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The Turkish Tea Garden: Exploring a "Third Space" with Cultural Resonances

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Abstract

This article examines the history, use, and significance of the Turkish Tea Garden or *Cay Bahcesi,* positing that these gardens offer unique democratic spaces for public discourse set within the polis. The article unpacks the historical, cultural and symbolic features of these gardens, and the role these shared spaces play in Turkey's multivalent civic environment. It employs Ray Oldenburg's notion of "third space" to consider how these gardens provide inclusive settings for a culturally diverse citizenry. Further, the paper considers how these spaces act as repositories of shared memory, mediating conflict that appears in other societal spheres. The gardens are presented as uniquely "sacred" third spaces, distinct from the "profane" third spaces characterized by Oldenburg.

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Without the public oneiric spaces of the arcade or the square, without the people who can help us shape and articulate our wishes, we lack places to do our dreaming. We are left without sites on which to engage each other when we awake from that dreaming and try to make our wishes real. We are left without the most basic enabling conditions to create a world worthy of our aspirations. (Kingwell, 2001, p. 190)

As citizens negotiating the space of the city, we share common terrain with those whom we see as *"other"*: those manifesting difference be it through religion, ethnicity, culture, politics, or socio-economic standing. The city gathers together this variegated collection of individuals, many of whom have little in common, in spatial performances of politeness, propriety and publicity. In this pluralist world, cities cannot be conceived as homogenous entities in which citizens subscribe to a shared set of values and beliefs. Rather, cities must provide the cultural platform for a diverse citizenry, offering ways to *navigate* rather than *eliminate* political difference (Kingwell, 2001).

Settings that mediate these civic differences function as what urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989) refers to as "third spaces" – interstitial locales where citizens from all walks of life converge in a casual setting for discourse. Oldenburg is interested in these particular places as settings where individuals engage in social contact with those from differing backgrounds. He cites pubs, barbershops and coffeehouses as examples of such spaces – environments distinct from the private realm of the home or the public realm of the workplace.[i] Yet all his examples point to environments that hold no particular cultural or spiritual significance for their users. Instead, they function as what

Mercia Eliade (1987) refers to as "profane" space, holding no deeper collective cultural resonance.

This article examines the history, use and role of a specific type of third space – the Tea Garden, or *Cay Bahcesi*. Using a combination of site observations, personal interviews, ethnographic research and academic sources, I trace the historical, cultural and symbolic features of these gardens, and the role these shared spaces play in Turkey's modern-day evolving, multivalent civic environment. I posit that these gardens, found throughout Turkey, provide a unique *sacred* third space within the structure of the polis, offering open, democratic, social spaces for public discourse within a setting that evokes deeply shared cultural meanings.

In the first section, I trace the historical and cultural backdrop that converges within the locus of the Tea Garden -- examining both coffeehouse traditions and a fusion of eastern garden traditions -- in order to explore the role these precedents play in generating common meaning and values in today's *Cay Bahcesi*. I then consider the need for Oldenburg's places of civility and common ground and how this need is particularly acute within Turkey's contemporary political and cultural context. Finally, I move on to examine present-day uses of the Tea Garden, considering their significance as sites that allow common cultural practices to be performed. I argue that the *Cay Bahcesi*, by providing the spatial context in which to situate these practices, offer unique value as shared cultural touchstones that help open gates of tolerance.

Section 1: Historic Influences

a. The Coffeehouse Tradition

The cultural practice of providing and enjoying refreshments within the Turkish public sphere can be traced back to civic amenities found within early Ottoman settlements. Historically, public fountains and kiosks (*sebils*), served as gathering nodes that distributed water, sweetened drinks, and juices to passersby. These "refreshment amenities", predate the establishment of coffeehouses, but suggest how infrastructure serving the need for refreshments held a privileged place within the public sphere (Hamadeh, 2008; Onay & Uğurlu, 2010). With the emergence of the coffeehouse tradition, this function took on deeper social and cultural dimensions.

