

BELONGING IN A MARGINALIZED NEIGHBORHOOD:  
A HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF ISTANBUL'S OKMEYDANI



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BELONGING IN A MARGINALIZED NEIGHBORHOOD:  
A HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF ISTANBUL'S OKMEYDANI

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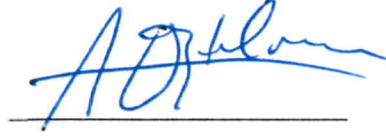
Boğaziçi University

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**Belonging in a Marginalized Neighborhood:  
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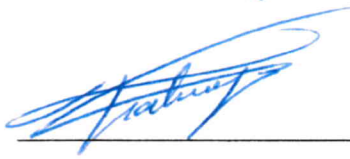
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**July 2019**

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Demet Yıldız certify that,

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
- this is a true copy of the thesis approved by my advisor and thesis committee at Boğaziçi University, including final revisions required by them.

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Date.....29.07.2019.....

## ABSTRACT

Belonging in a Marginalized Neighborhood:

A Historical Ethnography of Istanbul's Okmeydanı

This thesis studies the contemporary history of Okmeydanı, an urban neighborhood in Istanbul which has a specific place in the history of urbanization in Turkey.

Established as a gecekondu settlement during the rural-urban migration period in the late 1950s and 1960s, the neighborhood went through other transformations marked by new waves of migration and the political circumstances surrounding them. Based on the narratives of Okmeydanı's inhabitants, this study examines the sense of belonging and the sense of community in this place which has been generally approached as one of the marginalized "Alevi-leftist" neighborhoods.

To explore how the inhabitants developed an attachment to the neighborhood where they live in, and identify themselves with it, this study focuses on the establishment process of the settlement, and transformations that it went through in the 1990s. Given the diversity of its population and different historical processes, the inhabitants had their own particular experiences of bonding with their new environment after the migration, and thus have different recollections of the past.

In addition, by the 2000s, under the impact of globalization, Okmeydanı has become one of the targeted areas for gentrification and urban renewal attempts. This thesis also overviews how the Okmeydanı's inhabitants defend the identity and texture of their neighborhood against the urban transformation project.

## ÖZET

### Marjinalleştirilen Bir Semtte Aidiyet:

#### İstanbul, Okmeydanı'nın Tarihsel Etnografisi

Bu tez İstanbul'un kentleşme tarihinde özel bir konumu olan Okmeydanı semtinin yakın tarihini incelemektedir. 1950 ve 1960'lı yılların kırdan kente göç sürecinde bir gecekondulu yerleşimi olarak kurulan bu semt, yeni göç dalgaları ve siyasal koşulların etkisiyle çeşitli dönüşümlerden geçmiştir. Okmeydanı sakinlerinin anlatılarını temel alan bu çalışma, genelde bir "Alevi-solcu" mahallesi olarak yaklaşılan bu semtte aidiyet ve cemaat duygusunu ele almaktadır.

Bu çalışma, sakinlerinin yaşadıkları semte nasıl bir bağlılık geliştirdiklerini ve kendilerini onunla nasıl özdeşleştirdiklerini anlamak amacıyla bu yerleşimin kuruluş sürecine ve 1990lı yıllarda geçirdiği dönüşümlere odaklanmaktadır. Nüfusunun çeşitliliği ve farklı tarihsel süreçler göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, semt sakinlerinin göç sonrası yeni çevrelerine bağlanma konusunda kendilerine özgü deneyimlere sahip oldukları ve geçmişi farklı biçimlerde kurguladıkları anlaşılmaktadır.

Ayrıca, 2000li yıllarda küreselleşmenin etkisiyle birlikte, Okmeydanı soylulaştırma ve kentsel yenileme girişimlerinin hedeflerinden biri haline gelmiştir. Bu tez aynı zamanda Okmeydanı sakinlerinin semtlerinin mevcut kimliğini ve dokusunu kentsel dönüşüme karşı nasıl savunduklarına da değinmektedir.

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Without the help and cooperation of my interviewees in Okmeydanı, I could not achieve this mission of daring to write a historical ethnography of the neighborhood. I am therefore deeply grateful to every each one of my interviewees, who generously shared their stories with me. They are in a way the co-authors of this work. My special thanks go to my father Haydar Yıldız, and my friend İbrahim for their belief in me and their continuous support and guidance throughout my fieldwork. Let me express my sincere thanks to Buse Yıldırım, for our discussions, but also for her help in time management. I also benefited from the support of work environment at Beykoz Kundura, and I owe my sincere thanks to my co-workers.

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*To the memory of my beloved Coşkun Sancak  
and to all people in my neighborhood*



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on Okmeydanı, an urban neighborhood in Istanbul which has a specific place in the history of urbanization in Turkey. Okmeydanı was established as a gecekondu settlement during the rural-urban migration period in the late 1950s and 1960s. Since then, the neighborhood went through another transformation marked by new waves of migration and the political circumstances surrounding them. In time, Okmeydanı became one of the marginalized “Alevi-leftist” neighborhoods, situated among its counterparts like *Gazi, 1 Mayıs* and *Armutlu*.

Before the rural-urban migration period, the lands of Okmeydanı had been used for farming by the Albanians who migrated to the Ottoman Empire after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). It is beginning by the 1950s that migrants coming from the Eastern Anatolia and the Black Sea regions began to settle in and to build the first gecekondu in that area. As the migration waves were multi-directional, the population of Okmeydanı was initially composed of migrants coming from Sivas, Erzincan, Tokat, Erzurum, Muş, Dersim (Tunceli) as well as from Giresun, Kastamonu, Ordu, Rize, and Trabzon. By the 1970s, Okmeydanı had already become a highly politicized place, and mainly dominated by the leftist organizations. A structural change came with the 1990s, where a visible transformation happened both in the physical appearance of the neighborhood, followed by a change in the composition of its population. This was indeed part of the “apartmentalization” (apartmanlaşma) process of the late 1980s and 1990s, where most gecekondu began to be replaced by the multi-storey apartment buildings in Okmeydanı. This spatial expansion was soon filled by a new migration wave, resulting from the forced

displacement in the Southeastern part of Turkey, and causing an unprecedented rise and diversification in Okmeydanı population. Today, the neighborhood continues to be a destination for both internal and external migration, due to many political and economic reasons. One such political-economic conjuncture is undoubtedly the incoming Syrian refugees and migrants from Turkic Republics, who have settled there.

By the 2000s, under the impact of globalization, Okmeydanı has become one of the targeted areas of urban renewal attempts with new urban transformation projects. Although these projects claimed to transform urban space into more prestigious, healthier, secure and cleaner living space, in many cases, such as Sulukule, Tarlabası, and Fikirtepe, urban transformation ended up with a gentrification of urban space by the hand of the state, changing land ownerships, and cleansing the urban centers from poorer populations. The fact that the inhabitants of Okmeydanı collectively resisted to such urban transformation projects planned for their area called attention of the related authorities in time. With its population consisting of the working class, disadvantaged groups, and ethnic communities such as Alevis, Kurds, Romanies, the neighborhood began to be represented more and more as a marginal and conflict producing area in media and public discourse. The emphasis on “cleansing the region from terrorism” became an important discourse especially after the Gezi movement in 2013, when many important demonstrations took place in Okmeydanı. Today, there is still a constant tension between leftist organizations and state authorities whose presence is deployed at the center of the neighborhood.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The existence of the state forces became a part of everyday life in Okmeydanı. The anti-riot water cannon vehicles (TOMA), panzers and other police vehicles located in a schoolyard at the entrance of the neighborhood and patrol around regularly.

The early studies on the gecekondu settlements in the urbanization process in Turkey adopted an elitist and modernist approach until the 1990s. They mostly focused on the integration issue, in regard to the migrant population evaluated as the “other” of the city that need to be assimilated. Later studies conducted on Okmeydanı, and other such neighborhoods, which were established in similar patterns and through similar phases, approached to these settlements as “marginal spaces,” in the context of political struggle and social movements. Following Marxist scholars like Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, these studies discussed the issue of urban transformation projects around the concepts of social justice, the right to the city, and the use and exchange value of the urban land.<sup>2</sup> In most cases, however, the subjective and affective dimension of the relation between people and place has been neglected. As a long-time resident of Okmeydanı, I had the opportunity to observe different attachments to the place. Given the diversity of its population and different historical processes, the inhabitants had their own particular experience of bonding with their new environment, and thus have different recollections of the past. This memory is not yet documented in the written literature on Okmeydanı, a fact which led me towards an oral history approach. This thesis will therefore be a first attempt to examine how past is reconstructed in the narratives of Okmeydanı inhabitants, with an eye on their sense of belonging to that place. It aims to understand how they construct and consolidate their individual and communal identity in relation to the place, the neighborhood of Okmeydanı as they settled. “Place” is a rather complex

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Sema Erder, *İstanbul'a Bir Kent Kondu: Ümraniye* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996), Oğuz Işık & M. Melih Pınarcıoğlu, *Nöbetleşe Yoksulluk* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), Şükrü Aslan, *1 Mayıs Mahallesi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), Neslihan Demirtaş, *Social Spatialization in a Turkish Squatter Settlement* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), Fırat Kurt, *Making of Community in the Margins of Turkey, The Case of Okmeydanı* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), Zeynep Arslan, *Changing Legal Status of Land Property and Limits to Urban Transformation: The Case of Okmeydanı* (2014), Zeynel Gül, *Shifting Geographies of Subversive Politics in Istanbul* (2016).

concept for migrants, who on the one hand physically left but culturally kept their formal regional-local identities, while trying to get rooted in and attaching themselves to their neighborhood. This experience attributes various meanings to the notions of former and contemporary place. The thesis hope to explore these place-making practices and communal solidarity as important elements which constitute the sense of belonging both to the place and to the community.

My subjectivity and affectivity have a central place in this research since my family was among the first settlers to Okmeydanı in the early 1960s. Growing up in the neighborhood and exposed to narratives of “old Okmeydanı” me myself have a strong sense of belonging to the neighborhood and its community. As an insider of this place for thirty years, I have developed the local knowledge,<sup>3</sup> which both motivated me to conduct this oral history research, but also provides me with the tools and codes to research and interpret the narratives. Common memory of a local past and similar concerns about the future of the neighborhood, have undoubtedly been the main pillars of my interest for this research. But my real motivation grew with the Gezi movement, when my neighborhood became a site of memory with the funeral of Berkin Elvan,<sup>4</sup> followed by the shooting of Uğur Kurt by a police officer during a funeral at Okmeydanı Cemevi.<sup>5</sup> My first research in the neighborhood was on this *cemevi*<sup>6</sup> as a site of memory, conducting a fieldwork and making preliminary

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<sup>3</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Berkin Elvan was a 14 years old inhabitant when he was shot in the head by a tear gas canister thrown by a police officer during a conflict occurred in Okmeydanı. After 269 days in coma, he died in 2014 and his funeral turned into a great demonstration with participation of tens of thousands of people.

<sup>5</sup> This incident occurred while the high school students protested Soma disaster and were intervened by police. It demonstrated the fact that police use gun to prevent protests in the neighborhood. About the murder of Uğur Kurt, see Gökçer Tahincioğlu, “Uğur Kurt ve adalet,” *Milliyet*, February 21, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/gokcer-tahincioglu/ugur-kurt-ve-adalet-2197411/>

<sup>6</sup> *Cemevi* is the place of worship for Alevi which derives from the ritual of *cem* and means ‘the house of cem’. In Turkey *cemevis* are not officially recognized as places of worship as mosques, churches and synagogues. For this reason, *cemevis* are established as cultural foundations and associations.

interviews in 2014 for my undergraduate thesis. In the aftermath of Gezi movement, Okmeydanı became a “hot zone,” where one could witness several clashes. One of these was the demonstration after Uğur Kurt’s death, an event which rapidly turned into a conflict between the police and the protesters, causing the death of Ayhan Yılmaz, a disabled inhabitant from Örnektepe, who was stuck in the middle of the clashes.<sup>7</sup> I observed how in the midst of this chaotic environment, the inhabitants tried to maintain their everyday life, and worried about their future in this place. They commonly believed that this situation created by provocative actions, aiming the consolidation of the stigmatization of the neighborhood, in order to justify the urban transformation project planned to be eagerly implemented. Such a transformation would obviously be resulted by the displacement of current inhabitants, changing completely the texture of the place, and losing its memory. In addition to these observations, I recognized that the most common theme of the narratives was the fear to lose “their place” if such an urban transformation project happened. As former migrants who had already broken off roots from their hometown, the inhabitants of Okmeydanı were expressing a strong sense of belonging to their new place, as a nest within the greater Istanbul, while particularly facing an uncertain future. Although the urban transformation is not the main focus of this thesis, it is important to understand from the very beginning, how the inhabitants attached themselves to this place and how they defended it against the threats coming from outside. In addition, I believe that doing such a research will be important to understand and to document the history of the Okmeydanı with its identity and memory before the urban transformation project is implemented in this

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<sup>7</sup> Bekir Avcı, “Ayhan Yılmaz’ın Öldürülüşü ya da Tutul(a)mayan Yas,” *Biamag Cumartesi*, May 26, 2014. Retrieved from <http://bianet.org/biamag/yasam/155962-ayhan-yilmaz-in-oldurulusu-ya-da-tutul-a-mayan-yas>

neighborhood. It is difficult to estimate today, how being an *Okmeydanlı* will be transformed after the gentrification project, or even whether doing such a research will be possible or not.

Let me also give a brief explanation on the territory this thesis is situated. The geographical borders of Okmeydanı is surrounded by Piyalepaşa Boulevard in the east, and Kasımpaşa and Hasköy Streets in the south, while the main road connecting to the first Bosphorus Bridge remains in the west. The area of Okmeydanı includes seven neighborhoods, namely Mahmut Şevket Paşa, Piyalepaşa, Fetihtepe, Piripaşa, Keçecipiri, Kaptanpaşa and Kulaksız which are described in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The map of Okmeydanı with neighborhoods' borders

Prepared by the author

The borders of the neighborhood in the inhabitants' mind differed from the official borders of Okmeydanı. When they referred to their "neighborhood," the

inhabitants meant that this place ends up at Dört Yol in Kulaksız, where resided most people coming from the Black Sea Region. On the other hand, the fluid and extended borders of the neighborhood such as Örnektepe, Talatpaşa and Hacıhüsrev are worth to be taken into consideration as well. There are many people who currently live in these areas, but have strong bonds with Okmeydanı, spending most of time there, and define themselves as “Okmeydanlı.” This neighborhood’s population is undoubtedly more diversified than this thesis can focus, including Turkish and Kurdish Sunni inhabitants, Romanians, Albanians, and new migrants such as Syrian refugees and people who came from Turkic republics. However, given the limits of this research that based on the place identity and the sense of belonging of the inhabitants of Okmeydanı, I primarily focused on the Alevi and Kurdish population, and socialization places and agencies that gives the identity to this neighborhood.

Given the domineering written literature on *gecekondu* and the particular approach to Okmeydanı as a marginalized place, this thesis uses oral history both as an approach and a research method, to best explore the subjective experience of its inhabitants, situated within the political particularity and ethnic diversity of the neighborhood.

## CHAPTER 2

### ON METHODOLOGY AND REFLEXIVITY

#### 2. 1 Theoretical framework of the research

The relation between people and place has been a subject for a wide range of fields in many aspects. Since place is an indivisible part of the human existence and all experiences in the world, identity is constructed in particular places. Geographer Edward Relph asserts that “To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in his seminal book *The Fate of Place*, philosopher Edward Casey states:

To be at all - to exist in any ways - to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced.<sup>9</sup>

Scholars have also examined the difference between the concepts of “place” and “space” through meanings assigned by personal, group, or cultural processes.<sup>10</sup> Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan adopting an experiential approach developed the concept of *topophilia* to explain affective attachment of human beings to the place. He makes a distinction between space and place describing space as freedom, place as security. Place, Tuan states, involves and is connected with all the hopes, frustrations,

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>10</sup> See Yi-Fu Tuan, “Space and place: Humanistic perspective,” in *Philosophy in Geography*, eds. Stephen Gale and Gunnar Olsson (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands), 387-427; Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low, “Introduction,” in *Place Attachment* (New York: Plenum Press, 1992); Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

desperations, dreams, past experiences and future expectations.<sup>11</sup> Edward Relph also focuses the affective bonding that people develop for place and describes place as the “profound centers” of human existence.

The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence. There is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security, a point of departure from which we orient ourselves in the world.<sup>12</sup>

In other word, people transform space into place through place-making practices. They make space their own place, first settling in it, then through daily activities, routines, and establishing social relationships with people there. As a result of these practices people attribute a meaning and attach themselves to this environment. In that sense, place does not only refer to a physical entity but to an environment in which social relations established with other people, family, friends and community. During place-making processes through which people transform “space” into their own “place,” they get rooted in this place. Scholars like Simone Weil and Robert Coles approach to the concept of “rootedness” as a very significant fact for individuals and social groups. They both stress the particular need for roots, defined as a primary need of human soul.<sup>13</sup> To be rooted in a place provides a sense of security due to the predictable nature of the place that provides the context for human activities and familiarity with its population, which means knowing and being known there. In other words, people create a sense of belonging, a sense of

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<sup>11</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, “Place: An experiential perspective,” *Geographical Review* 65 (1975): 151-165.

<sup>12</sup> Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> See Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Robert Coles, *Uprooted Children* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

community in a particular place and the members of this community acknowledge the position of each other within the order of that particular place. Moreover, as a ground to host life experiences, place becomes an inseparable part of the memory of these experiences. In that sense, attachment to a place is an outcome of an affective bond between people and their environment, contributing to individual, group, and cultural self-definition and integrity. As such place plays a significant role in the construction and consolidation of identity for both individual and groups.<sup>14</sup>

Edward Relph calls attention to the interactive relationship between community and place, emphasizing that each reinforces the identity of the other. He describes the landscape as an expression of communal beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvements within this relationship.<sup>15</sup> By changing, modifying, naming, and even creating a place, we give a characteristic to it and contribute to the construction of its identity through our beliefs and values. Place identity concept refers to a set of place features that ensures its uniqueness and continuity.

Highlighting uniqueness of a place, the concept of *genius loci* is commonly used to describe place identity.<sup>16</sup> Environmental psychologist Harold M. Proshansky defines place identity referring to the relation between individual and physical environment as the “dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment.”<sup>17</sup>

The sense of place, which means being inside and belonging to your place both as an individual and a member of a community, and to know this, might be developed for home, for hometown, for nation, for city, or for neighborhood. Home

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<sup>14</sup> Altman and Low, *Place Attachment*.

<sup>15</sup> Relph, *Place and Placelessness*.

<sup>16</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980).

<sup>17</sup> Harold M. Proshansky, “The city and self-identity,” *Environment and Behavior* 10 (1978): 147.

is the most significant place for individual identity regarding rootedness, attachment, privacy and security. As Michel de Certeau reminds us, neighborhoods usually emerge as the link between public and private spaces.<sup>18</sup> Due to its in-between position, it carries both public and private features providing a sense of security, a sense of privacy through familiarity and close social relationships established within its community. On the other hand, neighborhood is mostly characterized by arbitrary borders. “As definable spatial and social units,” Yi-Fu Tuan states “neighborhoods have existed primarily in the minds of urban sociologists and planners.”<sup>19</sup> The notion of “neighborhood” can therefore be described as socially constructed place in particular times, which is considered to be a relatively homogeneous area, in terms of the typology of its buildings, infrastructure, environmental characteristics, and demographic composition. Deborah G. Martin remarks how cultural, ethnic, and income groups establish a communal solidarity and shared values and interests in that environment.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, people often identify themselves with their local areas and develop a sense of deep care and concern for this place.<sup>21</sup> One should also call attention to the intensity of the place attachment that may fuel strong feelings of territoriality. Since place is a physical environment which has boundaries that separate insiders and outsiders, the insiders develop a sense of protection and defend their place against threats of destruction from outside. For those insiders who strongly identify themselves with their place, to be forced to leave, becomes an experience of grief and homesickness. This shows how separation from one’s

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<sup>18</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking* (2) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998)

<sup>19</sup> Tuan, “*Place: An experiential perspective*,” 158.

