

Ara Güler's Photography of 'Old Istanbul' and Cosmopolitan Nostalgia

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Based on Ara Güler's photographs of Istanbul, this paper explores the relationship between nostalgia and photography in the city. Most of Güler's best known photographs were taken in the 1950s and 1960s while he was working as a photojournalist for the print press. The re-coding of a selection of his black and white images since the 1990s as art photography and in the pursuit of recalling 'Old Istanbul' as a cosmopolitan city presents a revealing case. Güler's recruitment as a photojournalist in the 1950s was a result of the expansion and modernisation of the city's print press, which itself was a response to dramatic transformations in the city, such as massive rural-to-urban migration and urban renewal and expansion. Güler's pictures from this era are typically of the urban poor and working classes. Focusing on two journalistic narratives co-produced by Güler – one in 1959 for the illustrated journal *Hayat*, and the other in 1969 for the daily *Akşam* – this paper asks why and how only images from the latter circulate today. It argues that contemporary urban discourses influence how we interpret these old photographs now.

Keywords: Ara Güler (1928–present), Istanbul, Turkey, nostalgia, memory, cosmopolitanism, print press, photojournalism, street photography, city photographs, rural-to-urban migrants and working classes in photography, minorities, migration

As Istanbul modernises and becomes more connected to the world, a sense of loss pervades public discussions on the city. As the city surfaces in global networks, it seems to drown in nostalgia. Nostalgia denotes a collective feeling, 'a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed'; as such, it is a modern phenomenon.¹ That it is commodified 'does not make nostalgia any less real'.² One form of nostalgia entails a longing for the former cosmopolitan character of the city. When this occurs, visual and literary depictions of the city become important sites through which to imagine and consume bygone times. Bookstores in Istanbul today stock their shelves with books on Istanbul. Amongst a wide range of publications on 'Old Istanbul', those with reproductions of Ara Güler's photographs are especially popular. Most of Güler's well-known photographs were produced at the beginning of his career, when he roamed the streets of the city working as a photojournalist. Güler's melancholic black and white pictures of Istanbul in the 1950s and 1960s have experienced a renaissance, and since the early 1990s his name has become synonymous with urban nostalgia. However, the original context of Güler's work could not be more different from its reception today. In the 1950s, with the addition of photographers to their staff, major newspapers and illustrated magazines in Istanbul started carrying serial articles accompanied by photographs and dedicated photograph 'corners' to portray rapid urban change, with particular emphasis on poor rural-to-urban migrants (figure 1). What is it in these images of the urban poor and working classes that lend them to cosmopolitan urban nostalgia in the past decade? How do contemporary discourses affect how we understand them today?

A postdoctoral fellowship from Brown University provided time to write this essay. I presented an early version at the 2007 World Congress of Aesthetics in Ankara. I am indebted to Nezar AlSayyad, Greig Crysler, Deniz Göktürk, Gökçe Kınayoglu, Douglas Nickel, Graham Smith, Cihan Tuğal, the students of my course 'Urban Modernity and the Middle East', and colleagues at the Cogut Center for the Humanities Fellows' Seminars who read drafts, and provided invaluable feedback and critiques that contributed immensely to my thinking about Güler's photographs.

1 – Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic 2001, xiii.

2 – Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press 2004, 14.

Figure 1. Ara Güler, 'Eminönü after the 1959 demolition work'. Reproduced, with Ara Güler's permission, from Ara Güler, *A Photographical Sketch on Lost Istanbul*, Istanbul: Dünya Yayınları 2008.



The revival of Güler's work made his name synonymous with urban nostalgia that amplified to the realm of popular consumption in the early 1990s. This nostalgia corresponds with the beginnings of official government policy to turn Istanbul into a 'cultural capital'. Thus, it may be possible to date Güler's revival to 1992, when the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey declared the following year to be the 'Year of Istanbul' and recruited the History Foundation to manage and organise the celebrations, endorsing the self-designated mission of the then newly established 'civil society' organisation of Turkey's prominent social scientists and historians to re-present Istanbul's history and memory. Güler's first Istanbul exhibition, 'Unending Interview Istanbul', his twenty-second solo exhibition, was organised by the Foundation as part of these celebrations. *A Photographical Sketch on Lost Istanbul*, a coffee-table catalogue, presented in 1994 his selected Istanbul work in print.³ Many photographic exhibitions and books with photographs followed in this vein, all with the intention of reproducing the 'lost' Istanbul captured by Güler. A catalogue of Güler's work from 2003 claims he is the 'last poet of Istanbul'.⁴ Güler has emerged as the official and popular photographer of choice for Istanbul. Local critics praise him as an artist – a label which he never fully approved of. According to reports, Güler was not pleased with the 2008 subway display of a selection of his work; he said that they needed to be exhibited in gallery settings and that those who pass by his photographs will not understand them (figures 2 and 3).⁵ The irony here is that in their original context most of these photographs were taken to be published in newspapers and illustrated magazines, not to be exhibited in galleries.

In one of the most well-known memoirs of the city, by the Nobel-recipient Orhan Pamuk (1952–), Güler's photographs are once again used to illustrate the longing for what was once a great city.⁶

On Güler's photograph of 'Old Istanbul', Pamuk says:

Ara Güler's photographs show Istanbul to be a place where traditional life carries on regardless, where the old combines with the new to create a humble music that speaks of ruin and poverty, and where there is as much melancholy in the faces of the city's people as in its views; especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when the last brilliant remnants of the imperial city – the banks, *hans*, and government buildings of Ottoman Westernizers – were collapsing all around him, he caught the poetry of the ruins. In his *Vanished Istanbul* [Lost Istanbul], with the marvellous photographs of Beyoğlu as I knew it as a child – its tramways, its cobble stone avenues, its shop signs, its tired, careworn, black and white *hüzün* – he also makes excellent use of the elements of the neighbourhood picturesque.⁷

3 – Ara Güler, *A Photographical Sketch on Lost Istanbul*, Istanbul: Dünya Yayınları 2008 (7th ed. published in both Turkish and English).

