

# Architectures of Emergency in Turkey

## After the emergency?

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*emergency: the sudden or unexpected occurrence (of a state of things, etc.)*<sup>1</sup>

Much discourse around emergency in architecture has, drawing on its theorization by Giorgio Agamben, tended to favour the term 'state of exception.' As Agamben points out, German theory uses the term 'state of exception', whereas Italian and French law favours emergency decrees, and martial laws and emergency powers are referred to in the Anglo-Saxon context. Agamben explains that the difference in terms is related less to the specifics of the situation itself, and more to the cultural location, noting that: 'the state of exception is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law's threshold or limit concept'.<sup>2</sup>

As Banu Pekol discusses in her essay here, with reference to the work of Karl Schmitt, a state of exception occurs, when, in response to different kinds of events, the sovereign powers or the state suspend usual legal orders and put in place new measures – 'unconventional rules, institutions' – declared to be for the public good.<sup>3</sup> As Pekol goes on to argue, this phenomenon of the apparently temporary emergency that then becomes permanent has been studied extensively<sup>4</sup> – for Agamben, 'the state of exception has by now become the rule',<sup>5</sup> and in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'the state of exception has become permanent and general; the exception has become the rule'.<sup>6</sup>

The essays in this volume explore, with reference to the specific case of Turkey, how when living through times where the state of exception has become the rule, new kinds of normal emerge. One, if not the key, conceptual contribution this book makes then is to look – in great detail through a set of specific studies based in Turkey – at the ways in which the exception and the rule are related. In the introduction, co-editor Eray Çaylı argues that it is important to keep in mind not only how exceptions become rules, but also the more complex relation between emergency and normalcy:

A major body of scholarship that considers critically the relationship between emergency and normalcy revolves around the notion of exception. This critical scholarship has shown that the relationship between the exception and the rule as modes of governmentality has, throughout modern history, been one of interdependence and entanglement rather than antitheticality.<sup>7</sup>

The focus on how emergency and normalcy are entangled in Turkey in the late 2000s and early 2010s, but specifically after the introduction in mid-2020–12 of a piece

of legislation known popularly as the Disaster Act, is teased out in different contexts, projects and ways throughout the book. This study of what happens to attitudes of normalcy connected to the design and use of architecture and urbanism in a state of emergency is something of great value, not only for scholarship concerned with the Turkish context, but also more broadly for the wider field of architectural and urban studies, and especially today. We all need to learn now, from the intricate manner in which emergency and normalcy are connected, how power is played out through building and material processes, and the ways in which architecture can be used to rethink, resist and reimagine new and old normals in and through emergencies.

Wherever we are, right now in June to July 2020, within the space of just a few months, from the weak and often ineffectual responses generated by populist right-wing governments to the more stringent measures imposed by more authoritarian ones, we have all found ourselves living through some version of the emergency created by the Covid-19 pandemic. But this pandemic emergency is just one symptom of the ongoing ecological emergency, itself the result of centuries of extractivism perpetrated by colonial capitalism. The Extinction Rebellion protests of 2019 organized to highlight the climate emergency have now been joined by Black Lives Matter activists and their allies who demand immediate responses to the injustices of systemic and historical racism. None of these emergencies have ended yet, and are not likely to conclude any time soon; each one has its own particular relation to cause and response, its own unique temporal mode of intensity and duration, and yet they are all interrelated, as responses to the differing symptoms of extractive neoliberal capitalism.

At the start of the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, some citizens – including me – were calling for governments to take action, to instigate lockdowns, to put in place states of emergency in order to protect citizens. In the UK, when Covid-19 hit, many academics were on strike at the universities across the country, engaging in activities outside normal academic life, creating a break, an emergency of resistance, to draw attention to the inequalities and precarity of labour conditions caused by the financialization of universities. Reading an ‘Open Letter to the Trade Union Movement’ from *Labour Transformed* encouraged me to act with comrades to close our picket at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, as an act of social solidarity with the United Kingdom’s National Health Service, to help to ‘level the peak’ of the Covid-19 infection, and create an interruption to the business-as-usual model of operation which was spreading the virus at a rapid rate. So we posted this message from *Labour Transformed* on Instagram and on the outside of our building:

Staying at home and self-isolating is an act of social solidarity, one that ensures that the burden of ill bodies falling onto the shoulders of our brothers and sisters in the NHS is somehow manageable.<sup>8</sup>

So we see here, how a desire to protect citizens from the health risks posed by the potential for the virus to spread due to normal patterns of behaviour led to a call for a break to normalcy and a demand for something different, though we did not envisage a

suspension of law as a solution. One of the UK government's former scientific advisors is now making clear that the delay in taking decisive action and installing a 'lockdown', itself a state of emergency, has resulted in the unnecessary loss of at least 25,000 lives,<sup>9</sup> and a year later, in June 2021, at the time of copy-editing this essay, the total death toll has risen to 128,124.<sup>10</sup> And it is important to note that the relaxed and apparently milder positions adopted by populist neoliberal governments, which avoid the kind of 100 per cent lockdown or quarantine associated with states of emergency, have been intended, not to save lives but to appeal to sections of the voting population and to safeguard the economy by removing restrictions on trade, while some of those enforcing strict rules have done so in the public interest to protect vulnerable groups.

On 20 May 2020, during the UK's Covid-19 first 'lockdown', W1A, the BBC political comedy show, aired their special 'zoom' 'Initial Lockdown Meeting', and as this quote makes clear, by then, the manipulation of normals, old and new, had already become a full-fledged aspect of managing the crisis and communicating the government message:

Welcome to the first ever lockdown meeting of the BBC COVID19 'Bounce Back' Group. I know we've all got used to thinking of ourselves as the 'Way Ahead Group' but in the current circumstances it didn't seem to ring true with the realities of the new normal, whereas the Bounce Back Group seems positive, clear and very much does what it says on the tin . . . but really the remit couldn't be more exciting, to try to imagine what the new normal will look like, and to begin to plot a path towards it, from wherever it is that we are now. . . . What we know of course is that it won't look anything like the old normal, or as I think we can safely call it now, the past, which really frees us up to think creatively.<sup>11</sup>

An emergency is often posed in the present tense, flanked by past and future normals, both of which are ideally envisioned as the same. In the moment of rupture created by the emergency, no normal is present, and this allows us to see the qualities of the normal more clearly, to define what constitutes the normal and the range of nuances of normalcies, and to distinguish between normalcy and emergency more carefully. Yet when immersed in the emergency itself, when nothing is normal anymore, anxieties emerge and many resort to calls for normalcy in order to reduce them: some normalize the emergency itself; others look for normals that remain or can be invented despite the emergency; others even try to locate the normal elsewhere or afterwards, in order to provide a spatial boundary or time limit to the emergency operating in the here and now. At first, during Covid-19 in the UK I noticed how the 'new' normal was pitched in the time ahead of us by those who were set to benefit from a future cast in the same image as the past, but soon there was talk of the present moment, the lockdown itself, as the new normal, and then as normals started to multiply, to appear everywhere, it became harder to locate oneself in time, to see the edge of the emergency and indeed any distinction at all between emergency and normalcy.

*normalcy: the usual state or condition*

In this book, in the chapter ‘The politics of normalcy: Examining the festival on the island of Imbros/Gökçeada’, Sevcan Ercan notes how it is important to connect normalcy with a form of hegemony that ‘constantly suppresses any deviance from the various conceptions of the sovereign powers regarding the everyday’. She describes how the exception, in this case a festival, ‘provides us a way to perceive how normalcy is a construct’, and how the

normalcy of the everyday involves the notion of exception . . . . The politics of normalcy which control the everyday rely upon an awareness of an exceptional element, i.e. normalcy does not make any sense without an understanding of the opposite contained within it (abnormal, exceptional, emergency etc.).<sup>12</sup>

Ercan discusses how ‘the festival’s reassuring regularity as a planned site of exception reveals how the politics of normalcy operates as a set of mechanisms governing both what counts as normal and what counts as exceptional’. It is not only, she writes, that authorities can engineer situations where exceptions become rules, or that one can try to insert patterns of behaviour that one is comfortable with in order to alleviate stress by making an emergency feel normal, but that certain kinds of emergency – like festivals, like play, like jokes – are required in order to allow the functioning of the normal.