<sup>20</sup> Deborah G. Martin, “Place-Framing as Place-Making: Constituting a Neighborhood for Organizing and Activism,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 3 (2003): 732.

<sup>21</sup> Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 34-37.

identified place means not only to lose the familiar physical environment but also their social integration and the sense of community.<sup>22</sup>

Under the impact of globalization, the urban land became a commodity for the global market. This development brought along urban renewal projects that change meaning and values attributed to places. In that sense, it is worth to mention at this point the concept of placelessness developed by Relph, “that is, the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place.”<sup>23</sup> The standardization process cuts roots, erodes symbols, replaces diversity with uniformity and experiential order with conceptual order. Thus, it transforms places created by place-making practices into anonymous spaces and exchangeable environments.

If places are indeed a fundamental aspect of man’s existence in the world, if they are sources of security and identity for individuals and for groups of people, then it is important that the means of experiencing, creating, and maintaining significant places are not lost. Moreover, there are many signs that these very means are disappearing and that ‘placelessness’ - the weakening of distinct and diverse experiences and identities of places - is now a dominant force. Such a trend marks a major shift in the geographical bases of existence from a deep association with places to rootlessness, a shift that, once recognised and clarified, may be judged undesirable and possibly countered. It will then be of no small importance to know what are the distinctive and essential features of place and of our experiences of places, for without such knowledge it will not be possible to create and preserve the places that are the significant contexts of our lives.<sup>24</sup>

French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs pointed out that while extraordinary events occurred in the place, awareness and bonding of the people living there became more salient.

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<sup>22</sup> David M. Hummon, “Community Attachment: Local Sentiment and Sense of Place,” in *Place Attachment*, eds. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 260.

<sup>23</sup> Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

The place a group occupies is not like a blackboard, where one may write and erase figures at will. No image of a blackboard can recall what was once written there. The board could not care less what has been written on it before, and new figures may be freely added. But place and group have each received the imprint of the other. Therefore, every phase of the group can be translated into spatial terms, and its residence is but the juncture of all these terms. Each aspect, each detail, of this place has a meaning intelligent only to members of the group, for each portion of its space corresponds to various and different aspects of the structure and life of their society, at least of what is most stable in it. Of course, extraordinary events are also fitted within this spatial framework, because they occasion in the group a more intense awareness of its past and present, the bonds attaching it to physical locale gaining greater clarity in the very moment of their destruction.<sup>25</sup>

There are other authors who draw attention to various factors that influence the strength of the place attachment, among which one can cite the amount of contact people, the size and location of place, and presence of threats against the place.<sup>26</sup> They usually argue how times of loss and hardship may strengthen the sense of attachment to particular places.<sup>27</sup> Many times, people may seem to have a little consciousness about the places they inhabit on a daily basis, but once their place is threatened, they become more aware of their sense of place.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, when the place identity characterized by ethnical elements or disadvantageous groups, place attachment became more significant. According to psychologist Maria Lewicka, in Catalonia and Basque Country where the regional identity contains ethnical elements, people are more identified with the regional identity and their place attachment is stronger.<sup>29</sup> Another factor that intensifies place

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<sup>25</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (Harper Colophon Books, 1980), 130.

<sup>26</sup> Charis E. Anton and Carmen Lawrence, "Home is where the heart is: The effect of place of residence on place attachment and community participation," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 40 (2014): 451-461.

<sup>27</sup> Relph, *Place and Placelessness*.

<sup>28</sup> Anton and Lawrence, "Home is where the heart is," 453.

<sup>29</sup> Maria Lewicka, "Place attachment: How far have we come in the last 40 years?" *Journal of environmental psychology* 31, no. 3 (2011): 207-230.

attachment is awareness of the place history. When people know about the history of their place, their identification and attachment increased along with being proud of belonging to this place.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. 2 Oral history as an approach and research method

Written sources on the history of Okmeydanı are not vast. A great majority relates to the history of entertainment, with a particular focus on the history of archery. As its name reveals, Okmeydanı was a site used as an archery practicing area during the Ottoman period, and there was no settling on it.<sup>31</sup> It is not possible to find much publications about the historical change and urbanization of Okmeydanı during the Republican period. There are only several works in the late 2010s that focus on its socio-cultural and political aspects and examined urban transformation project planned for this area.<sup>32</sup>

Taking into consideration the lack of historical documents about our field of study, I adopted oral history as a historiographic approach as much as a methodology, which is based on the experiences and memories of interviewees.<sup>33</sup> Following oral historian Michael Frisch's approach, it would be useful to refer to the concepts of "more history" and "anti-history" for this research.<sup>34</sup> Adopting the "more history" approach, I attempted to reveal undocumented and unrecorded aspects of the

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<sup>30</sup> Maria Lewicka, "Place attachment, place identity, and place memory: Restoring the forgotten city past," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 28 (2008): 209–231.

<sup>31</sup> See A. Süheyl Ünver, *İstanbul Risaleleri*, ed. İsmail Kara, (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 1995), 40-50; Özbay Güven, "Türk Kültüründe Kaybolan Miraslarımızdan İstanbul Ok Meydanı Spor Alanı," *Toplumsal Tarih* 3, no.14 (1995): 14-19.

<sup>32</sup> See Kurt, *Making of Community in the Margins of Turkey, The Case of Okmeydanı* (2010); Arslan, *Changing Legal Status of Land Property and Limits to Urban Transformation: The Case of Okmeydanı* (2014); Gül, *Shifting Geographies of Subversive Politics in Istanbul* (2016).

<sup>33</sup> Arzu Öztürkmen and Joanna Bornat, "Oral History," in *Encyclopedia of Women's Folklore and Folklife*, eds. L. Locke, P.Greenhill, T. A. Vaughan (Abingdon, OX: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2009), 433-435.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority, Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 186.

history of Okmeydanı through its inhabitants' life-stories, with a cross-examination between the narratives. This neighborhood was established as a gecekondu settlement in the late 1950s and 1960s, during the rural-urban migration period, and most of the first settlers came there when they were very young. Their life-stories involved therefore the establishment and transformation processes of the neighborhood. Secondly, adopting the “anti-history” approach, I tried to transcend the conventional history of Okmeydanı, and its representation in public discourse and media. In that sense, this research aims not only to reveal the history of the neighborhood, but also to be able to interpret its current situation.

The issue of reliability and validity of oral sources is closely related to the subjectivity issue and has been much discussed in the field of historiography. Oral history has been an approach to acknowledge this fact, inviting this discussion to the analyses of written historical material, like letters, diaries, newspapers, court records and so on, where subjectivity is also central. As oral historian Alessandro Portelli remarks, oral history allows us to be aware of this elusive characteristic of historical truth.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the subjectivity is not the weakness of the oral history, on the contrary, the emphasis on subjectivity is what makes it different. Portelli points out that oral history “...tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*.”<sup>36</sup> In that sense, oral history arises as an important tool to reveal concealed historical data – which obviously need to be cross-examined – while observing how this data is emotionally perceived and interpreted. As Alessandro Portelli states:

Oral sources are credible but with a *different* credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are

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<sup>35</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories, Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

no “false” oral sources. Once we have checked their factual credibility with all the established criteria of philological criticism and factual verification which are required by all types of sources anyway, the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that “wrong” statements are still psychologically “true,” and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts.<sup>37</sup>

Within this context, during my interviews, I encountered discrepancies in dates, events, or some other information in the narratives. I tried to construct my own historical narrative by comparing and contrasting them. I also tried to focus on the meanings attributed to these events by the narrators, and how selectively they constructed and situated their own narratives to the overall historical frame.

Besides my deep interest in pursuing the contemporary history of Okmeydanı, I also felt a certain responsibility regarding the current situation of the neighborhood. Since Okmeydanı has become a marginalized neighborhood in recent decades, its negative representation has visibly increased in public discourse and media. Today, there is a strong need to re-define who really are these “*Okmeydanlıs*,” what this means and what happens in this neighborhood.<sup>38</sup> Frisch’s description of oral history resumes our understanding while conducting this research;

“...a powerful tool for discovering, exploring, and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory - how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them.”<sup>39</sup>

To sum up, using oral history as an approach and research method, our purpose was to give voice the inhabitants of this marginalized neighborhood, and to contribute to writing an alternative history of Okmeydanı.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>38</sup> By *Okmeydanlı* I refer to people who are from Okmeydanı or still living there.

<sup>39</sup> Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, 188.

### 2.3 A review of the research process

In 2014, when the first time I decided to conduct a research in Okmeydanı, I was still living there and witnessing everyday life of the neighborhood. For my undergraduate thesis, I studied Okmeydanı Cemevi as a site of memory conducting in-depth interviews, some of which are also used as primary sources in this thesis. However, during that research, I recognized that my interviewees were willing to talk more about the neighborhood at large, than just the Cemevi. This preliminary observation led me towards a wider research on Okmeydanı. With my growing interest since then, I visited the neighborhood regularly, even if I moved out to a different place. I began to attend organized meetings for positioning against the urban transformation project, the rituals of *cems* and other cultural activities held in Okmeydanı Cemevi. I also closely followed other various events organized by neighborhood associations, village or hometown associations, meetings for the women's rights, weddings, funerals, and commemorative ceremonies for Berkin Elvan and the other losses of the neighborhood. In that sense, participant observation was a part of the methodology of this research.

Being an insider of Okmeydanı has greatly helped me to access and interview with its inhabitants. Because of the critical situation and tensioned atmosphere of the neighborhood, many inhabitants have been reluctant to be interviewed. Being an insider provided trust between us to some extent and opened reliable channel for them to talk with me. It was very significant that they introduced me to each other often stating "She is not an outsider" or "She is one of us."<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, it was still hard to conduct such a research, because most of the inhabitants feel saturated with

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<sup>40</sup> "Yabancı değil," "Bizden." I frequently heard these descriptions when I studied on Okmeydanı Cemevi and the other researches related to Alevism. For Alevi people, *outsider* (yabancı) means Sunni people, and *one of us* (bizden) means Alevi. As the Alevism is most prominent identity marker of the neighborhood, I think these descriptions about me refer both to be *Okmeydanlı* and to be an Alevi.

the news about their neighborhood, which appeared on both mainstream and alternative media. Most of them do not want to see representations of their living area with violent acts on media anymore. “The left-wing press is being fed from it” says one inhabitant, “‘This happened in Okmeydanı, that happened in Okmeydanı.’ Okey, they do news, but when they always show conflicts, the pressure increases over here, even buses do not enter the neighborhood.”<sup>41</sup> Another expresses his thoughts as follows: “They reflect like we walk around here all day long with the molotov cocktail in our hands. This is not all about what Okmeydanı is. Yes, there are some violent protests, but we also have objection to them. They should sometimes show the violence that the state applies here.”<sup>42</sup> Finally another states, “I don’t want to neighborhood receive any harm because what I say here. The situation is obvious. They write what they want, without thinking about its consequences. There are people living here. This is not a battlefield.”<sup>43</sup> Another critical subject has been the establishment process of the neighborhood and title deed issue. Since the neighborhood was established as a gecekondu settlement, most of inhabitants do not have title deeds. They started to talk about this issue by the words such as “We are not invaders,” “We purchased lands paying their price.”<sup>44</sup>

Even after they were convinced that I was not a journalist and was more concerned on the history of the neighborhood, some of them still refused to be interviewed, or cancelled their appointment at the last minute. On the other hand,

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<sup>41</sup> “Sol basın da bundan besleniyor. ‘Okmeydanı’nda şu oldu, Okmeydanı’nda bu oldu.’ Tamam haber yapınlar ama hep bir çatışma gösterince de buradaki baskılar artıyor, otobüsler bile mahalleye girmiyor.”

<sup>42</sup> “Yani öyle bir yansıtıyorlar ki sanki biz burada gece gündüz elimizde molotofla geziyoruz. Okmeydanı bundan ibaret değil. Evet, şiddet eylemleri yapanlar var ama biz de onlara itiraz ediyoruz. Biraz da devletin burada uyguladığı şiddeti gösterebilirler.”

<sup>43</sup> “Ben şimdi burada söylediğim şeyler yüzünden mahalleye zarar gelsin istemem, zaten durum ortada. Gidiyorlar, sonuçlarını düşünmeden kafalarına göre bir şeyler yazıyorlar. Burada yaşayan insanlar var. Savaş alanı değil burası.”

<sup>44</sup> “Biz işgalci değiliz,” “Arsaları parasını ödeyip aldık.”

many inhabitants gave me sincere suggestions about what I should write, or whom I should interview. For example, when I met one of my interviewees, there was a group who made an announcement for the 1 May Worker's Day and police intervened them. My interviewee calmed down the tension between the group and police officers asking me to stay distant, then he came back and said me "Write this as well, here you saw that, this is what Okmeydanı is. Children distribute leaflets, what is the problem?"<sup>45</sup> Sometimes I was warned about to be careful taking photos by interviewees stating "They might suspect you," "They might consider you as an agent" or "They might think you came for urban transformation."<sup>46</sup>

Another important issue about Okmeydanı is the ambiguity of its borders. There is an urban renewal plan which includes the whole region, but neighborhoods such as Piyalepaşa, and Mahmut Şevket Paşa were divided parts and were assigned different municipalities. However, as far as I recognized, the borders of the neighborhood in the inhabitants' mind differed from the official borders of Okmeydanı. For example, when they said "neighborhood," they meant that the place ends up at Dört Yol in Kulaksız, where resided most people coming from the Black Sea Region. If we define "neighborhood" as a socially constructed place, with a relatively homogeneous area in terms of demographic composition, communal solidarity, shared values and interests, that part of the region seemed not having any commonality with the rest of Okmeydanı (except for the property issue). To be able to focus on the communal sense of belonging, this area of the neighborhood will be set apart for further research. On the other hand, there are some former inhabitants, who moved out of the neighborhood after selling their houses to contractors.

I interviewed many such former residents who had sold their property because of the

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<sup>45</sup> "Bunu da yaz, gördün işte, Okmeydanı bu. Çocuklar bildiri dağıtıyor, ne var yani bunda?"

<sup>46</sup> "Şüphelenirler," "Ajan sanırlar," "Kentsel dönüşüm için geldin sanırlar."

ambiguous situation of property or because of the concerns about security, but still regularly visit Okmeydanı to work or spend leisure time there. There are also some interviewees who currently live in Örnektepe and Hacıhüsrev,<sup>47</sup> but have strong bonds with Okmeydanı, spending most of time there, and define themselves as *Okmeydanlı*.

During this research, I interviewed 7 women, 13 men, in total 20 people over 30 years old. Most of the interviewees witnessed or actively participated in the establishment process of the neighborhood, and some of them currently led the resistance against the urban transformation project in Okmeydanı. I avoided to interview the representatives of the political organizations in order to listen ordinary people's life-stories instead of political speeches, but as political activism is very common in the neighborhood and a part of some inhabitants' life, it was not appropriate to ignore these part of the narratives. On the other hand, I also interviewed people who were leader of some village, hometown and neighborhood associations besides the attendants of Okmeydanı Cemevi. Sometimes, they asked me to actively participate in these associations rather than remaining a passive observer because they believed that I could be more helpful to defend "our neighborhood" and "our rights" as an "educated person". The most challenging part was perhaps to handle my distance and regulate my relationship with my interviewees.

Most of the interviewees asked for confidentiality. They all expressed their anxiety of getting in trouble because of the critical situation of the neighborhood.

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<sup>47</sup> These two neighborhoods located on the border of Okmeydanı, were established in the same period and through the same phases. Most of their population socialize in Okmeydanı, visiting their relatives, attending the activities and events held in Okmeydanı Cemevi and other associations. They have been through a gentrification process as well. However, they were excluded from the former works which limited by the official borders of Okmeydanı.

Therefore, I have kept their names confidential, giving only the basic demographic information about them in Appendix A. The original Turkish quotations of the narratives were added in Appendix B. There were very strong expressions and terms which signify the narrators' subjectivity and affectivity in the narratives. I preferred to translate them in the way that reflects the meaning of these expressions rather than a literal translation.



## CHAPTER 3

### RETHINKING URBANIZATION PROCESSES IN TURKEY

#### 3. 1 On the concept of urban poverty: from modernization to globalization

Urban poverty as a global issue is strongly related to the processes of industrialization and modernization. Rapid urbanization following the World War II gave rise to what we call ‘urban poverty’ in contemporary usage and, with the beginning of the neoliberal era in the 80s, it has become an intricate problem. The rise of industrialization led to drastic changes in the socio-political and economic structures all over the world. However, consequences-wise, the effects seen in the third world countries differed from the west. While the European countries have continuously (but unevenly) developed since the Industrial Revolution throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and increasingly needed more labor force for the industrial areas, the third world, based on an agricultural economy, started to disintegrate. One of the most significant legacies of this period was the population movements and restructuring of the urban space. In the western countries, the gap between the social classes widened and ethnic differences were accentuated in the process. The urban poor, including the people who migrated from the third world for job opportunities, constituted the ghettos and banlieues at the periphery of the western cities. These settlements are called *slums*, *shantytowns* and *squatter settlements* in English, *les bidonvilles* in French, and *lendsviertel* in German.

Another significant population movement was the internal migration from the rural to the urban areas, especially within the third world. Because the rapid urbanization was not accompanied by social, economic and structural reorganization needed in the urban areas of the third world countries, the solution for the housing

problem of poor migrants who were unable to pay for shelter led to the emergence of the squatter settlements. These settlements were named differently based on the place surrounding them and the specificity of their establishment. They are called as *favela* in Brazil, *villas miseria* in Argentina, *ciudades de refugio* in Colombia, *pueblos jovenes* in Peru, *barriada brujas* in Panama, *poblacionnes callampas* in Chile, *cantegriles* in Uruguay, *rancheros* in Venezuela, *barrios de los pobres* in Ecuador, *colonias proletarias* in Mexico, *basti* in Delhi, *chawls* in Bombay, *bidonville* in Algeria.

Turkish cities witnessed internal rural-urban migration in parallel with the rest of the third world countries. In the Turkish case, glimpses of rural-urban migration can be observed during the late 1930s and 1940s, especially with young people who migrated to the city and town as seasonal workers due to the insufficient income and job opportunities in the rural areas. Yet, mass migration in Turkey only gained significance with the beginning of the 1950s, then the rates gradually increased between 1960s and 1970s. This internal population movement coupled with the migration of guest workers to, what was then, the Federal Republic of Germany. The rapid urbanization in Turkey led to the emergence of squatter housing in the urban areas, called *gecekondu*, nomenclature for a problematic phenomenon. It will be examined in detail in the next sub-heading of this chapter.

Urbanization was considered to be the synonym of modernization in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in fields ranging from social sciences, architecture, economics, and political science as well as in the public discourse. During this period, Chicago School had a great influence on the studies on urbanization, and American sociologist Louis Wirth's definition of the city and the idealization of the urban way of life was commonly accepted. Wirth described the city as a type of community that

is large, dense and consist of socially heterogeneous individuals. He put forward the characteristics of urbanism as anonymity, transitory & impersonal relationships, and secularization of thought.<sup>48</sup> In this sense, urbanization was considered as the criteria of development and modernization. On the other hand, the population of the rural areas typified as traditional society, folk society or preindustrial society and they were seen as manifestations of backwardness. This approach was based on the presupposition of rural-urban dichotomy, and the conjecture that declared urban way of life as the highest level of development that civilizations could reach.

By the impact of the social and political atmosphere in the late 1960s and 1970s, the Marxist approach dominated the academic field, and social inequalities in the urban space became the subject alongside the criticism of the modernization theories. The most referenced authors Lefebvre, Castells and Harvey have discussed the issues related to the urban space such as the right to the city, the democratization of the city, the use value and the exchange value of the urban land, the distribution of the income in the urban space, social justice, social movements and urban movements. French sociologist Henri Lefebvre developed the concept of “the right to the city” that involves the right to participation and the right to appropriation for urban inhabitants.<sup>49</sup> He asserted that there was a need for new urban politics and restructuration of social, political, and economic relations in the city. Lefebvre described “(social) space as a (social) product” and criticized the modernist production of space for its relationship with the capitalist relations of production. He proposed the direct participation for the urban inhabitants to the decision-making

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<sup>48</sup> Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (1938): 1-24.

