of “opening,” they would (eventually) find an expression of their mandate as an unprecedented receptive state, both to international investment and politics, and to the diverse constituents of Turkish society.

104 In 2002, Turkey’s prospect of EU membership was formally renewed, and the Copenhagen Criteria turned a nebulous aspiration for European-ness into a list of enumerable benchmarks, complete with a timeline. The Criteria stipulate, in addition to a free-market economy and the stability of democratic institutions, standards concerning expressive freedom and minority rights. The prospect of membership proved majorly catalytic, as the AKP government introduced a series of reform packages aimed at Turkey’s “harmonization” with EU accession criteria. Between 2002 and 2005, Turkey passed two major constitutional reforms, eight legislative packages, and an extensive revision of the penal code (Hughes 2010). Already in 2003, the European Commission Report noted Turkey’s “great determination in accelerating the pace of reforms” (2003: B 1.6). This was the “heydey of Turkey’s Europeanization drive”: “Bureaucrats in the European Union had never seen such a frantic Turkey so determined to do all it could to begin accession negotiations as soon as possible” (Oktem 2011: 135, 136).

105 For instance, in 2011, when Prime Minister Erdogan remarked that the aforementioned Turkish-Armenian friendship monument was “ugly” and a “monstrosity,” it was widely reported in the international press, and journalists discussed the sincerity of Erdogan’s “democratic opening.” See, e.g. Ghazinyan, Aris. “Kars in the Spotlight: Friendship Monument Becomes Symbol of Divisiveness.” The Economist. 3 February 2011.

106 Bourgeoning markets in culture and tourism helped to drive the state’s unprecedented investment in heritage. Following broader global trends, major Turkish cities moved away from manufacture and
park in Urfa, more than a local initiative, was intended within this wider context to signal the state’s embrace of inclusionary politics: In Erdoğan’s words, “Times that a citizen of ours would be oppressed due to his religion, ethnic origin or different way of life are over” (Arsu 2011).

So what did it mean that state-backed heritage projects in Urfa often failed? To many, it seemed that Urfa was not only spurning the state’s inclusionary embrace, but rejecting the project of pluralism altogether. Among the projects’ national planners and backers, there was a great deal of frustration with the people of Urfa, who in the national press were deemed “closed” and hostile to religious difference. For those residents of Urfa who had helped plan and back the project, the defeat was particularly distressing; they pinned the failure on certain “uncultured” inhabitants, who block the city’s progress and give it a bad name nationally. In conversation, they often frame their predicament as a conflict between their own desire for progress, on the one hand, and the forces of backwardness or intolerance, on the other.

This chapter will ultimately suggest that the failures of multicultural heritage and interfaith tourism in Urfa do not amount to a rejection of pluralism (any more than the state’s investment in heritage amounts to an embrace of pluralism). Below, I will situate these questions about pluralism in a context of local struggles over “culture” and space in Urfa, and then examine three case studies of culture projects in Urfa today. It may turn out that “pluralism” is at stake in these projects; but the contest is not between those who support it and those who do not, but between the state’s narrow and strategic multiculturalism and the way Urfa’s inhabitants understand toward service based industries. Culture became an increasingly important site of investment, a way of attracting foreign visitors and capital. (Between 2002 and 2004, foreign direct investment more than doubled, and it tripled between 2004 and 2005) (Oktem 2011: 139). The preservation and promotion of culture became a prime factor in the restructuring of urban economies and the development of urban space, particularly in major Western cities like Istanbul (Gezici and Kerimoglu 2010).
social difference. At stake, I’ll suggest, are crucial differences in the hermeneutics of collectivity, materiality and time.

A majoritarian multicultural

In Urfa, the most visible proponents of culture and tourism are a group of men sometimes referred to as the aydınlar, the intellectuals or enlightened ones. The aydınlar are a loosely defined group of educated men, fifty years of age and older, mostly Turks, and mostly acquainted with one another. They are the fledgling generation of intellectuals who were educated in Urfa, instead of outside the city (which was the norm for the elite prior the opening of the city’s first high school in the late 1940s). They command a certain respect both as “original” Urfalıs and as learned people. They are dedicated to preserving and promoting Urfa’s heritage through the arts, education, and cultural activities. They have a strong textual presence in the city, as writers of books, publishers of magazines and newspapers, and as regular contributors of editorials in local papers. They also have a strong presence in those government ministries and institutions which have a say in urban planning and resource allocation, such as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The aydınlar, in presenting themselves as arbiters of Urfa’s “true” or “original” culture, are differentiating themselves from an Urfali culture that is somehow less true or original. As we have seen in previous chapters, this distinction is drawn along a temporal axis (the time before migration vs. the time after), and along a spatial axis (village vs. urban; old city vs. new city). Readers will by now be familiar with this basic division, and here I only intend to highlight how the discourse of “culture” figures into it. “Original Urfa,” set in the old city during the middle of the century, is portrayed as a golden age of respect, trust, and dignity:
Our generation lived within the old city walls, and its four doors. If there were any problems – for instance, if a shop was robbed in the city — they would close the doors to the city so that it could be resolved. It was safe back then, there was trust (emniyet, guvenli). (C.I. 6/17/11)\textsuperscript{107}

At that point agriculture was not yet mechanized. There were theaters, cinemas, entertainment places. The social life was very nice. There was interest in music and literature. There was respect. That’s how we grew up. (H.H.4/14/11)\textsuperscript{108}

As the mention of theaters and cinemas suggests, the past is also a time when the city was more “cultured” than it is now:

In the days of our youth, people wore ties and hats. The city population was only 30,000. There were a lot of people who read newspapers and books. People were cultured. There were no villagers [living in the city]. The city center was Turkmen. The villagers lived in the villages. (H.H.4/14/11)

In this complexly coded description, H.H. identifies himself by way of a series of non-reciprocal traits: to be cultured (to read newspapers and books), to live in the city, to be Turkish. We can thus see how being cultured (and literacy in particular) works alongside geography and ethnicity to discursively differentiate “original” Urfa people like H.H. from the late-coming villagers. In his narrative, the story of Urfa’s decline begins with the waves of village-to-urban migration which, beginning in the 1970s, would forever change the city’s fabric. He describes the corrosive effects of migration in terms of the physical corrosion of the environment:

People began to migrate to cities... Eyyübiye , Yakubiye, Bağlarbaş [informal para-urban neighborhoods]. These neighborhoods did not exist back then. When the agha came to the city, he thought that he could do anything here. He thought he could raise a cow in the city, but you can’t do that in the city. The city began to smell bad. (H.H. 4/14/11)

Today, Urfa’s “traditional culture” is presented as in decline and under threat. H.H. presents

\textsuperscript{107} Interview with Cevher Ilhan, 6/17/11

\textsuperscript{108} Interview with Hasan Hayirli, 4/14/11.
the status of his culture in Urfa today as an embattled minority position:

In Urfa there are still families with roots (köklü). They still keep the traditions alive. At the same time, there are uneducated people who have come from villages. If only ours could have stayed the dominant culture here … But it was the opposite. They are the dominant ones. (H.H 4/14/11)

When, over the past two decades, restoration and urban renewal came to the fore of the planning agenda, the aydınlar had a chance to reshape the city. In 1991, a formal administration was created to identify and classify Urfa’s cultural heritage sites, and to allocate funds for their preservation and restoration. This is the Şanlıurfa Foundation for Culture and Research, or ŞURKAV (Şanlıurfa İli Kültür Eğitim Sanat ve Araştırma Vakfı). ŞURKAV is dedicated to the preservation of Urfa’s “traditional” architecture, music, and culture. By “traditional,” I suggest, we should understand “prior to migration.” This reading is amply supported by ŞURKAV’s near exclusive focus on that era—for instance, a thick book of photographs entitled “Urfa: 1850-1950,” which simply excludes the past several decades from the account (Kürkçüoğlu 2008).

ŞURKAV’s restoration projects reveal a similar concern to “roll back the clock” in certain areas of the old city (their restorations have included Balıklıgöl, the covered bazaar, and the customs inn).

A prime example of ŞURKAV’s restoration work is the remaking of the main ritual site,

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109 As I explained in Chapter 2, since the turn of the century, GAP has largely retreated from large-scale socioeconomic restructuring (hydroelectric dams, industrial infrastructure) in favor of more limited urban renewal and multi-cultural heritage initiatives. The director of the regional administration in Urfa, a position almost always held by engineers, was filled for the first time by an archaeologist.

110 Their other focus is on Urfa’s ancient past.

Balıklıgöl, between 1993 and 1997. Beginning in the 1970s, newly arrived villagers had begun building informal housing clusters in the area of Balıklıgöl; these structures filled in the surrounding hills, crowded around the mosque complex, and climbed to the edge of the castle.

The ŞURKAV project entailed the restoration of all major mosques and monuments. It also called for the expropriation and demolition of all of the informal housing, which was deemed an eyesore and a safety hazard (e.g., in its violation of building codes). Many of the displaced had never had Turkish identification cards, so IDs were drawn up for the purposes of this transaction. (On the IDs, the birth month and day are given as 01/01).

Today, Balıklıgöl is referred to as an “open air museum” – and it does resemble one, with its manicured gardens and neat walkways. But this effect is quite recent. If one looks at early 20th century photographs of Balıklıgöl, it is evident that while the hillsides surrounding the site were bare, the complex itself included residential architecture (stone mansions) in addition to the mosques, and the carp pools were used for swimming competitions. That is, Balıklıgöl was not set off from the residential life of the city in the manner of a monument or museum. Restoration is not just about turning back the time of culture, but also about turning culture over to capital (Povinelli 2002).

The re-making of Balıklıgöl is only the most high-profile example of a much broader trend in urban planning in Urfa over the past two decades. The current, “forward thinking” (ileri görüşlü) mayor of Urfa is largely credited with having “cleaned up” the city, despite the controversy this has often generated among those who are the objects of the cleaning. The latter normally entails encroachment on, and very often demolition of, living urban fabric (Kostof 1991). Particularly vulnerable are the informal dwellings that surround the historic sites of the old city; these tend to belong to the urban poor, who are overwhelmingly the city’s ethnic (Kurdish and Arab)
minorities (recent migrants). A building, a housing complex, or an entire neighborhood may be deemed an eyesore, a sanitation hazard, or a tourist repellent, and patterns of dwelling and livelihood that are not heritage material are considered expendable (Herzfeld 2006; Celik 1993 and 1994). Expropriation, historically carried out in the name of economic expediency and state priority, is now carried out in the name of saving monuments and giving heritage its due. In the words of former Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, “With the GAP project, we achieved great economic development. But we did not manage to rescue Urfa from being the kind of society that grazes sheep in between its historical monuments. Unless economic development supports cultural and social development, then the waters of GAP will have flowed for nothing” (Suleyman Demirel, quoted in Karaaslan 1997).

