

Bulent Diken
Strangers, Ambivalence and Social Theory
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Strangers are a problem. Immigrants do 'us', the affluent and settled - the honour of choosing to live and work amongst us. Refugees pay us the great compliment of seeking sanctuary with us. Unfortunately for them, by doing so they also hold us to our civilised self-image, and to the promise of tolerance and fairness that we have announced so often in so many ways. This promise does not always ring hollow, but is often made good only grudgingly. The less strangers are like us, the more work we have to do just to be comfortable around them. Often we try to keep our distance. If they come to resemble us in some small way, then we fear that they will compete with us, and maybe even win.

In recent years, it has become clear that thinking of strangers as a problem is also a problem, a neurosis on the level of collective symbolisation. In their presentation of difference, strangers demystify our felt ideologies of identity, exposing us to our own 'strangers within'. No self-confident person or society would experience this as a threat of course. So it is safer to say that there is a problem rather than to decide that strangers are the problem. But how is this problem, now shared by stranger and familiar - to be addressed? It often seems that we must change our hearts and minds. Diagnosed as a cultural malaise, prejudice and discrimination seem to call for symbolic remedy' changes in the way of belief to prefer mixture over segregation and hybridity over purity. When this strategy meets evidence that the modern habit of 'planning' has often set our neurosis in concrete, we might be forgiven for thinking that the last thing we need is another plan. Rather, we need an atmosphere of tolerance and a free marketplace of identities and cultural mores. So the more the problem is solidified, the more gaseous the suggested solutions. Diken, trained as an urban planner and informed by the hesitant tendency in recent social theory, thinks otherwise. Concrete changes, small and negotiated will have to come before any real 'toleration' is possible. But this means that the discipline of urban planning must change its sensibilities. Diken sets his carefully researched insights into the politics and planning of Turkish immigration to Denmark into a conversation with, amongst others, Bauman, Law, Latour and Bourdieu. It is properly theoretical purpose; the interrogation of existing ideas from the perspective of a clearly stated problem to inform those who are involved professionally and personally with managing that problem. How can urban planning help rather than hinder strangers and accommodate hosts to their inevitable presence?

The first four chapters lay out the various positions of Turkish immigrants to Denmark. Details are given of the location and design of Gellerup, the suburb where many Turks

live. Chapter 1 is a survey of the recent history of housing policy in Gellerup. It describes a range of attempts to house immigrants without disturbing Danes and Danishness too much, so that they may bulk out the shrinking Danish population. Chapter 2 is a close reading of discourses and popular representations of Turkish immigrants. It highlights the degree to which Turks have come to bear the burden of some Danes' anxieties for their own identity. Chapter 3 describes Turks' attempts to make sense of living in Gellerup's modernist, shake-and-bake, high-density housing. It reveals how the designed self-sufficiency of the suburb, built in the 60's for the 'standard Danish family', contributes to Turks' economic and cultural marginalization. Under constant low-level hostility, however, they attempt to re-assemble the spaces they are given, establishing vegetable gardens, street-markets, 'invisible' mosques and ethnic clubs.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 survey recent literature on hybridity, globalisation, modernity/post-modernity and organised/disorganised capitalism. This survey is at once an introduction to these themes, an opportunity to shed further light on the complicated relations struck between Danes and Turks, and an empirical development of the now familiar theme of hybridity. Diken is particularly interesting on the variety of ways that Turks and Danes have developed of playing their hybridity. He finds 'hybrid mimicry' in those Turkish-run 'Italian' pizza-joints whose proprietors are neither simply assimilating as Danes nor asserting their Turkishness. He finds hybridity denied in that 'kitsch' spirit of cheerful recognition of the other's right to pure and certain identity, which makes difference safe by placing it beyond touch. He finds hybrid identities lived as pure identification with the Turkish motherland, some Turks becoming Turkish and Muslim through the process of immigration. The reader gets a strong sense of how flexible and variable hybrid relations are. The simple contrast Danish/Turkish generates a multitude of workings and re-workings of heritage, space, economics and cultural performance. It turns out that problems arise when attempts are made to fit the varied expressions of hybridity within a single popular or social theoretical model. It is at this point that Diken turns to a critique of social theoretical essentialisms and singularisations. The 'ambivalent' social theory that he advocates turns out to be a way of allowing hybridity its variations. On Diken's view, it is not enough for social theorists simply to prefer 'hybridity'. A preference of this kind stalls analysis as surely as 'kitsch' tolerance does. It allows 'good conscience' to float free of mess and contradiction and to avoid practical engagement. In the final two chapters, Diken takes up the challenge he has set himself of equipping urban planners with the sensibilities needed to plan against hatred and fear. He argues for a 'blind planning' that feels its way through the social field through the multiple intelligences of conversation, contact and local knowledge. It should be blind to large objectives such as 'how to integrate foreigners', and should instead be sensitive to small concrete problems, such as conflict over the proper length of time to spend drinking a cup of coffee. These small problems can be

tackled by changing the 'affordances' that the built environment offers to action. In short, planners should be more like immigrants when they convert a house into a mosque, than like politicians when they see 'social problems' that urgently require rapid, large-scale intervention to ward off crisis. Considered as an attempt to translate many contemporary social theorists' willingness to be baffled, stalled and slowed as a normal part of their practice to another more 'practical' realm of practice, this book is a great success. I hope it finds its constituencies.

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