Coffeehouses emerged from the Near East, arriving in Istanbul from Yemen in the mid 1500s. Initially, the beverage was consumed by members of the Sufi order, ostensibly to help them stay awake during their all-night devotional practices. Sufis drew their membership from a broad range of social and economic strata, and were widely respected within the broader community. The consumption of coffee by Sufis, as part of their spiritual activities, imparted upon the beverage a sense of cultural legitimacy -- helping prompt its widespread acceptance amongst the general public (Hattox, 2000). Coffeehouses came to be subsidized by the local wealthy elites, as part of their private contribution towards the public good. Their revenue streams contributed to the *Vakifs* (religious endowments), which supported the mosque and its works (Hamadeh, 2008; Ozkocak, 2007). Coffeehouses were therefore often located near mosques and were considered an integral part of the religious complex.

By the end of the 16th century Turks had embraced coffee and coffeehouses as an important new social institution, with this new gathering space exerted a sweeping effect

upon the social practices of Istanbul's inhabitants. Acts of hospitality and sociability, by being granted cultural legitimacy through their association with the mosque complexes, could for the first time be respectfully transferred from the private domain of the home into the public domain of the city. For less wealthy citizens, who lacked homes large enough to receive visitors, coffeehouses could be used as a stand-in -- a space where one citizen could host another within the public realm (Mikhail, 2007). Coffeehouses thereby emerged as inclusive forums, frequented by people from a wide of array of social statures, including "beys, nobles, officers, teachers, judges and other people of the law" (d'Ohsson, 1788, cited in Hattox, 2000, p. 93). Here, citizens could enjoy sociability, entertainment, and the exchange of information (Hattox, 2000). Unlike stratified social environments, coffeehouses offered "egalitarianism, congeniality and conversation" (Ellis, 2008, p. 157). While repeatedly the subject of government closures, the popularity of coffeehouses continued to spread and, being a major source of tax revenues, their status as an urban fixture eventually stabilized (Artan, 2011).

The Garden within the Coffeehouse context

Ralph Hattox (2000) identifies three types of coffeehouses: the take-out stall, the modest shop, and the grand "house-style" coffeehouse that included an outdoor component. Hattox describes the coffee garden environment as offering, "a park or gardenlike atmosphere … surround[ing] the patron with refreshing sights and sounds unlike those of either the city or the desert" (2000, p. 81). He also refers to the presence of outdoor mats, shade trees, trellises, and large benches. Descriptions of this outdoor aspect of coffeehouses are also found in various traveller diaries. In Julia Pardoe's accounts of Istanbul, for example, she describes "a long street, terminating at the water's

edge [...] overshadowed by limes and acacias, beneath which are coffee terraces; constantly thronged with Turks, sitting gravely in groups upon low stools not more than half a foot from the ground" (quoted by Hamadeh, 2008: 121, see also Johnson, 1922, p. 262). Coffeehouses are described as extending into the street (Tokman, 2001), where the coffeehouse opens "onto a courtyard surrounded on three sides by wooden platforms with a pool and fountain in the center" (Isin, 2003, p. 88). Engraved plates depicting life in the 16th century provide further information about these outdoor spaces, with depictions that include those of kiosks along the Bosphorus, and cafés located near water features (Melling, 1807). Also identified are the games played at coffeehouses -- with backgammon, chess, and mankala being illustrated.

From these sources we understand that outdoor coffee gardens were an important compliment to the indoor coffeehouse experience. Nonetheless, while coffeehouses have been extensively studied, there is little documentation of their outdoor aspect. Consequently, our image of the coffeehouse is generally limited to that of either an interior space or, if outdoors, one that is somewhat analogous to a sidewalk café. Yet the coffee *garden* constituted a significant place for social gathering in its own right. These coffeehouse gardens provide a key spatial precedent for the Turkish Tea Garden, both in terms of their functional and physical components.

The shift from Coffee to Tea

Russian and Balkan immigrants who moved to Istanbul in the late 19th century brought with them the new custom of teahouses (and the gardens associated with them). These proved popular, in part due to tea being an inexpensive alternative to coffee

(Tokman, 2001). In 1878 a Turkish governor wrote a pamphlet promoting the health benefits of tea, entitled the *"Çay Risalesi"*. This helped prompt the introduction of several teahouses in Istanbul and other cities (though coffee still dominated). But the full import of tea as a national drink emerged only after 1923. With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire (and the loss of Yemen, Turkey's main source of coffee), Turkey was forced to import much more expensive coffee from Brazil. In 1924, in an effort to develop greater self–reliance, the government established a series of national tea plantations. Thereafter, tea became a much less expensive alternative to coffee. The ubiquity of tea drinking was further accelerated due to the fact that, in many areas, its consumption was considered to be safer than that of water (Ger & Kravets, 2009).