4 – Photographs by Ara Güler and introduction by Enis Batur, *İstanbul'un Son Şairi Ara Güler* [Istanbul's Last Poet, Ara Güler], Istanbul: Yapı Kredi 2003. This catalogue was produced by Yapı Kredi Bank as a 'gift to personal banking customers'.

5 – 'Ara Güler'den, Belediye'ye sergi tepkisi', CNNTürk (6 March 2008).

6 – Orhan Pamuk and Maureen Freely (trans.), *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, 1st American ed., New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2005, 234. Orhan Pamuk, *İstanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir*, Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık 2003.

7 – Ibid.



Figure 2. Sinan Gül, *Installation view of Gül's 'İstanbul'da Alinteri'*, organised jointly by the Chamber of Trade and Istanbul Municipality in the Taksim subway station. Reproduced with permission of Anatolian Agency.



Figure 3. Ara Gül (second from right) with the Mayor of Istanbul (second from left) at the opening of the exhibition of Gül's photographs in the Taksim subway station. Reproduced with permission of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality from its official website www.ibb.gov.tr.

In his memoir-cum-urban history, Pamuk distinguishes between mere melancholia and its Turkish variant, *hüzün*, arguing that the latter is 'unique to Istanbul' and 'binds its people together'.⁸ *Hüzün* is different from melancholia in that it extends beyond the pain of a single individual, belonging rather to the city. Pamuk seems immersed in this specific longing that he seeks to describe to his readers, and finds Gül's photography to be particularly communicative of.

Pamuk explains in an interview that his objective in *Istanbul* is not to mourn the loss of empire and Ottoman Istanbul, but instead to critique the top-down nature of the republican project of modernisation.⁹ How does the mourning of Istanbul's (former) cosmopolitanism achieve this? One of the aspects of republican nationalism was its coupling with a strong anti-cosmopolitanism. Early republican Ankara, the new capital of the nascent nation-state that was established over the remains of the Ottoman Empire, was turned into the showcase of 'civilization'; its newness and cleanliness was celebrated against the cosmopolitanism and decadence of Istanbul.¹⁰

8 – Ibid., 83.

9 – Orhan Pamuk, *Other Colors: Essays and a Story*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2007, 369. When asked 'in *Istanbul* [...] you seem to mourn the loss of the Ottoman Empire', Pamuk responds, 'I'm not mourning the Ottoman Empire. I'm a Westernizer. I'm pleased that the Westernization process took place. I'm just criticizing the limited way in which the ruling elite – meaning both the bureaucracy and the new rich – had conceived of Westernization'.

10 – Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Studies in Modernity and National Identity), Seattle: University of Washington Press 2001, 67.

Re-centring and celebrating Istanbul with emphasis on the city's cosmopolitanness serves then as a critique of Ankara, of ethnic nationalism, and uncritical Westernisation. Yet, Pamuk's critique, if and when situated within contemporary local debates, can also be interpreted as participating in a displaced critique of the state of urbanism in contemporary Istanbul that manifests itself as nostalgia.

Contemporary Istanbul is hardly the 'black and white', provincial city of Pamuk's childhood memories, but a booming metropolis, celebrated this year as a 'European Capital of Culture'. Nevertheless, black and white photographs can successfully evoke a mood of loss and yearning and Pamuk uses Güler's photography effectively in a layered manner.¹¹ First, black and white photographs act as 'melancholy objects' – to borrow a phrase from Susan Sontag – which 'turn the past into an object of tender regard'.¹² Second, 'black and white' or the lack of colour doubles as a mode of seeing – 'To see the city in black and white is to see it though the tarnish of history: the patina of what is old and faded and no longer matters to the rest of the world', suggests Pamuk.¹³ This mode of seeing perhaps registers metaphorically the city's loss of (cultural) colour.

This sense of loss is interpreted differently and produced via a broad range of strategies. The circulation of Güler's canonical Istanbul photographs in media and their inclusion in exhibitions, magazines and books provide what Alison Landsberg calls a 'prosthetic memory' for imagining 'Old Istanbul' for the larger public who, unlike Pamuk, may not have personal or transmitted lived memories of that Istanbul and have to rely on technologically reproduced representations such as photographs, films, museums, theme parks and other simulations of the past.¹⁴ More recently, commercial ventures such as the Ara Café in Beyoğlu or the boutique Point Hotel in Talimhane advertise physical environments in which customers can immerse themselves in Güler's work and wear it as prosthetic urban memory. Ara Café is located in a building owned by Güler. And, as the customers eat off Güler's photographs printed on paper placemats, they can study large-format reproductions on the walls and imagine that at any minute he will come down to join them from his studio in the upper floors. The reframing of Güler's images is part of a broader cultural and commercial production of 'Old Istanbul' that has been underway since the early 1990s.

As with most constructions of memory, this process entails remembering and forgetting, in a dialectical relationship, where memory and history are entangled – rather than oppositional as Pierre Nora argued in his famous piece on *les lieux de mémoire*.¹⁵ The relationship between photography and memory is also a complex one. Photography is popularly conceived as an act of remembrance – despite the fact that some of photography's best known critics, such as Siegfried Kracauer and Roland Barthes, argued that the two 'are at odds'¹⁶ or that photography 'blocks memory'.¹⁷ Geoffrey Batchen suggests that photographs are produced not necessarily to bring the past to the present, but to situate the self in relationship to an unknown future.¹⁸ Arguably, the recall of old photographs from the archive serves a similar purpose in the context of Istanbul. In a city under the strain of economic neo-liberalisation, an older or other time and place can be imagined as a 'belle époque', a time when citizens were more civilised and tolerant toward each other. Güler's photographs have been instrumental in Istanbul in the imagining of an alternative city in an alternative future.