<sup>49</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968).

process and a shift for the power relations from capital and state to the production of urban space in favor of urban inhabitants.<sup>50</sup>

Influenced by Lefebvre's thoughts, Marxist geographer David Harvey developed the idea that the social processes are spatial. He rejected that the given paradigm that evaluated the social processes and spatial forms as distinct objects of study. Instead, he proposed a conceptual framework which includes "spatial consciousness" or "geographical imagination" besides the "sociological imagination" for understanding city.<sup>51</sup> His great contribution to the field was to reevaluate the right to the city around the concept of social justice. Since the redistribution of income moves towards a state of greater inequality and greater injustice there is a need for application of the principles of the social justice in the spatial system.<sup>52</sup>

Another important scholar who focused on the social aspects in the urban space is the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells. He tackles with urbanization within the framework of dependency theory and demonstrates that "the acceleration of urban growth in the 'underdeveloped' regions, at a higher rate than that of the urban take-off of the industrialized countries, without the concomitant economic growth."<sup>53</sup> In this sense, he puts forward another concept for the urbanization for the 'underdeveloped countries' as an obstacle to development, *over-urbanization*, that refers to "the idea of a level of urbanization higher than which can 'normally' be attained, given the level of industrialization."<sup>54</sup> The situation of the 'underdeveloped' countries highly related to the advanced capitalism, and the domination and dependence produced by imperialist system. However, he reinterprets the

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<sup>50</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

<sup>51</sup> Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1988), 24-27.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>53</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 40.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

dependence as an expression in the internal organization of the dependent societies, and in the articulation of the system of production and class relations.<sup>55</sup> He also focuses on the production and consumption processes in the urban residential system. The urban resistance and the urban social movements occur in these consumption processes and the political struggle constitute the central element of the urban mobilization.<sup>56</sup>

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main focus of the urban studies shifted towards the impact of globalization and neoliberal policies. The most important innovation of globalization is the replacement of the national economies by the growing interdependence in the world economy. Alongside the rising information technologies, this period characterized by the increasing mobility and liquidity of capital. In this new socio-economic order, the flows of capital beyond the geographical, political and ethnic boundaries, privatization, deregulation, the opening up of national economies, and the extending free world market became the key concepts. Furthermore, the most developed cities such as New York, London and Tokyo were represented as the prototypes of a new phenomenon: the global city. On the other hand, with deindustrialization and transformation into consumption society in the global scale, the tertiary sector and luxury consumption became the most significant functions of the global cities. As the transnational capital needed new investment areas, the exchange value of urban land gained importance for the global market. The ground rent, urban renewal and urban transformation projects constituted the subject of debate in this atmosphere. However, all these changes in the socio-spatial structure of the cities, increased the disintegration in the urban space. In parallel with this new order supported by the neoliberal policies,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 325.

reproduction of urban space through the market-led urban process came into question. Thus, the new urban movements took place in reaction to the commodification and privatization of the urban land. Besides the urban conflict, the subjects related to the urban issues varied from locality, human behavior, ecological problems, to the gender and everyday life in the urban space.

### 3. 2 Rapid urbanization and the emergence of the gecekondu settlements in the 1950s and 1960s

The modernization and industrialization process in 1950s and 1960s, caused rapid urban growth and in relation to this we witnessed the emergence of the urban poverty as a result of the internal rural-urban migration. This rapid urbanization process has been explained widely through push and pull factors for rural population migrated to the cities. The unequal division of the land, low productivity, and mechanization in agriculture are considered as push factors in the rural areas. As English historian Bernard Lewis remarked, the government of the Republican People's Party attempted to change the unequal division of the land in the rural areas passing a land reform bill in 1945. The purposes of this law were providing land and means for landless peasants, and to make the arable lands used effectively. However, the implementation of the law failed due to the political reasonings. Then migration had accelerated in search of job opportunities, better income, better living conditions, education and health services –these are described as pull factors for the urban areas. Consequently, the urbanization had gradually increased during the 1950s and 1960s. In that period, since the housing stock in the cities was insufficient to answer the housing needs that stemmed from the mass migration, and the newcomers had no opportunity to buy or rent the houses offered, they have built gecekondu at the

periphery of the city where close to the jobs available to them. In the 1960s, the number of gecekondu in Turkey reached 465.000 and the population of the gecekondu were about 2 million people.<sup>57</sup> According to the report of State Planning Organization dated 1967, the proportion of gecekondu in total number of houses was 65% in Ankara, 40% in Istanbul, 24% in Izmir, and the proportion of gecekondu population in total population of the city was 59% in Ankara, 45% in Istanbul, and 33% in Izmir.<sup>58</sup>

The term gecekondu derives from the construction method of the shelter, which means, “built overnight” in Turkish. This shelter was built overnight invisibly, using the cheapest materials and needed to be completed immediately. Otherwise, it could be subjected to the legal action by municipal police since the legislative regulations allowed to demolish the structure in the building process. When it was built and completed overnight, then municipal police needed to get the decision from legal authorities. That is why gecekondu usually were built at night, in cooperation with the neighbors and relatives. According to the law 775 of July 20, 1966, gecekondu were described as “structures built on the lands which do not belong to the builder, without the consent of the owner of the land, and inconsistent with the laws and regulations concerning reconstruction and building operation”.<sup>59</sup> In many studies, the terms of “slum”, “shanty towns” or “squatter settlements” used for describing the gecekondu areas. In this research, taking into consideration the social aspects and the particularity of the phenomenon in Turkey, we prefer to use the term gecekondu, both to highlight and to preserve its connotation.

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<sup>57</sup> *Konut Özel İhtisas Komisyonu Raporu* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı Yayınları, 1966), 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Konut, İkinci Beş Yıllık Plan Çalışmaları* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı Yayınları, 1967), 14.

<sup>59</sup> *T.C. Resmi Gazete*, no. 12362, July 30, 1966.

The gecekondu settlements have always been considered as a problem needed to be solved by governments and various measures taken from time to time. As Metin Heper cited in his work on the policies developed by governments for the solution of this “problem,” in 1930s several measures proposed for the regulation of migration to prevent rapid urban growth, such as necessity to obtain permission and special urbanization taxes from the new arrivals and to create urban activity in the rural areas.<sup>60</sup> The first legislative regulation for the gecekondu settlements was enacted in 1948 and was only valid for Ankara.<sup>61</sup> Then in 1949, another law was enacted which facilitated to demolish the gecekondu that had been built without construction permit. According to this law, the structures started to be built without obtaining construction permit shall be stopped immediately by the municipalities. If the structure is not deemed to be inadequate, the building inspection fee was taken as four floors. If the structure is found to be essentially inadequate and inconsistent with the provisions of this law, it will be demolished. In case the municipal committee decides to demolish the structures, the municipal police evacuate the structures until the finalization of the demolition decisions. The state police will use force for those who resist to municipal police. If the construction is to be built on private property, it will immediately be demolished and at the same time, a light sentence and a light fine that is no fewer than 100 Turkish liras will be imposed on the concerned parties by the courts of sessions.<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, the growing housing problem in the urban space has become a significant issue in the political sphere and the gecekondu population turned into an important pressure group on politics. Politicians have had different

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<sup>60</sup> Metin Heper, *Gecekondu Policy in Turkey: An Evaluation with A Case Study of Rumelihisariüsti Squatter Area in Istanbul* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi University, 1978), 17.

<sup>61</sup> *T.C. Resmi Gazete*, no. 6938, Law No. 5218, June 22, 1948.

<sup>62</sup> *T.C. Resmi Gazete*, no.7230, Law No. 5431, June 11, 1949.

attitudes towards the gecekondu areas. Especially in the local election periods, the politicians attempted to develop policies for these regions on the purpose to gain the votes from the inhabitants. As Tansı Şenyapılı remarks, a year before the 1954 elections, Democrat Party government enacted a law on Encouragement of Building Construction and Unauthorized Buildings (Law no. 6188) and allowed municipalities to purchase state land and to build of low-cost houses on them. This regulation involved only the gecekondu dwellers who have lived in the city more than two years but did not provide any solution for the newcomers.<sup>63</sup> This attitude of politicians repeated in later election periods and they distributed or at least promised to distribute title deeds besides providing public services for the gecekondu settlements.

In 1963, with the first comprehensive and detailed law regarding gecekondu that is named Gecekondu Act (Gecekondu Kanunu), the term of gecekondu was formally acknowledged by the authorities. This law proposed by the coalition government led by İsmet İnönü and was enacted in 1966. According to this law, the lands that belong to state and located within the boundaries of the municipalities are to pass into the ownership of the municipalities for free, to use for the purposes that designated in the Law 6785 (Art.3). The reclamation and dischargement areas of the gecekondu, and their boundaries will be determined by the municipalities by using all means and facilities, within 6 months from the date of publication of this law (Art. 16). After the date of entry into force of this law, all the structures built on the state lands without construction permit, will be immediately demolished by the municipal or the state police, without any decision being made (Art.18).<sup>64</sup> Those had been built before this law entry into force will be reclaimed and the owners of this houses will

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<sup>63</sup> Tansı Şenyapılı, *Gecekondu: 'Çevre' İşçilerin Mekanı* (Ankara: ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi, 1981), 202-203.

<sup>64</sup> *T.C. Resmi Gazete*, no.12362, Law No.775, July 30, 1966.

be burden with debt. The solution provided through the Act was to improve those gecekondu settlements which were in relatively good condition but to demolish those in poor condition and to prevent further construction.

Despite all the regulations, most of the gecekondu dwellers could not afford the cost of amelioration of their houses or get their title deeds and remained vulnerable to the legal actions. On the other hand, in many cases, the regulations could not be implemented. One of the most important reasons of this failure was the attitude of municipal police towards the dwellers. They have tended to overlook the gecekondus that had to be demolished and they neglected to implement the law. Since some of the municipal polices were also gecekondu dwellers themselves, they have developed empathy with the people who would lose their houses. Moreover, the municipal police have made profit by taking bribes from migrants when they overlooked the gecekondus. Consequently, the gecekondu settlements as an unintended consequence of the Turkish urbanization process stayed in existence until the late 1980s and was transformed into apartments with the neoliberal policies of the decade.

### 3. 3 Commenting on the urbanization literature in Turkey

The rapid urbanization and its consequences urban poverty and gecekondu settlements became of interest to scholars from various fields such as sociology, anthropology, political science, urban planning and architecture. To understand today's situation and evolution of the approaches towards the urban poverty and the urban poor neighborhoods, we need to look over the beginning of the discussions about urbanization and its consequences in Turkey. In this part, the common

approaches in the early studies on the subject are overviewed and the most prominent works are summarized.

Adopting the western way of modernization and urbanization, the urban elites of the early republican period considered the rural way of life as backward and regarded rural migrants in the urban space as an obstacle for the progress, for the attainment of western standards in the structural and social order of the city. Gecekondu settlements described in the public discourse as the ugly areas that resulted from unplanned urban sprawl and discussed excluding its social, cultural and economic aspects. As the academic discourse is not totally independent from the public discourse, most of the early studies influenced by the modernization theories, based on the presupposition of a linear transformation from rural to urban society. This idealization of the “urban way of life” involved an integration process for the rural migrants live in the urban space to achieve the highest level of urbanization which refers to “ideal city” and “ideal urbanite” concepts.<sup>65</sup> In that sense, the studies conducted between the 1950s and 1970s on the gecekondu settlements in Turkey, mostly focused on the integration issue and involved an effort to find a way to assimilate the rural migrants into the urban population. The gecekondu settlements are regarded as a temporary solution for the housing problem of the rural migrants and would be disappeared at the end of the integration process. Likewise, the traditional rural elements and folk culture maintained in these settlements would be eliminated.

The very first discussions in the field of urban planning and architecture were around the housing shortage in the cities. Scholars regarded the gecekondu settlements as a problem resulting from the unplanned urban growth and argued that

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<sup>65</sup> Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life.”

this could be easily solved through several measures to be taken by the government. We need to consider that the number of gecekondu were approximately 5.000 in that period. Architect and economist Ekmel Zamil regarded the housing shortage as a global problem which led to the emergence of the gecekondu settlements and he suggested that the government can solve this problem by measures in the housing distribution.<sup>66</sup> After visiting the gecekondu settlements in Kazlıçeşme and Zeytinburnu, he describes the structure of houses in detailed in his article and defined the settlements where the migrants lived as an autonomous community in detached houses. On the contrary to the accusatory approach of the media and parliament members in this period, he defended the gecekondu dwellers as poor migrants who had to be self-helped against the housing shortage problem. He emphasized unequal housing opportunities between migrants and the people who had more than one houses and recognized housing as an indispensable right for the rural migrants as well as the urbanites.

A homeless, miserable person is harmful and dangerous for the community, a person who wants to shelter under a roof with his family and children is worthy and useful and helpful. A citizen living in gecekondu under bad circumstances deserve more admiration than a person who occupies two or three houses in this housing crisis. The one who built gecekondu has established a roof, with intent not to be a vagabond; although he did not get help from the community, he wanted to save himself and to take his place in the society by his own means; our sympathy is always with them.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ekmel Zamil, "İstanbul'da Mesken Mes'eleleri ve Gecekondu," in *İçtimai Siyaset Konferansları* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1949).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 80. "Evsiz, barksız bir sefil, cemiyet için zararlı ve tehlikeli bir mahlûktur; ailesi ve çocukları ile birlikte bir çatı altında barınmak isteyen bir ferd ise, kıymetli ve faydalı bir varlıktır. Kötü şartlar altında Gecekonducularda yaşayan bir vatandaş, bu mesken buhranında iki üç ev işgal eden bir kimseden-daha fazla takdire lâyıktır. Gecekondu kurucusu barksız bir serseri olmamak için, bir çatı kurmuştur; cemiyetten yardım görmediği halde, kendi imkânlarıyla kendi kendini kurtarmak ve cemiyet içindeki yerini almak istemiştir; Sempatimiz daima bunlarla beraberdir." (Translated by the author).

In parallel with consistent increase in the numbers migrating from rural to urban areas between 1950s and 1960s, gecekondu settlements and their inhabitants have become more visible both at the periphery and at the center of the cities. Since the existence of the rural migrant population in the urban space could not be ignored anymore, the researches based on the fieldwork appeared during this period. The very first monography on the subject was penned by İbrahim Öğretmen and focused on the demolishing process of the gecekondu in the center of Ankara, in Çankaya and Altındağ districts.<sup>68</sup> Then in 1964, Granville H. Sewell studied on Akdere using questionnaires and interview methods. He approached gecekondu settlement as a problem of urbanization arose in the transition process from traditional to modern society.<sup>69</sup> In the same year, many researches had been conducted by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement to find a solution to the gecekondu problem.

The work of sociologist İbrahim Yasa, *Ankara'da Gecekondu Aileleri* (The Gecekondu Families in Ankara) has also important place in the early gecekondu studies. He also attributed a transitory character to the settlements and aimed to observe the change of the values and lifestyle of the migrants during adaptation process to the urban life. He regarded the traditional way of life of gecekondu family as neither urban nor rural but as temporary imitation of urban culture and suggested that it would disappear at the end of the integration process.<sup>70</sup> At the appendix of his book, the narratives on the life-stories of gecekondu population are presented. Despite these are not directly from the voice of the interviewees, it is still very striking to find such a data between the early gecekondu studies.

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<sup>68</sup> İbrahim Öğretmen, *Ankara'da 158 Gecekondu Hakkında Monografi* (Ankara: Ajans Türk Matbaası, 1957).

<sup>69</sup> Granville H. Sewell, *Squatter Settlements in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

<sup>70</sup> İbrahim Yasa, *Ankara'da Gecekondu Aileleri* (Ankara: Akın Matbaası, 1966).

Another study which had an impact on the gecekondu policies, Charles W. M. Hart's *Zeytinburnu Gecekondu Bölgesi* (Zeytinburnu Gecekondu Area) was published in 1969. Hart conducted this research using questionnaires, and participant observation methods and especially focused on the housing problems of the dwellers.<sup>71</sup> The research was financed by Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement, then the staff of the Ministry trained by Hart conducted more researches in the gecekondu settlements of Ankara, Izmir and Istanbul. The results of these researches evaluated by Turhan Yörükân, using the notions of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* of Tönnies, and *sacred* and *secular* of Becker in the context of rural-urban dichotomy.<sup>72</sup>

During the late 1960s and 1970s, inspired by the civil rights movement in the West, the leftist political groups began to criticize the class inequalities in the Turkish society, and started developing sympathy for the working classes. Latter was consisted of the gecekondu dwellers. With this sympathetic approach, the representation of the gecekondu people as the “rural other”<sup>73</sup> in the public discourse has changed and scholars have tended to examine the gecekondu phenomenon as a result of economic and social inequalities. One of the representative scholars in this period was sociologist Mübeccel Kıray who made a great contribution to the Turkish urban studies literature. When she examined the social structure of Ereğli before the establishment of iron and steel plant and social changes brought along industrialization, she developed the “buffer mechanism” concept to explain social reorganization during the transition from “feudal rural society” to “modern urban

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<sup>71</sup> Charles W. M. Hart, *Zeytinburnu Gecekondu Bölgesi* (İstanbul: İstanbul Ticaret Odası, 1969).

<sup>72</sup> Turhan Yörükân, *Gecekondu ve Gecekondu Bölgelerinin Sosyo-Kültürel Özellikleri* (Ankara: İmar ve İskan Bakanlığı, 1965).

<sup>73</sup> For an analysis on the changing representations of the gecekondu population, see Tahire Erman, “The Politics of Squatter (Gecekondu) Studies in Turkey: The Changing Representations of Rural Migrants in the Academic Discourse,” *Urban Studies* 38, no. 7 (2001): 983–1002.

society”.<sup>74</sup> The buffer mechanism concept used later by many scholars to explain the emergence of the gecekondu settlement as a temporary solution for the housing problem of rural migrants in the urban area. The social networks provided in the gecekondu settlements for the newcomers such as communal solidarity make easier the integration process of the migrants to the urban environment and allows a smooth transition from rural to urban way of life. Kıray regarded gecekondu settlements as an inevitable result of rapid urbanization in the developing and non-industrialized countries. She stated at the Seminar on Gecekondu, at the Chamber of Geomatic Engineers in 1970, that:

The construction of the gecekondus cannot be considered as an intentional crime, regardless of whether they were built on someone else's land or it is considered to inconvenient to the standards. It is impossible for the settlers to return to the village. 70% of the gecekondu people in Ankara stated that they migrated because they were landless and unemployed in the village. The jobs they find here and the income they receive do not allow them to reside in a different place. Since they are unable to increase their income or to change the conditions of industrialization that will provide it, we should accept the gecekondus as a complete reflection of our underdeveloped, non-industrialized socio-economic order.<sup>75</sup>

The most referenced work in the studies related to the gecekondu settlements today still is the work of historian Kemal H. Karpat.<sup>76</sup> He conducted a very comprehensive research and detailed analysis on three gecekondu settlements in

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<sup>74</sup> Mübeccel Kıray, *Ereğli: Ağır Sanayiden Önce Bir Sahil Kasabası* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı Yayınları, 1964).

<sup>75</sup> Mübeccel Kıray, *Toplumbilim Yazıları* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi, 1982), 278. “İster başkasının arazisi üzerine inşa edildiği isterse standart normlara uymadığı düşünülün yani iki temel hukuk kaidesini ihlal ettiği göz önünde tutulsun, gecekondu inşası kasıtlı bir suç addedilemez. Buralara yerleşenlerin fiilen köye dönmeleri imkansızdır. Ankara gecekondularında yüzde 70'i köyde topraksız ve işsiz olduklarından göçtüklerini bildirmişlerdir. Burada bulabildikleri işler ve ellerine geçen gelir de başka türlü bir yerde oturmalarına izin vermemektedir. Gelirlerini arttırmak ya da bunu temin edecek sanayileşme şartlarını kökünden değiştirmek de onların ellerinde olmadığına göre, gecekonduları bugünkü az gelişmiş, sanayileşmemiş sosyo-ekonomik düzenimizin tam bir yansıması sayıp öylece kabul etmemiz gerekir.” (Translated by the author).