The main challenge of culture and tourism in Urfa is persuading the people to be “rescued” from this fate. As of 2011, they remained unpersuaded, as evidenced by the more or less continual, low-grade struggles over the use of space in Urfa today. For instance, in the countryside surrounding Urfa there are hundreds of deep-set, yawning caves, which recently attracted government interest for their tourism potential. However, the largest of these caves are used by villagers as shelter for livestock (cows, goats) and as unofficial animal markets. During my fieldwork, the municipality ordered the caves vacated, building instead a central “animal market” in Eyyübiye. There was a huge protest on the part of animal sellers, who would have to incur the costs of vehicles for transporting the animals, and of traveling with them, etc. On the day of the order, they formed a crowd in protest outside the municipality building and called on the mayor to resign (he didn’t). Articles were published in support of the mayor, revealing a mixed rational for closing the caves: The sanitation hazard posed by the proximity of livestock to
the city; the need to attract tourists; the respect due to Urfa’s ancient heritage. While there is a confluence of disparate discourses—culture, health, sanitation, sophistication—they run in the same direction: the mark of a civilized and developed society is that it recognizes and preserves its cultural heritage.

Around the turn of the century, the discourse of multiculturalism was added to the mix. In Urfa, this largely took the form of the interfaith - seeing as the city’s patriarch, Abraham, is a prophet common to Jews, Christians and Muslims. The aforementioned theme park was part of a wider effort to remake Urfa as an “interfaith tourism” destination—for example, urban renewal efforts, mosque and church restorations, and the establishment of an infrastructure for ‘faith tourism.’ For examples, planners in Urfa looked to the nearby cities of Mardin and Antakya, which like Urfa have significant Christian histories, and which have transformed themselves into centers for culture and faith tourism that attract thousands of visitors (and dollars) each year. In Urfa, however, flag-ship projects like Abraham’s Path and Democracy and Tolerance Square (which I will examine in detail below) had stalled. As of 2011, interfaith tourism had scarcely taken root in Urfa: even though Urfa lies on the road connecting Antakya and Mardin, few tourists, it seems, even think to stop there.

Among the local supporters of these projects, there is frustration with the people of Urfa for having blocked the development of tourism. Their resistance to interfaith projects is often understood in terms of their purportedly backward (gerici), closed (kapali) or “conservative”

In Urfa, Christians, Muslims, and pagans all have sacred places. There is something for everyone in Urfa... It is a very important place for Christians—you know the story of Jesus’s “mendil.” If this were narrated [as part of a tourism strategy], that would be enough [to attract Christian tourists]. We need leaders, managers who will narrate that. This is our problem (eksiğimiz bu). We need leaders that are forward looking, tolerant, with broad horizons. I have been saying this for years. Conservatism is very dangerous. The worst thing is to be conservative. (C.K. 7/6/11)

The failure of faith tourism in Urfa is thus attributed to “conservatism.” “Conservative” has a quite specific valence here, and takes part in the aforementioned “original”/“non-original” Urfa distinction: conservative means (roughly) uneducated, rural, non-Turkish. This is a discourse that circulates far beyond planners or the intellectual elite. A female acquaintance my age (who would not remember an Urfa prior to migration) nonetheless explained to me that the city used to be more “open-minded” and “forward-looking,” but that those people had gradually been replaced by villagers who were “backward” (gerici) and “conservative” (tutucu).

In the ten years since the national AK Party victory in 2002, “conservatives” are increasingly present in Urfa’s ministries and institutions. For instance, the mayor who ultimately struck

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113 C.K. is referring to the legend of the Mandylion, a cloth bearing the miraculous imprint of Christ’s face. As the story goes, then-king Abgar suffered from a skin disease and, having heard of Jesus’ miraculous healing powers, requested that he visit Edessa. Although Jesus did not come, he sent the cloth bearing the miraculous imprint of his face. Abgar received the cloth and was cured of his disease, after which he accepted Christ. The Mandylion—or the Image of Edessa, as it came to be known—would have been the first Christian icon. According to some, it was taken to Constantinople in the mid-10th century, and vanished during the fourth crusade. Locals, however, hold that it was hidden in the well shaft located in today’s Ulu Cami, and for this reason the well water is said to hold healing properties.

114 Interview with Cihat Kürkcüoğlu, 7/6/11

115 In local discourse, “conservative” means something very different than it does at the national level. At the national level it usually implies “religious” as opposed to “secular” (a distinction according to which everyone in Urfa is “conservative,” including the aydinlar). If in the local context there is a religion distinction in play, it is roughly between followers of textual religion and followers of folk tradition (see chapter 4).

116 Again, the aydinlar (and those they represent) do not oppose the AK Party’s religiosity, but their
down the Theme Park project was an AK Party mayor, and he was perceived by some to be appeasing his conservative base:

If the leaders believe something, the people do too. If the leaders don’t believe something, neither do the people. The leaders influence the people. One mayor says, “I will not make that theme park happen. I won’t create a place for a synagogue and a church.” After that, the people say the same thing. But if the mayor were to say, “Yes, this is a good project, this must be done,” then the people would follow him. The people are linked to the managers. Whatever the manager says, they look to him. They look to their leaders. [That is why] our leaders have to be enlightened (intellectual). (C.K. 7/6/11)

From the perspective of many of the ayyınlar, then, it is the duty of leaders to edify the benighted people of Urfa. Culture projects are, like the environmental engineering projects discussed in Chapter 2, top-down.

It is clear that the multiculturalism in question is a limited and strategic one—since projects like the theme park imply, for instance, that Urfa’s (former) Christians “have” culture whereas Kurds and Arabs evidently do not. Similarly, we might note that the state that is celebrating its religiously diverse past (that of Jews and Christians) seems content to ignore the concerns and grievances that stem from its religiously diverse present (that of, e.g., Alevi) (see Walton 2013, Dressler 2013). That official multiculturalisms always entail fictions and exclusion has been elucidated in recent years by anthropologists and others (e.g., Kymlicka and Bashir 2008); some deem multicultural recognition itself a tool of encompassment and a means to ultimately expand state power (Povinelli 2002; Herzfeld 2003).

The phrase “majoritarian multicultural” is intended to highlight several features of the discourse of multiculturalism circulating in Urfa. First, “multiculturalism” is something visited

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association IN URFA with the (roughly construed) rural/conservative/non-Turkish/uneducated set.
by the elite on the non-elite. Although H.H. and the group he represents (“families with roots”) now constitute a numerical minority within Urfa, they are nonetheless very clearly the “majority” culture: Turkish, male, and elite, they are the standard or constant in relation to which forms of difference are typically gauged or measured in Turkey (Deleuze and Guattari 1989). Second, multicultural and interfaith projects are instituted in a top-down fashion. Third, and most importantly for what follows, this version of multiculturalism is “majoritarian” insofar as it entails submitting culture to a pre-defined model or standard. In this sense, “restoration,” insofar as it entails remaking lived space in terms of a model or blue-print, is an inherently majoritarian mode.

The picture I’ve painted thus far has been binary, a contest between the proponents of majoritarian multiculturalism versus those who “resist” or undermine its reach. But the picture is far more complicated: For instance, as the first section describes, “minorities” also invest in majoritarian culture, sometimes with more fervor than anyone. As ethnographers have amply illustrated, state projects, as normative and strategic as they are, cannot only be normative and strategic. They travel in material forms that cannot help but enfold differential interpretations and uses, and in this way generate new forms of consciousness (Appadurai 1986; Biehl 2007, Keane 2007, Tsing 2007). The rest of the chapter explores this more ambiguous ground.

What follows are portraits of three minor uses of “culture” in Urfa on the part of three individuals. Each of these individuals could be called a “minority” (in ethnicity, politics, gender), but that is not what makes their use of culture “minor.” “Major” and “minor” do not refer to two different cultures, but to distinct treatments of the same culture (Deleuze and Guattari 1989; 1983). A “majoritarian” treatment, as we have seen, submits culture to a model or standard, whereas a “minoritarian” treatment is a process of creative divergence from that standard —
which proceeds by way of the standard, working to place it in “continuous variation” (1989: 476). The people who appear below work with the “media” of officialized culture—writing, photographs, blue-prints, architecture, art-work, books, signs, petitions—whose function can be either major or minor, or both. It is important to understand “major” and “minor” as two poles or ideals; both are always in play, sometimes as a clear contest among different constituencies, sometimes in the choices and pressures confronting one person. The ethnography bears out this complexity and ambiguity, and so I will let it speak for itself, and reconnect with the argument of major/minor in the conclusion.

Culture lessons

What could Ahmet have wanted with the playbill from the Urfa Independence Day Musical? We’d arrived after curtain to the performance commemorating Urfa’s role in Turkey’s War of Independence, and so we hadn’t received copies of the program on the way in, but we both wanted them. Ahmet was the son of poor Arab migrants, a teacher of sixth grade social science and a minor historian of Urfa. Because we were both interested in the history and culture of Urfa, we would often team up to conduct interviews or attend cultural events. We found that together we could access those official spaces—archives, government ministries, the offices of politicians and professors—in which each of us felt uneasy alone. Initially, I did not understand Ahmet’s preoccupation with culture, or the purpose of what he called çalışma, “my work”—only that he pursued it with a singular determination. On the day after the Independence Day Musical, he rode the bus to the municipality building and requested two copies of the official playbill, one he kept and one he gave to me.

Ahmet spoke readily of “our culture” and “our values,” expressing himself at different times
“as” a Muslim, a citizen of Turkey, and a representative of the city. In many ways, he did seem a paragon of Urfali decorum: By five thirty each morning, Ahmet was awake and at prayer, and by seven he was in the teacher’s lounge at Şair Nabi School, going over the social science lessons he’d prepared for his sixth-grade students. At the end of the school day, he would ride the bus half-an-hour from Eyyübiye to the city center, where he would read until evening in an Islamist cafe and book store. Ahmet was always crisply dressed and clean-shaven, and he carried tissues to wipe sweat from his brow or to dry his hands and feet after ablutions (he rarely missed a prayer-time). He avoided even common, minor vices like smoking cigarettes, and he had never seen alcohol in a glass.

Still, Ahmet was far from what most people in Urfa would describe as a representative citizen, an “original” Urfa man (orijinal Urfali). His parents were Arabs from Harran, the plain that stretches from the city’s southern flank down to the Syrian border, and they moved in the 1970s to the poor para-urban neighborhood of Eyyübiye. Over the past fifteen years, state-backed irrigation efforts in Harran had greatly enriched certain (land-owning) families, resulting in rapid upward mobility for some. While Ahmet’s family owned only a modest amount of land, irrigation benefited them enough that they no longer had to migrate for agricultural labor, meaning that Ahmet and his siblings could attend school year-round in Urfa. Ahmet “took” to schooling. Of ten siblings, he was the only one to have completed more than a few years of primary education. In fact, he was the first person in his family, immediate or extended, to read and write, and one of the only adults to speak Turkish fluently.