This process of recycling images of the city's past is not exclusive to the city of Istanbul or to the field of photography.¹⁹ For instance, Svetlana Boym observes in the context of Eastern European cities that 'the urban renewal taking place in the present is no longer futuristic but nostalgic; the city imagines its future by improvising on its past'.²⁰ The built environment of Istanbul is also in the process of being recycled into an image of the past: manufactured streetscapes such as the recent 'French Street' and the gentrification of the city's historic quarters, where predominantly non-Muslim minorities lived, similarly capitalise on nostalgia for a bygone Istanbul populated by ethnic-religious minorities. Books ranging from memoirs to popular histories,

11 – I thank Graham Smith for bringing to my attention Gabriel Koureas's work on Pamuk's use of photography and photographic terms in *Istanbul*, in a paper entitled 'Istanbul: Memories of a City (2005): Orhan Pamuk's Melancholic Narrative'. This was delivered at the 'The Photobook' conference organised in Birkbeck College, University of London (<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hafvm/research/photobook>).

12 – Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1977, 51–82, this reference 71.

13 – Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, 38.

14 – Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press 2004.

15 – Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989), 7–24.

16 – Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography' (1927), in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press 1995, 47–63, this reference 50. Quoted in Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 16.

17 – Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, London: Vintage 1982, 91. Quoted in Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 15.

18 – Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 98.

19 – Many cities are undergoing similar processes. The following works explore Damascus in Syria and Harbin in China: Christa Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria*, Indiana Series in Middle East Studies, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004; and Yukiko Koga, "'The Atmosphere of a Foreign Country'" Harbin's Architectural Inheritance', in *Consuming the Entrepreneurial City: Image, Memory, Spectacle*, ed. Anne M. Cronin and Kevin Hetherington, New York: Routledge 2008, 221–53.

20 – Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 75.

articles, exhibitions and festivals repeatedly demonstrate how cosmopolitan the city once was.

In the contemporary public culture of Istanbul, the term ‘cosmopolitan’ is conflated with ‘multicultural’ referring to the peaceful cohabitation of different ethnic and religious groups in the city.²¹ Longing for such a peaceful co-existence is a productive and positive attribute, and the recall of ‘Old Istanbul’ from the photographic archive in this pursuit is also promising. Presenting a ‘portable, fluid and nonessential form’, prosthetic memories bear the potential to evoke empathy for others, but may not always succeed to do so.²² Several ethnographic studies of specific groups and so-called cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, in addition to literary analysis, together expose the contradictions of current cosmopolitan nostalgia narratives.²³ They suggest that the nostalgia of these narratives is ‘depopulated’ – that is, the non-Muslim minorities that are fundamental to the imagination of cosmopolitanism are no longer there. Nostalgia for the cosmopolitan city does not address the problems different groups experienced in the past, and equally fails to display a genuine commitment to a multicultural society in the present.

In Nebil Özgentürk’s *Ara Güler* documentary of 1998, the narrator suggests, rather uncannily, that Istanbul should thank Güler because his photographs enable the city to maintain its ‘innocence’.²⁴ It is important to dwell on the choice of word here because it refers to a good time that once was and proposes later corruption, possibly referring to the explosive growth of the city, roughly ten times in size and population, in the second half of the twentieth century mainly with rural-to-urban migration from Anatolia. A complex chain of associations is at work here. It is, in some narratives, the republic that is held responsible for homogenising a once multicultural society; and, in others, mass migrations of peasant Turks from Anatolia are assigned responsibility. As has been argued independently by Can Kozanoğlu and Rıfat Bali, two local scholars who write on popular culture, populist nostalgia may double as a screen for contempt for the urban poor.²⁵

Güler’s public persona is central to the reception of his photographs, as is demonstrated partly by his absent-presence at the Ara Café, which not only bears his name but is also themed by this persona. In many of the interviews he has given since the early 1990s, Güler responds to questions about his photography and its relationship to the city by lamenting Istanbul’s lost character. Repeating the familiar nostalgia for ‘Old Istanbul’, which easily lends itself to contempt towards the city’s late-comers, Güler said the following to a *New York Times* reporter in 1997:

We have been overrun by villagers from Anatolia who don’t understand the poetry or the romance of Istanbul. They don’t even know the great pleasures of civilization, like how to eat well. They came, and the Greeks, the Armenians, and the Jews – who became rich here and made this city so wonderful – left for various reasons. This is how we lost what we had for four hundred years.²⁶

Yet, when asked of his experiences as an Armenian-Turkish citizen in Turkey, Güler is extremely reticent in public interviews. He states that he considers himself to be just another Ahmet or Mehmet.²⁷ While Güler’s attitude is consciously or unconsciously self-protective, the appeal and popularity of his photographs have to do with the way they present a particular mode of remembering that he himself embodies.

Only a handful of Güler’s photographs have been reproduced from his total body of work, which is said to consist of nearly 800,000 images. The few continually reproduced photographs from this vast portfolio seem to be those that do not refer to minorities or conflict. These are the photographs that depict immense poverty and waiting. Significantly, they do not lend themselves to pedagogical or reformist readings.

It is important to understand the original framing of Güler’s photographs in order fully to comprehend how they are re-framed in the present. This may also provide a more nuanced understanding of the workings of cosmopolitan nostalgia. Compared with other metropolitan centres in Europe, ‘mass’ print and photojournalism arose very late in Istanbul. Corresponding with Turkey’s integration into the

21 – These terms may be used interchangeably, but their frame of reference in scholarly literature is quite different – the objective of multiculturalism is ‘to satisfy ethnic and cultural minorities within the state’, while cosmopolitanism refers to a world citizenship that transcends the borders of the nation-state. Craig Calhoun, ‘Belonging in the Cosmopolitan Imaginary’, *Ethnicities* 3:4 (2003), 531–68. Pheng Cheah, Bruce Robbins, and Social Text Collective, *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press 1998. Daniele Archibugi and Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, *Debating Cosmopolitics*, London and New York: Verso 2003.