<sup>76</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *The Gecekondu: Rural Migration and Urbanization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

Istanbul, namely Nafibaba (Hisarüstü), Baltalimanı and Ahmet Celaleddin Paşa (Emirgan) in 1968. This research was conducted by a group of researchers, using questionnaires prepared by both categorical and open-ended questions with a total population about 3500 of five hundred dwellings. Karpat's purpose was to investigate the socioeconomic background of the migration and urbanization of the rural migrants living in these gecekondu settlements. He adopted a global perspective on the phenomenon, and he made a comparative analysis on squatter settlements of Turkey and the third world countries. He emphasized that these settlements were an almost natural step for modernization and urbanization in the third world countries. In the context of the rural-urban continuum and the modernization process in these countries, he regarded the settlements not as a deviation from but as a part of the process. Comparing the gecekondu settlement with the squatter structures in the third world and western countries, he argued that the former was similar with the latter ones in terms of the emergence and structural properties, but it had historical, economic and cultural specificities in Turkey. For instance, the slums in the western countries characterized by the poverty and misery, had been constructed in accordance with the regulations of reconstruction and considered as modern houses at the beginning. Then they became old and fusty overtime and started to be preferred by poor people. However, the gecekondu, since its construction process was already inconsistent with the regulations, under the housing standards and unhealthy shelter.<sup>77</sup> It differs from the slum in terms of social and cultural properties as well. Karpat described slums as "a dismal gathering of people with little in common" while remarking that the gecekondu settlements had a community spirit

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<sup>77</sup> For an example of the construction process of gecekondu, see Nursun Ertuğrul, "Gecekondu Yapım Süreci," *Mimarlık*, 152 (1977): 105-109.

and solidarity between its dwellers.<sup>78</sup> He emphasized that there was no “culture of poverty” in the gecekondü settlements on the contrary to the slums.<sup>79</sup>

Taking into consideration the macro factors involved in rural migration and urbanization, Karpat regarded the gecekondü settlements as a “by-product of the malfunctioning of the economic and social system” and proposes to examine the migrants’ relations with the urban environment by the concept of economic marginality.<sup>80</sup> In that sense, the gecekondü settlements are considered not as a problem but a solution to a problem. Remarking “push factors” (poverty, low income, unproductive agriculture, lack of educational and medical facilities) and “pull factors” (the opportunities for employment, higher income and availability of educational, medical and other facilities) in rural migration, he demonstrated these reasons were common in most of the third world countries. While the population growth was above or equal to economic growth, living standards cannot increase and a state of unemployment or marginal employment of the population occur. Although he rejected the elitist approach and western concept of urbanism when evaluating the third world cities, he still regarded the gecekondü settlements and the traditional way of life maintained by migrants, as a result of the urbanization process not accompanied by adequate industrialization and economic development.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, he objected Wirth’s urbanization model that requires the elimination of the traditional elements which constitute folk culture, such as kinship bonds, traditional attachments, solidarity, and he emphasized the coexistence of urban and rural cultures in the gecekondü settlements.

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<sup>78</sup> Karpat, *The Gecekondü: Rural Migration and Urbanization*, 247, note, 72.

<sup>79</sup> For a detailed explanation for culture of poverty, see Oscar Lewis, *Anthropological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1970).

<sup>80</sup> Karpat, *The Gecekondü: Rural Migration and Urbanization*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Metin Heper also studied emergence and development of Rumelihisarüstü (Nafibaba) gecekondu settlement focusing on the development of housing policy in Turkey.<sup>82</sup> He examined the legal, administrative, and financial aspects of the policies carried out until 1977. He described the measures such as legislative regulations and increase of social housing to prevent establishment of gecekondu and land speculation, then he explained ineffectiveness of them because both types of measures were largely assigned to the municipalities while they do not had adequate opportunities and not supported by the central government. He remarked the exploitative attitudes of politicians towards the settlements and the lack of coordination between related agencies.<sup>83</sup> As a solution to the gecekondu problem, he proposed to accelerate industrialization besides the new regulations.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the focus shifted to the economic aspects of the subject. Especially two important works based on the dependency theory, evaluated the urban poverty in the framework of the center-periphery conceptualization. One of them is Tansı Şenyapılı's work in which she examines gecekondu population considering its function in the economic system.<sup>84</sup> She emphasizes that rural migrants provided cheap labor force needed in newly industrializing economy and the gecekondu settlements fulfill the shelter need for this population. She conducted her research in 1976, in Gazi Osman Paşa, Gültepe, Eminönü, and İstinye in Istanbul, and Akdere, Tuzluçayır, and Yıldız in Ankara. The second important work in this context published by Danielson and Keleş. In this work, adopting a critical approach towards the modernization theories, Keleş stated

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<sup>82</sup> Heper, *Gecekondu Policy in Turkey*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>84</sup> Şenyapılı, *Gecekondu: 'Çevre' İşçilerin Mekanı*.

that urbanization should not be used as a synonym for modernization and industrialization.

Instead, urbanization refers to a particular element of the development process – the concentration of population in relatively large settlements. Concentrating people into large settlements is associated with distinctive economic, social, and political changes, such as specialization of the labor force, alterations in family structure, and changes in the political attitudes of urban dwellers.<sup>85</sup>

Keleş rejected the concepts that commonly used in the gecekondu studies such as integration, marginality, informality arguing these concepts were imported from the western understanding and not convenient to explain the Turkish experience in its particularity. His main point was the relations between the political parties and the gecekondu dwellers. According to him, the populist policies of the governments accelerated the migration from rural to urban areas and increased the establishment of the gecekondu settlements.

The most common problem of the early studies was to consider urban poor and gecekondu settlements as a homogeneous population and stereotyped as rural migrants. Adopting a simple dichotomy between rural migrants and urbanites, they neglected social and cultural differences inside both categories. Therefore, the results of a research conducted in a gecekondu settlement frequently generalized for any urban poor settlement throughout the country neglecting their diversities. On the other hand, the rising conflicts between radical leftist and rightist groups in the gecekondu areas during 1970s, changed this perception of the homogeneity about these areas. By the emergence of the identity movements under the influence of the neoliberal politics in the 1980s, the modernization theories abandoned, and the

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<sup>85</sup> Michael N. Danielson and Ruşen Keleş, *The Politics of Rapid Urbanization* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 3.

cultural, ethnic, religious and political diversity of the urban poor population became apparent in the later studies.

#### 3. 4 Resituating the gecekondu settlements: neoliberal policies and globalization

The 1980s was a period characterized by the market-oriented economy in the global extent. The relocation of industry caused by the rise of the tertiary sector, brought about the restructuring of the urban space. Turkish society has also experienced significant social, political and economic changes during this period. After the 1980 coup d'état, the military government established an excessive control in all fields. By the end of the military government in 1983, the liberal economy and IMF policies adopted by civilian government led by Turgut Özal in order to integrate the Turkish economy to the liberal world. With the regulations such as funds for land acquisition provided by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement, implementation of city plans, the National Fund for Gecekondu for service improvements in the gecekondu settlements, land acquisition, and housing development, mortgage loans for low-cost housing provided by the Real Estate Bank (Emlâk Kredi Bankası) and the Mass Housing Administration (Toplu Konut İdaresi) allowed large construction firms to enter the housing market and land speculation. In addition, because of the upper classes tended to move to the peripheral urban lands, and the competitive housing demand, to establish gecekondu settlements in these areas became difficult during this period. Although the construction of new gecekondu became impossible in 1980s, the gecekondu settlements already established gained a permanent character by the legislative regulations in this period. These regulations encouraged the gecekondu dwellers and contractors for profit-making from gecekondu lands as an income generator. The continuous migration and housing shortage contributed to

turning gecekondur land into a commodity. During this process, the new interest groups have emerged such as land speculators and land mafia.<sup>86</sup> Then the gecekondus replaced by multi-storeys apartments and the image of the gecekondur owners as poor migrants who needed a shelter replaced by the “undeserving rich Other” that means a new group of people who became wealthy in a short period of time.<sup>87</sup> In addition, the architectures and urban planners have maintained the elitist approach towards the gecekondur population, attributed them an opportunist character on the one hand, and on the other, they blamed the housing policies of the government to make possible land speculations, illegal housing and unplanned urbanization.<sup>88</sup>

In the 1990s, a new mass migration from the South East to the West of Turkey occurred. This migration was totally different from the former ones and it is called “forced migration.” Sema Erder emphasizes the traumatic difference between the former migration that is “gradual” and “voluntary,” and the new migration wave that occurred “abruptly,” “widely” and “obligatory.” She describes the new migration wave as a “migration of peasants who do not have village anymore.”<sup>89</sup> The rural migrants who had come to the cities between 1950s and 1980s had a support from their relatives living in the village and had an opportunity to go back to their villages if they could not survive in the city. However, in this period, the migrants did not have such a support and had no opportunity to go back. As the forced deportation occurred suddenly and the migrants could not do any preparation for it, most of them left behind their properties and came to the urban areas in a state of

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<sup>86</sup> “Arazi mafyası” or “gecekondur mafyası” in Turkish.

<sup>87</sup> Erman, “The Politics of Squatter (Gecekondur) Studies in Turkey.”

<sup>88</sup> For a significant work in the field of architecture, see Dođan Kuban, *Istanbul, an Urban History: Byzantium, Constantinopolis, Istanbul* (Istanbul: Economic and Social History Foundation of Turkey, 1996).

<sup>89</sup> Sema Erder, *Istanbul Bir Kervansaray (mı?)* (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015).

poverty. Consequently, these migrants settled in the gecekondular areas mostly as the tenants and contributed to social, cultural and economic diversity of the gecekondular population. In parallel with the transformation of the gecekondular population, especially in the late 1990s, a new term “varoş”<sup>90</sup> appeared first in the media and public discourse and for the population of these settlements the varoşlu started to be used with a negative connotation. This term highlights the cultural inferiority and the lack of aesthetic of consumption rather than the rural way of life. The public perception about the ‘rural migrants’ of the gecekondulars turned into ‘threatening, marginal and criminal’ population of the varoş areas.<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, since the 1990s, as a result of globalization and the rising concept of ‘global city’ or ‘world city,’ the urban space became the most beneficial source of investment and urban renewal and urban transformation projects came into question. However, these transformation processes caused new forms of urban segregation and inequalities in most of global cities of advanced capitalist states.<sup>92</sup> As for Turkey, since the 1980s, there was an attempt for such a transformation by opening the economy to global capital and commodity flows. During the period of the 1984-1989 when Bedrettin Dalan was the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, the infrastructural investment and development projects started to be applied with the aim of turning Istanbul into ‘a world city.’<sup>93</sup> Then the late 1990s and 2000s urban transformation and urban renewal projects appeared on the government programs. In this period, global capital entered to the Turkish economy, especially in the real estate investment. The shopping malls, five-star hotels, ultra-luxury

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<sup>90</sup> The term *varoş* means the neighborhoods outside the city walls in Hungarian.

<sup>91</sup> Zeliha Etöz, “Varoş: Bir İstila Bir Tehdit,” *Birikim*, no.132 (2000).

<sup>92</sup> See Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>93</sup> Tuna Kuyucu and Özlem Ünsal, “‘Urban Transformation’ as State-led Property Transfer: An Analysis of Two Cases of Urban Renewal in Istanbul,” *Urban Studies* 47, no.7 (2010), 1484.

residences have been built in various areas of Istanbul. However, with the increasing real estate values, surviving in the urban space became very difficult for the urban poor, particularly for the population of former gecekondu settlements which are targeted by the urban transformation projects. After the disastrous incident of the Gölçük earthquake in 17 August 1999, the threat of the earthquake used to legitimize the destruction of the gecekondu or multi-storey buildings constructed by the inhabitants of these settlements. The experts reported that these structures were not earthquake-resistant and state-led urban transformation projects (UTPs) had become the main topic of the agenda. The claim was to transform urban space into more prestigious, healthier, secure and cleaner living space for the citizens. Nevertheless, in most cases, such as Sulukule, Tarlabası, and Fikirtepe, UTPs meant to the gentrification of the urban space by the hand of the state, changing of the land ownership, and cleansing the urban centers of the poor population. Kuyucu and Ünsal describe the UTPs aim as follows;

These large renewal programmes are the primary mechanisms by which a capitalist logic is imposed on urban land and housing markets, especially in incompletely commodified informal housing areas and ‘rundown’ inner-city neighbourhoods. By redefining property rules and market dynamics, the UTPs achieve two major goals: physical and demographic ‘upgrading’ of particular localities within the city and the construction of a neo-liberal regime of governance that no longer tolerates the legal ambiguities and the incompletely commodified market structure characterising these areas.<sup>94</sup>

The legal ambiguities with regards to the property and the marginalizing representation of these settlements in the national media have provided justification for the need for UTPs in these areas. When the prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan described the settlements as “tumors” surrounding cities and should be

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 1480.

removed,<sup>95</sup> the UTPs were presented as the solution to the social problems. In many cases, the attitude of the inhabitants of the gecekondu settlements towards these projects was resistance because they were excluded from the decision-making process. They regard the whole process unfair for them and refuse to sign the agreements offered by the municipal authorities. The inhabitants' aim is to protect their lifestyle and houses since the intervention through the UTPs to these areas mostly resulted by displacement and dispossession of the urban poor for the benefit of the coalition of urban developers, credit institutions, real estate investors, and local and central state actors.

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<sup>95</sup> Şenol Başta kar, "Şehri ur gibi sardılar, niye zavallı oluyorlar," *Sabah*, April 9, 2006. Retrieved from <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/04/09/eko106.html>

## CHAPTER 4

### HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF OKMEYDANI

#### 4. 1 Okmeydanı in the Ottoman period

Okmeydanı, as its name refers to the square of the arrow in Turkish, was the place that allocated for the archery training after the conquest of Istanbul in 1453.

According to some authors, this area was very precious for Fatih the Conqueror and he ordered “do not allow even birds pass over here.”<sup>96</sup> The lands of Okmeydanı were extended by Sultan Bayezid II and registered as the property of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation (see Figure 2), which means the lands allocated for public interest and cannot be sold or turn into private property.



Figure 2. Okmeydanı from C. Stolpe's map of Constantinople prepared in Berlin (1866)<sup>97</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Cahit Avcı, "Okmeydanı," *TOK Belleteni* 51, no. 330 (1976), 12-17.

<sup>97</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.swaen.com/zoomV2.php?id=24801&zif\\_first=true](http://www.swaen.com/zoomV2.php?id=24801&zif_first=true)

It is accepted by some authors as the first sports area in Istanbul established by Turks, having the oldest, biggest, and richest arrow monuments all over the world.<sup>98</sup> The grand vizier Iskender Pasha made built a lodge there for the archers that was called Okçular Tekkesi or Kemankeşler (Tirendazlar) Dergâhı in 1484, and later a minbar and *namazgâh*<sup>99</sup> were built by Gürcü Mehmet Pasha in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Besides the archery training area, there was a resort area that hosted the feasts and circumcision ceremonies of Sultan's sons and it was open to the public use. However, by the mid-1800s the sultans had no interest in Okmeydanı and archery. After the lodge partially destroyed in the earthquake in 1894, it did not be repaired.<sup>100</sup>

As Özbay Güven cited, the archery training in Okmeydanı was accompanied by the audiences, and the archers had shown their abilities in the form of ceremony in every Mondays and Thursdays. After they performed in competitions, the feasts were given to the honor of them, the archers rewarded by the appellation of *kemankeş*<sup>101</sup> and being capable to perform in the presence of the sultans.<sup>102</sup> Figure 3 shows the location of arrow monuments in Okmeydanı in 1869. The archery area drew attention of some artists as well. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Luigi Mayer painted Okmeydanı, describing the archery practice in the area (see Figure 4).

An important foundation, Darülaceze was established in Okmeydanı by Abdülhamit II, in 1895 (see Figure 5). This foundation served as an asylum for orphans, homeless aged and disabled people, and today it still maintains this function for homeless aged and disabled people.

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<sup>98</sup> Güven, "Türk Kültüründe Kaybolan Miraslarımızdan İstanbul Ok Meydanı Spor Alanı."

<sup>99</sup> Place for praying outdoors that shows the kiblâh direction.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 15-17.

<sup>101</sup> *Kemankeş* means being master in archery.

<sup>102</sup> Güven, "Türk Kültüründe Kaybolan Miraslarımızdan İstanbul Ok Meydanı Spor Alanı," and Ünver, *İstanbul Risaleleri*.

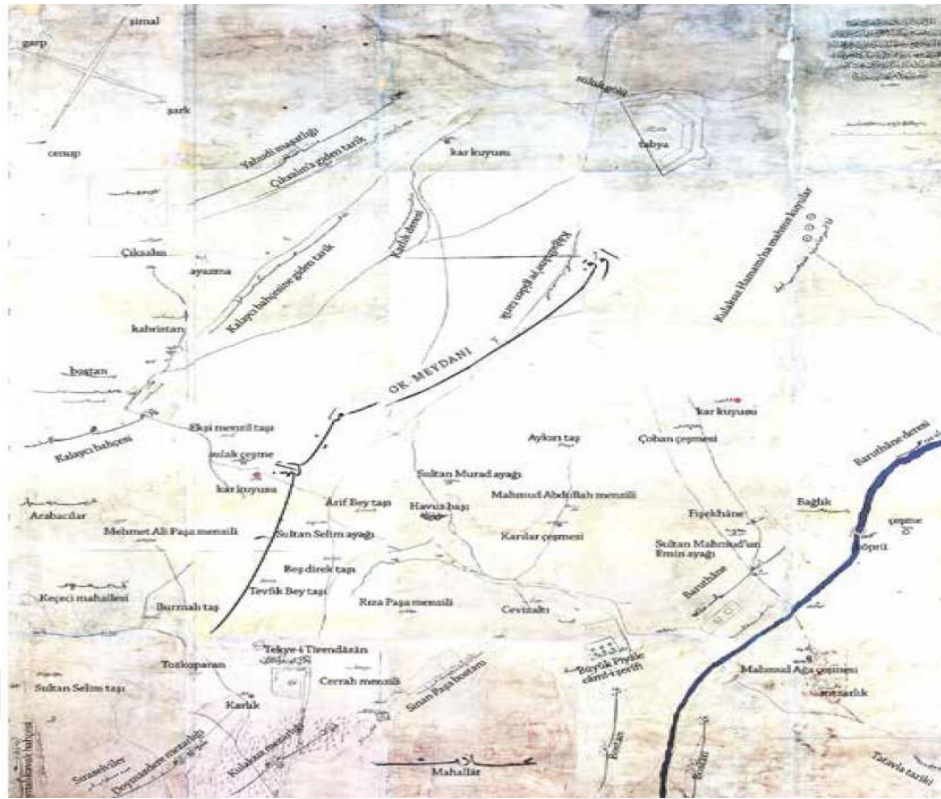


Figure 3. The map of Okmeydanı prepared by lieutenant Lütfi Efendi (1869)<sup>103</sup>



Figure 4. Luigi Mayer's painting of Okmeydanı (18th century)<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.okcularvakfi.org/istanbul-Okmeydani-ve-Okcular-Tekkesi-s-18>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.



Figure 5. Darülaceze (19th century)<sup>105</sup>

Another historical place, Okmeydanı Baruthanesi<sup>106</sup> which can be seen in Figure 6, was established to produce gunpowder in 1578. According to the archival sources, this manufactory was abandoned after the fire broke out in 1596.<sup>107</sup> Until 2018, there was no intervention or renovation attempt by the authorities, but in that year Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality started to renovate this historical structure.<sup>108</sup> This renovation process still continues and it is planning to establish a business center which will include several offices for trade affairs after the renovation will be completed. This is only one of the examples of the gentrification attempts that came about in Okmeydanı in recent decade.

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<sup>105</sup> Nevzat Özkaya, *Darülaceze albümü* (İstanbul: Darülaceze Yayınları, 2013).

<sup>106</sup> Gunpowder factory.

<sup>107</sup> İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilatında Kapıkulu Ocakları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988), 20, 117.