Ahmet attended university in Ankara, the nation’s capital, and he describes moving there as a small shock. Suddenly he became aware of the accent that marked him as someone from a “backward” (geri kalan) region, who spoke Turkish as a second language, and who was
particularly conservative. His habits and values (e.g. prayer, avoidance of alcohol), which in Urfa had more or less fit within the rhythms of daily life, suddenly appeared as elements of a “life-style” (yaşam tarzı) that set him apart from his peers. He watched as other young men from provincial towns were swept away by the sudden freedoms of college life in Ankara: He mimicked their zeal, widening his eyes and glancing manically from side to side, “No father! No family! Freedom!” In Ankara, these men dated casually, drank alcohol, and inhaled Bally vapors through paper bags (Bally is an industrial glue, which, Ahmet explained to me, “does what all drugs do, it makes you escape [kaçmak] from yourself.”)

Ahmet had no desire to escape from himself, and instead his experience in Ankara prompted him to “become aware” of and embrace his identity, including his locality and ethnicity. On the wall of his dorm, he displayed the traditional “Arab” costume of Harran: a white jalaba with a woven belt, and a checked kefiye. Although Ahmet himself dressed in collared shirts and khakis, he displayed the costume in order “to show our culture to the people in Ankara; to say, ‘this is how we are’”—one identity among many that comprise Turkey.

After graduation, Ahmet returned to Urfa, feeling a sense of responsibility (sorumluluk) to his family and to his city. He was aware that Urfa was widely regarded as “backward,” and he was determined to help rectify this image through his work as an educator. Ahmet took a teaching post at a large public school in his own neighborhood, Eyyübiye. His students were themselves the children of Kurdish and Arab migrants, and, like him, the first generation to speak Turkish and attend school. His primary aim was to educate his students about the history and heritage of Urfa—to help them realize, as he had, that being from Urfa could be a source of value and pride. “Relations between the state and the people are changing,” Ahmet told me. (Halk ve devlet arasında ilişkileri değişiyor). “It used to be that the state related to the people
tepeden, from on high, but things are different now.” Today, as he himself proved by example, hard work could be rewarded with inclusion and upward mobility. He considered it his duty to convey this possibility to his students. “Most families in Eyyübiye do not speak Turkish well, and this embarrasses them,” he told me. Through his teaching, he’d show them that “Your language is not important. You are a citizen, you are valuable” (Vatandaşıınız, değerlisiniz).

As an educator, Ahmet was tireless, and while his classroom teaching was largely governed by a mandatory state curriculum, he supplemented it wherever possible with guest lectures, panel discussions, and school trips. One day in March, I joined Ahmet and his class on a field trip to the Urfa museum (and I’d joined Ahmet there the previous afternoon, when he was planning his lesson, and considering how best to impress upon his students that these disparate objects and artifacts were their heritage). The museum’s lower level holds a collection from a huge stretch of the ancient past: Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Old Bronze Ages (painted pottery, flint tools, stone idols, and burial objects). Spinning his lesson, Ahmet improvised a narrative, and performed it with gusto. “Look, friends, what do we have here!” he thundered, pointing to a clay bowl. “In those days, they used to drink water from these”—and he acted out scooping up water and drinking from a bowl. After describing some of the other objects in that window, he led the group on to the following display. “Then what?” he asked, moving along, “Then, they developed metals”—he gestured toward some needles—“They began sewing things.” He was constructing a chronological scene as he moved (out of material that was only roughly chronologically

117 This is a fairly striking reiteration of the AK Party’s official narrative. Ahmet’s conviction that if the students read, work hard, they will have a shot at upward mobility, like he did entails a certain faith in the state—that individual hard work will be justly rewarded. It braids together the narratives of the self-improving individual and the “self-improving state” (Povinelli 2002).
arranged). “And then what?”—as we came up to a window of jewelry and decorative items—
“They discovered art.” When we came to an exhibit of a funeral mound, with a skeleton folded
in a stone sarcophagus, one of the children shouted “And then they died!” and everyone laughed.
The joke was astute: Ahmet was constructing a continuous history of Urfa, as though it were an
individual biography.118

We proceeded to the museum’s upper level, an “ethnographic section” displaying 19th and
20th century cultural artifacts: regional dress styles; traditional crafts; ornately carved wooden
doors; ritual objects like hand-written Qurans; plus the accoutrements of daily life like jewelry,
glassware, cooking instruments, carpets, and more. Many of these artifacts recalled the diversity
of Urfa’s pre-Republican past—for instance, the Arabic and Ottoman scripts; the forms of local
garb that differentiated tribes; the Syriac inscriptions; the crafts like stonemasonry that were
practiced by non-Muslims. These communities were violently expelled from Turkey in the early
twentieth century, and yet here were their traces, presented as national heritage. Whatever
dissonance this might have provoked seemed not to trouble the students, nor their teacher: They
busied themselves with various domestic artifacts; the girls acted out scenes with jewelry and
cooking things, while the boys attended to tools. For me, the scene called to mind scholarship on
the ideological dimensions of “heritage” (museums, material culture, folklore), and how it works
to encompass diverse collectivities into a single national body and a single national time
an exhibit of swords and pistols, Ahmet mimicked the noise of an explosion. “What’s that? The

118 It is this rendering of discrete events as “continuous” in time and space that, as Paul Veyne argues,
“binds history to the continuum and makes of it above all the biography of a national individuality”
French have come! Quick, everyone, grab a weapon and let’s go!” As each child pointed to their weapon of choice, Ahmet narrated the story of the “Independence War” following World War I (the same one commemorated in the aforementioned musical), when the people of Urfa rose up to expel the would-be French occupiers.119

It is not scholars alone who are skeptical of state efforts at encompassment. In southeastern Turkey, many Kurds, especially, have experienced the state’s assimilationist policies which targeted Kurdish language, religion, and ways of life.120 Skepticism often extends to the present-day policies of “democratic opening” in which Ahmet placed such faith; many Kurds, especially, viewed AK Party rhetoric as a continuation of assimilationist policies by another name.121 Thus Ahmet’s outlook was challenged periodically by other young people in Urfa, who regarded his nationalism as naïve, at best. On one occasion, I invited Ahmet to a photography exhibition held by an acquaintance, Yasin, a progressive and artist-type. For reasons I did not understand, the two were immediately but tacitly antipathetic toward one another. This was not simply a disagreement about electoral politics, but something more diffuse that they perceived instantly in one other. The subject came up of the “Turkish Olympics”—a heritage event where non-Turks compete in Turkish language skills in a stadium setting. The event was to be held that year in

119 This is an explicitly nationalist gloss on local history. The French had been defeated, but by a loose coalition of independent Kurdish chieftains, who fought not for the sake of God or country but rather to defend their autonomy and territory. (In fact, these Kurdish tribes did not hesitate to turn their weapons against the Turkish state shortly thereafter, when it attempted to curb their autonomy). These fighter have been recuperated as “national heroes,” and their struggle against the French has been incorporated as a front in the “Turkish War of Independence”—honored in annual ceremonies like the “Independence Day Musical.” Herzfeld (2003) describes something similar in Crete.

120 See Saracoglu 2010.

121 Inclusion narrative is AKP. There is a developed/articulated critique of the AKP’s strategy on the part of the BDP (the Kurdish party), which has called “democratic opening” an attempt at integration at the price of relinquishing identity.
Urfa, and I knew that Ahmet looked forward to attending. Yasin, by contrast, scoffed at what he considered nationalist dreck: “I’d like to see them hold the Kurdish Olympics.” This precipitated an argument with Ahmet, who stormed off. I went after him, and as I left Yasin called: “Bridget, keep your mind free! And don’t make friends with people like that.”

To view Ahmet’s work as principally an effect of ideology is to lose track of the state’s immanent and moral dimensions, the role it played in Ahmet’s life. I went once to the house in Eyyübiye where Ahmet lived with his parents and his ten siblings, and met his mother and three sisters. In the bare, spacious room where the six of us sat cross-legged on the carpet, there was only one piece of furniture, Ahmet’s desk, which stood incongruously against the far wall. On it he had carefully arranged his collection: Brochures and programs from various panels, conferences, and cultural performances; photographs of him shaking hands with local notables or scholars; the business cards of people he’d met; a flier he’d made for a Panel Discussion at Şair Nabi school with an Anthropologist from Princeton University. (Notable here is not only a love of culture but a romance with officialdom).

Clearly, Ahmet’s literacy, and his involvement with state institutions, distinguished him within his family, although not in the way one might expect. Ahmet’s parents regarded their son’s literacy as less a point of pride than of ambivalence, even mistrust. Each day, upon returning to their home at dinnertime, Ahmet would feel the weight of their disapproval. “They don’t understand why I spend so much time outside,” he explained. “In their thinking, ‘You go to work, you come home. What else is there?’” There was, of course, Ahmet’s other life—the life he forged through the official documents proudly displayed on his desk—but to his family this was all opaque. They worried that Ahmet remained unmarried at 28, and they assumed (largely accurately) that it was because whatever he did outside the house took up his time and focus.
Throughout the year, pressure would mount for Ahmet to “settle down.”

Among Memet’s collection were a few special volumes commissioned and published by the state. Dedicated to Urfa’s history, architecture, and traditional culture, they were authored primarily by local scholars and published via the Şanlıurfa Foundation for Culture and Research, or ŞURKAV (Şanlıurfa İli Kültür Eğitim Sanat ve Araştırma Vakfı) described above. For Ahmet, these volumes were particularly prized, since they were printed in limited numbers and could not be purchased. Their distribution was a who’s who of the local intelligentsia: copies would go to directors of government ministries, publishers of newspapers, patrons of the arts. For those who cared about these books (a small group, admittedly), they had the power to bestow prestige, or withhold it.\(^{122}\) Ahmet’s most prized volume was a twelve-pound, expensively-produced volume of photographs of mid-twentieth century Urfa.\(^{123}\) It was given to him by the mayor, who we had recently interviewed together. After the interview, the mayor presented a copy of the book to me, saying “I’d like you to have this to remember Urfa,” and Ahmet said, “I’d like one too.”

As mentioned, ŞURKAV, founded in 1991, is dedicated to the preservation of Urfa’s “traditional” architecture, music, and culture, against its perceived erosion by village-urban migration. In other words, ŞURKAV’s mission is to preserve a culture that it perceives as under attack from, precisely, Ahmet. Thus in the course of Ahmet’s work with official culture, the deck was always stacked against him in subtle ways. This was especially evident in our dealings with

\(^{122}\) One municipal librarian had run afoul of the local director of the Ministry of Culture, and had subsequently stopped receiving the volumes: “Everyone in Urfa would tell me they had no more left, and so I would have to request copies for the library from Ankara.”

state administrations. There were those men (they were almost always men) who sat in air-conditioned, smoke filled offices, who would greet us from behind desks with expressions that told us we had interrupted. They asked us terse questions (“What is it you want?” “What for?”), which often left us stammering. We took to bringing type-written letters of introduction to produce when necessary, and the directors would pore over them with exaggerated slowness. At the Architecture Archive, the man who was reading our letter of introduction turned to someone else in the room (there were always various, un-introduced men sitting elsewhere in the room, smoking), with whom he casually carried on a 20 or 30-minute conversation before turning back to us. (I recall finding myself suddenly hyper-aware of being a woman, of speaking Turkish poorly, of being out of place; I sat without moving a muscle, repeating to myself that these men’s judgment meant nothing to me).