22 – Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 18.

23 – Benton Jay Komins, ‘Depopulated Cosmopolitanism: The Cultures of Integration, Concealment, and Evacuation in Istanbul’, *Comparative Literature Studies* 39:4 (2002), 360–85. Amy Mills, ‘Boundaries of the Nation in the Space of the Urban: Landscape and Social Memory in Istanbul’, *Cultural Geographies* 13:7 (2006), 367–94. İlay Romain Örs, *The Last of the Cosmopolitans? Rum Polites of Istanbul in Athens: Exploring the Identity of the City*, Harvard University 2006.

24 – Nebil Özgentürk, *Ara Güler*, (Biographic Documentary Film), Istanbul: Boyut 1999.

25 – Can Kozanoğlu, *Pop Çağı Ateşi*, 3rd ed, Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları 1995. Rıfat Bali, *Tarz-i Hayattan Life Style’a: Yeni Seçkinler, Yeni Mekanlar, Yeni Yaşamlar* [From Ways of Living to Lifestyle], Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları 2002, 134–41.

26 – Stephen Kinzer, ‘Turkey’s Passionate Interpreter to the World’, *The New York Times* (13 April 1997), 39.

27 – Ibid.

28 – Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin, Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2008.

29 – Edibe Dolu, 'Periodical Press in Turkey', *International Communication Gazette* 10 (1964).

30 – It is surprising that there are few scholarly sources on the history of journalism in Turkey. Memoirs of journalists continue to serve as primary sources of information. A classic work is Ahmet Oktay, *Toplumsal Değişme ve Basın: 1960–1986 Türk Basını Üzerine Bir Çalışma* [Social Change and Press: 1960–1986 A Study on Turkish Press], Turkey: Bilim/Felsefe/Sanat Yayınları 1987. Recently, Yapı Kredi Bank's press YKY printed two monographs on famous newspapers: Nurhan Kavaklı, *Bir Gazetenin Tarihi: Akşam* [The History of a Newspaper: Akşam], Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayıncılık 2003; and Aysun Köktener, *Bir Gazetenin Tarihi: Cumhuriyet* [The History of a Newspaper: Cumhuriyet], Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayıncılık 2004.

31 – Seyit Ali Ak, *Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Fotoğrafı (1923–1960)* [Early Republican Period Turkish Photography, 1923–1960], Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi 2001, 181.

32 – Ibid.

33 – Engin Özdeş, *Photography in Turkey*, Istanbul: Pamukbank and History Foundation 1999, 26.

34 – For the history of history of American photojournalism and the work of *Life* magazine, see Erika Doss (ed.), *Looking at Life Magazine*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 2001; Wendy Kozol, *Life's America, Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1994; and Marianne Fulton, *Eyes of Time: Photojournalism in America*, Boston: Little, Brown 1988.

post-Second World War economic order and with major public works underway during the second half of the 1950s, a new obsession with the city surfaced. Just as the boulevards cut through the city in response to the demands of urbanisation, the photographs cut through the talk on the printed page and opened windows onto the city. The boulevards and the press framed everyday life for mass circulation.

Despite early encounters with various media of 'technological reproducibility'²⁸ – photography, the print press, and cinema – the public's 'mass' demand for these media forms picked up in Turkey only during the post-war period. Throughout the nineteenth century, magazine and newspaper circulation remained in the thousands, and in the early Republican period reached, at maximum, tens of thousands.²⁹ It was not until the 1950s that a new generation of newspapers and magazines sought to address a 'mass' audience. When creating their 'imagined communities', these papers and magazines had to engage in a similar exercise of the imagination in order to make themselves pleasing to their readers.

Existing literature attributes this belated increase in circulation to the political democratisation that swept the country from 1950 onwards, when Turkey switched to multi-party elections.³⁰ It may also be argued that this delay followed from a delay in consumer-reader demand, which, in turn, resulted from a delay in urbanisation. The rise of the mass print press in Istanbul and the urbanisation of the city were very much related. Mass-circulation dailies and magazines translated the everyday experiences of the city into images for consumption. The use of interviews and photographs in the press reflected a desire on the part of these establishments for spontaneity and simultaneity, and enabled the identification of their readers with the journalists and with other readers as a 'community' of Istanbulites.

Hürriyet and *Yeni İstanbul* newspapers, along with *Hayat* magazine, became pioneers in the way they privileged photographs and hired photographers on their staff. *Hürriyet*, published from 1 May 1948 to the present, is cited as the first Turkish newspaper to have had a photograph accompany a news report.³¹ Various accounts of the Turkish press history state that such innovations were how *Hürriyet* increased its initial circulation of 200,000 to the half million mark in 1965 and to the one million mark by 1969.³² Despite the number of high-circulation newspapers and illustrated magazines printed in Istanbul throughout the 1950s, a country-wide distribution system was not established until the 1960s.

Hayat (Life) magazine was of particular importance in the development of photojournalism in Turkey.³³ This was not the only similarity the Turkish magazine shared with the famed *Life* (1936–1972) magazine of the US.³⁴ *Hayat* occasionally borrowed content from *Life* as well as from *Paris Match*. It immediately became a success story with a record circulation and a high 'pass-along' rate, suggesting it could have entered most homes in the city, but those who leafed through its pages would have consumed different parts and with different degrees of attention. *Hayat* retained this market position by maintaining its low price, appealing content and advertising revenues until 1978, when it ceased publication, outliving the American *Life*.