Following Ataturk's modernization program for Turkey, greater provision was made for the creation of public parks, with Tea Gardens becoming an important municipal feature within these environments. While each neighborhood (*mahalle)* maintained parochial local coffeehouses, much more broadly attended municipal Tea Gardens were created at important civic sites, including those that had once been used as excursion grounds (Evyapan, 1999). These municipal sites, as opposed to "belonging" to the more insular confines of the *mahalle,* attracted citizens from all parts of the city. The gardens became increasingly popular as socially inclusive environments, which "brought men and women together at the same table" in keeping with the desired "European etiquette" (Isin, 2003, p. 163). As part of the modernization project of Turkey, it was important that women have a visible place within public parks, thus removing the gender obstacles that remained intact within the neighborhood coffeehouses. Further, with Istanbul's population growing rapidly, many families were moving into smaller homes

that lacked gathering spaces to host friends. People therefore increasingly frequented Tea Gardens as spaces to meet. This combination of factors led to the increasing popularity of Tea Gardens in the 1950s as sites for families and friends to gather. The modern *Cay Bahcesi*, occupying a central position in the urban fabric, nonetheless enfolds practices that can be traced back to the 16ᵗʰ century coffee gardens (Ger & Kravets, 2009).

b. Garden Traditions

I wish to now consider the particular symbolic significance of *gardens* as the sites wherein tea is consumed. Garden traditions in Turkey draw upon a variety of influences: Islamic Paradisal garden traditions; Royal Pleasure gardens; and Turkic nomadic excursion grounds. While the social act of coffee drinking can be traced as the *functional and social* precedent of the Tea Garden, these various garden types provide the *physical and symbolic* precedents.

The idea of the Garden as Paradise, a sacred and visionary space, derives from early Islamic teachings. The word paradise comes from the Persian word *pairidaeza* referring to a walled enclosure (Moynihan, 1979). Islamic gardens were conceived as being a reflection of the heavenly paradise. Vivid descriptions of heaven depicted within the Koran gave guidance as to how these earthly gardens should be conceived with, "greenery, gushing fountains, rivers, delicious food and sensual beauty" (Schimmel, 1976, pp. 17–18). Rulers would pride themselves on creating this man-made version of paradise -- conceived as a form of worship -- that linked the world of the mundane below to that of the sacred above. Wealthy Muslims, as a testament of their devotion, would endeavor to create this, "paradise-like, cool and green garden" that "elevated the attitude

towards nature, to the realm of religion" (Evyapan, 1986, p. 10).

These Islamic Paradisal gardens stood in opposition to their surrounding environments, constructed as walled oasis encompassing streams, trees and pavilions. The garden palette included water, trees, the division of earth into quarters, and the elevation of the mountain. Features such as the terracing of the garden were representative of varying levels of bliss (Moynihan, 1979). These paradisal gardens were intended to absorb peoples of different backgrounds and economic standing within their midst, providing a space of shared cultural practices experienced and performed through conversation, hospitality, love of nature and sociability. They not only served as locales for pleasure, leisure and the enjoyment of nature, but were also charged with symbolic content. The physical elements and spatial organization of the garden brought heavenly symbols to bear upon the secular activities of earth.

In contrast, Royal Pleasure gardens were a hedonistic space, conceived as outdoor spaces intended for the daily life and leisure of the court (MacDougall & Ettinghausen, 1974). The Sultan and his court would hold excursions to gardens in both urban locations and suburban estates (Brookshaw, 2003). Thirteenth Century documents describe Seljuk lands and villages, and include references to, "pools and gardens and orchards and other trees […] and gathering places for residents and playing grounds for youth" (Turan, quoted in Redford, 2000, p. 317). Construction of these gardens was inspired by an Islamic body of literature that made specific reference to the provision of public gardens as being associated with an ideal vision of governance, reflecting a just ruler (Redford, 2000). Thus, between the 11th and 13th centuries, Persian rulers would undertake the construction of gardens in order to convey both their power and sense of justice