But Ahmet’s anger and indignance showed on his face. He knew these men as müdürs, “directors”—those in power in the ministries of culture, education, finance, religious affairs—and he encountered them constantly and of necessity. If these ministries had the power to grant Ahmet upward mobility, they could just as easily block it. All of his pedagogical efforts—the class trips and museum visits, the panel discussions, any departure at all from the curriculum—required special documentation from the Ministry of Education, which was not always granted. As Ahmet narrated his experience to me, it seemed that these setbacks were not only pragmatic but moral. Once, at the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), an ill-mannered secretary had been rude enough to ask “Are you Kurdish or Arab?” and when Ahmet replied that he was Arab, the man said “But Arabs are dark-skinned” (esmer).

These encounters only seemed to double Ahmet’s determination. One might see in this a kind of hegemonization of consciousness (e.g., Herzfeld 2003, Tugal 2009) — an example of the
nation’s oppressed defending it tooth and nail. But “false consciousness” does not help to explain
the moral dimensions of the state, or the promise that it held out to Ahmet. In part, it was the
promise of upward mobility—the state was the means by which Ahmet could advance his career,
join the ranks of the intelligentsia, and attain a different class status. But his investment in
official culture exceeded these aims. Ahmet found himself blocked or confined on all sides (his
family urged him to settle down, his boss warned him to respect authority, and officials
continually put him in his place); it was through his agonistic\textsuperscript{124} work with culture that he kept
himself on the move, continually opening spaces that were not home, not work, but elsewhere.

\textit{Democracy and tolerance square}

On the east end of the old city, at the far side of a long, narrow corridor of street, is the quiet
residential quarter of Nimetullah Mahallesi, Urfa’s former Syriac quarter. It is a tightly-knit
neighborhood, composed of narrow, capillary, and irregularly oriented streets, which seldom
connect to main thoroughfares but culminate instead in dead ends. The streets, which are too
narrow for cars to pass, are given over to children and to the sounds and smells of residential life
(voices calling to one another, the aroma of food wafting from home to home). There are no street
signs, and apart from residences there are only small convenience-store kiosks, a corner bread
oven, and a neighborhood mosque. If you were to find yourself in this neighborhood, that is, you

\textsuperscript{124} “All of Kafka’s works could be entitled “Description of a Combat”: the combat against the castle,
against judgment, against his father, against his fiancées… But these external combats, these combats-
against…must be distinguished from the combat between Oneself. The combat-against tries to destroy or
repel a force (to struggle against “the diabolical powers of the future”) but the combat-between, by
counter, tries to take hold of a force in order to make it one’s own. The combat-between is the process
through which a force enriches itself by seizing hold of other forces and joining itself to them in a new
were most likely either a resident, or lost.

Nazim walked with easy directedness through the quarter’s winding alleys – he knew its paths like the back of his hand, having grown up nearby in the former Armenian quarter, and having spent two years working as a librarian in a short-lived “culture center” that was located here. Nazim was a municipal archivist and librarian, and an author of several short books about Urfa. He had led me here in order to show me a particular area, Fifty-eight Square, which held a unique architectural constellation: Here, within shouting distance of one another, were a mosque, a church, a dervish lodge, and a Syriac school. Of these, only the mosque remained open. But the structures remained—even if obscured in part by the smaller, informal residences of today’s inhabitants—and, to the perceptive eye, they provided a snapshot of Urfa’s plural neighborhood life, just before it would disappear forever.

As the Republic was consolidating its power in the first decades of the twentieth century, most of the religious buildings in Fifty-eight Square would be shuttered, their communities driven underground or into exile. The Syrianis had fled Urfa by 1924, mostly to Aleppo. Their property was confiscated, and subsequently either nationalized or distributed to local notables. The church, Mar Petrus and Mar Paulus, was converted to a tobacco factory, and the Syriac school was turned into Urfa’s first Republican school. The neighborhood’s Islamic sites did not fare much better, since the state centralization of Islam during these years entailed marginalizing “intermediary” forms of religious authority such as sheikhs and Sufi orders (especially in the restive southeast). The dervish lodge in Fifty-eight Square was shuttered in 1924, and only the mosque remained open (the symbol of sanctioned, Sunni Islam).

Beginning in the late 1990s, the square was recognized as a symbol of Urfa’s multicultural past, and was the object of extensive renovation plans. The plans, conceived by the local
intelligentsia and backed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, involved restoring the monuments of Fifty-eight Square and renaming it Tolerance and Democracy Square (often simply called Tolerance Square, *Hoşgörü Meydani*). Early in the new century, major renovations were underway. Between 2002 and 2004, the Syriac Church was restored, and in 2006 it was opened as a “culture center” and youth library (*Vali Kemalettin Gazeoğlu Kültür Merkezi*). Just months later, the culture center was closed abruptly, without explanation, and soon all of the plans for Tolerance Square had stalled. Most Urfa residents with whom I spoke attributed the closure to opposition on the part of the residents of Fifty-eight square. These residents—mostly lower-class Kurds and Arabs—were assumed to be hostile to religious difference and desirous of keeping the neighborhood “closed” to outside visitors.

Nazim was by all accounts an outsider to this neighborhood, which he had begun frequenting as the librarian at the culture center. Yet the neighborhood had become familiar to him, and as he walked it unfolded to him signs that the untrained eye would easily miss. For instance, he pointed out that many homes in this neighborhood feature ornate stone motifs, or elaborately painted murals, around street-side entryways of houses. These he called *hacı kapıları*, or “hajji doors,” since their purpose was to mark the doors of those who had travelled to Mecca as pilgrims. He also pointed out a large traditional house that featured, on either side of its front door, two stone seats. He described these as “*soluk taşılar*”—“stones for taking a breather”—built so that passers-by could stop and rest if they were tired, without ever seeing the people inside the house. He regarded these stones as evidence of Urfa’s historical receptivity to outsiders, which he called “guest culture” (*misafir kültürü*).

It was by walking daily through these streets, and speaking with its residents, that Nazim acquired his intimate knowledge of the space, including details that could not be found in any
history book. Consider the name “Fifty-eight Square”—had I ever heard the story? Nazim and I paused at one corner of the square, the mosque to our backs, looking across at the school and the tekke. He recounted: “According to what they say,” (dediklerine göre), there was once a large hamam (public bath house) in this square, in that area. The hamam collapsed, and the fifty-eight people trapped inside and were killed. The implication is of divine punishment for illicit sexuality, potentially homosexuality, and the square derives its name from this.

As Nazim recounted the story, the owner of a nearby shop stepped forward, smiling: “I was listening to make sure you told it right.” He extended his hand to Nazim: He remembered him from his time at the culture center, and was teasing about the accuracy of his story. “Was the story alright?” I asked him (Düzgün mü?) “Yes, yes,” he said, “if it wasn’t I would’ve set it straight.” (He would have, too: there is a distinctly “Urfa” tendency to join other people’s private conversations). The men exchanged pleasantries, Nazim commenting on how big his daughter had gotten (You were just this tall last I saw you, maşallah!). Over the years, it seems, the shopkeeper had seen countless outsiders pause in the square to relate its history, and had overheard the most varied tellings—earthquakes, tornados. People get it wrong all the time, he told Nazim, why is that? “Isn’t there information, documents, sources?” (Bilgi, belgi, kaynak var mı?) “For instance, people come here and say that these fifty-eight were Jews. But this isn’t even the Jewish Quarter!”

He continued: this was the Syriac Quarter, who doesn’t know that?125 He drew my attention to the stone façade of the primary school across the square: “Do you see that column…look

125 He was not indicating that the 58 were Syrianis, only that the explanation that they were Jews makes no sense.
toward the bottom of it, do you see the three carved stones?—one, two, three. It’s something that can be missed, but they [i.e. other neighborhood residents] explained it to me. Do you notice anything? There’s a shape on them.” The man made the shape of a cross with his two index fingers—“it’s a stretched cross motif.” Nazim (who was already familiar with this theory) explained: in Urfa stonework, there is a strong Armenian and Syriani influence, as they were the stone-workers. Some other men from the bread oven, who had been standing nearby, nodded their consent, “They don’t do stonework like that anymore.”

The readiness of neighborhood residents to discuss the quarter’s Syriac past was striking to me, in light of what I understood about the failure of “Tolerance Square.” In the popular imagination (that is, in the casual tellings I’d heard during my fieldwork), the project had been abandoned due to the resistance of local residents. Those residents (so I heard) believed that the “culture center” was only a cover for missionary operations, funded by the Swiss Government.¹²⁶ “Tolerance Square” was really a veiled effort to establish a base of operations in Urfa, the coveted birthplace of Abraham. On two occasions, I spoke with people (residents of Urfa but not of the neighborhood) who were convinced of this version of events. Usually, however, stories about secret missionary activities were communicated to me second-hand, and in tones that already dismissed such views as paranoia, and the holders of such views as hopelessly backward and bigoted. (Recall C.K.’s comment: “Conservatism is very dangerous. The worst thing is to be conservative”). Below I will suggest that the conflict at Tolerance Square is not between the champions and opponents of pluralism, but between incompatible hermeneutics of community

¹²⁶ The Swiss government apparently had donated some of the money for the restoration of the church, hence that detail. Other people said the funding was from Israel (though this rumor does not appear to be based on anything).
and place. The above suggests that there is perhaps a different understanding of pluralism at work among residents than among the planners, and it will be useful to draw out this contrast.

In designing Tolerance Square, planners relied not on oral memory but on historical documents, and especially on old photographs. Cihat Kürkçüoğlu is a photographer and local historian who has, over the past four decades, collected an archive of 30,000 pictures of the streets of Urfa. For him, the value of photographing streets and architectural forms is in creating an archive that can later be used to make models and blueprints for restorations. “Documents are extremely important,” he told me. “After forty or fifty years go by, no one believes that there were such styles of architecture in Urfa. But if you’ve documented [these forms], you can show people examples, you can show them a photograph, a book.” Kürkçüoğlu was one of the main planners and proponents of Tolerance Square, which he views as a testament to old Urfa’s spirit of pluralism:

I’m the one who came up with this name: Tolerance square, Democracy square... In my writings I was the first to call it this. Why “Tolerance Square”? There is a church, the symbol of Christianity. By its side, twenty meters away, there is a mosque, the symbol of Islam. There is a tekke, the symbol of Sufism. There is a school, the symbol of edification—of the Republic, of progress, innovation. These four symbols all within twenty meters of one another—this is a square of tolerance. It shows that it is possible for people to sit together, live together, understand one another. For that reason, how many tourism ministers have I brought there? Anyone whom I have brought, I stop with them in the middle of the square and I tell them this story. This is the square of democracy, a church and a mosque side by side, a tekke and a school side by side... This is a square of tolerance. This must be reclaimed for tourism. These structures must all be restored. Maybe there should also be a cafe in this square, with tables, where people will sit and drink tea and look at the surroundings (C.K. 7/6/11).