Güler was one of the new group of photojournalists whose careers were made by *Hayat*. He began his career in photography at the *Yeni İstanbul* (1949–1981) newspaper, joined *Hayat* in 1955 and continued working there until 1961. He gained familiarity with the work of the foremost photojournalists in the field through *Hayat's* contacts with European and American magazines and photographic agencies, becoming a member of the Magnum Photo Agency in 1961. His photographs were used in *Hayat* for photo-essays, as illustrations for news stories and also for advertising purposes.

A typical use of street photography emerged in the form of daily 'corners' on the front pages of leading newspapers. These tended to juxtapose the urban poor and migrants with modern spaces. Usually no larger than one-third of the width of the page and with only a simple caption underneath, this strategic framing accentuated both the backwardness of the migrants and their potential to become 'modern'. In a photograph by Sökmen Baykara (figure 4), two peasants walk a herd of cattle on a



Figure 4. Sökmen Baykara, *Peasants herding cattle in front of the recently opened building of the Istanbul Municipality*. Reproduced from the front page of *Yeni İstanbul*, 2 August 1962.

brand-new avenue right in front of the recently opened building of the Istanbul Municipality; the cattle, signifying traditional ways, block the roads that had been paved for modern vehicles. The caption reads:

Beneath its nose: Decisions and prohibitions about order in the city, citizen rights and health, social problems are controlled by the administrators inside the Municipal Palace building above. As seen in the photo, cows shepherded by their owners are slowly strolling by the Municipality.³⁵

Together with this caption, the photograph suggests that such sights ought not to be allowed by the authorities. Another typical caption asks 'Is it possible to see in any other big city other than Istanbul that claims to be European herds of cattle pass through the largest square of the city in broad daylight?'³⁶ This kind of representation supported the hegemonic belief that an inefficient traditional society impeded the progress of modernisation – a mystification that neglected to address the economic inequality that created such a scene. Especially when read against *Hayat*'s persistent effort to recast its readers – Istanbulites, as 'tourists' (figure 5) in their own city³⁷ – the appearance of newcomers on the recently opened boulevards and on printed pages suggests that photography doubled as a site of exploration for locating the Istanbulite.

Only some of Güler's early work has resurfaced in the present day – that which has remains detached from its subject matter and lacks any didactic potential. It is therefore functional for imagining the return of 'Old Istanbul' as a future-past. A comparison of two photo-essays co-produced by Güler, one from 1959 and the other from 1969, illustrates this point. Both depart from the mainstream reformist photographic documentation of the city exemplified in figure 4. The first was published in three consecutive issues of *Hayat*. Güler and his colleague, Orhan Tahsin, used the mode of ethnography to research everyday life in Taşlıtarla. The second essay was published as a ten-day serial in the daily newspaper *Akşam* and invited the public to engage in a socialist *flânerie* through some of the poorest quarters in the city. Only images from the second essay found their way into contemporary publications to suggest cosmopolitan Istanbul.

Güler and his writer colleague Orhan Tahsin conducted forty-five days of participant observation in Taşlıtarla from 1 October 1959 to 16 November 1959. The publication of the final twelve-page photo-essay was spread over three weeks, with the first instalment appearing in *Hayat*'s 1 January 1960 issue.³⁸ Notably, the outside vertical edges of the last two pages were filled with commercial

35 – Author's translation of the following caption: 'Burnun Dibinde: Şehir nizamını, vatandaş haklarını ve sağlığını, cemiyet problemlerini ilgilendiren kararların, yasakların pek çoğu yukarıda resmi görülen Belediye Sarayı içerisindeki idareciler tarafından yürütülür. Resimde görüldüğü gibi, sahipleri tarafından götürülen inekler Belediye'nin önünden ağır ağır geçiyorlar'. *Yeni İstanbul* (2 Ağustos 1962).

36 – *Cumhuriyet* (5 March 1960).

37 – *Hayat*'s covers featured most typically celebrities and photographic images of Istanbul's vistas and scenic spots. This particular issue of *Hayat* provided its readers with a double-page spread 'touristic map' of the city while most of its readers were already located in Istanbul.

38 – The first installment appeared in *Hayat*, no. 1, vol. 1 (169th issue) on 1 January 1960. The following issues appeared on 8 January 1960 and 15 January 1960. In a recent memoir/biography, Ara Güler states that Adnan Menderes' government – which was overthrown by the military coup of 27 May 1960 – interfered with the Taşlıtarla 'röportaj' (interview) because it revealed that the government tolerated the informal occupation of the land in exchange for election votes. Nezi̇h Tavlş, 'Taşlıtarla Gecekonduarında' [In the Taşlıtarla Squatter Houses], in *Fotomuhabiri Ara Güler'in Yaşam Hikayesi* [The Life Story of Photojournalist Ara Güler], Istanbul: Fotografevi 2009, 97–99.

Figure 5. Cover of 'Hayat', 4 July 1958.



39 – Erika Doss, 'Introduction: Looking at Life: Rethinking America's Favorite Magazine, 1936–1972', in Doss, *Looking at Life Magazine*, 8.

40 – Taşlıtarla originated as a state-sponsored resettlement community for Bulgarian Turks immigrating to Turkey (1953–1954) due to assimilationist policies there. The Bulgarian Turks were joined by rural-to-urban migrants from Anatolia. Taşlıtarla soon grew into a squatter settlement. At the time of the production of the essay, the issue of migration was complicated by issues of national identity and rights to the city. Migrants from the Balkans were allocated land and sometimes basic housing units, but migrants from Anatolia were totally left on their own.

advertisements for canned food, insurance and romance novels, which implies that the editors had an expected audience in mind – middle-class female homemakers. According to Erica Doss, writing on *Life*, the 'juxtaposition of "instructive" articles and photoessays' and advertisements in the layout of the magazine 'relieved anxieties regarding *Life's* educational imperative'.³⁹ A similar functionality can be attributed to *Hayat's* use of advertising. In the case of the Taşlıtarla essay, the reader is invited to 'touch' the promise of consumerism as the piece concludes, setting oneself apart from the impoverished subjects of the essay.