<sup>108</sup> *TRT Haber*, July 1, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/kultur-sanat/tarihi-okmeydani-baruthanesi-restore-ediliyor-372936.html>



Figure 6. Okmeydanı Baruthanesi (2018)<sup>109</sup>

The limited works on Okmeydanı mostly focused on the Ottoman heritage, and historical importance and privilege of the place, which criticized the negligent attitude of governments and inhabitants towards the monuments found in this place.<sup>110</sup> The current inhabitants of Okmeydanı were described as invaders in these works, ignoring the social and economic aspects of the Turkish urbanization. In addition, the decisions about protection of Okmeydanı dated back to 1938, and the High Commission of the Old Real Estates and Monuments (Gayrimenkul Eski Eserler ve Anıtlar Yüksek Kurulu) introduced a ban to construct any building in this area in 1961. Then it was decided to establish an open air museum in 1985, but any of these decisions were not implemented.<sup>111</sup> Since the first settlements appeared in this area after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), which were increased during the rural-urban migration in the late 1950s and 1960s, these monuments were destroyed or left between disordered structures. Today, most of the monuments were transferred to the

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<sup>109</sup> Retrieved from <https://ibbqr.ibb.gov.tr/beyoglu-okmeydani-baruthane-binasi-restorasyon-insaati/>

<sup>110</sup> According to Güven, there was 50 arrow monuments and 4 boundary stones located in Okmeydanı, until 1995.

<sup>111</sup> Güven, “Türk Kültüründe Kaybolan Miraslarımızdan İstanbul Ok Meydanı Spor Alanı,” 18.

Okçular Tekkesi to be exhibited in the courtyard of the lodge, but we could still find several monuments at some sides of the area or in the garden of houses. Some of these monuments can be seen at Figure 7 and 8.



Figure 7. Archery monument in Okmeydanı (16th century)<sup>112</sup>



Figure 8. Archery monument in the garden of a house (2006)<sup>113</sup>

<sup>112</sup> M. Şinasi Acar, *İstanbul'un Son Nişan Taşları* (İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2006).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

In 2013, with the support of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Okçular Foundation established in the place of historical Okçular lodge, and a modern complex was built for the practice of archery. However, current inhabitants of Okmeydanı have had a negative perception towards this place considering it as an attempt to revive Ottomanism by the AKP government, because after the Okçular Foundation established, the reclaims on the land of Okmeydanı have increased in the public discourse.

#### 4. 2 ‘More History’ of Okmeydanı: migrating from one village to another

According to the former studies on Okmeydanı and to the narratives of the interviewees, the first settlers of Okmeydanı were the Albanian refugees who migrated to Ottoman Empire after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). They were farming and doing animal breeding in these lands until the migration wave in the late 1950s and 1960s. By the rapid urbanization process in Turkey, Okmeydanı had become one of the areas that rural migrants settled in and they built gecekondus as a solution for their housing problem. As the literature on the rural-urban migration in Turkey demonstrated, the migration was accelerated by the push and pull factors which can be summarized as unequal division of the land, low productivity, and mechanization in agriculture in the rural areas and better living conditions, job opportunities, better income, education and health services in the urban space. The life-stories of inhabitants of Okmeydanı provided us a knowledge about their lifestyle and problems in the rural areas before the migration, as well as about the push and pull factors of the migration.

We were ranch hand in the village. For example, we used to mow grass, we used to cultivate barley, wheat and rye. In our region, that was all. There was no vineyard or truck farm there, they could not grow there. The village was composed of a hundred households let's say, the population was nearly a thousand people. When the population increased, village land, pasture and arable field remained inadequate. As a matter of fact, migration began because of the livelihood, that was why... There was education issue as well. There was no school, no education, our fathers, our grandparents have never been educated. We just went to elementary school, but not properly. Then we thought that, if we would marry, if we would have a future, our children would not remain ignorant. (Narrator 1, Appendix B, 1)

Another important factor that motivated migration was the ethnic and religious identity of the narrators. The disadvantageous of situation in the rural area as being a member of Alevi and Kurdish community constituted one of the reasons of the migration. In some cases, the natural disasters also accelerated the migration. One of the narrators pointed out the earthquake in Varto in 1966, as one of the reasons that pushed them to migrate. The interviews allowed to not only explore internal migration narratives in Turkey, but the external migration was also the issue. As many inhabitants mentioned, almost in every families, some members migrated to Federal Republic of Germany as guest workers.

When I went to school in Erzurum, the village I went to, was a conservative village. We were children, we didn't understand anything, we didn't know who we really were. Those children, I didn't know how they regarded us, what they learnt from their elders, but when there was a fault, they used to put the blame on me, do you see, on me... I also had a trouble with speaking in Turkish, and I could not defend myself properly, the teacher was hitting me with a stick. I was saying "I didn't do it..." The half of the class... - Shall I talk clearly here? - The half of the class was Sunni. It was a Sunni village; I mean the students were Sunni. They had no knowledge about Alevism, they knew only what they had been taught, what they had been told... They considered us as non-believer, faithless. When someone did something wrong in the school, for example, when the table was broken, the book was torn, the board or the photograph of Atatürk was fallen into floor, it was always put on me. "He did it." I was saying "I didn't do it," all was yelling, "he did it, he did it." Then, when the teacher left, they used to beat me. I had been beaten up many times. Anyway, I went to school in that village, then two years later I came back to our village. A teacher came to our village... - It is an

unfavorable issue, let's not talk about it. - [...] A teacher came to the village, he was completely militant, he was segregationist. He used to beat us; he used to beat us very badly. [...] So, the situation was like that in the village. My sister still lives in Erzurum, she moved to the center, but it is still the case. You can't live outside your own village, it is impossible. There is a hostility even from neighboring villages. [...] One of my uncles was in Germany. When Germany was getting workers in the 1960s, my uncle went from village directly to Germany because he was literate and young. Then my other uncle went. Then my father went twice, but he did not stay there, he came back. (Narrator 2, Appendix B, 2)

My father was a public health officer when we were in village. Our financial situation was good, I mean it was better than the others'. We had lands, pastures, arable fields. But my father had always problems with landlords because he used to resist against their attitude towards peasants. That was why the landlords used to harass my father, they burnt his fields, they threw his crops to the river. [...] Then the earthquake in Varto occurred, it was the last straw. I was a child, but I remember it shadowy, how stones rolled around, how people cried... After that catastrophe, we migrated. [...] There was another factor as well, my sister who lived in Istanbul, would go to Germany, and my parents would look after her children left behind. We came here, my father first has worked for Şişli Etfal Hospital, later, he opened a grocery store. But we lost many things, we became poor in the city. (Narrator 3, Appendix B, 3)

Many studies on migration from rural to urban areas demonstrated that the first migrants were mostly male members of the family and they encouraged relatives to migrate to the city, informing them about the job opportunities. Women and children came when the conditions are suitable, frequently after the *gecekondu* was built. When I asked why they chose Okmeydanı to settle in, the responses were “to join our relatives” or “to join our family”<sup>114</sup> as well as to benefit from the job opportunities closed to this area. Despite migration and displacement usually led to the isolation of migrants, in this case, the place where they migrated was socially well-known because their relatives or *hemşehris*<sup>115</sup> already settled in, it meant rather reunification of the family or the community.

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<sup>114</sup> “Akrabalarımız burada olduğu için,” “Ailemiz burada olduğu için.”

<sup>115</sup> Fellow countrymen in English. It is used in Turkish studies to describe the people who migrated from the same village, same town or region. However, our narrators almost never used this word,

Since our father was working here, and we did not have a chance to see him, we migrated to here to be with our father. Because it was the place that we earned livelihood, we migrated here. My father was working here, in Unkapanı, with a smith. [...] In the village, my father was not with us. We could see my father once a year, when he went on leave for 10-15 days. My grandfather looked after us. My grandfather was like my father... Then he also came and lived with us for a while. He lived with us and with my uncle. When I was at high school, he passed away. (Narrator 4, Appendix B, 4)

I came here to study in 1974. My teacher in the village convinced my father to send me here after I graduated from elementary school; he thought that I was a good student. In that time, my brothers have already been here. They came to Istanbul maybe 5-10 years ago. You know the reason for the migration in that time, because of the economic conditions in the country. After all, Istanbul was a metropolis; they came here to make a living. Then people brought his relatives, brothers, and friends as well. When I came here, I lived with my brothers. First, I went to Alibeyköy Secondary School and then Okmeydanı Secondary School. In fact, when I came here, I did not suffer the difficulties of being a stranger, because there was more or less a village here. As it is today, the majority of our villagers have been lived in this region. The first generation of the people who we were familiar with had come and settled in before. I have had no difficulty except for missing my village and my father. Apart from that, I did not feel like a stranger because we knew each family. (Narrator 5, Appendix B, 5)

In the period that rural-urban migration occurred, there was a widespread negative approach towards the migrants' way of life. Since the urbanization and modernization were accepted as synonymous in that period, the rural migrants' way of life was regarded as an obstacle for the modernization and urbanization. To attain the level of 'modern city,' they should abandon the traditional rural lifestyle, integrating to the urban way of life. However, the narratives of Okmeydanı's inhabitants demonstrate that their experience was far behind the urban life. Although the place where they settled in was located within the borders of the city, it was the periphery of the city in that period and had no common with the center in terms of

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instead, they used villager (*bizim köylü* or *köylümüz*) to describe all their relatives, and people from the same village. Therefore, we used *hemşehri* in the text, but in the quotations, we preserved their connotation.

infrastructure and other material conditions. Indeed, according to the narratives, this place was more similar to their villages or small towns for the migrants.

We came Istanbul with big dreams, like we were going to a beautiful city, but the place where we came was a village, Okmeydanı. It was a village more than our village. We came from village to village, I was disappointed... My father had built a gecekodu, he had prepared everything, then he called us. We sold everything with the help of my grandfather, then we migrated to Istanbul. But we looked that the houses had no differences from our village houses. The village houses were made of stones. The only difference of these houses here was that they were made of briquettes and had roof tiles. That was the only difference. The environment was empty; it was exactly the same, like village, mulberry trees, etc. The Albanians were farming here, they used to cultivate things like wheat, rye, like lettuce, radishes, onions, and they have made a living with this. They were ranching, for example, there was a large dairy farm opposite to our house, almost 100 cows belonged to Uncle Meydin, an Albanian citizen. [...] The housing opportunities were very limited in those days, the state did not have TOKI<sup>116</sup> as it does today, and Okmeydanı was an empty land, so the people who were working around Haliç, for shipyards or factories bought the lands illegally from the Albanians witnessed by the mukhtars or neighborhood representatives to solve their housing problems. (Narrator 4, Appendix B, 6)

Although living conditions were relatively better than the rural areas, it was still hard to deal with the urban life in a gecekodu settlement for women. Since the migrants firstly lived in the same house with their relatives and there were no public services in the first years of the migration, such as water, electricity, roads, the burden of women was too heavy. Later, women also started to work outside, mostly in domestic services especially after the 1980s.<sup>117</sup> One of the interviewees mentioned her losses in the village but the circumstances were not very different in the city. She stated that, because their house was too crowded and they lived in the bad conditions such as lack of hygiene, humidity and cold weather she lost her child.

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<sup>116</sup> The Mass Housing Administration (Toplu Konut İdaresi).

<sup>117</sup> For a detailed analysis of the situation of women, see Özyeğin, *Untidy gender: Domestic Service in Turkey* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

I suffered a lot in the village too. After my mother died, I was overwhelmed with the responsibility of seven children. I was the oldest one. I raised those children. One of my sisters was 6 months old when my mother died. My mother died at 37, she was 3 months pregnant, now I know her illness was meningitis. She died in three days. I was 15. Then one of my sisters had surgery and she couldn't survive. My father got married five years later, with a girl younger than me. He was a bit naive, and they would get him married with their daughter because he was a landlord. My father was a so-called landlord, son of a landlord. Do you know our village? Have you ever been? There was no landlord in our village, who ruled or something, but he had property, that was why they called like that. [...] Then I got married. How I got married? Well, the old custom, it was arranged. He is my aunt's son. There was such a tradition, getting married with cousins. We had a stepmother; she was putting pressure on us. My stepmother was younger than me, but her mother was putting pressure on us. Then we came here. Our place was awful. My 1,5 years old daughter became ill and died. We lived with the relatives, uncles, lots of people, I took care of everything. (Narrator 6, Appendix B, 7).

#### 4. 3 From space to place: the settling and transformation processes

People transform space into a place through place-making practices. They make space their own place, first settling in it, then practicing daily activities and routines there, establishing social relationships between each other, attributing a meaning to this environment and attaching themselves to it. Relph, referring Heidegger's thought on ontological foundations of place and space, describes building as dwelling and dwelling as the essence of existence of the human beings. People shape, create, and reclaim the space by the act of building or landscape modification.<sup>118</sup> Besides the act of dwelling has such a significance in the relation which is established between people and place, during this research I recognized that active participation in the building process also play a central role in the attachment of people to a place. The interviewees mostly started to narratives with the building process of the gecekondü. The gecekondus were generally built in cooperation with relatives both to avoid

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<sup>118</sup> Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 17-18.

paying for labor and to complete the building process immediately. Sometimes they considered building their own houses as the only thing that they achieved throughout their life and they were proud of themselves as actively worked in those processes (See Figure 9).

My father built our gecekondu, it had only two rooms. Later, when the central Okmeydanı was destroyed in 1973, when I was in high school, I made a window wall in front of the house. Okmeydanı started to be demolished, the Bosphorus Bridge was being built, because the route would come. We were getting the nice materials that they threw away. We brought them to the house. My father couldn't handle it, because he was working hard, so I started to deal with it. When I was at that age, I tried to do a window wall in front of the door. I never forget it. So, after we made it, we had a 2+1 house. We lived in such a process, we were used to it, in the one-storey gecekondu houses everyone had gardens, and cultivated pepper, tomatoes, eggplant and so on. We used to have breakfast under the vine trees. It was a beautiful time. (Narrator 4, Appendix B, 8)



Figure 9. Gecekondu dweller working on his garden (1980s)

Source: Author's personal archive

The rural characteristics of the neighborhood both in terms of population and geography make easier to root the migrants in this place. Furthermore, as they were in solidarity in the building process, they develop very strong social relationships in the urban space. When the narrators mentioned their neighbors, no matter they were relatives or not, remembered how they were helping each other, not only for construction of gecekondus but also for adaptation to the urban life. Through these relationships that is established in the place which besides the act of dwelling, Okmeydanı was transformed into these new settlers' place, and they started to name it. Today, some regions still called other than their official names, such as "Sivashlıların mahallesi," "Laz mahallesi," "Erzurumluların mahallesi."<sup>119</sup>

There were fountains in our neighborhood, it was all gecekondus. There were mulberry trees, fruit trees, organic products that people cultivated in their gardens. I love the gecekondu life, I am still a peasant because we found the village life here, in Okmeydanı. We also find it in Gazi, in Armutlu. These are the neighborhoods that preserve their authentic texture. Baruthane School was a barrack, do you know? It is just below the Sibel Yalçın Park. That park was the place where Laz Mahmut brother's briquette area located. The Albanians were resided here and when there was a need for land or gecekondu, they have provided it. We used to help our new neighbors, our people. We were children yet, but we carried briquettes, sand and cement to help them. Uncle Veysel had a horse carriage, he was living in Talatpaşa, he was hanging here in Anadolu Kahvesi and he used to carry sand, cement by the horse carriage. We entered into such a life; we were happy here with our neighbors. There was a coffeeshouse in the corner where the hospital located now. That is why this area called as Anadolu Kahvesi. Şark Kahvesi is the same.<sup>120</sup> (Narrator 7, Appendix B, 9).

We were coming and digging at night, and skulls were appearing. My brother also came and lived with me for eight years. We were working in constructions, and we were coming here and digging at night. We were fixing the ground of the gecekondu. We were working during daytime in

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<sup>119</sup> "Mahalle" means neighborhood in Turkish. Above mentioned neighborhoods called by inhabitants' hometowns.

<sup>120</sup> Anadolu Kahvesi (Anatolian Coffeeshouse) and Şark Kahvesi (Oriental Coffeeshouse) were two closed coffeeshouses at the center of Okmeydanı and most known places by the inhabitants. Today although these coffeeshouses do not exist anymore, this area where they located are called by their names.

constructions, and at night here. Everyone was working at night. The important thing was to make the ground, after you fixed the ground, you bring briquettes in the evening, and build it until morning. It was not a proper structure. You are putting the briquettes on top of each other. Nonetheless, you build your own house, with your own efforts, it is something else. Today, no one do this. However, when we came next morning, we found out that the municipal police had destroyed everything, but they didn't touch mine. They demolished them, and the neighbors built them again. Some of them demolished maybe ten times. They destroyed my uncle's, he built it again, but they didn't touch mine (Narrator 2, Appendix B, 10).

In Narrator 2's narrative, we can observe the sympathetic attitude of the municipal police towards the gecekondu dwellers. The narrator first hesitated to tell the situation but remembered that the municipal police who helped them was old in that time and so he would not get in trouble anymore, because he must be dead by now. He stated that the municipal police sympathized with them because they were newlywed couple and they were poor, and he allowed them to construct their house, after asking whether they had more gecekondus or not. This question refers to another fact about the gecekondu settlements in that period. According to the narratives, any organization such as land mafia or land speculators could not be effective in Okmeydanı due to resistance of the inhabitants and leftist organizations, but some people built more than one houses and sold them to the newcomers. On the other hand, the inhabitants who had only their own gecekondu were living under difficult conditions. For an example of interior design of a gecekondu, see Figure 10).

There was no land-mafia here, but we heard that they also attempted here, they didn't have an opportunity. In Şark Kahvesi, there occurred such an organization, they tried to do something. People prevented and fired them from here. But there were some people who had already two houses, they still used to build new ones and sold them. Excluding that, there was no one who sold lands or houses. There was no mass destruction; they didn't enter here with bulldozers. Only the municipal police were coming and hitting the walls with a sledgehammer, smashing and going. Then people were building again.

I didn't give any bribe. I couldn't even if I wanted to. Maybe some people did, I don't know. If someone had already one house and built more, they were demolishing the others. But that man helped us when he saw our situation. He found good stones for us and told me to go and get them. First, he asked me if I had another house, I said; "what house, come and look." He came and saw that we had nothing but only a bed and dishes, then he didn't touch mine. How can I be unjust? (Narrator 2, Appendix B, 11)

There was a land-mafia for a short time, this man called Ali Rıza, the owner of the Şark Kahvesi, he came and sold the lands in Örnektepe which didn't belong to him. He brought mafia-type guys here at night, sold the lands to people. Afterwards our young people intervened in. You know, there was a left-right case in those days, and our young people fired him. He already had taken his share, but he couldn't carry on. Thanks to the young people, Bülent Demir and his friends, God rest his soul, he was one of the leaders of Dev-Sol, and he was murdered later. When he heard about the issue, he prevented such injustice. He said, "Don't do this injustice." He saved the neighborhood from the mafia. (Narrator 8, Appendix B, 12)



Figure 10. Gecekondü family in their home (early 1980s)

Source: A narrator's personal archive

In several interviews, the narrators pointed out the changing attitude of politicians towards gecekondü settlements. Especially in the local election periods, they used to overlook increasing gecekondü constructions. Then in the 1990s the apartmentalization process of the gecekondü settlements encouraged by the government. Taking into consideration this attitude of politicians, we need to

reconsider the situation of the neighborhood. The inhabitants of these settlements who invested all they had in these houses and could not obtain title deeds are still blamed for being invaders and subjected to the negative discourse by the government and media.

The municipal police came; they demolished the houses twice, but in the local election periods, - people were always waiting for that - in that time, people started to build gecekondus. Then nobody intervened, people have built. There was a strong solidarity, people were gathering, building together. On the other hand, everyone would like to his or her relatives to be around. For the security, to protect the demographic structure and belief structure. They would like to be in comfort with a familiar environment, to develop better neighborly relations. They used to build gecekondu in cooperation and it finished almost in one day. There was no planning, so what you call gecekondu is an unplanned construction. The reason why a gecekondu settlement appeared here, in my opinion, because both on the right and left side of the Golden Horn, all along from Alibeyköy to Eminönü, was full of factories. If there is a factory, it needs workers. Well, the workers need shelter, since there was no chance to live far away. The state could not solve this problem and didn't intervene it. The closest places to the factories became generally gecekondu settlements, because you found a job there, you build a house here, you solve the transportation problem, you go to job on foot. But what happened when the factories were closed? The deal was over. (Narrator 5, Appendix B, 13)

In addition to building houses, the inhabitants developed the infrastructure of the neighborhood in cooperation with the aim of reaching better living conditions. Most of narrators yearningly mentioned how they worked hard together during this process. Moreover, the leftist organizations which were very active especially in the 1970s, contributed to strengthening solidarity of the neighborhood.