In Kürkçüoğlu’s vision, the four monuments stand forth: Church, mosque, school, and tekke appear as symbols of their respective cultures. The neighborhood’s vernacular elements, like the smaller residential homes, fade to the background of this description (and in the official sketches they’re disappeared altogether). Notably, Kürkçüoğlu’s focus on the buildings as monuments—
as “abstracted, urban-scale fragments that represent cultures” (Celik 1994)—annuls the question of relations among the buildings and among their respective communities (See also Huyssen 2003 and 2008). Instead, each community is presented as a self-contained entity—severed from its relational context, fixed in its place, and synchronically connected with other “cultures.” This “monumental” (Herzfeld 2006) approach is also evident in Kürkçüoğlu’s published photography books, which typically arrange photographs of buildings by type: there is a chapter on mosques, a chapter on churches, a chapter on civic buildings (e.g. Kürkçüoğlu 2000). This approach cancels the temporality of the structures in question, and thus historical tensions and displacements: The above description is blind, for instance, to the fact that the Republican School replaced a Syriac school.

Consider, by contrast, how the residents of Fifty-eight Square understand its material presence in relationship to the past. As the conversation with Nazim, the shop-owner, and passers-by revealed, residents too were interested in what the neighborhood’s architectural forms revealed about its plural past (consider their discussion of the cross motif carved in stone). Yet their interest in these forms was apparently not insofar as they represented an abstract Syriac Christianity, but insofar as they were traces of people who were here, and who did concrete things, like carve stones and build houses. The lingering presence of Urfa’s Christian


128 The school was expropriated from the Syriani community and converted to a state school in the early years of the Republic. It is still in use as a primary school today. The name given to the school, 11 Nisan Kurtulus Ilkogretim Okulu (The April 11th Independence Day Primary School), carries an unsettling historical connotation: It was the War of Independence which sealed the fate of Urfa’s Christians, as their alleged collaboration with the French rendered them enemies of state, and provided official justification for their expulsion.
communities is also manifest in the vernacular names of many places that continue to be called by their Christian names several decades after they were officially renamed: a nearby Armenian village is still called by its Armenian name, *Germüş* (not the Turkish *Dağeteği*), and a section of the old city is still known by its Syriac name, *Telfındır*. Among many residents of the old city, memories of former Christian inhabitants are proximate—in ways both pleasant (Nazim’s mother recalls an Armenian neighbor, “Aunt Miryam”) and not (in Yuvacali, Mehmet’s grandfather recalls being told by Turkish soldiers, “Anyone who kills ten Christians will go to heaven.”) As the macabre story of the name “Fifty-eight Square” reminds us, it would be a mistake to assimilate local sensibilities to liberal multiculturalism. Their memories of inter-communal relations are of a different sort, where temporality, agonism and dissonance are never far from the surface.

To recover these temporal dimensions of pluralism calls for a mode of engagement with culture and history that is ambulatory rather than photographic, and whose point of view is immanent and mobile. For Kürkçüoğlu, the forms of the built environment were objects to behold (“people will sit and drink tea and look at the surroundings”). For Nazim, those forms revealed themselves only in their human context, and only ever in partial profile. Several years ago, he had accompanied an elderly Syriani priest, Ibrahim Nur, on a walk through this same neighborhood; the priest had grown up here but fled to Aleppo in his youth. “He remembered everything,” Nazim recalls, “all of the paths, who lived where.” It seems that for Ibrahim Nur, as for Nazim, the sensible environment *is* culture, memory, and collectivity—yesterday as well as today. Significantly (as we will see), the culture of today’s Fifty-eight Square is inseparable from the intimacy of its environs: the narrowness of the pathways and the proximity of bodies as they pass one another; the close, quiet streets which ensure that no conversation is really private; the
laundry hanging in people’s houses that one could not help but glimpse from time to time.

As fascinated as Nazim was with Urfa’s culture, his view of it was far from romantic or nostalgic. Raised in a non-religious household by a Kurdish father and a Turkish mother, and preferring to spend much of his life in the company of books, Nazim understood himself to be “different.” It might have been this experience of difference that allowed him to perceive so well the “thickness” of culture, and its embeddedness in the forms of everyday life. For years, he had wanted to purchase his own apartment in Urfa, to move out of his family’s home, but he was told again and again by landlords that the presence of a single man in the building would “make families uncomfortable.”

Nazi’s cultural politics were thus inseparable from a personal sensibility (see Stout 2004). Nazim believed in change, in making more room in Urfa for different styles of living and expression, but he could see that this was a long and slow road. “Two steps forward, one step back,” he once said. For him, the library and culture center had been an opportunity, a chance to prise a small opening in the neighborhood—not by erecting a model of the past, but by becoming part of the present and shaping it from within. “If you accept people” he told me “they will accept you” (consider the way he was greeted by the neighborhood’s residents, despite his “outsideness”). This gradual method was, in Nazim’s eyes, the only way: “You can try to force change on people, but they will reject it (tepki göstermek, “react”)—you have to take things gradually, be aware, show respect.”

In Nazim’s reckoning, the culture center had failed because it had proceeded too quickly, without due awareness of the surrounding neighborhood, and its specific norms of proximity, visibility, and gendered relations. Nazim’s office at the culture center had been on the second floor of Reji Church, and it had large windows. “I never approached the windows

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(yaklaşımdım),” since, he explained, their height and the narrowness of the streets would have provided a direct view into the inner courtyard of people’s houses. “It would have made people uncomfortable ( rahatsız).” But when the culture center opened, it drew a traffic of visitors from around the city, who were less cognizant of their surroundings. He mentioned teenage couples with their arms wrapped around one another, or people looking from the church’s high windows into other people’s homes. Nazim could read these signs; he warned the project director at the Ministry of Culture that, unless something changed, there would be a negative response in the neighborhood. The director did not listen, and five months later, the program was abruptly shut down. The police came and gave everyone two hours to evacuate, with no explanation (a void quickly filled by rumors of missionaries). For Nazim, the failure of the culture center had nothing to do with Christians, nor with any abstract questions of pluralism. Instead it was a question of neighborhood ethics—this community’s norms and ways of life. “If the center had been in the new city, it would have been fine.”

We stood talking outside Reji Church, whose gate we found locked. Nazim evoked the space inside the walls: There is a small exhibition salon, a large congregation hall where events were held, a cafeteria, and a library upstairs. Now the center is open only from time to time, for a special occasion or conference.

Four neighborhood children who had been playing nearby gathered and listened to us talk, entering the conversation now and then (as children, like adults, were wont to do). One girl took a blue ice pop from her mouth to say of the library “I used to come here all the time.”

“I remember you,” Nazim said.

--“I remember you, too.”

“You had an older sister.”
--“We had lessons here…”

Nazim related to me how hard he had worked on the library project, picking each book out by hand. The children in the neighborhood used to come all the time, and he’d gotten to know them.

--“Aren’t you going to open it?” the same girl asked, nodding toward the gate.

Nazim answered “If it were up to me, I’d open it. But it’s closed now.”

--“Why?” she asked, expectant, but when no answer came, she shrugged: “Hopefully they’ll open it again (inşallah açarlar).” Then: “Which buildings are they going to tear down?”

“They’re not going to tear anything down, don’t worry.”

Nazim told me that he believes that the Governor’s Special Administration (Vali Özel İdaresi)—which is now closing down their current office building—will send some of its personnel to work here.

“And then what?” the children asked one other, “What if we won’t be able to play here anymore?” The question circulated among them, voices grew louder. “We’ll play here anyway!” said one. “We’ll climb over the walls!” exclaimed another, throwing her arms in the air over her head.

“Climb the walls, climb trees,” Nazim told them. “As long as you play within certain hours and you don’t make too much noise, no one can stop you, right?”

*The gallery of fine arts*

“[Art] is a power of affirmation and potentiality only if it is viewed not as the representation of the world but as the expression and creation of what is not yet, not present or not actual” (Colebrook 8).
This was not an “interview,” she made that clear from the start. The details of Nevin Güllüoglu’s life and work had already been recorded elsewhere—there were countless articles, she said, a book—and we’d met at the behest of Nazim, our mutual friend. Now in her mid-sixties, Nevin was no longer involved in culture and the arts in Urfa, and kept little public profile, but from 2001 to 2004 she had served as director of the Ministry of Culture in Urfa. Prior to that, she had been at the center of a brief but intense scandal that I was curious to learn more about. While Nevin had little interest in formally recounting the story, she nonetheless welcomed me into her home, and offered me access to a cardboard box of disorganized documents and news clippings related to “the events”—a messy private archive which her sister, not she, had put together.

Nevin greeted Nazim and I at the door of her home—the first apartment building on the main street of the “new city,” whose nine stories overlooked the entire expanse of the old city below. She wore a mid-calf length purple tunic, and her loosely-arranged, jet black hair framed a strong, proportional face. The apartment was beautifully and artfully arranged: The furniture was wooden with sea-green fabric, in a gorgeous antique style, and there was a lovely muted green Turkish carpet in the middle of the room. And there were subtle details, like an antique cuckoo clock whose small wooden bird popped out to announce the hour, and bursts of vibrant contrast, like a string of rainbow-colored elephants in the doorway of the parlor, or a paper mobile in the hall. The style was so unique, and so remote from any I’d seen in Turkey, that I imagined its contents must have been curated in the course of travels around the world. No, Nevin said: “I really haven’t travelled, I’ve almost never been outside of Turkey.”

On one side of the main room, black and white photographs were arranged on shelves: Nevin’s parents and grandparents, old stills of her siblings in school uniforms. A nearby glass
shelf held hand-painted Turkish china, and another displayed antique metal objects that appeared local in origin. “It’s like a museum,” I whispered to Nazim—but what sort? The far wall was covered, frame to frame, with the most varied paintings: colorful abstract canvases, black and white sketches, portraits, landscapes; some were austere and some popped with color and movement. Yet while the canvases differed wildly in style and composition, together they composed a precise sensibility (see Nehamas 2006). Nazim thought that most of the paintings had been gifts, but Nevin corrected him immediately: “I bought most of them, I don’t like presents. That one”—she indicated a colorful painting—“was given to me by the painter,” an Urfalı man named Muharrem whose style was bold and abstract. “I refused the gift, so he hid it somewhere in the house and left so I’d have to accept it,” she laughed. Everything about her—her posture and demeanor, her manner of speaking, her casual statements like “I haven’t really travelled” or “I don’t accept presents”—all spoke clearly of someone who was entirely self-possessed, entirely at ease.