(Brookshaw, 2003). The royal pleasure grounds hosted scholarly as well as casual gatherings, wherein people enjoyed wine, food, dancing, poets, and musicians (Brookshaw, 2003). They were typically situated so as to take advantage of dramatic views, allowing the Sultan to survey his holdings, and included small structures and tent pavilions in which the Sultan could receive visitors. In the eighteenth century the royal pleasure gardens were made increasingly public as excursion grounds available to all social strata (Artan, 2011; Hamadeh, 2008). After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire it is these gardens that became public amenities, maintaining their role as excursion sites. As mentioned, the fact that these gardens were not considered the territory of any particular group made them much more inclusive settings compared to the local *mahalle* gathering sites.

A final factor coloring the nature of the Turkish garden is the nomadic character of the Turkic peoples. These roots led them to engage in a highly active use of gardens, placing within them functions that one would normally expect to be found within buildings. This practical uses of garden settings resonated with the nomadic use of the outdoors -- where nature is not so much brought under control, but adapted to serve everyday life (Seckin, 2003). Thus, while the Turks inherited key aspects of the Persian Garden tradition, they quickly adapted these for pragmatic requirements: altering the contemplative nature of the garden so that it could instead serve as an active setting for day-to-day life (Moynihan, 1979). While the geometry of traditional Persian gardens is formalized, with a specific organization of space intended to evoke paradise, the Turkish garden layout is conceived in a much more informal manner, in keeping with Nomadic traditions (Evyapan, 1986). In contrast to the inward looking Persian settings, Turkish

gardens came to be outward looking, chosen for views, irrigation and weather conditions. They included naturalistic elements such as fountains, pools, pavilions and flowers. Gardens were also often situated at civic focal points near mosques and coffeehouses (Seckin, 2003). The Turkish garden therefore distinguishes itself from the Persian garden tradition insofar as it treats the natural environment as a semi-tamed venue for sociability, a place of social excursion rather than a rustic and wild setting for retreat or a sacred venue for contemplation. It is thus more informal, active, and naturalistic, while remaining rife with symbolic content (Evyapan, 1986).

c. Turkish Tea Gardens Today

This specifically Turkish integration of the various garden traditions outlined above manifests itself in today's Tea Gardens. These are characterized by: informal layouts; water features; prime views; various options in terms of seating arrangements; and generous spacing between tables to allow for privacy. Local Tea Gardens are found within neighborhoods, but civic Tea Gardens are either prominently located adjacent to municipal buildings, or situated to take advantage of views or natural features. The boundary condition of the garden is clearly demarcated from the surrounding urban fabric, often with a low wall or elevation shift, creating a disjuncture with the everyday life of the city. In keeping with Turkish traditional use of outdoor space, people come to the Tea Gardens for unhurried relaxation, family events, conversation or games.

These gardens, I suggest, provide the third spaces Oldenburg regards as so important in establishing a meeting ground for disparate voices, but are unique insofar as

they do so within *sacred* rather than profane space. This is in sharp contrast to the bars, bowling alleys and barbershops so often constituting the "third spaces" normally cited.

Section 2: Mediation and Civility in the Public Sphere

There is in fact no Kantian standard of universal rationality functioning beneath all our particularities, and so political stability cannot be secured by stripping those particularities away. Subordinating one's particularity to that false universal only means losing one's self, not preserving it. The political imperative, then, is not to secure individual rights under a larger political structure of generalized, and therefore empty respect, but to demand real respect for my particularity in the uniquely valuable project of living my life. (Kingwell, 2001, p. 54)

I wish to now turn to the contemporary political and social significance of the Tea Garden, outlining some of the discussions bearing upon our understanding of social interactions in the public domain, and moving on to the specifics of how this applies to the Tea Garden. I argue that Tea Gardens sit outside of contemporary secularized Turkish space and in so doing tap into shared cultural memory.

Jurgen Habermas (1991) presents a detailed analysis of how citizens come together in the public realm, drawing our attention to the political importance of the public sphere. Making a distinction between interests that are private in nature and those affecting the *civitas*, he argues that the authority of a democratic government is insured, in part, by the fact that it represents viewpoints derived by an informed populace. Only in the context of the public sphere can individuals come together, leave their solely private

pursuits behind, and arrive at consensus regarding the common good. In order for democracies to have a rational mandate for governance, there needs to be a sphere wherein such debate can occur. In the past, Habermas argues, coffeehouses and salons -- Oldenburg's third spaces -- played a vital role as the physical infrastructure wherein this debate could arise.