There was no sewage system. Especially when I was in high school, this area was where the youth movement were more active. The revolutionary youth movement made the sewage system by its own initiative. They were quite effective in the construction of houses and so on; they helped a lot during the construction process. People who came from the village mostly had difficulties in adaptation. The youth were very helpful in that sense. They also helpful on social aspects, in terms of solidarity between people. All of us

came from village, but still a little feudalism prevailed, the youth had an impact in that sense, along with that feudality, they contributed to the development of another spirit of solidarity. That sewage system was made by the people living here, with help of young people. You build gecekondus, but there is no infrastructure, toilets are outside, there is no sewage system. I mean people learned to reclaim their environment. They learned to be in solidarity with each other to develop this place, to make it more livable area. You get the materials from the municipality, but the labor is on you. All of us worked in this process. (Narrator 5, Appendix B, 14)

One of the most important themes occurred in the narratives about the neighborhood's past, is the communal solidarity. Despite all difficulties they dealt in that time, many narrators mentioned as the good old days when they lived in gecekondus. They stated that when they were living in those detached houses with gardens and animals, the sense of community and solidarity of the neighborhood were stronger, and they were happier than today (See Figure 11). They emphasize that due to the homogeneity of the neighborhood's population, it was a more secure place in those days.

When we first came here, living conditions were difficult, we were working in construction, and we were tenant. Then we bought ourselves a house. Everyone was saying, "I wish I had a gecekondu, I could sit under its roof." At that time there was few things to eat. The best breakfast was butter and cheese. When we had a guest, rarely, we were getting two eggs and sausage. Now there is everything, we have everything, hot water, natural gas, but no humanity, no society. I mean, I think that is all over. But at that time life was better, there was humanity, we were visiting each other as a community. Nowadays, our customs have disappeared. Look, you grew up here, you are like my daughter, but we don't know each other if we come across on the road, we don't say hello. That is why, our conditions were better in those time, if you look at the current circumstances. There was poverty, but there was also humanity, there was honesty. When someone bought coal, everyone heartfely helped them with wheelbarrows and carried coal. When someone was building a gecekondu, everyone collaborated. One gave tiles, one gave woods, and one built the roof. So, the relations were very good at that time. As we got urbanized, as buildings arose, as the bricks arose, the humanity, the community got lost. (Narrator 9, Appendix B, 15)



Figure 11. Gecekondu family in their garden (late 1980s)

Source: Author's personal archive

After the apartmentalization and new migration process in the 1990s, the population of the neighborhood has become diversified and its texture started to be dissolved. Most of the inhabitants complained about the tenants who are “outsiders.”<sup>121</sup> Since the Alevi population settled in there was a closed community, they were concerned about protecting the identity and the sense of place to live in peace and to maintain their traditional culture. The nostalgia for the gecekondu life includes this traditional lifestyle in the neighborhood. That period was significant for preserving and maintaining the Alevi traditions and rituals which have an important function to create and consolidate the sense of community. For an example of traditional feast, see Figure 12.

Weddings, henna nights were held in our square, just like today. There were no wedding halls; we were using buildings in winter. There were no associations. Under a newly built building, in an empty building, people were going there, and the jewelry ceremonies were held there. They were taking cars, forming a convoy and going for a drive around the neighborhood. Now it is held in wedding halls. Actually, it is a good thing. Because the

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<sup>121</sup> As I remarked before, when they say outsider (yabancı), they rather refer Sunni people.

neighborhood has changed, you don't know everyone. Someone comes, intervenes, and you know the youth, they dance, they don't sleep. When a quarrel occurs among young people, incident happens. The police don't interfere anyway; they say you have to take your own measure. Because of the political incidents and some extreme movements, police don't come for the events anymore. The wedding owner take on a responsibility. Moreover, entertainments at street are banned by the state. Therefore, everything is held in the wedding halls. In the past, the young people organized entertainments in *Hızır* period. They used to disguise like an old couple and collect flour and oil from the households, someone was giving salt, and someone was giving sugar.<sup>122</sup> We used to cook halva by them, do you know the *zerfet*? We used to cook *zerfet*, and *şir*.<sup>123</sup> We were playing games, having entertainments and eating. In those days, there was not too many people here; it was only our people, relatives. There was no problem. Then all is lost. In those days, there was really beautiful things, and humanity. There was not too much fight. Because it was the same community, the same people. When two people fought, the elders intervened, and reconciled. Now there is no such thing. (Narrator 9, Appendix B, 16)



Figure 12. Two boys disguised for the *Gağan* feast (late 1980s)

Source: A narrator's personal archive

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<sup>122</sup> There might be a confusion in this narrative because he describes *Gağan*, a feast celebrated by Zaza communities, but he calls it as *Hızır*, which is a holy period when the Alevis fast and celebrate at the end of the period.

<sup>123</sup> The traditional meals of Zaza communities.

After being appointed and coming back as a teacher, I felt the change here very strongly, today it is more difficult to live here because of the demographic change. Secondly, I think people have become more individualized, it might be related to economic conditions, because they are more comfortable today and think they don't need anyone else. All of us recognize, the bonding between people is getting weaker. In order to prevent that, people started activities called association. Now, each village has an association. They try to protect our culture and solidarity through associations. But first of all, it is not a safe place anymore as it used to be. Everyone would say the same thing if you ask, it was a safer area because everyone knew each other before. There weren't a lot of apartment buildings. Apartment life brought along something else; it makes people afraid of each other. The population has increased, the gecekondus replaced by apartments. People are not very selective about the tenants; they aim just to get a rental income. When I came from the university, I saw that the houses became apartments. I saw there has been a lot of change in 2-3 years. People demolished their gecekondus, tried to turn them into apartments somehow, and spent all they had to this. But it was an unplanned urbanization for sure. [...] The most important problem here is the title deed problem, it isn't yet solved. The houses had already changed, the apartmentalization had started, but it didn't just happen. Building an apartment took 2-3 years, rough construction, no plaster etc. There was a strong solidarity at that time as well. When someone destroyed his house, and if his neighbor or relatives had an empty flat, they were sheltered there. There was a solidarity. Then, of course, the road has come, but there was no road before, people fixed the pathways by their own means. Everyone who lives here made an effort for this. Especially I want you to know this, to write this. (Narrator 5, Appendix B, 17)

#### 4. 4 Place identity and collective memory of Okmeydanı

##### 4. 4. 1 The identity markers of the neighborhood: religion, ethnicity, ideology

Okmeydanı is defined commonly as an “Alevi and leftist neighborhood.” The interviewees define themselves as Alevi first and then leftist or dissident. They state that being Alevi is the reason to be exposed to discrimination, violence and marginalization referring the other places where Alevi population concentrated such as Gazi, Armutlu, 1 Mayıs neighborhoods and Dersim (Tunceli), Sivas and Maraş provinces. In this sense, we can say that the most significant identity of the neighborhood is Alevism. Other characteristics such as being Kurd, leftist, and

coming from which province are secondary identities of the inhabitants. Ideology and political activism also significant for the neighborhood. Many inhabitants define each other referring their political engagements and using leftist terminology.

Although they are critics to each other regarding marginalization of the place, when a threat emerged against the neighborhood they unite and defend place together.<sup>124</sup> The Kurdish identity came to the fore in the last decade especially among the younger inhabitants who were influenced by the political circumstances in Turkey. Even if the first settlers were Kurds or Zazas, they ignored their own ethnicity, and they have kept a distance from Kurdish migrants who settled in the neighborhood in the 1990s. Many inhabitants still do not mention being Kurd as a part of their identity unless I asked them and when they say “Kurds” they mostly refer to the Sunni Kurds who came from Van, Ağrı, Diyarbakır, Mardin and the activists of the Kurdish movement.

#### 4. 4. 2 “Always a peasant”: The role of *hemşehri* relations and village associations in the neighborhood

Hometowns as a distinguishing feature of identity in the neighborhood gains importance depending on circumstances. It is obvious that “hemşehrilik” played a significant role during the establishment of the neighborhood and adaptation process of the inhabitants to the urban space. In many gecekondu studies, kinship and hemşehrilik scrutinized as a form of communal solidarity and survival mechanism for the gecekondu population. Erder remarks how the kinship and hemşehri relations transforms in the urban life and argues that the modernist approach which is based on

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<sup>124</sup> During the interviews, I observed disagreements between the political organizations in the neighborhood and heard critics for the groups who carry out violent acts against the state forces. Since the political organizations in the neighborhood are not the subject of this research, I will not focus on these debates here.

the traditional-modern duality failed to define the meaning of these relations for migrants. These relations vary regarding culture, origin and social class of the group. In the urban space the kinship and *hemşehri* relations on the one hand might be loosen but on the other might be expanded and institutionalized over time.<sup>125</sup> In this case, I observed that *hemşehrilik* could be both unifying and dividing factor. Even between the people who are coming from the same town, there is a distinction regarding their villages. For example, when I asked to people about the Okmeydanı Cemevi who are coming from Erzincan or Dersim, they said that they do not visit there so often because the people who came from Sivas and Tokat dominant there and they “manage” the Cemevi. Likewise, some narrators pointed out dividing aspect of the village associations.

In the past there was a real unity. When these associations were opened, people were divided regarding their villages. There was no such thing in the early times, we were all like brothers and sisters. Now everyone goes to their own village association. “Let’s do something together?” No one comes... There are associations everywhere. Whereas, go inside and look, there are ten people or not. It is not a good thing. It would be nicer if we were together, if we were united, wouldn’t it? (Narrator 9, Appendix B, 18)

We try to overcome problems through associations. We try to gather people around the associations. It is not only for this neighborhood, we also try to bring people together who came from the same region but living in Gazi neighborhood, in Alibeyköy, in Örnektepe, in Sultanbeyli. It is our purpose, but sometimes you succeed and sometimes you fail. Now every village has an association, you should have already heard about it. (Narrator 5, Appendix B, 19)

I think village associations are not a good thing. They separate people. Everyone goes to their own association of the village, they have picnics, they organize activities, one doesn’t go to the other’s. Most of them are also called association but in fact they are coffeehouses. They have no activity as an association. Uncles socialize there, play cards, but women have to stay at home. They are not suitable for young people neither. If you ask me, village

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<sup>125</sup> Erder, *İstanbul Bir Kervansaray (mi?)*, 14.

associations should have remained in the village. Now we have neighborhood associations, I wish they would go there. These are not only for men; women can also enter. Young people can do various activities there. I mean, now we have to stop hometown discussion and focus on the problems of where we live in, all together. Today, the issue 'you came from there, migrated, I came from here' does not make any sense. Which one of us is going to our hometown? Is there a hometown anymore? We are all from here, we are from this neighborhood, we are from Istanbul. (Narrator 10, Appendix B, 20)

On the other hand, these associations contribute to maintain traditional rural values in the urban space through organizing many events. They also try to revive the communal solidarity. For example, when one of the members needs financial aid for health issues or other problems, they collect donations to help them. In addition, these associations play a central role for development of the villages themselves. In recent years a movement occurred that is called "back to the village" among the inhabitants, many of them built or repaired houses in their villages and now spend time there in summer. Although they have to come back in winter, these holidays have a strong impact on the inhabitants as many of them define themselves "still peasant" and state that they were happier in the village. Moreover, some inhabitants remarked the contribution of these holidays to reviving their traditional values and culture giving example that they speak the mother tongue in village during their stay and when they come back, they try to maintain this attitude.

#### 4. 4. 3 Memory of the place: Combining Alevi collective memory with neighborhood history

According to Maurice Halbwachs who introduced the concept of collective memory as a constitutive component of community, as a social being, people take a part in several groups during their process of socialization. These groups constitute the social dimension of memory, and the memory of human being takes a form in

accordance with the past of these social groups. Remembering is not simply a recall process of the past as such, but it is a process of reconstruction of the past that occurs in a social context. During this reconstruction process, people use the resources that they borrow from their group like its language, point of view, ideas, opinions, and notions, and combine the past of the group with their own.<sup>126</sup> In this sense, collective memory is one of the constitutive parts of identity. Different ethnic, cultural or social groups build their collective identity on a common past and they ensure the permanence of the group by transmitting their memory to the new generations. This transmission is realized by different ways such as narratives and practices of the family and community, commemorative ceremonies, and places of memories. The collective memory of the subordinated groups situates against the dominant discourse and the official historiography. These “counter-memories” have their own alternative stories that resist to dominant narrative. According to Michel Foucault, the counter-memory is a kind of memory that shows residual narratives which resist official version of historical continuity.<sup>127</sup> German Egyptologist Jan Assmann highlighting the function of resistance, asserts that since memory is a fundamental component of identity, counter-memories contribute to the construction of counter-identities.<sup>128</sup>

In Okmeydanı, the place identity is built on Alevi cultural and religious memory first, and then it was fed by the memories of political struggles carried on in the neighborhood. During the interviews, I heard many testimonies about the discrimination that Alevis were exposed to, especially referring the time when before the cemevis were established.

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<sup>126</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1950).

<sup>127</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>128</sup> Jan Assman, *Kültürel Bellek* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2001), 164.

I remember very well, one of our neighbors' mother was dead, God rest her soul, the imam didn't come to the funeral prayer in the mosque, he didn't come out. I know it very well; I won't forget it. He said that "They don't enter the mosque, so I don't perform the funeral prayer." There, some people on that side got angry, and another imam came to perform the funeral prayer, I know it very well. The man didn't come, didn't perform prayer. In the years of 1972-1973, it was like that in that time. Now our cemevis were established so we got over it. It is a very good thing. We are freed from that suffering. (Narrator 8, Appendix B, 21).

Furthermore, they combine the Alevi memory with the neighborhood's past and regard the incidents occurred today as a continuation of the past massacres in the Alevis history. As historian Gyanendra Pandey pointed out, remembering violence plays an essential role for the construction and reproduction of collective identity of social groups that were exposed to it.<sup>129</sup> As remembering violence constitutes a part of Alevi identity, expression and recognition of these incidents could mean recognition of their identity which is very important for them.

Because we are Alevi, you know, it has been always like that. From Kerbela, Dersim, to Gazi and Madımak, they always consider us as a threat, as enemy. Although we are peaceful people, we regard everyone as equal, we believe the word "Do not hurt even you got hurt," they don't act like this. But I don't have a blind faith, I think we need to defend ourselves. As long as we keep silent, we accept to be victim, they will benefit from this. You know, the Gezi martyrs, all of them were Alevis, after Gezi, Okmeydanı was burnt, no one saw that. (Narrator 11, Appendix B, 22)

Okmeydanı has been highly politicized area since 1970s when Turkish society characterized by the polarization between the radical leftist groups and ultra-nationalist groups since the gecekondu settlements were one of the areas where the radical leftist groups organized. Okmeydanı was one of the neighborhoods

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<sup>129</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

dominated by these radical movements and called “rescued region”<sup>130</sup> where the state forces could not enter. The neighborhood was divided into two opposite parts and the place which is called Dörtyol was the border that separate Alevi and leftist population from the Turkish nationalist inhabitants. During this period, many conflicts occurred between the leftist and nationalist groups in the region and many people died.

There was no peace, in the sense of politics. For example, Ferhat Tüysüz killed nine people here. He was a right-wing militant, a fascist. Teachers were murdered, people were murdered, Orhan Karaca was murdered. Only Ferhat Tüysüz killed nine people, as far as I know. There was the left-right issue, neighborhoods were divided into two parts. So, there was no peace, everyday something was happening. So today, it is the same, nothing has changed. But in those days, two fronts were opened. For example, the coffeehouse near my uncle’s house was raked. Mehmet was injured, Hanifi was injured. They raked coffeehouses many times, they set a fire. I was taken twice to the branch office 2, I was tortured. They regard you as a leftist; the state regards you as a terrorist. They take you just for suspicion, they take 5-10 people from this neighborhood, beat you in the branch office 2, then search your past, and they find nothing. Just because you are an Alevi, you tend to be a leftist, but you are not a militant. At that time, I was working at the Demirdöküm factory, I was a member of the trade union. We were assaulted in Eyüp before the 12 September.<sup>131</sup> In that time, everyone was regarded as suspect. I personally participated in the meetings, but I did not have such an attitude of assassination, attack, using gun or something. But when a teacher was murdered, for example, when Kemal Türkler was murdered, I went and walked in the forefront. You know, I used to attend funerals to protest, but I never involved any violent act. (Narrator 2, Appendix B, 23)

In 1977, we became revolutionaries, sympathizing with the revolutionaries. We used to do writings on the walls. When I went to university, I started to be interested in politics, but we couldn’t go to university because of our safety. [...] Then I ended up in prison. I received many letters; everyone was sympathizing with us and became leftist. After 9-10 months, I was released. In those days there was a segregation in the neighborhoods, everyone was taking care of their own area’s security. So, armed people were walking down to the street to ensure security. It is called that right-left issue, you know, there were fascist attacks and people were defending themselves against these attacks. Dörtyol was the area where right-wings militants located, there were

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<sup>130</sup> “Kurtarılmış bölge.”

<sup>131</sup> The third coup d’état in the history of Turkish Republic. It was declared in 12 September 1980 and headed by Chief of the General Staff Kenan Evren.

fascists. We used to do writings on the walls there as well, in order to demonstrate that “We are here,” “We dominate here.” Because if there were leftist writings on the walls, it meant that it was a leftist neighborhood. We wanted to extend the boundaries. In that period, we struggled against the fascists for power. We had many conflicts, they shot many people, and they raided coffeehouses. We had such a process. [...] But we did very good work. We built the sewage system with people. Each household started to love us. There was no house we didn't enter. For example, we used to buy a kilo of meat and visiting them, the children didn't even know what meat was. We used to cook together, eat together. We had very pleasant days, every day was beautiful, we were happy. (Narrator 4, Appendix B, 24)

The inhabitants have a strong memory about the politics. During the interview, when I asked the date, they frequently refer to the significant moments or different actors of Turkey's political history instead of stating the date. For instant, they describe date such as “In that year when Deniz Gezmiş and his friends executed,” “When Kenan Evren came to power in 12 September,” “In Ecevit's period,” “When Nurettin Sözen was the mayor,” “In that year, Hüseyin Aslan said ‘build your houses.’”<sup>132</sup> However, they usually do not remember the exact date and state like “In 1972 or 1973,” “In the 1980s, I can't remember exactly when it was.”<sup>133</sup> This is an important clue about their subjectivity, which means they constructed subjective memory on the meaningful periods and events for them, without certain knowledge provided by official history writing.

On the other hand, the incidents and losses in the neighborhood have a large place in the collective memory of the neighborhood. They collectively organized commemorative ceremonies for their losses. (For a commemorative ceremony of Berkin Elvan, see Figure 13).

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<sup>132</sup> “Deniz Gezmiş onlar idam edildiği sene,” “Kenan Evren geldiği zaman, 12 Eylül döneminde,” “Ecevit döneminde,” “Nurettin Sözen belediye başkanırken,” “O sene hani Hüseyin Aslan dedi ya ‘evlerinizi yapın.’”

<sup>133</sup> “72 ya da 73 senesinde,” “80lerde ama tam olarak ne zamandı hatırlamıyorum.”



Figure 13. Commemorative ceremony for Berkin Elvan in the place where he was shot

Source: A narrator's personal archive

Okmeydanı Cemevi is a very symbolic place for the neighborhood identity where Alevi's beliefs is transmitted by rituals and ceremonies and it contributes to reviving Alevi's culture and traditions in the urban space. In the early 1990s, leaders of 20 village and hometown associations of Sivas in Okmeydanı gathered to build a place for prayers in where they could perform *cem* rituals and funerals. For this purpose, they had recourse to Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation (Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı) and this foundation supported them. Thus, Okmeydanı Cemevi was established in 1994 under the name of a branch office of Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation with the financial contribution of the Şişli Municipality.