The Güllüoğlu family had evidently been very wealthy, very prominent. The stone mansion they once occupied in the old city now sat empty, but the street (located just a block or two from Fifty-eight Square) still bears the family name. Nevin’s had been one of the first families who’d had the desire and means to leave the old city in favor of more modern accommodations (the position of the apartment building, located precisely where the “new city” begins, attests to this pedigree). Nevin was part of the fledgling generation to be educated in Urfa after the high school opened (along with the men like Cihat Kürkçüoğlu, i.e. the aydınlar or local intelligentsia). Although it was rare at the time for girls in Urfa to be educated beyond primary school, Nevin’s father insisted on sending her to high school, and then to college in Ankara. His only stipulation was that she use her education in the service (hizmet) of Urfa, and so she came home after
graduation—with some reluctance, she admits—and has been here since. “At that time, I did not want to [return], but thankfully I did.”

In 1977, Nevin began her position as a teacher in the Urfa public school system. When she entered this field it was almost entirely male, with the exception of one older woman who taught at the same school. Nevin recalls that at lunch break on her first day, the woman had invited her to share a clandestine cigarette in the ladies’ room. This struck Nevin as odd: why couldn’t she smoke in the teacher’s lounge as the men did? That evening, she asked her mother: “Can I smoke in the teacher’s lounge?” Her mother said “No, ayıptır – it would be shameful.” She asked: “If I was engaged, if I had a ring on my finger, then could I smoke in the teacher’s lounge?” Her mother replied “Yes, then you could,” at which point Nevin decided she would smoke in the teacher’s lounge like everyone else.  

It is clear that the Gallery is considered Nevin’s great achievement (she and Nazim referred to it, more than once, as her “child”). The Gallery of Fine Arts (Güzel Sanat Galerisi) opened in 1987, with Nevin as its director. It occupied a prominent building on the main street of the old city, next to the Ulu Cami; it was the first of Urfa’s classical stone mansion to be restored, and a fine example of “old city” architecture. Before the gallery opened, there had been no place for contemporary art in Urfa: The municipal museum was an archaeological one, dedicated to the preservation and display of the past. But Nevin wanted a place for art that was new, and one moreover where the people of Urfa could create art. Her friends and colleagues considered the idea crazy. “Forget it,” they advised. “What do Urfa people understand of art?” (Urfa

129 Like her sense of art: what to endorse, what to ignore, selecting from the environment. Consistency and novelty, sensibility or style. See Alexander Nehamas 2007.
In Nevin’s understanding, Urfa people had a “potential” for art—this much was clear to her from the city’s highly developed folk music traditions. The visual arts had been practically non-existent, but she held that this was not because the people lacked some internal capacity, but simply because there was as yet “no place” for such art (meka n yoktu). The gallery thus introduced to Urfa a new form of expression, visual art, but there was no telling if it would find an audience, or what its effects might be.

When the gallery opened, interest in art “exploded” (patlatti), and even Nevin was taken by surprise. The classes and exhibitions were popular from the start, but moreover, the gallery became an informal gathering place. It was set in the middle of the old city near the bazaar, and its doors were open, so people would “drop in” from the street, sit and drink tea, run into acquaintances, talk. This type of space had no real precedent in Urfa (and no equivalent as of 2011). Public gathering places in the city tend to attract distinctive “crowds”: there is Gümrük Hanı, a shaded courtyard where old men play backgammon; there is Manici, a cafe at a pricey and picturesque boutique hotel where elite couples sip tea; there is the smoke-filled cafe on the main street, where male youths play cards. But the gallery was truly heterogeneous, a meeting place “for all kinds of people, religious, progressive, left, right…” Of course, Nevin said, not everyone was happy. “The religious people were angry with me for one thing; the left was angry with me for another,” she laughed. She went her own way, and having no electoral ambitions, she never minded the dissonance.

One example of this dissonance occurred in the mid-1990s. The gallery displayed nudes, from time to time, and although this had been the case for years, in 1994 some conservative voices were raised in protest. There is no written record, but the gallery was criticized on radio
shows (Radyo Mega and Güneydoğu Radyo were two stations that Nevin recalled). She struggled to remember the details, but recalled the hosts objecting to an artistic style “from Paris” and which depicted sexual (cinse) themes. (This was, it seems, an effort to cast the works as not only obscene, but also foreign and elite).

Nevin continued as before, and worked to expand the gallery’s activities. She began holding “open-air” exhibitions in different neighborhoods, where canvases would be displayed on the street for an afternoon, and residents could view them in the course of their daily movements. Colleagues warned her to avoid poor and conservative neighborhoods, for instance those in the old city and in para-urban quarters, since they expected the exhibitions would generate opposition along the lines articulated by the radio hosts. “I did hold exhibitions in those neighborhoods—especially in those neighborhoods,” Nevin said, “I didn’t receive one negative reaction.” In fact, quite the contrary: it was there that people showed perhaps the most interest. “Despite what anyone says, the people of Urfa are not backward (gerici), nor conservative (tutucu).” She spoke of Urfa’s halk, “the people,” and also of “the man on the street.” “There is, of course, a tendency toward ‘group-thinking.’ But if you trust yourself, and if you do your job well, the people will recognize that and they will stand by you.”

In May of 1997, a notice arrived from Ankara that Nevin’s position (tayin) had been reassigned from Urfa to Malatya, a city in Western Turkey. The order had come from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism’s central office in Ankara, which oversees local branches. In Turkey, the sudden relocation of a public servant is an implicit referendum on her performance, a kind of banishment. The notice had come suddenly, a terse, official document in black and white—“Please be advised…”—and gave no reasons. The decision came from the national governing party, the Islamist Refah party, who at that time also happened to be in power in the
Urfa municipality.\textsuperscript{130} Despite these party connections between Ankara and numerous political actors in Urfa (the governor, the mayor, several of the parliamentary representatives), no one claimed any knowledge of the decision.

But for Nevin and Nazim, there was little mystery. The political climate in Urfa had been shifting: In 1996, the conservative Refah Party had come to power in Urfa (the same year they came to power nationally under Erbakan, although in Ankara they were quickly deposed). For Nevin, the only explanation was that the Refah MPs of Urfa had asked their colleagues in Ankara to remove her from the city. I tried to specify what precisely was controversial—why had the gallery, which had run fairly smoothly for a decade, suddenly become such a point of controversy? Was there a problem with certain paintings like nudes? Was it a theological issue concerning figural representation? Yet it seems the issue was not clear-cut, even at the time. As Nazim put it, it was not only the images but “Nevin herself” who had become “a symbol (\textit{simge}) of what the Refah Party in Urfa could no longer accept.”

What was it about Nevin, then? She was “different” in many ways: she never married and had no children, she was an intellectual, a vegetarian. Yet, again, the problem was in all and none of these factors. The newly powerful Refah Party had set about consolidating a constituency, and this involved restaffing local institutions with party loyalists (around the same time, several other

\textsuperscript{130} In February 1997, Refah’s national leadership (under Erbakan) was deposed, in what came to be known as the “soft coup.” In January 1998, the Refah party was officially disbanded. Thus during Nevin’s ordeal, the Refah party Prime Minister was no longer in power but they still held office in provincial and municipal governments, as well as in Parliament. It should be noted that party names are often used as short-hand for their constituencies (in much the same way party labels work in the United States, where “Republican” refers to party members and their constituencies). Even when parties are disbanded, their (former) constituencies continued to be referred to colloquially by that party name. For instance, many people in Urfa still use the term “DTP” to refer to supporters of the Kurdish party, even though the DTP was disbanded in 2008, and the Kurdish party today is the BDP.
long-standing civil servants in Urfa were also relocated). (This party-led cleansing of institutions is a common practice in Turkey, and has its own verb, kadrolaşmak, to form cadres or to close ranks). It seems plausible that it was Nevin’s “difficult-to-place” character that made her presence unsettling: She was not an overtly political figure, but as someone who galvanized people across social divides and party lines, she was a potentially disruptive presence—as the local leadership was about to learn.

The news of Nevin’s relocation apparently came as a shock in Urfa, and the people reacted swiftly. A crowd formed in protest outside the local party headquarters. “Why is Nevin’s post being moved?” “What has she done wrong?” Nevin recalls that “the reaction” (tepki) came “first from the people (halk),” and second from the press, in an outpouring of articles expressing outrage with the decision and with those responsible. The writers demanded explanations—“What crime has Nevin Güllüoglu committed?” (Biner 1997)—but they also demanded names. One article (Kapakli 1997) began:

> Whose decision was this?
> Was it the Refah Party province head, Niyazi Yanmaz?
> If not, was it the Refah Party MP Ibrahim Halil Çelik?
> Or was it Zulfikar İzoł?
> Abdulkadir Öncel?
> Maybe it was the mayor, Ahmet Bahçivan?

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132 Omer M. Kapakli. “Günün Sözü: Nevin’in bir anlamda sürgün edilmesi resmen siyasi terbiyesizlikdir.” Gündeydögü Gazetesi. May or June 1997 (news clipping from Nevin’s personal archive, date not visible).
Who is responsible?
Whoever did this, come out in the open.
At least have the courage to say, “Sister, this was my decision.”

No one in Urfa ever claimed responsibility, and there was not one article published in support of the decision from Ankara. The local Refah Party found itself in a very bad position, appearing equal parts weak and duplicitous (“How could this decision have come from your party without your knowledge?” one editorial asked [Biner 1997]). Perhaps for Refah the cost of admitting responsibility would have been too high, or perhaps there were disputes within the party; in any case, their silence on the matter was never broken.

The craftsmen of the bazaar (esnaflar), who were among Nevin’s most vocal supporters, began a petition which said, simply, “We, the people of Urfa, want to see F. Nevin Güllüoglu, whose position was moved to the Malatya Fine Arts Gallery, return to the Fine Arts Gallery in Urfa.”

The petition garnered “a record number of signatures” from “all fair-minded people, men and a women, left and right” (Hizmet). Against the anonymous body that had effected the decision (a party label with no personal names), there emerged a constituency that was nothing besides personal names. A petition is an instance of what Austin (1975) calls an illocutionary act: a form of expression like a pact or promise whose primary purpose is not to represent but to enact. Thus the petition did not correspond to or represent an already-extant group of people, but itself materialized that group of people. In this way, it was like Nevin’s gallery, which did not

133 Nevin Güllüoglu personal archive.
134 Author’s name not visible.

“respond” to an existing interest in visual art but actually created that interest. By the second week of June, less than a month after Nevin received the initial notice, a second letter arrived from Ankara, this one reversing the decision, “as the people of Urfa did not want it.”