Habermas' views on the public sphere reflect a Universalist perspective, building upon Enlightenment ideals. He valorizes the public sphere as being indispensable in a democracy -- but he ties this to a quest for a singular version of truth. In his thesis, there exists within the polis a dialectic encounter: wherein citizens with differing backgrounds and beliefs are able to meet within the public sphere for dialogue and gradually, through a rational encounter amongst informed speakers, come to a place of understanding and shared belief. Without this public sphere of encounter, people are confined to their own parochial beliefs and perspectives, and knowledge is limited to what they already "know" to be true.

Post-Modern thinkers are critical of Habermas' failure to adequately problematize how differences in perspective are not always resolvable through arrival at a common viewpoint (Kapoor, 2002; Mouffe, 1999). They also argue that he incorrectly assumes an equality of voices having access to public debate, whereas the public sphere is in fact a socially distorted environment – one wherein not all voices are equally expressed and heard -- and hence no universal truth can emerge. In addition, they find deeply problematic the perspective that valorizes a quest for a singular legitimate truth "out there", instead proposing a multiplicity of co-existing and contingent truths. Amongst his critics, philosopher Mark Kingwell questions his basis for a normative, universalizing

objective for public debate, and similarly problematizes the productive capacity of reason. Kingwell argues:

> This drive for a common language of political discussion is in some ways admirable, since it seeks to resolve disagreements rather than simply eliminate them, but at a fundamental level it is misconceived. Some ethical and political differences simply do not go away; some conflicts can never be resolved, only managed [...] We often have genuinely differences with those who share our political fate. We may dislike those we have to live with, or simply be indifferent to them. And yet these divergences will not surrender to reason, no matter how assiduous and extensive our attempts to resolve them in that way. (2001, pp. 87, 89)

Kingwell's claims for the public sphere place a greater emphasis on generating tolerance amongst citizens, rather than transcendent truth. In his view, the aim of the public sphere is not to eliminate conflict, but rather to mediate it. Kingwell goes further, stating that differing viewpoints, and the inherent conflict associated with them, have a productive role to play in contributing to a just, democratic society – albeit as long as these differences are negotiated in a civil manner (see also Mouffe, 1999). It is rather the *suppression* of conflict that has destructive tendencies in limiting free expression.

Similarly, while there is growing concern about secular/Islamist rifts becoming more apparent in contemporary Turkish society, many argue that the *masking* of these rifts under the nationalist myth of a "Modern" Turkey has been equally destructive. The Turkish Republic deliberately attempted to break with memories, symbols and religious beliefs of the past, in a revisionist "official" version of "Turkishness" that aimed to secularize society (Kucukcan, 2003). These reforms left gaping holes in the realms of tradition and cultural practices -- with shared ideals of Turkishness in large part an

invention of a secular state struggling to manufacture a unified identity in the aftermath of Ottoman rule. This singular political unity of the country belied underlying disunities of culture, ethnicity and religion.

A growing body of work now challenges the so-called success of Turkey's modernization "project" (Kasaba & Bozdogan, 1997), problematizing the Turkish Republic's homogenizing state narrative. Today, ethnic tensions suppressed through the unifying myth of a National Turkic identity have unraveled in the ongoing struggle with Kurdish peoples, who seek recognition of their distinct language and culture. Economic pressures have led to increasing rural to urban migrations, forcing seasoned urbanites to share spaces of encounter with those perceived as "backward" newcomers (Robins & Aksoy, 1995). In this context, contested urbanities driven by religion or ethnicity, though present, have become less significant than cultural and economic distinctions. These rifts are increasingly bearing down upon a society struggling to mediate between ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and political tensions within the shared space of the polis.

These tensions have amplified as Turkey's political leadership increasingly realigns the country towards an Islamist identity. The AKP (Justice and Development Party) has embarked on a controversial cultural agenda to reassert Turkey's Ottoman heritage, long subsumed under the narrative of Ataturk's modernization and secularization project. But this reintroduction of Islamist symbols into the Turkish public sphere can be read in contested ways -- as indicative of a retrograde conservatism that threatens to suppress liberties associated with Republican modernization or, alternately, as a reclamation of specific cultural identities and distinctions, subsumed in an uncritical race to accept Western normative values (Çinar, 2005; Kasaba & Bozdogan, 1997).