Elise Massicard asserts that there was a competition between leftist organizations and Okmeydanı Cemevi. According to her research conducted between 1999 and 2002, Cemevi's board members did not want the foundation's youth to be interested in political activism.<sup>134</sup> During this research, I observed the same situation

<sup>134</sup> Elise Massicard, *Türkiye'den Avrupa'ya Alevi Hareketinin Siyasallaşması* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), 294.

about board members of the Cemevi. They were not agreed with the idea of political activism prevails among the young people who attend Cemevi and emphasized the need for separation of belief and politics. However, the young people did not share similar opinions with them. I was surprised when I found out that most of the board members were also the members of CHP, although they defend that there is no place for politics in Cemevi. On the other hand, when I interviewed young people who attend to the *cem* rituals (see Figure 14) and other events held in Cemevi regularly, I found out that their cultural and religious identity is not separated from the political identity of the neighborhood. They regard Alevism not only as a belief system but also as a political standing. One of the narrators who was former activist in a political organization explains the situation as follows.

When I arrived here, all the young people in the Cemevi used to support CHP.<sup>135</sup> I made them socialists. I was already fed by the political culture of Okmeydanı, but when I did some research, I found socialism in Alevism. There are several common points between socialism and Alevism. But the Okmeydanı youth don't come to Cemevi, because the state says "Cemevis raise terrorists." That is why the political activists don't come here, not to harm the Cemevi. [...] Alevism is a way of life for me. I can't say that it is a religion or belief. It has a political dimension as well. The political dimension of Alevism has been existed since its emergence. For example, Hüseyin's disobedience, Pir Sultan's resistance... These are political issues. When we talk about politics, some assume that we are talking about political parties, that is not the case. When we say politics, we mean resistance, revolt against repression, injustice. Some say that Alevism should not involve in politics, but they don't know that politics has been exist at the origin of Alevism. So, we cannot talk about a single definition of Alevism. If we say it is a sort of belief, it will be an incomplete definition. (Narrator 12, Appendix B, 25)

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<sup>135</sup> Republican People's Party.



Figure 14. Ritual of *cem* in Okmeydanı Cemevi (2016)

Source: Okmeydanı Cemevi's archive

In addition, Okmeydanı Cemevi has a function as a site of memory (*lieu de mémoire*)<sup>136</sup> for the inhabitants. Besides the several portraits of figures from Alevi history, there is a poster that reminds us Uğur Kurt's murder at the courtyard of the Cemevi (see Figure 15).

I come to Cemevi with the aim of learning our culture, traditions, and our beliefs. I attend to *cems*, and any other events such as concerts, conferences, and cultural activities. But after Berkin's funeral and Uğur brother's death it means more to me now. When I come here, and remember the blood on the floor, I feel bad. My job is near here, when I heard the incident, I arrived here right away. I saw blood on the floor, I was shocked, I can never forget it. The courtyard was a place where we chatted, we laughed before, now everything has changed. I think "Why do these happen to us?" In fact, my parents don't want me to come here anymore, because they are scared. We are not sure of our safety. But we must come here, if we are afraid today, others might be murdered in the future. We must remember this incident; it is very important. If we forget that, if we don't do commemorative ceremonies, there would be more incidents like that. By doing commemorative ceremonies, mass demonstrations, we try to prevent it to repeat in the future. I think we need to go to Cemevi more often after this incident. We must unite to resist; we must show that we are still here. (Narrator 13, Appendix B, 26)

<sup>136</sup> See Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1984-1992).

I often heard the unification call from the inhabitants. They are worried because of the incidents happened in the neighborhood, and they always feel in danger. Therefore, they frequently emphasize the need to unite to defend themselves and the neighborhood together.



Figure 15. Poster put on Okmeydanı Cemevi after Uğur Kurt's court (2017)  
Source: Okmeydanı Cemevi's archive.

Another distinctive feature of the neighborhood is the street writings, graffiti and posters on the walls (see figures 16, 17, 18 and 19). These visual means contribute to revive the collective memory and to reflect the place identity. They also have a function of expression for the political organizations and means of announcements.



Figure 16. Street writing that reminds Berkin Elvan<sup>137</sup>

Source: Author's personal archive



Figure 17. Portrait of Kurdish writer Yaşar Kemal (1923-2015) and a symbolic picture as a reminder of Soma disaster<sup>138</sup>

Source: Author's personal archive

One of the narrators pointed out how the identity of the neighborhood plays a role in the sense of belonging.

<sup>137</sup> "Berkin Elvan is immortal."

<sup>138</sup> The mine disaster that caused the death of 301 miners in May 13, 2014.

I moved out two years ago, but I still visit my neighborhood once or twice a month. I moved out when I was married, because my husband had a house in Alibeyköy. However, I try to convince him to move back, because I miss my neighborhood, although we live among our people in Alibeyköy, it is not the same. I grew up here, my family, my neighbors and relatives are here, I miss them... When I come here, when I see the writings on the wall, I say “That is Okmeydanı.” You can’t see such pictures or writings on the wall anywhere else. Maybe in other Alevi neighborhoods, but not in all of them. For example, the old people speak Zazaish, I like very much to speak them. [...] When I walk into the neighborhood, I feel like home. Everybody says hello and asks, “Why don't you come, how are you?” For me, it’s safe here. People outside, say it’s dangerous, but it’s the safest place for us, because we know it, everybody knows each other. They say it is dangerous because there was an incident, the police came and threw tear gas so on. We used to it. I tell my husband, you would get used to it if you come, but his family is scared because they don’t know. They don’t know people here. They don’t know that everybody knows each other. We live in a housing estate in Alibeyköy, there is no neighborhood culture, you are alone, you stay at home all day long. But here, you can go out, sit and have a chat with the neighbors, even you don’t realize how the day ends. (Narrator 14, Appendix B, 27)



Figure 18. Scored-out street writing (2019)<sup>139</sup>

Source: Author’s personal archive

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<sup>139</sup> “The only way is revolution.”



Figure 19. Symbolic picture about the people who lost their life in the Gezi movement  
Source: A narrator's archive

The story of the picture in the Figure 18 is very interesting. It reminds the losses in the Gezi movement and refers to Ahmet Kaya.<sup>140</sup> This picture has been scored out many times by police and repainted by inhabitants. It might be considered as an attempt to erase the memory and identity of the neighborhood and a very significant example for the struggle between the inhabitants and state powers.

There are some other practices that revive the memory of the neighborhood such as naming places. Besides the streets which are called by inhabitants' hometown or villages, there are also some parks named after the political activists who were killed by the state forces. For example, one of the largest parks in the neighborhood is called Sibel Yalçın Park by the locals despite the official name of it

<sup>140</sup> A Kurdish singer died on exile in 2000.

was Fatma Girik Park, and another park started to be called Mehmet Ayvalıtaş Park after Gezi movement.

#### 4. 5 Rootedness versus placelessness

Since Okmeydanı was established as a gecekondu settlement, most of the inhabitants do not have title deeds and they are constantly exposed to the threat of losing their houses. Although they have title deed appropriation document (tapu tahsis belgesi),<sup>141</sup> they have faced with many difficulties when attempted to get their title deeds. First of all, the lands of Okmeydanı were belonged to Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation and determined as a historical site through legislative regulations. Despite the efforts of inhabitants for legalization of their housing there, this problem is still not solved. Moreover, since the late 2000s, there has been an urban transformation project to be implemented in this area and in 2016, Okmeydanı was defined as a risky area.

Although these people who broke off their roots once when they migrated and rooted in their new environment, transforming it and establishing a sense of community there, they consistently worry about their houses and their place. If we turn to Relph's concept of placelessness which means insensitivity to the significance of place as a result of standardization of landscape and urban renewal projects, this neighborhood is about to change such a rapid pace. After the urban transformation project implemented, the meaning and values attributed to the neighborhood will be disappeared. This standardization process will cut roots, erode symbols, replace diversity with uniformity, and experiential order with conceptual order, and transform this place into an anonymous space and exchangeable environment (see

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<sup>141</sup> *T.C. Resmi Gazete*, no. 18335, Law No. 2981, February 24, 1984.

Figure 20). In this sense, for the inhabitants of Okmeydanı, losing their current houses does not only mean to lose their property but also to lose the sense of place and the sense of community. Moreover, most of them think that they will be obliged to leave the neighborhood because they cannot afford the debt that they should pay for the new houses.



Figure 20. Model of urban transformation project planned for Okmeydanı<sup>142</sup>

Gecekondus were tolerated in every election period. We didn't think about infrastructure, we did not think to get title deeds, or reconstruction permit, we thought firstly to have a roof over our head, a barrack, we usually thought like that. After all this happened, we realized that it was wrong. If I knew then what I know now, I would not be in this issue. So, look at this house, no title deed, God knows whether it will be left to us or not. When we built gecekondus, we carried everything in a wheelbarrow, we carried them on our back from the street, from the slope, there was no roads. The gecekondu consisted of a room and a living room in front of it, coal, dishes and beds were in the same place. At that time, I was young, I could not think in detail, I did not know Istanbul, we were not well adapted. I might have gone elsewhere and purchase a land. Actually, once I intended to sell the house. There was a man, he came and promised to bring me the money the next day. However, my wife cried, she did not want to go elsewhere as tenant because we thought that the house will belong to us eventually. In addition, all relatives were here, and I changed my mind. We settled here, rooted in here.

<sup>142</sup> <http://www.vatandasinokmeydani.com/pages.php?id=12>

But if you ask the truth, we were wrong. We are all in contradiction right now. The house is not guaranteed, no title deed. We talked last evening in coffeehouse; our houses are in illegal state in the eyes of the state. What will happen now? You have spent your life here, you have invested all you had in this concrete, your labor, your life, your children's future... If you don't have a guarantee here, you worry about that. They give you a place in the middle of nowhere... (Narrator 2, Appendix B, 28)

One of the problems of our neighborhood is that there are many houses in illegal state in our neighborhood, they don't have title deeds, people are aggrieved. They probably do something very bad; this will be very bad if AK Party continues like that. You know why? They increase difficulties, they do a lot of things. Many people do not have title deeds, but what will happen? What will happen to these people at the end? People are unemployed, poor, have nothing, life is very expensive. These are very important. If there is no unity, things will get worse. (Narrator 9, Appendix B, 29)

One of the narrators who came to Okmeydanı in 1973, when he was 10 years old, and witnessed all transformations process in the neighborhood has a strong identification with it.

I grew up in Okmeydanı, Okmeydanı grew up with me. I cannot live anywhere else; I never imagine it. I love this neighborhood very much. First of all, I grew up here. We have come to today with very good memories. I don't know how healthy my life will be from now on, but I certainly won't leave here. Because I carried the bodies of my comrades and my revolutionary friends on my shoulders here. We had many hard struggles for our *cemevi* and solidarity in the neighborhood. Beyond that, it is a revolutionary neighborhood, I witnessed many things here, and we achieved many good things all together. Even today, I walk around my neighborhood once a week, it makes me happy. I go to Sibel Yalçın Park, Anatolian Park, I visit our associations, our institutions. Because we grew up here, we shared many things with our friends here. The places like Okmeydanı, which they call *varoş*, fascism calls them as *varoş*, but these are sheltering places for us, our home, our homeland. This is like a homeland, like honor. I never forget the honor of living in a neighborhood like this for the rest of my life. (Narrator 7, Appendix B, 30)

Another narrator emphasizes the communal solidarity and Alevi identity of the neighborhood. He considers Okmeydanı as a peaceful and safer place due to its demographic features and relationships established between inhabitants.

If I were in a foreign place, I would not be able to live. You feel lonely. I don't know how to say; you feel in a deserted place. You worry about what you would going through until you are adapted to those people. Usually people feel each other. The structure is the same, the faith is the same, and the way is the same. Mostly this attracts you, you seek for it. Let me give you an example, my father's cousin Ismail came from Germany and purchased something at the Bosphorus, for 700 thousand dollars. He went from village to Germany, the story is long, I will tell you later, it isn't relevant to your thesis. So, he purchased, how to call the structures at the Bosphorus? Villa, yes, he purchased a villa, in Bebek or somewhere else, I don't know. His brother Ibrahim was diabetic. When he was at Ismail's house, he went into a diabetic coma. People around didn't help; he couldn't call anyone. He got him on his back, went out, nobody even helped. That is why, Ibrahim dead. Ismail brought him to the cemevi for the funeral. Because he doesn't have a community there. For this reason, we couldn't go elsewhere. It is impossible. Mehmet moved to Bahçelievler, he purchased a flat there, but he has stayed there just for a year. Then he came back, he couldn't live there. You can't adapt to it. My mother in law was cardiac and the neighbors used to give us a lift to the hospital at midnight. Or you go out and shout "Mehmet come; we'll take the child to the hospital!" The man gets up and runs. Look, we have a neighbor, he is an outsider, but his wife is one of us. Why does he live among us for 20 years, why didn't he leave? It is because he trusts us, he learned our culture, his children grew up in this culture. We don't discriminate people. For this reason, the poor people, down-and-outers, the migrants come here, between us. For Syrians children, some people say lice, but when you regard like that, your humanity is over. If they are infested with lice, with fleas, if they are dirty, there is a reason. You should think about it first. (Narrator 15, Appendix B, 31)

This feeling of being proud of neighborhood and ethnic and religious identity is common for the inhabitants. Despite an implicit discrimination towards Syrian refugees especially in the narratives focused on degeneration and corruption of the neighborhood in recent years, when we asked directly about these newcomers, they defend equality or at least tolerance for them as a principle of Alevism and their political standing.

90% of this neighborhood is Alevi. We are also Alevis, the Kurdish Alevis. Later, the Hanafi Kurds came, then the Syrians came, now there are black people, Afghans, Mongols. I'm not complaining about this, because we regard everyone as human beings. They may be different from us, their cultures may be different, their way of life, everything may be different, but we don't disrespect them unless they disrespect us. After all, they are flesh

and bones like us. Do they have to be like us? No, they are not because we are not like them, so they can't be like us. I think it like that. I don't know, you may see it very humanistic, but it is about our vision of world, about what is happening around us. Our analysis is different from other neighborhoods. If there is an injustice, we are against it as a neighborhood, we have such a texture. (Narrator 16, Appendix B, 32)

Another common phenomenon in the narratives is the people move out from the neighborhood and come back. The most important reasons of leaving neighborhood are title deed issue and security. Some of the narrators currently reside in another place because of these reasons but have a job in Okmeydanı or still spend most of leisure time there. This situation demonstrates how inhabitants or former inhabitants attached themselves to the neighborhood.

I bought a house from another neighborhood, I didn't want to buy from this region because the house prices are very high, and there is no title deed. Another reason was the living areas, playgrounds, parks, gardens, so that my children can live in a more beautiful place. I preferred another neighborhood in terms of social facilities. I have two daughters, now they are playing volleyball in the garden or on the street, but in Okmeydanı, I worry about them if I leave my children on the street, what would happen, would they get lost? [...] I never thought moving my business. I love Okmeydanı. You know that people living in Okmeydanı can't live anywhere else. Both because of its ethnic background and political structure, this is a different neighborhood. (Narrator 16, Appendix B, 33)

Knowing and being known in a place also play a central role in the place attachment. Many people emphasized this as the most important aspect which is why they attach themselves to the neighborhood.

There is social life in Okmeydanı, human beings exist with their social environment. When you leave this place, you become like a fish out of water. My social life, my political life is here, there is spirituality as well. Living well doesn't mean only eating and drinking. There are other ways to live well. I can do these here. The people of Okmeydanı know me, we have very good relations. I know everybody, I know how to treat whom. I can't do these anywhere else. I become less. (Narrator 4, Appendix B, 34)

#### 4. 6 Defending Okmeydanı against marginalization and gentrification

The incidents constantly occur in Okmeydanı. My son grew up in this environment. Children regard all this as a play. They perceive it as a play tag. Since then, our children join us in the hustle. This is all that happens. No one should stigmatize my child as a terrorist. No one should use my child for their rent. He was only a 14-year-old boy... We have Sibel Yalçın Park here. The state regards the children who go to this park and play there as 'terrorist'. Our only fault is living in Okmeydanı and growing up in Okmeydanı. We don't have any other fault. I have already said and now I am saying again, the state chose Okmeydanı as a target, the state chose my son as a target.<sup>143</sup>

The statement of Gülsüm Elvan is a remarkable summary of the perception about Okmeydanı. We mentioned before the political atmosphere in Okmeydanı and the marginal representation and stigmatization of the neighborhood in public discourse and media. Especially with Gezi movement and after Berkin Elvan's funeral, the news about violence and clashes in Okmeydanı had a large place in media.<sup>144</sup> During these clashes, another young person, Burak Can Karamanoğlu from Dörtöyl where conservative population located, lost his life.<sup>145</sup> There was a chaotic atmosphere in Okmeydanı in this period, and the inhabitants were worried if the neighborhood would divide to two parts like in 1970s. On the other hand, many inhabitants have a critical attitude towards this situation. They defend that most of the conflicts stem

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<sup>143</sup> From an interview with Gülsüm Elvan after death of his son Berkin Elvan. *T24*, March 15, 2014. Retrieved from <https://t24.com.tr/haber/berkinin-annesi-basbakan-insan-ise-karsima-ciksin,253476> "Okmeydanı'nda sürekli olaylar oluyor. Benim oğlum da bu ortamda büyüdü. Çocuklar bütün bunları bir oyun olarak görüyor. Kovalamaca oynamak gibi algılıyorlar. Bir o yana, bir bu yana koşuşturmada çocuklarımız da bize katılıyor. Bütün olanlar bu. Kimse benim çocuğumu 'terörist' diye damgalamasın. Benim çocuğumu da hiç kimse kendine rant yapmasın. O 14 yaşında bir çocuktur... Bizim burada Sibel Yalçın Parkı var. Zaten o parka gidip oynayan çocuklara devlet 'terörist' gözüyle bakıyor. Bizim tek suçumuz Okmeydanı'nda oturmak ve Okmeydanı'nda büyümektir. Başka bir suçumuz yok. Ben başından beri söylüyorum, şimdi de söylüyorum. Devlet Okmeydanı'nı kurban seçti. Oğlum kurban seçti." (Translated by author).

<sup>144</sup> See for example, *Haber7*, May 24, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/1161277-okmeydaninda-gerginlik-devam-ediyor; Yeni Şafak, August 26, 2015. Retrieved from https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/okmeydaninda-ingiliz-terorist-2236415>

<sup>145</sup> *T24*, March 13, 2014. Retrieved from <https://t24.com.tr/haber/okmeydaninda-hayatini-kaybeden-burakcan-karamanoglu-son-yolculuguna-ugurlaniliyor,253320>

from provocative actions conducted by the actors who aim to contribute to the stigmatization of the neighborhood.<sup>146</sup>

Today, the political activism is still very common among the inhabitants and they are well aware of the marginal representation of the neighborhood. Many people believe that this marginalization is intentionally created by the state to justify ‘the cleansing operation’ and urban transformation project in the area. The urban renewal and gentrification of Okmeydanı have been on the agenda since the early 2000s. The geographical location of Okmeydanı is significant for these plans. During the rapid urbanization period in Istanbul, the former peripheries like Okmeydanı have turned into internal varoş and have been targeted by the political authorities who have been willing to open new rent areas. Today, the value of lands of Okmeydanı significantly increased because of its closeness to centers of the city. In addition, the transportation opportunities made it a central area in the last two decades. That is why, whoever talks about the situation of Okmeydanı, inevitably mentions the rent existence here.<sup>147</sup>

This is not an urban transformation; this is a rent transformation. They try to steal people’s 50-60 years of labor by oppression and exploitation. For example, there is a plan about building a sports complex on an 8-9 hectares land in Keçecipiri neighborhood. So where are you going to send the people living there? What are you going to do with the people there? They are different from us in terms of ethnicity, worldview, but they are my neighbors. I defend the same rights for them. They paid a price for it, for 30-40 years they paid for electricity, water, all kinds of taxes. Where are you going to send these people? He would build a sports complex on 8-9 hectares, such a big thing. He would build a marina in Hasköy, as if I have many yachts, let me bring one of them to Hasköy. These are not made for us anyway. Why do they say, “We make Okmeydanı like Champs-Elysees”? What is Champs-Elysees? A place where rich people benefit from, it is for them, not for ordinary people. But what would you do for the rights of these people? You

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<sup>146</sup> İsmail Saymaz, “Okmeydanı kimseye mezar olmasın,” *Radikal*, March 24, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/okmeydani-kimseye-mezar-olmasin-1182818/>

<sup>147</sup> See Cansu Çamlıbel, “Taksim 300 metre,” *Hürriyet*, June 9, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/taksim-300-metre-26574376>

explain it first, then come and put your candidacy for mayor. There is no issue about the neighborhood's up and down, right and left. The concern of the people living in this neighborhood is "What will happen to my children?" I am a shopkeeper here for 25 years, where would I go when urban transformation comes? I will have to start doing this labor elsewhere. How will you reorient my life, my children's life? (Narrator 16, Appendix B, 35)

The inhabitants have organized around the NGOs and local associations such as Neighborhoods Union (Mahalleler Birliđi), Okmeydanı Environment Protection Association (Okmeydanı Çevre Koruma Derneđi) and Okmeydanı Social Cooperation and Solidarity Association (Okmeydanı Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneđi) and started to struggle for the title deeds (see Figures 21, 22, 23 and 24). Since the narrators pointed out the consistent threat to lose their houses as most important problem, they worry about both the neighborhood's and their own future. They highlighted the state intervention to the neighborhood texture besides drastic changes in the population during the apartmentalization process and new migration waves. They claim that despite these changes they reunite for housing rights and deal with this problem together. One of the narrators who actively conduct the resistance, mentioned solidarity between two opposite parts of Okmeydanı for title deeds and resistance against the urban transformation project. He told how the inhabitants cooperate to defend the neighborhood and their housing rights highlighting the participation rate of the conservative population in Dört Yol to the meetings, protests and petitions.