*Architectures of Emergency in Turkey* tracks the impact of Turkey’s state of emergency on architecture and urbanism, specifically through three themes – heritage, displacement and catastrophe – so here I’d like to consider the particular possibilities of each in terms of the interplay between emergency and normalcy.

First, regarding urban heritage and the material visibility of culture, the instigation of an emergency by a state, in this case Turkey, provides an opportunity for artefacts representing the lives of unwanted communities to be removed, and the struggle that emerges is for communities that have been marginalized to seek to hold on to what they value. At the same time, emergencies can also provide the chance for a breach in normality, in the operation of an oppressive regime like South African apartheid, for example, and it is through this breach in the status quo that more liberatory practices can break through. With the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement, originally directed against a statue at the University of Cape Town (UCT) that commemorated Cecil Rhodes, the removal of racist monuments from public space by protesters, created a hiatus, and in this break, came an opportunity to address the racist past in the present, and question given normalities. We can see also how the protests following George Floyd’s death, interrupted the state of emergency, which was the Covid-19 lockdown, producing a powerful range of anti-racist activities. Enacted against the normalcy of colonial history, some have involved the removal of statues, as well as the names of slave owners and other colonialists from their revered public positions in UK towns and universities.

Among those who, in the name of history, argue against the removal of such statues and plaques are some who wish to see the anti-racist protesters themselves removed from public space, and traditions of colonialism maintained. Such arguments

should not be seen to be on the side of history; history's role as a discipline is to actively and critically engage with what has come before, to see precisely *how* the past enters the present, and how the present acts to refigure the past, not to uncritically preserve what has come before, just because it took place earlier. In this case, it is the emergency of the protests, their very emergent nature, that provides the possibility of disrupting normalcy, revealing it as an ideological construction, and one that can be displaced.

*emergent: an unforeseen occurrence, a contingency not specially provided for*

The intersection of the Covid-19 and the climate emergencies has been discussed in terms of 'a crisis in a crisis',<sup>13</sup> but also in terms of how the virus is a symptom of the ecological crisis. The climate emergency is such a huge crisis that it has largely been disavowed by governments, to the extent that citizens have had to call, through 'Extinction Rebellion', for example, for governing bodies, such as states, to impose states of emergency in order to rapidly reduce carbon emissions. The response to the climate emergency has varied from a denial of the crisis, to a refusal to trust the science evidencing the human-produced nature of it, to a belief in often-untested future technological fixes, to promises to make inadequate adjustments to carbon emissions to be put in place at some future unspecified date and within a business-as-usual model. In short, the demands of the Extinction Rebellion have often been rejected as impossible, because they oppose the normalcy of neoliberal carbon-fuelled capitalism. And yet we have seen how it has been possible to respond to the dangers posed by a virus with emergency measures, and, as lockdowns were called for, nation by nation, in early 2020 to combat the spread of Covid-19, to install a 'new normal' almost overnight. However, despite all the new measures that have been put in place to combat Covid-19, which may have reduced annual global carbon emissions by around 4 per cent to 7.5 per cent,<sup>14</sup> the call remains strong, to return to the old normal, to restart economies and so push carbon emissions back up.

Secondly, if we now turn to displacement, as the next theme of this book, then we can see how this features in the case of emergencies, not only in terms of the state-produced wars and destruction – often enacted to secure carbon – and the interrelated impacts of climate change on migration but also in the way in which one form of emergency can displace another, from the climate emergency, to Covid-19, to Black Lives Matter. Perhaps partly because of the immediacy of social media and its amplifying affective effects, our attention is held in a constant state of present-ness, waiting for the next emergency to impact, which makes future planning, and even future imagining, almost impossible. As those who have lived through the crises of displacements caused by emergencies – migrants, displaced communities and persecuted minorities, as described in this book – know from experience that raised adrenalin, exhaustion and trauma have serious health impacts.