Thus, depending upon the perspective taken, one can view the veiling of women in public space as either entailing freedom of personal expression *or* as a return to conservative religious restrictions; similarly, one can see the appearance of unveiled women in Kemalist public space as either a function of liberalization under Ataturk's reforms, *or* as evidence of the Kemalist appropriation of women's bodies as convenient tools for Statist propaganda, serving an elitist political agenda (Arat, 1997). Each reading is possible, and perspectives shift in accordance with individual situations. Thus, while secularists worry about the gradual normalization of the headscarf, members of the gay/lesbian communities join in protesting the ban of the headscarf at universities in a show of solidarity for freedom of expression. Similarly, a population of Islamists and secularists, Kurds, and LGBTTQ activists came together in the Gezi Park protests, rallying against a government seen by all as becoming increasingly authoritarian (Ors, 2014). Secular Turks at times support an Islamist government in order to ensure economic stability, whilst simultaneously rejecting Islamist ideology. While the Islamist tendencies of the AKP have generated controversy, that has not stopped both Liberals and Islamists from launching criticisms towards the earlier Kemalist project, increasingly seen by all as being paternalistic and authoritarian, negating, "the historical and cultural experience of the people of Turkey" (Kasaba & Bozdogan, 1997, p. 4). In Turkey today, neat divisions of identities fail to remain fixed and static, and simple binaries -- conservative/modern, Kurdish/Turkish, secular/fundamentalist -- unravel in the face of complexities manifested in lived experience (Turam, 2012, 2013).

Turkish public space holds together this array of shifting identities, often at odds but also mediated within specific contexts of unified vision. Many average Turks lament

what they see as a political desire to cause rifts amongst the populace, where seemingly polarizing issues concerning "veiled versus unveiled" or "secular versus Islamist", are amplified by political activists, but are not perceived as resonating with lived experience (see also Heper, 2011, who analyzes opinion polls confirming this perspective). Thus, "the plurality one finds on streets still defy the simplified ideological polarization that pits secularists and Islamists against each other with seemingly clear faultlines" (Gökarıksel, 2011, p. 12). Increasingly, global economic dynamics are bringing a diverse citizenry together in urban space, rubbing shoulder to shoulder as previously isolated groups begin to inhabit the same milieu: dissolving boundaries that once held difference apart. This creates new tensions as the public sphere becomes a much more complex space to navigate, at risk of fracturing into insular segments, held separate by demarcation lines made physical or perceptual (Davis, 1992). And yet rather than being oppositional, day-to-day experience in Turkey is often mediated by more nuanced "in-between" spaces of encounter, ones offering possibilities for shifting identities.

Oldenburg's third spaces are the locales wherein the Habermasian play of civility and dialogue occur, but in the Turkish instance, it becomes clear that finding a "universal" set of values within the public realm is no longer possible (nor desirable). Further, "affinities, shared goals and political alliances also originate from *contested* urban space, where interaction, albeit propelled by *uncomfortable* proximities, is preferable to segregation" (Turam, 2013, p. 426, emphasis added). I believe Tea Gardens offer one such contested space: a space occupied by many where the enactment of shared practices establishes common ground and where conflicts, at least temporarily, can be suspended. Rather then seeing the Tea Garden as somewhere along yet another

conceptual binary -- one that juxtaposes "liberal/modern" alcohol serving establishments against "backward/conservative" *Cay Bahcesi* -- Tea Gardens occupy a much more nuanced social hybrid, one that taps into shared memory and mythos.

Section Three: Tea Gardens as Shared Cultural Touchstones?