Nevin returned to work, putting the incident behind her. She went on to serve as the director of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, where she was widely respected until her retirement in 2004. The gallery reopened under new direction, and it remains open today, but not as a center of social life. As Nazim told Nevin, “After you left, the soul of that building left with you.” Nazim left the Ministry of Culture not long after Nevin’s retirement, and began working at the municipal library. In his spare time, he collected testimonies of people whose lives had been touched by the gallery, and he published them in a slim volume called *Oasis in the Desert*. Nevin was grateful, yet it seems that for her the gallery incident, and whatever lesson it held, was past. She did not care much to remember, and certainly she did not care to set the record straight or find out who had been responsible. That impulse belonged to Nazim, the archivist, or to her sister (a lawyer), who’d gathered the press clippings, but not to Nevin.

It was that impulse toward resolution—to draw the line between allies and enemies—that had hurt Nevin, and she was adamant that it had come not from the people (*halk*) but from the representatives (*temsilci*). This perspective is the mirror opposite of the more common formulation—that it is the responsibility of those in positions of power to “raise up” the backward and antidemocratic people of Urfa. I asked Nevin if she ever felt lonely in Urfa, or like she lacked peers, and she answered no, why would I? “I was born here, I grew up here. I went to

135 Nevin Güllüoğlu personal archive
school, I did my job” – i.e., as I take it, she was always fully involved in a cultural milieu, within which she found her people, and she did not feel alienated. “If you trust yourself (kendini guvenmek), no one can say anything against you, no one can pressure you or make insecure.”

Nevin acknowledged that she was “different” within the cultural context: an intellectual, an unmarried woman, and someone with extremely egalitarian views that do not find easy expression in Urfa. But Nevin, like Nazim, is insistent that she and her politics are of Urfa. In Nazim’s words, “the people are more democratic than their representatives.”

Urfa has always been a city

“If the writer is on the margin, is set apart from his fragile community, this situation makes him all the more able to express another, potential community, to force the means for another consciousness and another sensibility.” Deleuze and Guattari 1983

Each of the three people in this chapter was a marginal or minor figure in some way, and professed to be working “against the grain” of Urfa’s cultural milieu. Yet their individual differences did not inspire in them a feeling of alienation from Urfa—a desire to make a clean break or move elsewhere. Instead they engaged their culture (and did so by engaging “culture”), seizing on its resources, putting them to new and unexpected uses. In concluding, I will take a closer look at how each works with semiotic forms—art, architecture, artifacts—which can be the media of majoritarian encompassment—but which, in their hands, became tools for creating new personal and political possibilities. It is a question of the use of these materials, or their semiotic function: Is it a major (extensive, representative) use, which aims to merely represent what already exists? Or is it a minor (intensive, asignifying) use, with the power to generate something new? (Deleuze and Guattari 1989; 1983). These major and minor semiotic formulations are, we will see, directly linked to political formulations (formulations of
pluralism).

Consider Ahmet in the museum. In the museum, artifacts represent cultures (the Hittites, the Syrianis), understood as distinct groups within the encompassing history of the nation. In the museum (or the World Fair, in Timothy Mitchell’s famous formulation), “there is only one unfolding of time…in reference to which all other histories must establish their significance and receive their meaning” (Mitchell 2000: 7). We find a precise corollary in Ahmet’s understanding of himself as a minority (Arab; Urfalı) in relation to the wider nation; recall that when confronted with his otherness in Ankara, a potentially unsettling experience of dissonance, he responded by formulating his sense of difference as a positive identity (hanging a kefiye on the wall, to say this is who I am, “this is how we are”). If region and ethnicity are sources of pride, they are so in relation to the nation, which remains the sole means of upward mobility (for Ahmet as well as his students) and the sole granter of value and prestige (“You are a citizen, you are valuable.”)

But alongside this major use of culture, there was a minor or intensive one. What Ahmet called his “work” (çalışmalarım) was not just a way of progressing along a conventional path (“upward mobility”) but an agonistic affair and a way of opening new trajectories in his life. Consider his collection of official publications, or the playbill he requested from the municipality. Ahmet’s investment in these texts exceeded their content; they were the material means by which he created another world for himself, a lot other than the one he’d been cast (as a son, or a minority, or a migrant). In the course of his work, Ahmet created a style of living which no one could have foreseen, and which no one was prepared to let him have in peace. For however confidently Ahmet presented himself as representative of various social groups (the family, the nation, “our culture”), he was always bumping up against their edges: He moved too quickly, spoke too fast, was impertinently ambitious. His family pleaded with him to “settle
down,” and his colleagues warned him to know his place (even the principle of his school advised him to ease off the class trips and extra-curriculars). Leveraging these sets of pressures against one another, Ahmet created the displacements and interstices that allowed him to keep his present open.

In the battle over Fifty-eight Square, we might see a confrontation between two incompatible hermeneutics of place and culture, with Nazim attempting to navigate their cross-currents. “Tolerance Square” had been a project of restoration — it aimed to restore the square to its original or correct form (the multicultural town square) after it had fallen into neglect or misuse. The planners of “Tolerance Square” had in mind an abstract architectural formation, the monumental tableau as photograph or blueprint, and they could only regard the neighborhood’s ongoing use as degeneration or corruption. They are, in this sense, exactly like the aydnlar, who lament the ongoing use of the old city by its new inhabitants, or like the mayor, who decided that caves are for cultural display, and not for raising animals.

By contrast, Nazim’s fascination with Fifty-eight Square, and with the city more broadly, had nothing to do with its potential as model or monument. He was not interested in identifying an already-extant form—architectural or communal—and descrying its outlines through the chaos of the present. Instead, he tried to see how traces of the past enter into and shape the present, and this could only reveal itself in the context of ongoing, everyday life, and only ever in partial profile. His “reading” of the neighborhood—ambulatory, composite, and chatty—befits his understanding that the neighborhood is culture, for better or for worse. And though, like the city streets, this culture could feel confined, it was never entirely “closed”—it was up to the patient pedestrian to read its signs, discover its passageways, and somehow find a way through.

It is impossible to pinpoint exactly why an experiment like the “culture center” of Fifty-eight
Square failed, whereas the Gallery of Fine Arts was so well received (despite certain efforts to cast it as “elite” or foreign). One cannot tell in advance how a new form of expression will articulate with extant forms, whether it will find a place in collective life. We might however speculate that the success of the Gallery had something to do with the democratic sensibility—Nevin’s—that suffused it. For the non-elite of Urfa, “culture”—whether art, literature, or restoration—had always been presented as something that was not for them, but for tourists or the elite. Whenever “culture” entered their lives through official channels, it was typically in the form of displacement and eviction; their ways of life were precisely what had to be cleared away in order to make room for “culture.” The Gallery of Fine Arts was for the people: It was in the center of the old city, near the bazaar and a neighborhood mosque, and its doors were open.

Consider how the Gallery differs from the museum (where artifacts stand in for cultures), or from “Tolerance Square” (where buildings symbolize abstract religious communities); in both of those cases, semiotic forms (artifacts, architecture) only represent already extant groups. The Gallery, by contrast, introduced a form of expression, visual art, that found or fostered its own audience. In this way it opened out to the future. Minor art does not represent a real or extant people, but evokes a “people yet to come” (Deleuze 1989: 152; Biehl and Locke 2010). The “people” are connected not on the basis of a shared identity, but by virtue of collective expression that simultaneously creates the people. Consider the petition, which did not represent an extent constituency, but itself materialized that constituency. In this case, we can see how minoritarian art is directly linked to its political model, and we can also see why it is so threatening.

Ahmet, Nevin, and Nazim used the media of culture—art, texts, and architecture—to forge novel and unexpected connections with social others; that is to say that they used them
intensively, as tools (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 22). And all three found Urfa to be fertile ground for forging such connections. The dissertation began with Urfa’s apparent anomalousness, its “failure” to form coherent electoral blocks or stable identities. For Nazim, the absence of such blocks in Urfa was not something to be lamented (and it was not that people did not “understand” politics). “It is something that Urfa brings perhaps from its past,” he said. “Urfa has always been a city – a mix of people that prevents stable blocks from forming, whether it is from the side of the religious or from the side of nationalists, or from the side of the Kurds.” For Nazim, Urfa’s urbanism is synonymous with its unique “political reflex” (ilginç siyaset refleksi), its capacity to rise up unexpectedly, as the people had in support of Nevin, or once before in opposition to Erdoğan. These novel connections—forged at times “through the state, but not necessarily to the state” (Greenhouse 2012: 263)—are the vital pulse of social life in Urfa. They show the path to a pluralism that bypasses the state and its categories, becoming something different from what we first could have imagined.
Conclusion

That place which is not one

Urfa, the city, cannot be conceived apart from an “emergent territoriality”\(^{136}\)—one that is continually made out of movement: the trajectories of migrants, the paths of pilgrims, the cyclical routes of nomads—movements that are not confined to the city, but extend beyond it and generate it. Tracing these divergent paths has involved many walks in many places—through villages, in and out of houses, along canals, around the ritual site. Yet together, they have not yielded an image of the whole (Urfa as map or aerial snapshot); for different perspectives cannot be understood as “relative views on the (same) world” (Strathern 2005: 140). Instead, I have tried to pursue each walk, each trajectory, as really singular, not simply as a perspectives on the whole, as if together they might “add up” to a view from nowhere.

The preceding chapters have argued for the fundamental openness of place and of time—the idea that people, by engaging their surroundings, could create possibilities of living that are “uncontained by the present” (Grosz 1999: 7). This “openness,” however, is not the one signaled in the in the open/closed binary so often called on to differentiate Urfa from Western Turkey. In our account, the counterpoint of the “closed” city (the one that resists interpretation) is not one that lends itself to a transparent reading. Instead, my interpretive moves have involved finding various entry points and following them through—“disclosing” the city from within, but never once and for all. Conceptually and stylistically, I have struggled throughout to maintain this

\(^{136}\) Grosz 2013: 47
sense of openness or unfinishedness.

If my approach was persuasive, then the question that opened the dissertation—*what do the purple headscarves mean?*—no longer stands as a question to be answered. The question itself implies that, beyond the phenomenal world, there might be an order of ideal relations that a patient investigator could “map” in one dimension. Starting on the city bus and traveling through Urfa’s villages, neighborhoods, and para-urban quarters, I have tried to show that the relational dimension of identity is realizable only in time and space; it is emergent, and thus cannot be mapped in binary or reciprocal terms.

This insight is not new but it bares re-articulation. In “This Sex Which is Not One” (1985), Irigaray argues against the assumption that “woman” is, essentially, the inverse or other of “man.” For her, this misprision of gender identity is sustained by a pervasive “hylomorphism” in thought—a conceptual separation of *form* (ideal) and *matter* (material) — which would permit us to conceive identity apart from its specific instantiations. She argues, further, that the hylomorphic model is itself essentially gendered, supposing that matter (coded as passive/female) awaits the imposition of form (active/male) (Hill 2012). These formulations, Irigaray shows us, neglect the generative capacity of materiality itself. Heeding her insight, I have tried to elucidate the creative potential of matter—its capacity not to *receive* form but to *generate* form continually.