The first instalment likens Taşlıtarla to a rural village.⁴⁰ Güler and Tahsin note the primitive working conditions of the settlement, with women labouring on the earthen ground, drying foodstuff, as well as peculiarly urban novelties such as squatter homes built in two hours. In the second, they discuss the various personalities of Taşlıtarla. To their surprise, doctors, drivers, writers and religious readers seemed to cohabit peacefully. In the third and final instalment, entitled 'Neighbourhood with Seven Colours', they introduce their hosts, who were Bulgarian Turks and, contrary to expectations, lived a decent family life. Güler and Tahsin note and relate their observations of everyday life in full detail, as if to correct misconceptions about the settlement.

Güler and Tahsin present the residents of Taşlıtarla as a diverse group of interesting individual types. Güler prefers to photograph them at eye level, employing a strategy generally used to encourage viewers to identify with the subjects, and without distinguishing any power relations within the community and between the state and the community. The images and text in 'Taşlıtarla' dwell on diversity and alterity. The photo-essay challenges assumptions that permeated contemporary discussions by portraying migrants as heterogeneous in ethnic and linguistic origins as well as occupational engagements.

In their celebration of diversity, Güler and Tahsin try to undo prejudices about the kinds of people who lived in the settlement. This becomes especially clear when their work is compared with the more predominant depictions and discussions of migrants featured in newspapers and other cultural productions. Part of rebutting false impressions in their context is challenging the assumed homogeneity of the migrants. Thus, they expose how one type of heterogeneity – that is, the presence of Christian and Jewish populations of different religious ethnic make-up – was being replaced by another kind of heterogeneity that was equally, if not more, diverse in its 'languages'. However, while celebrating the diversity of this place, the journalists also treat it as a 'foreign' land. They view the settlement of Taşlıtarla as existing outside Istanbul, which indicates that they do not see its residents as among their reading public.

One of the most interesting pictures in the essay is of a makeshift second-hand store located across from the local police headquarters. A reclining bed frame and several stacked wooden chairs are spread alongside the street. In the foreground, a child examines a series of framed religious images (figure 6, top right). Güler and Tahsin note that these are Christian relics, but observe there were hardly any Armenian, Greek, or Jewish residents in Taşlıtarla at that time. Hence, these images are there because the minorities are hastily leaving the city with their belongings ending up in such stores. Considering that the newspaper-reading public at the time



Figure 6. Orhan Tahsin and Ara Güler, 'Taşlıtarla'da 1.5 Ay Yaşadım: Yedi Renkli Mahalle' (I Lived in Taşlıtarla for a Month and a Half: Neighborhood with Seven Colours), *Hayat*, 15 January 1960, 10–11.

was vocal both about the Muslim immigrants from the Balkans and rural migrants from Anatolia but surprisingly silent on the exodus of the non-Muslim minorities, except for condemning the 6–7 September 1955 riots, the importance and statement of this essay becomes apparent. Güler and Tahsin's work not only sought to counter-act bourgeois fears and undo prevalent notions of the poor as a homogeneous category, but also presented an alternative against the increasingly popular romantic city affection for a 'Turkish Istanbul' cultivated by several prominent Istanbul-based intellectuals in critique of Ankara's hegemony and popularised most affectively in the conquest's five-hundredth anniversary celebrations in 1953.

Ten years after the Taşlıtarla essay for *Hayat*, Güler carried out, together with the famed author Çetin Altan, a three-week expedition across the city for the prominent Turkish daily *Akşam*. In contrast to the Taşlıtarla essay, this photo-essay, 'Al İşte İstanbul!' (Here it is, Istanbul), does not try to identify its subjects or to comment on social makeup (figure 7).⁴¹ Starting with the garbage dumps by the city's ancient walls in Topkapı, they drove to a different squalid part of the city each day and walked around without a predetermined itinerary, while noting and framing what they observed. It can be inferred that the people they encountered did not belong to Altan and Güler's reading public because they failed to recognise Altan, who was a member of the parliament at that time and a prominent public intellectual.

41 – Çetin Altan and Ara Güler, 'Al İşte İstanbul', *Akşam* (26 May 1969). Photographs and text reproduced in Çetin Altan, *Al İşte İstanbul*, Istanbul: YKY (1998) 2005.

Figure 7. Front page of *Akşam*, 25 May 1969, with feature by Çetin Altan and Ara Güler entitled 'Al İşte İstanbul!' (Here it is, Istanbul!).



Initially Altan's text and Güler's photographs sought in the version printed in *Akşam* to call more fortunate readers into action but not necessarily to reform the subjects in the photographs. Altan's text was critical of an uninformed, blasé attitude, and encouraged his readers to get to know Istanbul. Bringing class, rather than national identity, to the debate, he exclaimed: 'The classes of the same society are living unaware of each other'.⁴² Drifting through the city, according to Altan, would help individuals acquire a fresh awareness of the country's 'underdevelopment' – a term that came into local usage at the end of the 1960s and has been associated with neo-Marxist dependency theories, which argued that poverty and economic stagnation characteristic of late-modernising countries was a result of their historical exploitation by advanced capitalist states.

The text vocalised Altan's personal desire for the reorganisation of class relations by technocrats in the name of the working classes. The captions to the images rendered their subjects as passive and spoke on their behalf, arguing, for instance, that 'They are not interested in Istanbul, nor is Istanbul interested in them. [...] They are not optimistic about their future'.⁴³ This obviously reflects Altan's own disinterest in the individual subjects of the photographs. After the two journalists undertook a total of twenty excursions together, Altan wrote about what he considered to be the pressing social problems of the city and he critiqued Istanbul's urbanism. He called for the reorganisation of small-scale production and its relocation from out of the city centre to factories in the periphery. He also called for the expropriation of the shores of the Bosphorus and the construction of Ataköy-type mass-produced large-scale housing for the incoming masses. Altan thought such projects could not only solve social injustice and spatial fragmentation in the city, but also drive Turkey's modernisation. The concentration of squatter settlements and the new urban poor in Istanbul served to argue, in this second photo-essay, that the modernisation attempts thus far had failed and there was a need to adopt a different path for development – a path that would insure redistribution in a planned and authoritarian city.