Human memory is spatial. The shaping of space is an instrument for the shaping of memory. A shared space – such as a street – can be a locus of collective memory…it can express the accumulation of memories from below, through the physical and associative traces left by interweaving patterns of everyday life. (Hebbert, 2005, p. 592)

Geographer Amy Mills, in her study of cultural co-existence in Istanbul, highlights the specific role that *memory* serves as a vehicle for constructing shared beliefs and identities (2010). Mills identifies how physical space can provide the infrastructure that memory cleaves to, "the social space through and on which memory is constructed" where we "imagine, narrate and practice the social relationships that make us who we are" (Amy Mills, 2010, p. 205). Yet many everyday spaces of life are without history, without memory. This was, in fact, a core part of the Kemalist agenda, best exemplified in the selection of Ankara -- a town with no historical "baggage" per say -- as the state's new capital (Sargin, 2004). The Kemalist program, with its aim to break from the Ottoman past, led Turks to associate a sense of shame and embarrassment with anything tied to a heritage seen as decadent and backwards (Çinar, 2008).

But this break with memory left Turks in an uneasy relationship both in regards to their conceptions of a shared past and their ambitions for a shared future. A disconnect

between a desired and imagined Western superiority versus the actuality of lived experience continues to be enacted today. Westernized consumer spaces have colonized the Turkish public domain with an endless barrage of international corporate brands and logos, and with spatial environments that could exist equally in Ankara or London. Meaning, if any, associated with these malls and chains has been manufactured by marketers. At the same time, these spaces are viscerally biased toward a sense of western superiority -- the notion that "modern" values associated with consumption in the West are somehow an improvement over the "backwardness" of the Eastern Bazaar. Seen within this context, the popularity of Tea Gardens can be viewed either as evidence of culturally conservative nostalgia (arabesque) or as an empowering reclamation of a heritage censured through the glorification of Western values.

Much of the struggle being enacted in Turkish society today involves this quest to reclaim authenticity: to seek roots tied to specificities of culture and place. Two young scholars from Turkey provided me with one anecdotal example of how this search for shared meanings is performed. They related how in the 1990s a series of western-style café's opened in Istanbul. Initially, many young people wanted to go to experience that culture, but over time the seduction of these environments waned (see also Tokman, 2001, who discusses the same phenomena). Instead there was a desire to return to one's *own roots* at the Tea Gardens, where people felt *at home* rather than on show. The unique sense of place experienced in these gardens had to do with a feeling that these environments were uniquely Turkish, embodying shared values. What was expressed to me was that in the gardens the posture one took felt *natural* and unaffected. This was is in contrast with the Westernized cafés, where the pressures of everyday life and

appearances continued to bear down upon patrons, even as they took their coffee breaks. This distinction between gardens and cafés was a recurrent theme in my interviews, where subjects reported a different relationship with time in these settings (see also Ger & Kravets, 2009). In the gardens, one could "spend hours" without pressure and "tea is offered" rather than sold. Cafés, in contrast, were seen as spaces of consumption where ordinary (and secular) time continued to prevail.

The use of the Tea Garden is ubiquitous across Turkey, transcending other differences and in many instances otherwise segregated groups come together in these venues. One interviewee noted that "Turkish people will fight anywhere, but not in Tea Gardens". Echoing this sentiment, anthropologist Christopher Houston observes how conflicts and suspicions are temporarily suspended within the Tea Garden, allowing new relations amongst people to be imagined. The space performs, "as neutral ground by both Islamist and laic subjects …[where] the 'dark' and 'civilized' faces of Islam sip tea, drop crumbs and fill ashtrays side by side, sometimes even at the same table" (2001, p. 86). Similarly, a newspaper columnist describing the array of identities co-mingling in a Tea Garden in Bursa, writes, "most of the young women wear the loose-fitting headscarves traditional in Turkey; others, the more elaborate and constraining ones that are a mark of newer currents in political Islam. Still others are on the dance floor, uncovered, bare-armed, dancing in an implausibly immodest way" (Caldwell, 2005).

Here diverse identities occupy the same public sphere -- tolerating difference in a nod to possible co-existence (Secor, 2004). The performance of shared social practices involving leisure, conversation, games, and tea-drinking point to a common heritage and fate, while their re-constitution makes it possible to imagine a peaceful co-existence in

the future. The power of these unifying social practices forms bridges of understanding between those who are otherwise at odds. Thus, if "my" belief and practice echoes "your" belief and practice, if we are able to honour the same rituals and rites of everyday life, then it becomes increasingly difficult to identify you as "other". The customs and cultural practices of the Tea Garden hold symbolic meaning for *all* who engage this space, whether perceived through the lens of religious doctrine, or from a secularist standpoint. The performance of these practices are, in turn, a re-enactment of mythic ideals from the past -- pointing to open, respectful cosmopolitanism.