This is maybe why, in *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway refers to the ecological crisis as a permanent and urgent crisis, and write of urgency rather than emergency, exploring what it means to 'cultivate the capacity to respond to worldly

urgencies with each other'.<sup>15</sup> Engaging with the work of Anna Tsing, who she argues considers 'multispecies extinctions, genocides, immiserations, and exterminations,' Haraway terms these as 'urgencies rather than emergencies because the latter word connotes something approaching apocalypse and its mythologies';<sup>16</sup> rather, her preference is for the different mode of temporality offered by urgencies.

*urgency: the state, condition, or fact of being urgent; pressing importance; imperativeness*

What seems to be required in these times of urgencies (then) is for counter forces to come together to take forward initiatives, to subvert the order of things, to live with urgency in a way that is neither part of the emergency nor the old (or even new) normal. But as Özyetiş discusses in *Architectures of Emergency in Turkey* in 'Forum in relation to the polis: The case of 1.39 and Turkey', the production of catastrophe out of emergency can produce breakdown, not only to physical, architectural and environmental settings, but also to political discourse, intellectual capacity and emotional sensibility, rendering certain modes of resistance ineffective. This third theme of the book figures catastrophe or destruction then as a way of understanding the relation between emergency and normalcy.

*catastrophe: an event producing a subversion of the order or system of things*

Özyetiş examines how some kinds of *parrhesia*, and following Foucault's work on this,<sup>17</sup> a speaking truth to power, rely too strongly on logos, or certain modes of life which prioritize intelligence. Instead Özyetiş traces, through the story of Antigone, the important role of bios, which Foucault underscores as vital to a Socratic form of *parrhesia*, as a practice which balances logos and bios. Foucault examines the function of *parrhesia* in terms of the crisis of democratic institutions, and also how *parrhesia* occurs as an activity in human relations, with respect to care of the self, and in relation to others, specifically through three kinds of relations: individual personal, community and public life. Foucault talks of how, in the shift from a political to a Socratic or ethical form of *parrhesia*, the relation between *logos*, truth and courage alters to include *bios*, and to focus on the balance between *bios* and *logos* with respect to truth:

Here, giving an account of your life, your bios, is also not to give a narrative of the historical events that have taken place in your life, but rather to demonstrate whether you are able to show that there is a relation between the rational discourse, the logos, you are able to use, and the way that you live. Socrates is inquiring into the way that logos gives form to a person's style of life; for he is interested in discovering whether there is a harmonic relation between the two.<sup>18</sup>

Now, this balancing of human life between logos and bios, has been challenged by other philosophers. In *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben identifies what he calls a 'division of

life' that separates 'simple life' or zoe from 'politically qualified life' or bios,<sup>19</sup> and he divides the biographical and the political,<sup>20</sup> positioning bare life as the threshold between the two.<sup>21</sup>

The political power that we are familiar with is instead always ultimately founded on the separation of the sphere of bare life from the context of forms of life.<sup>22</sup>

Agamben's analysis opens up the discussion of life to include not only bios and logos but zoe; however, Rosi Braidotti takes issue with his view of zoe as 'non-life' and argues, instead, from a feminist and ecological perspective, for a version of zoe which includes vitality.<sup>23</sup> Critical race theorist Sylvia Wynter has also challenged the distinction between bios and logos, reframing the human being as a hybrid, as bios and mythoi together.<sup>24</sup> She argues this through her concept of 'human being as praxis', as Katherine McKittrick has noted 'Wynter is suggesting that our cognitive understanding of the world and our selves is *simultaneously* biological and cultural (bios/mythoi) . . .'<sup>25</sup>

Pekol ends her chapter in this book with a section titled, 'Emergency as Normalcy', something she describes as acting 'in lieu of' a conclusion. I read this as an unwillingness to perform simple endings, and as a desire to acknowledge what it means to face up to endings. Both normalcy and emergency refuse to end: they offer two different versions of a continuous presence, one endless, the other timeless. As the reality of living in these interlocking emergencies becomes normalized, the past and future disappear from view. How then to engage with beginnings and endings?