In Urfa, no identity is binary or reciprocal: not only is woman not the opposite of man; “Kurd” is not the other of “Turk” or “Arab;” and villager is not the inverse of urbanite. Ethnographically, it is impossible to understand the meaning of any of these without reference to context, and without reference to simultaneous forms of identification: Consider that the *significance* of the village/urban divide introduced in Chapter 2—that is, how this division
operates in the social field and in people’s lives—was made visible only through the gendered discourses discussed in Chapter 3. In these chapters and others, no one identity category—ethnicity, gender, class—categorically trumped any other; rather, each in turn would “wink into relevance” before resolving and leading elsewhere. As suggested by the continual dance of gendered bodies on the city bus, identities emerge in and through the unfolding, responsive contexts of sensible interaction.

My aim was never to prove that identity is not “real,” but only to point out that as a heuristic it can be extremely limiting. It is limiting in that it encourages us to read empirical phenomena—movements, scarves, buildings—as expressions of something static, interpreting the flux of living relations in terms of a pre-existing frame. The chapters of this dissertation thus move, but not in order to “pull back the curtain” or uncover what is “really” at stake; rather, our movement has been a *making visible*, where there is no final reveal.

Consider, relatedly, how the figure of “the state” surfaces unevenly throughout the dissertation, ultimately failing to find its opposite in “the local.” In each chapter, I present two contrasting hermeneutics of difference (pursued as two contrasting formulations of time/space): one dominated by discourses of state, the other referencing Urfa’s specific history and spatiality (I have refrained from calling the latter formulations “local,” but they could be read that way). I have insisted that these are not merely heuristics, but are also ethnographically tangible, at times as concretely as a bulldozer through a settlement mound. Still, over the course of the dissertation, these two contrasting formulations are increasingly difficult to disentangle ethnographically; this is because I present the state itself in increasingly immanent terms.

In the early chapters, the state is easily identifiable, and is either abstracted entirely (the floating party slogans in Chapter 1) or else is clearly locatable within the scene (Melik’s voicing
of developmentalist premises, in Chapter 2). But, by introducing local talk about gender and
space, Chapter 3 troubles the idea that we can ethnographically disentangle state discourse from
a local alternative; I show, for instance, how local talk both refers to, and calls to question, a
telos of modernity based on the “place” of women in modernizing societies. Here, state
discourses are shown to be both ethnographically tangible (Fatma’s father’s remark, “even the
girls go to school”), and not entirely ascribable (Fatma’s ambivalence about her own “upward
mobility”). By Chapter 4, the “state” does not appear explicitly at all. Instead, it is implicitly and
obliquely present, a dimension of formal religious education, and the distinction the latter draws
between Islam and non-Islam (folk tradition). This distinction (Islam/folk tradition), I argue,
does not index two different empirical phenomena, nor can it be ascribed to distinct sets of actors
or practices. Instead, it appears as a discrepancy within practice (the ambiguity of the Night of
Power), and even within perception (a hesitation to clap). In this way, I have tried to show how
state power is immanent in peoples’ lives, as in perception. It is not over-determining, but is
rather one of the things that make up the field, among (and mixed in with) others—family,
religion, marriage, friendship. It can also, as the stories of Chapter 5 suggest, provide the
material for creative forms of action, personal and collective.

My approach might be seen as a counterpoint to those scholarly accounts (the ones discussed
in Chapter 2, for instance) which tend to hypostatize the state and juxtapose it to society. This
tendency is particularly marked in Turkish studies: for many critical and progressive scholars,
the top-down nature of 20th century Turkish politics itself seemed to demand a top-down
conceptual model (as Yavuz cannily noted in his 2003 study of Islamic mobilization, “This
analysis…will start with the state not because my approach is state-centric, but because Turkish
political culture is state-centric” [9])\textsuperscript{137}. However, if Turkey is really changing as quickly as everyone thinks it is—moving toward democracy, neo-liberalism, and decentralization, then perhaps we will see this paradigm shift in favor of more ethnographic approaches to “state” and “society” that attend to their complex intertwining (Tugal 2009, Navaro-Yashin 2002, Ozyurek 2006, Walton 2013).

My effort to maintain analytical openness in the previous chapters entailed an engagement not only with discourses of state but also with those scholarly voices that turn collective practice into a discipline, another telos. This is the other edge of the plank I walked in this dissertation, if often implicitly, so I will close by reflecting on that other edge.

Among anthropologists working on Islam and the Middle East, there is today a great deal of interest in sub-state collectivities, particularly “communities” engaged in ethical practice (largely after MacIntyre 1980). This interest followed from wide-ranging critiques of secularism (e.g., Connolly 1999, Casanova 1994, Asad 2003)—many of which conceived the state not as a reified entity but as an immanent discursive power, constitutive of subjects. At the same time, and not incidentally, religion was undergoing a similar discursive formulation, redefined not as a thinking subject’s search for meaning, but as a set of dispositions rooted in pre-conscious, embodied practices (Asad 1993 and 1996; Schatzki 2001, Abu-Lughod 2005).

The corollary of these critiques has been a surge of interest in collectivities that flourish or persist below the secular state, often described in the language of “communities” and “counter-publics” (Abu-Lugohd, Hirschkind 2006, Gole 2008, Bell an de Shalit 2011). These accounts

\textsuperscript{137} For a critique of this tendency in Turkish studies, see Mardin 1997.
take time and space seriously, as integral to collectivity—for instance, in taking up explicitly the “overlapping patterns of territory, authority, and time [that] collide with the idea of the imagined national community” and “resist the scope of national politics” (Asad 2003: 179-180). This work dovetails with a valorization of the local in communitarian critiques of liberalism, from which it often draws its conceptual bearings. In accounts of Islam, authors are interested in thickly-textured “life-worlds,” where embodied selves are attuned to Islamic virtues. These life-worlds are bound by shared practices, discussed principally in the language of *habitus* and sedimentation (Mahmood 2005).

Understanding people’s embeddedness in time and space has been crucial to the analytic I’ve tried to elucidate throughout the dissertation. Yet, while I have argued that place and practice are crucial to community, I have resisted the notion that they “ground” it. In fact, I have suggested that some anthropological accounts emphasize the material dimensions of life in a manner that is “too thick,” and in which place works both to root and to stifle:

> The peasant can only but live rooted in the land on which he was born and to which his habits and memories attach themselves. Uprooted there is a good chance he will die as peasant, in that the passion which makes him a peasant dies within him (Bourdieu and Sayad, 1974, 115 - cited in Silverstein 2009).

This is Bourdieu, in 1974, but I hear distant and not-so-distant echoes in contemporary work on communities and counter-publics (accounts that, like Bourdieu’s, are written in opposition to colonial or post-colonial power). These anthropological accounts excel at describing cultural reproduction, but offer less convincing accounts of social transformation (Silverstein 2009). This is, in some part, by design:

> To what extent and how often historical narratives that constitute identities can be politically deconstructed remains a difficult question. Thus I have been arguing on the
one hand that Europe’s historical narrative of itself needs to be questioned, and on the other that the historical narratives produced by so-called “minorities” need to be respected (Talal Asad 2003: 177-178).

Seeing as, in the twentieth century, religious and ethnic minorities have often had to struggle to simply survive, Asad’s emphasis on “respecting” (rather than “questioning”) minority identities makes good sense. Yet we may also query the asymmetry of this approach, and its effects in shaping agendas of anthropological inquiry. In studies of Islam in recent years, for instance, there has been a tendency to ignore or elide the complexities, ambivalences, and contradictions that mark the lives of Muslims (as well as non-Muslims); these tend to disappear as authors stress the distinctiveness of Islamic tradition vis-à-vis the liberal West (Haj 2009; Mahmood 2005; Abu-Lughod 2005; for a critique see Hammoudi 2009, Purcell 2010).

I would argue that all of us, majority and minority, need to think about change—since it happens whether we want it to or not. Thus each chapter in this dissertation has been concerned with how people navigate the currents of transformations that they did not ask for: the displacement of villagers due to land reform or dam construction; of old-city dwellers who moved to the new city; of married women who moved from their fathers’ houses to their husbands’. These are changes in the sensible environment which are also, I have shown, changes in the shape of personal and collective life, and thus of identity. Yet, in the accounts I’ve presented, uprooting and disconnection are always simultaneously occasions for new connections.

For this reason, I have been drawn to phenomenological over Foucauldian accounts of

138 It seems evident to me that Asad’s work has an agenda-setting effect, regardless of whether he intends this—note the volume of work on Islam as a “discursive tradition” over the past ten years.
practice. In both approaches, being-in-the-world is, first and foremost, a pre-reflexive and embodied orientation. But for phenomenologists orientation is not co-extensive with experience—it does not “cover” it. In practice, what we might call *habitus* is constantly encountering the limits of its own mastery—in loss, in madness, in failures of all kinds. Merleau-Ponty interests me because of his attention to moments that interrupt perception’s seamless process of recognition and reaction—for instance, the case of a phantom limb:

> It is precisely when my customary world arouses in me habitual intentions that I can no longer, if I have lost a limb, be effectively drawn into it, and the utilizable objects, precisely in so far as they present themselves as utilizable, appeal to a hand which I no longer have. Thus are delimited, in the totality of my body, regions of silence (1962: 84).

Normally, we perceive things only as they appear ‘relevant’ or useful within our limited, habitual repertoires of sense and action. Everyday perception is thus essentially *subtractive*: it works to reduce a world of continual movement to a series of relevant forms. But when these repertoires are interrupted or suspended, perception is temporarily shocked: “Something in the world forces us to think” (Deleuze 1989: 162). In these spaces of abeyance or silence, what new perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and connections become possible?

This dissertation suggests the value of anthropology precisely here—in elucidating the interstices and discrepancies that permeate the “consistency” of social life, and that crop up as hesitations, or as moments of friction or doubt. When we seize on these seemingly minor moments, and trace their sinuous paths through the lives of our interlocutors, we often find that they lie along major cultural fault lines. In this way, anthropologists can place a finger on the pulse of those incipient, ambiguous, and sometimes painful processes whereby “new possibilities are ushered into being” (Connolly 2002: 1).
With each chapter of this dissertation, I have tried to show that the present is replete with more resources than categories can name, and more than are evident on the surface of things. Those resources can be seized on, redirected, and treated creatively; They invite people to imagine other ways of being and living; they open paths that cannot be predicted, and perhaps cannot even be mapped precisely in retrospect (Biehl and Locke 2010). The question is not about how to suspend the real or distance oneself from it as such—but, rather, about how to foster culturally specific modes of distantiation and critique. My guiding concern has thus been with how the people of Urfa, by engaging their lived environments, orient themselves in the present, with an eye toward the possible. This is a subtle but, I think, important difference in conceptual orientation from the scholarly discourses taken up here. This orientation is important not only for thought but, more importantly, for thinking—the homely, active, unceasing work of perceiving the world.
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