What is interesting is that, without Altan's text, Güler's photographs did not carry any of these meanings. Güler's approach to taking these pictures was akin to that advocated by Cartier-Bresson's 'pictures on the run' (*images à la sauvette*).⁴⁴ The first picture of the ten-day series (figure 8) depicts a decaying inner-city neighbourhood. Children occupy the foreground of the picture. The middle ground is occupied by several women and many lines of clothes hung out to dry in the middle of the earthen street. Crumbling wooden houses situate the background of the photograph. Although this photograph displays poverty, it is not interested in exposing the misfortune of impoverished living conditions. Poverty does not seem to weigh on the children or the few women living in this environment. One of the boys almost throws himself at the photographer; with his eyes fixed on the camera, he is ready to become its subject. The viewer of this photograph is invited to take an interest in the subjects but not necessarily to get to know them or to take action. The photograph does not even try to persuade its audience to conclude that such conditions should change. All it does is evoke a generalised compassion. In this way, it departs from the reformist photographs of the period, which intentionally juxtaposed the 'traditional' with the modern, with the aim of motivating viewers to be proactive in the modernisation of their city and its unmodern inhabitants.

The text of this photo-essay was reprinted several times during the 1970s and 1980s, but without Güler's photographs. By the mid-1990s the text had become redundant so that the photographs had to be recalled from the archive for a brand new *Here it is Istanbul* published in 1998, in the form of a glossy coffee-table book. The hardcover book is available today in the Istanbul sections of many bookstores around the city. Its cover is distinct from previous paperback editions of the text. Previous covers featured a male migrant (1970) or a father and a son in a garbage can (1980), both illustrated by hand.⁴⁵ The cover of the 1998 version and latter

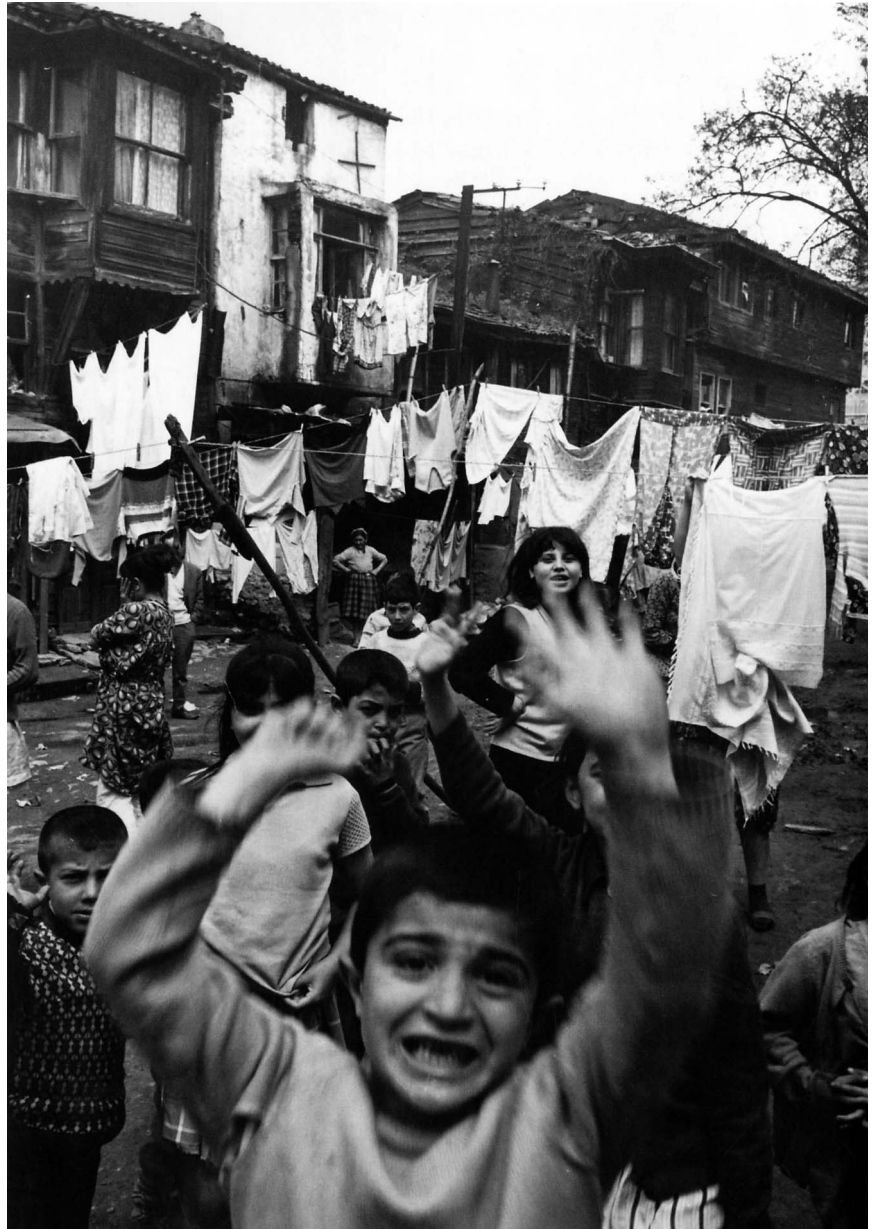
42 – Altan, *Al İşte İstanbul*, 2005, 169.

43 – Altan and Güler, 'Al İşte İstanbul', 1.