I am well aware that this nostalgic yearning for a multi-cultural inclusive past is complex and that the trope of cosmopolitan tolerance is not innocent. It masks inconvenient truths that fail to congeal with the narrative of tolerance (Hanley, 2008). Furthermore, while seemingly appearing as "inclusive" there is also a sense that the concept of "cosmopolitanism" is linked to a European sensibility towards inclusion -- valorizing a sort of liberal and Western "person of the world" versus granting cosmopolitan status to "multiple distinct persons in the world". This need for a truly inclusive public sphere that includes *all* practices of Turks is particularly acute today. But the ubiquity of "Ottoman mulit-ethnic tolerance" as a common cultural trope, cited by "leftists, human rights activists, secularists, and intellectuals, as well as Islamist politicians and conservatives" (A. Mills, 2011, p. 193), nonetheless points to a common *desire* for an acceptance of plurality -- a resistance to the hegemonic imposition of a singular Nationalist rhetoric.

In many locales within the city, it is difficult to preserve, empower, and reproduce this mythic memory of tolerance. The division of cities like Istanbul into specific insular

neighborhoods keeps individuals apart, establishes distinct territories, and propagates notions of perceived difference. But Turkey, and Istanbul in particular, is a complex and uneven terrain holding both spaces of segregation and areas of rapprochement (Secor, 2004). Due to their spatial lineage as special territories situated in unique settings of the city, Tea Gardens cannot be claimed by any one specific group. They are not defined by a particular neighborhood or *mahalle*, but are instead bridging nodes that "belong" to the citizenry as a whole. They thereby exist perceptually as a special case within the urban fabric, as apart from the city now as they were in the past when walled off as heavenly enclosures. This sacred space allows for a conceptual disjuncture with the surrounding "profane" city and its tensions, and for special types of behaviors to unfold within their demarcation lines.

The Tea Garden reconstitutes and concretizes memories surrounding a place where it is possible to interact peacefully with one another.[ii] It holds commonly shared visceral associations with both sacred notions of the Earthly Paradise and Coffeehouse virtues of openness, respect, and civility -- associations that pre-date many contemporary sources of conflict. These associations weave together shared history, culture practices, and sacred symbolism, to confer an *elevated* meaning upon the act of social gathering (in contrast to Oldenburg's profane third spaces). Within the *Cay Bahcesi* memories are re-enacted within a spatial setting that exists as part of an unbroken tradition, a *milieux de memoire* where memory remains embodied as social practice, taking root "in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects" (Nora, 1989, p. 9). The gardens act as a specific locality where memory and narrative are gathered in a space with shared cultural allusions to the sacred. The gardens serve as repositories of shared customs, collective

beliefs, and historic memories -- including those real, imagined, and mythic in substance.

In order to build a truly inclusive Turkish Society, one able to accommodate difference rather than merely suppress it under state ideology, there need to be spaces that allow different factions of society to come together and begin to envisage common dreams under a socially agreed upon narrative of peaceful co-existence. Opening the notion of cosmopolitanism up beyond its Western connotations to allow for multiple identities, is key to creating "in-between" places that allow for mediated, multiple and divergent identities (Ors, 2002). Peace and tolerance may need to begin with imagination, with constructing narratives and memory: tolerance may at times be temporary and contingent; more mythic than real; and co-existence may be more about pointing towards a desired future then providing an accurate representation of present or past. But this does not diminish the productive capacity of this shared mythos to weave peoples together, regardless of whether or not it masks historical inaccuracies, or glosses over present-day contradictions. In order to build a society for the future, spaces of memory that point to a respectful relationship in the past can act as powerful cultural touchstones to generate unifying ties amongst disparate peoples. Here, the *Cay Bahcesi* offers a unique, sacred, third space to concretize the dreams and aspirations of peaceful co-existence.

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[i] Lyn Lofland (1998) argues that many of Oldenburg's third spaces are in fact "locations" (parochial) rather than "locales" (public). Parochial spaces, while seemingly open to all are, in practice, sites of gathering for those who already share common belief systems – wherein these can become more firmly entrenched.

[ii] For a discussion on how memory is captured in space see (Halbwachs & Coser, 1992)