*resurgency: that rises, or tends to rise, again; increasing or reviving after a period of little activity, popularity, or occurrence*

Writing this essay during the COVID-19 emergency I have seen the resurgence of 'natural' life even in a time of human death, as well as attempts for forestall transformations. It is this that we need to attend to: the energies released in the interruption of normalities made possible by the emergency. We have to take care of these resurgent powers and the resistance they can offer to the normals of colonial extractivist capitalisms, old and new. Both Braidotti and Wynter engage with life, one affirming zoe as a vital life force, and the other insisting that biology is joined with culture. Haraway, too, argues for the necessity of resurgence in 'mixed-up times', and for what we can do in times of urgency, together:

In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All definitions of terms (in italics) taken from *Oxford English Dictionary*, oed.com.

<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>3</sup> See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), referred to in Banu Pekol, 'Destabilizing National Heritage: Preserving Turkey's Non-Muslim Architectural Heritage', in *Architectures of Emergency in Turkey: Heritage, Displacement and Catastrophe*, eds. Eray Çaylı et al. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the relevance of Agamben's work for architecture and urbanism and a discussion of his thinking on the 'state of exception' with reference to his oeuvre, see Camillo Boano, *The Ethics of a Potential Urbanism: Critical Encounters between Giorgio Agamben and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Eray Çaylı, 'Architectures of Emergency in Turkey: Heritage, Displacement and Catastrophe', in *Architectures of Emergency in Turkey: Heritage, Displacement and Catastrophe*, eds. Eray Çaylı et al. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> 'Britain: On the Coronavirus and the social crisis – An open letter to the Trade Union movement from Labour Transformed', Links: International Journal of Socialist Movement, accessed 25 June 2020, <http://links.org.au/britain-coronavirus-social-crisis-open-letter-trade-union-movement-labour-transformed>.

<sup>9</sup> Lizzy Buchan, 'Coronavirus: Lockdown One Week Earlier could have Halved UK's Death Toll, Says Neil Ferguson', *Independent*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/uk-lockdown-coronavirus-death-toll-neil-ferguson-a9559051.html>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/united-kingdom>, accessed 10 June 2021.

<sup>11</sup> British Comedy Guide, 'W1A: Lockdown Special', accessed 20 May 2020, <https://www.comedy.co.uk/tv/w1a/episodes/2020/1/>.

<sup>12</sup> Sevcan Ercan, 'The Politics of Normalcy: Examining the Festival on the Island of Imbros/Gökçeada', in *Architectures of Emergency in Turkey: Heritage, Displacement and Catastrophe*, eds. Eray Çaylı et al. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Rupert Bickersteth, 'Edward Denison: "Under lockdown people appeared to have a newfound interest in architecture"', *Architects' Journal*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/culture/data-shows-air-pollution-plunged-during-lockdown-prompting-calls-for-radical-change/10047328.article>.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson Ryan, 'COVID-19 Lockdowns Caused an "Extreme" Reduction in Carbon Emissions', *cnet*, accessed 10 July 2020, <https://www.cnet.com/news/covid-19-lockdowns-caused-an-extreme-reduction-in-carbon-emissions/>.

<sup>15</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 7 and 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>17</sup> See Michel Foucault (ed. J. Pearson), 'Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia: Six Lectures given by Michel Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley, October–November 1983', *Foucault.info*, accessed 4 February 2020, <https://foucault.info/parrhesia/>. See my discussion of this in relation to institutional critique in Jane Rendell, 'Giving an Account Of Oneself, Architecturally', *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 3 (2016): 334–48.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, 'Discourse and Truth'.

<sup>19</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer, IV, 2*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [2014] 2015), 203.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>23</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 39–42.



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<sup>24</sup> Sylvia Wynter in Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, 'Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations', in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 16.

<sup>25</sup> Katherine McKittrick, 'Axis, Bold as Love: On Sylvia Wynter, Jimi Hendrix and the Promise of Science', in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 154.

<sup>26</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 1.