44 – Güler admits that the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004) had a tremendous influence on his own. Cartier-Bresson's first collection was *Images à la Sauvette* (1952, 'Pictures on the Run' as it translates from French or 'The Decisive Moment' as it was published). He was one of the co-founders of the famous Magnum Photo Agency (1947–present) in Paris, and is known for developing the style that came to be known as 'street photography'. Henri Cartier-Bresson and E. Tériade, *The Decisive Moment*, New York and Paris: Simon and Schuster 1952.

45 – Çetin Altan, *Bir Uçtan Bir Uca ve Al İşte İstanbul*, İstanbul: Kitapçılık Ticaret Ltd Şirketi 1970. Çetin Altan, *Al İşte İstanbul*, İstanbul: Yazko 1980.

Figure 8. Ara Güler, *Photograph for 'Al İste İstanbul'* (1969). Reproduced from Çetin Altan, *Al İste İstanbul*, İstanbul: YKY 2005, 150.



editions, however, is more abstract, featuring a bleeding image of handprints (perhaps on dirt, perhaps on drying mortar) printed in a monochromatic hue. This is the last image of the photo-essay.

In its glossy reincarnation, the original layout of the newspaper is abandoned, the sequence of the photographs is fundamentally altered and now each is printed full-page, while the text, in large font, uneasily fills the space between them. The text clearly does not reflect nostalgia for the city's lost cosmopolitan character. On the contrary, Altan refers to the former cosmopolitans of the city as 'compradors'. He wants the decaying Ottoman fabric, with its wooden houses, to collapse so that it can be replaced with fresh mass housing *sites*. The new book design suspends Altan's text between the photographs, but this neither alters the coffee-table book's message nor newly invented legacy of a multi-cultural past presented by the photographs.

Güler's photographs emerged from the demand of an expanding print press and in relation to dramatic physical and social transformations that occurred in the city during the 1950s and the 1960s. The reframing since the early 1990s of Güler's work through a selection of his photographs from this earlier moment serves a popularised

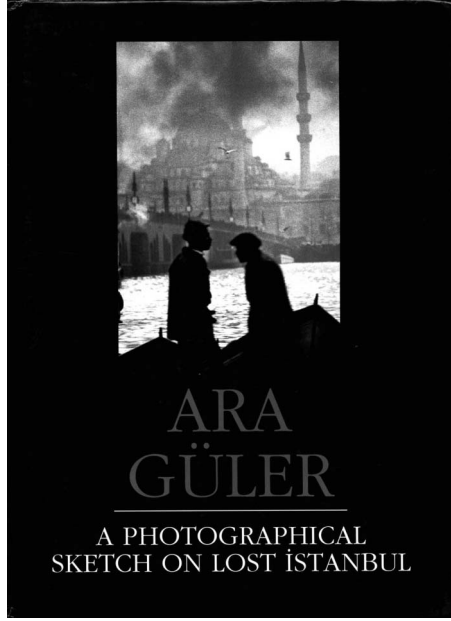


Figure 9. Dust jacket of Ara Güler, *A Photographical Sketch on Lost Istanbul*, Istanbul: Dünya Yayınları 1994.

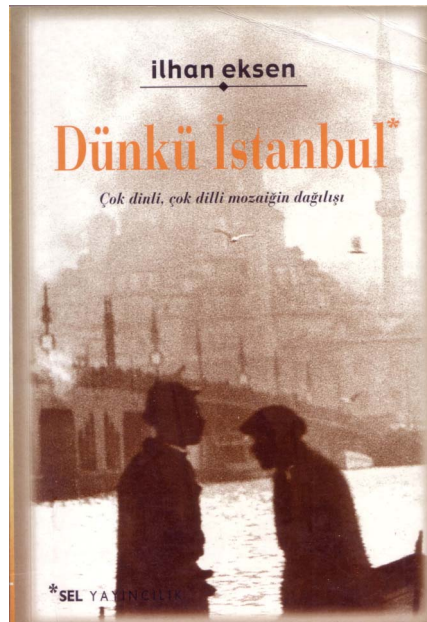


Figure 10. Cover of İlhan Eksen, *Düncü İstanbul: Çok Dinli, Çok Dilli Mozağin Dağılışı* (*The Dissolution of a Mosaic with Multiple Languages, Multiple Religions*), Istanbul: Sel Yayıncılık 2002.

longing for the multi-ethnic, multi-religious days of the city. A typical example is Güler's photograph of two fishermen by the Galata Bridge, which adorns the cover of his *Lost Istanbul* and another author's popular book, which tries to recover the memories of 'Old Istanbul' (figures 9 and 10). This longing selectively edits out conflict from public memory. The appeal of some of Güler's photographs in this context is not necessarily derived from their stories or from the texts that may or may not accompany them, but arguably from their aesthetics of irony – their potential to

46 – This is the enabling effect of ‘prosthetic memory’. Furthering the metaphor of prosthesis, Celia Lury argues that there is a shift from aesthetic culture to ‘prosthetic culture’, from plural society, ordered by variety, to post-plural society, ordered by diversity, and in which the self as possessive individual is being replaced by the experimental self, for the narration of which media representations, especially photographs, provide an archival source. Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory, and Identity*, New York: Routledge 1998.

evoke human compassion without engagement. Güler’s recycled photographs do not lend themselves to a programmatic reading. Hence, the image of a child examining Christian relics in one of the streets of Taşlıtarla has no place in this particular album because it unveils both the ‘depopulated’ nature of current cosmopolitanism and the heterogeneity of the then-emerging new social composition of the city, which is ever present today. It is important to remember that photographs of the city become ‘nostalgic’ only through a careful collective editing process that determines whether they should be included in the album of public memory. These photographs of ‘Old Istanbul’, which have been resurfacing since the 1990s, provide a versatile source for narrating new selves.⁴⁶ They seem to be those from which it is possible to create a phantasmagoria of the future as a past that was at once poor, civilised and innocent.