We established a title deed commission in 2002 gathering 50-60 people with representatives from the village associations regardless their political position, leftist or rightist. We went to Ankara, organized a meeting, called the representatives of any political parties, they supported us. They decided to give title deeds in the parliament. This land belonged to the foundation, then it was exchanged for treasure land in Yakacık and it was entitled to receive title deeds. It was said that the plans will be implemented, and the title deeds will be given, but this plan which has been prepared for years is not a proper plan; it is an urban transformation plan. Since they do not give guarantee, we

resist it and we sue them. We won most of those cases. There are many things against us in the contracts. We don't trust contracts; they are not obvious. Therefore, the process continues. [...] The best work we have done here was that; during the mayor of Tayyip Erdoğan, it was declared that this place a protected area, and according to that plan, it would be destroyed. We fought against that plan. We had an office here, for a month we prepared petitions of objection for days and nights with urban planners and lawyers. We were well organized. We had groups, we organized demonstrations, protests. One day, I never forget it, we went to a meeting with Tayyip Erdoğan in Hacıhüsrev we went there only three people, we thought that if we go crowded, they will attack immediately. Although we were only three people we were suddenly surrounded, just because we took word and asked a question. I explained him there was something wrong, he doesn't know his own plan. There is a cemetery where he mentioned but he was not aware of it. There are 5-6-storey buildings where he described as an empty field. I said that there are buildings in the places you show, thousands of people live in there, according to this plan they will be demolished, what will happen to these people? Everyone was agreed with that beautiful plan he was talking about but suddenly they got confused, everyone started to grumble, they said I was right. I never forget that. (Narrator 4, Appendix B, 36)



Figure 21. Street writing<sup>148</sup>

Source: Author's personal archive

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<sup>148</sup> "Okmeydanı belongs to the people."



Figure 22. Demonstration against urban transformation project<sup>149</sup>

Source: Okmeydanı Social Cooperation and Solidarity Association

One of the first things I did was, you know, there was a serious title deed problem there, in my early years, there was a case because it was a large land foundation there, including the place where my hospital located. It was the land of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation. The buildings on this land were the illegal constructions, workplaces, houses... They were built since 1950s and overlooked. In fact, there is some kind of distorted urbanization that the state, the administrators or the municipality overlooked, implicitly gave way, nothing else. What should they do? They tried to make a place for themselves, a home, they can't sleep on the street. What will they do if you don't give them a land, don't provide them a proper urbanization? They will purchase land from someone and build on it. After a while, when the population increased, there was an attitude of government that treated them as a vote potential. This was the first thing I noticed about the title deed issue, there was a case, the people live in there were depressed. Because the houses do not belong to them. Our people very appreciate the place. It is very important to own a house. Being owner of a house actually construct a memory. That is why they still say, "I was born here, but I come from Hafik or Alucra." But it is obvious that they won't go back, you won't go back to Hafik, you won't go back to Alucra. The way to settle here, to be an urbanite, to adopt a city culture, being from Istanbul is to form a city consciousness and it can be possible through this memory. They should get out of this volatility. So, I put aside my job at that time, maybe for two years I was the spokesman of the title deed commission. What is my business as a doctor there? I wasn't just an ordinary healthcare manager there. I don't recommend it either. If you only listen to the aching parts of your patient, you won't not do your job as a

<sup>149</sup> The writings on banners say: "Our neighborhood is our home, we don't go anywhere," "How many times will you sell it?" "Don't touch our house, our neighborhood."

doctor. When you listen to a 70-years-old woman who is depressed and has endless joint pain, you learn that one of her sons died in a long death fast, and that the other one was in prison. This woman won't recover anyway. What if I give her Prozac? Or a carpenter down there, who makes seat skeletons, had rubber checks, bankrupted, and finished. He had an accident, lost his hand in the machine. What do you do now? It is a very expensive thing to suture tendons. At that time, I brought the armchair carpenters together and said, "Let's make a provident fund." Accidents are common among them, "Let put that money there, everyone gives 100 Turkish liras every month, let me contribute to it as well and let's use that money in such cases." I tried to invent formulas like that. I mean, if he comes to me, I can't say, "Give me 3000 Turkish liras, then I will suture that." It is a different hospital, a different neighborhood. It still is. (Narrator 17, Appendix B, 37)

On the other hand, the inhabitants state that, since the late 1990s, there has been a systematic degeneration and corruption which consist of drug traffic, formation of the gangs and illegal affaires in the neighborhood. Because of this situation, the inhabitants of Okmeydanı have no trust to the state. As pointed out before, they are well aware of marginal representation of the neighborhood and have no expectation for this situation to be changed.

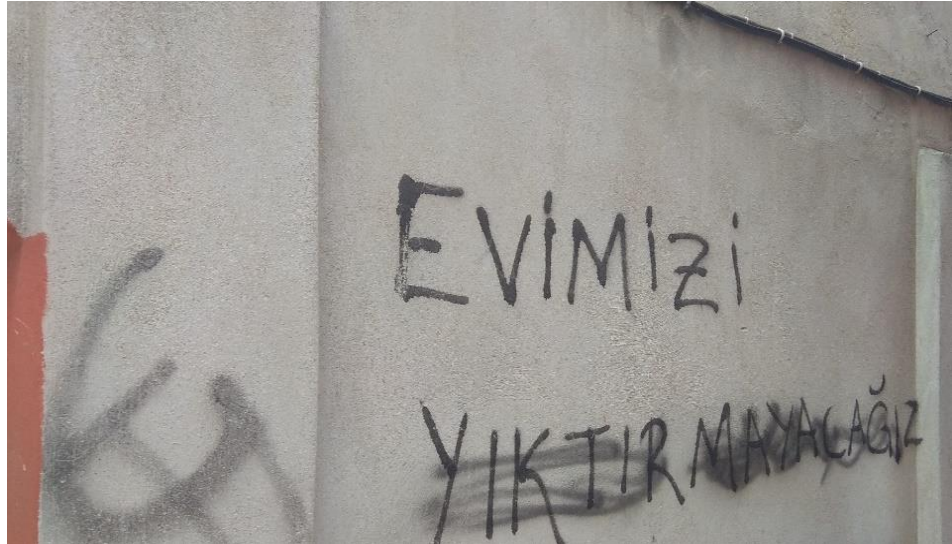


Figure 23. Street writing<sup>150</sup>

Source: Author's personal archive

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<sup>150</sup> "We won't allow our house to be demolished."



Figure 24. Demonstration against urban transformation project<sup>151</sup>

Source: Okmeydanı Social Cooperation and Solidarity Association

There is a great fear created about Okmeydanı outside, for example, we are friends with parents at my son's school, we have a group with them, we organize events, we take the children to the cinema etc. When it is my turn, their husbands say, "I give you a lift," "I pick you up," calling time to time, "What happened? How are you?" So, the perception about Okmeydanı is like that, "there is terrorism," "a dangerous place," there are writings on the wall, and when they saw it, they were scared. When they came here, there was also an incident, and we made them get in a taxi from another street. But they saw that people living in this neighborhood are not bad people. Of course, on televisions they say, "That happened in Okmeydanı," "There is an incident in Okmeydanı," those people are so scared of here. One day I met a teacher in a minibus, she came from Sorgun, she said "Do you live here?" I said "Yes." "It is very dangerous here, they appointed me to the school here, but I rent a flat in Gültepe, they said don't rent here." I said, "I have been living in this neighborhood for 50 years, there is no problem, the people of the neighborhood are not harmed here." You know, if the revolutionary children do something, they do it for good, they do it against drugs, they support useful things. Perception of Okmeydanı should change, there is a very good solidarity. But they see like, they are Alevi, they are terrorists. (Narrator 18, Appendix B, 38)

<sup>151</sup> The writings on the banners say, "We dealt with its mud, we don't leave the rent to you," "Let us see the title deeds before we die," "You said title deeds for 50 years, you caused our parents to be ill."

Apart from the political protests and incidents occurred in Okmeydanı, there is no relation with the state forces. Many inhabitants worry about the existence of police in the neighborhood and regard political organizations as an alternative for their security against the corruption of the neighborhood (for an example of demonstrations against the corruption of the neighborhood, see Figure 25).

I was angry with the young people, because I have asthma, every day the neighborhood was under the tear gas, I was tired of it. There are people who have children, babies. Many people died in these incidents. That is why, I was really angry with them, saying “why don’t you stay calm.” But now, most of them were arrested, the place is empty, and neighborhood has become dangerous. Drug dealers, thieves, any kind of dirty works came here. Every day I see strange people in the neighborhood. [...] How can I call police? You already know that they call us as terrorists. They only come here when a protest occurs, and they have a hostile attitude towards us. They killed a kid running over him by a scorpion. He was a Syrian child; he was also our child...<sup>152</sup> Well, when we have a problem, we call our young people, but in these days, there is no one, we are completely alone because they are arrested. So, there is no security in the neighborhood and an endless freedom for criminals. (Narrator 19, Appendix B, 39)

Busses do not enter the neighborhood, they come in front of Perpa and go back. They say what, “they burn vehicles”, no, it is not true. We have established committees here; we went to the municipality. We went into buses and brought the buses to the neighborhood. They put money to the poor children’s pocket and say “Go, make barricade here, make a fire there, so we can raid the neighborhood.” They put molotov cocktails in their hand and make them throw into buses. There are many witnesses, and I have also witnessed. Some people sell drugs to the children 10 meters away from the police, they don’t do anything. Today, people are afraid to go home. We used to patrol the neighborhood two nights a week. Because people get off the bus and walk all the way, my daughter was harassed twice. We try to solve problems by our own means, then we become “terrorists” in their eyes. I am one of the first settlers in this neighborhood, but today I became a stranger in my neighborhood. It is very sad, but I am afraid to walk around my neighborhood. Very sad but true. Because it is not clear who is who anymore. Kids have gun in hands. It became like that, after revolutionaries arrested. We no longer have security. (Narrator 7, Appendix B, 40)

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<sup>152</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.insanhaber.com/guncel/polis-zirhli-araci-istanbul-okmeydani-nda-suriyeli-cocugu-h99388.html>



Figure 25. Demonstration against corruption of the neighborhood

Source: A narrator's archive

On the other hand, there are many inhabitants who have a critical approach towards the radical leftist groups. They blame these groups to mishandle Okmeydanı by the violent acts and to contribute stigmatization of the neighborhood. They defend peaceful protests and wish to live in more peaceful area. Some people leave the neighborhood because of the conflicted situation. For example, the Dede<sup>153</sup> in Okmeydanı Cemevi in 2014 was complaining this situation, and after a couple of months, he left.

I was at Cemevi's courtyard for funeral, I was very close to Uğur Kurt when he was shot. Some say that the police had targeted me, but I don't believe that, I don't think he targeted Cemevi, I don't want to believe it. After this incident, as a "dede," I tried to stay calm and prevent provocations. [...] People use their legal rights, but the police attack them. It is the nature of Okmeydanı, every day there is an incident. We don't support people who are

<sup>153</sup> Dede is the religious leader of Alevi community. In every cemevi there are one or two dedes at least, to conduct the ceremonies, funeral, and cem rituals.

covered and who are armed, but the police attack all people, even if they are not at the protest. I am old and unhealthy, and I am tired of living the same things every day. Maybe I will leave Okmeydanı Cemevi if it continues like that. (Narrator 20, Appendix B, 41)

#### 4.7 An exploration of the inhabitants' narratives

In this research I primarily focused on the establishment process of Okmeydanı as a gecekondu settlement. It was very striking that the inhabitants started their life-story narratives with the building process of gecekondu like their life started with the dwelling and building houses in this neighborhood. Most of them did not mention the period when they lived in the rural areas before the migration, unless I asked them. When they mentioned that period, they mostly described the situation in terms of deprivation and poverty. As most of the interviewees were from the second generation of migrants, they explained their reasons of migration as to join their relatives or family, besides the push and pull factors. Because Okmeydanı was a place where the interviewees' relatives and hemşehris had already settled, the neighborhood was a familiar place to them, and it was relatively easy for them to get used to this place. Migration meant in a way the reunification of their extended family and former community members.

The second important factor that affected rootedness in the neighborhood, was its physical appearance in the early period. Until the late 1980s, Okmeydanı was a peripheral neighborhood of Istanbul with rural characteristics. The rural migrants had easily continued to maintain their traditional lifestyle in their gecekondu, with the gardens that they cultivated. Many narrators yearningly mentioned this period and described themselves as "still peasant." Such a description shows us how theories of modernization on Turkish urbanization, which mainly focused on rural-urban dichotomy with an idealization of urban way of life, had limitations to develop

a deeper understanding of the so-called “gecekondur phenomenon”. As opposed to what early studies of urban development have estimated, although many gecekondus had disappeared and were replaced by the multi-storey buildings today, most dwellers expressed their difficulties to adapt to the urban life, having still a nostalgia for their former “gecekondur life.” Recently, with the new movement called “back to the village,” many inhabitants built new houses or repaired the old ones in their village, to be able to pass their summer there. They do not plan to go back to the village permanently, but these visits, they express, give them a sense of revival of traditional and cultural values.

The communal solidarity in the neighborhood is another significant aspect that marked the establishment process. Dwelling and building houses as “place-making” practices, required communal solidarity, an experience which is indeed similar to other gecekondur settlements. The inhabitants of Okmeydanı built their houses in a communal cooperation during the establishment process, and they developed their own infrastructure such as sewage system and pathways with their own means. These place-making practices strengthened their sense of attachment to the neighborhood, which they considered now as “their place.” In the recent decades, they established a variety of village associations to strengthen their communal solidarity and revive their cultural traditions. These associations emphasized hometowns and villages on the one hand, a matter which contributed greatly to communal solidarity among different hemşehris. But they also had a divisive aspect, enforcing a classification among neighborhood inhabitants in terms of their local origins. Therefore, while people were gathering around these associations as small groups, building a certain internal solidarity, they also developed differential identities which caused them to act separately.

Narratives also revealed that for many residents the sense of a local identity and belonging to Okmeydanı has been primarily built upon a collective memory on Alevi belief and culture. This memory was followed by past remembrances of the “establishing” the neighborhood, with an emphasis on the political struggles which came about in the 1970s. In that regard, many defined themselves as an Alevi and leftist, showing how these two concepts were considered as the most prominent identity markers of Okmeydanı, by linking the Alevi collective memory to the neighborhood’s past. As the Alevi population settled in Okmeydanı consisted of a rather closed community, many inhabitants were concerned about protecting their local identity, while establishing a new place where they could live in peace and maintain their traditional culture at the same time. The nostalgia for the *gecekondu* life, expressed repeatedly in most narratives includes in fact a longing for this traditional lifestyle in the recent past of the neighborhood. That period was significant for preserving and maintaining the Alevi traditions and rituals, which have been significantly functional to create and consolidate their sense of community at the time.

Until the so-called “apartmentalization” (*apartmanlaşma*) period of the 1990s, Okmeydanı was a relatively homogeneous area. Many inhabitants emphasized homogeneity of the population in the good old days, complaining about the degeneration and corruption of the neighborhood in recent decades. With the coming of “outsiders” as tenants after the apartmentalization process, they thought, the sense of community started to be dissolved. On the other hand, with the increasing illegal activities such as drug traffic, burglary and usurpation, the neighborhood became a less safe place for the inhabitants. Most of them believe that this situation has been intentionally created by the authorities, to enhance the marginal representation of

Okmeydanı on media and in public discourse. There is a common belief that this representation is used for the justification of urban transformation project and the future gentrification of the area. The increasing clashes in Okmeydanı especially after Gezi movement and the emphasis on “cleansing the region from terrorism” by such a transformation in the public discourse contribute further to the marginalization of the neighborhood. In return for this, the inhabitants of Okmeydanı developed various strategies such as gathering around the neighborhood associations, preparing petitions for title deeds and organizing meetings in order to defend “their place” against urban transformation and marginalization.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to reveal undocumented and unrecorded aspects of the history of Okmeydanı, a neighborhood that was established as a gecekondu settlement in the late 1950s and 1960s. Since the population of this neighborhood mostly consists of subordinated groups such as Alevis, Kurds, Romanies - today Syrian refugees added - and it has become a highly politicized area throughout history, it is represented as a marginal and criminal area in public discourse and media.

First of all, our purpose was to give a voice to the inhabitants of Okmeydanı to tell their stories in parallel with the neighborhood history before it will be exposed to a radical change through urban transformation project. By doing so, we explored how the inhabitants rooted in and attached themselves to this place by place-making practices, establishing a sense of community and defending their place as excluded and marginalized groups in the urban space. We found out a strong identification with neighborhood, as a part of their individual and group identity. Although the population became more diversified today, we observed the domination of Alevis and Kurds in cultural and social structure of the place.

The communal solidarity between inhabitants, and the collective memory kept have been alive through various practices and sites of memories, which preserve and consolidate the collective identity of the community which were the most prominent features of Okmeydanı. In that sense, we explored a combination of the Alevi memory and neighborhood's past. Due to this memory and recent incidents occurred in Okmeydanı, there is a significant distrust for the state and the political authorities. The conflicts frequently occur between police and protesters, the hostile

attitude of the state forces towards the inhabitants and increasing corruption in the neighborhood by drug traffic and other crimes strengthens an internal solidarity and defending place against the threats outside.

Another focus of the research was how the inhabitants interpret marginal representation of Okmeydanı and their own perception about this place. The inhabitants were well aware of the representation of the neighborhood, interpret this representation as a part of discrimination against Alevi people carried out throughout history. They also regard this representation as intentionally created to use for justification of a “cleansing operation,” which means gentrification of the neighborhood. In addition, the inhabitants are exposed to threats of losing their houses and their place because of the urban transformation project planned to implement in this area. Since most of the inhabitants do not have title deeds, they consistently worry about the future of neighborhood. They envisage that as the other neighborhoods had been through such a process, the transformation will be ended up by gentrification of the place and displacement and dispossession of the current inhabitants. This situation also strengthens the place attachment and communal solidarity in Okmeydanı.

In this research, our major focus was subjective and affective aspects of the relations between people and place, and oral history allowed us to explore these dimensions of the inhabitants’ experiences through life-story narratives. Since most of the narrators were the first settlers, their life-stories included the establishment process of Okmeydanı. Besides the material structure of the environment, they also shaped the cultural and social structure of the neighborhood. In this sense, their memories and experiences allowed us not only to find out the history of Okmeydanı, but also to understand its present situation.

This study provided us a different perspective about the locality and geographical borders of place as well. The imagined borders of the neighborhood, its descriptions and practices such as naming places, prompted us to reevaluate definition of a place. The meanings attributed to the neighborhood by its inhabitants, and relationships established between them constitute its texture. In this research, we also aimed to explore the texture of Okmeydanı before it is erased by a drastic change which would be brought along the urban transformation.

On the other hand, further research is required to explore the current transformation of the neighborhood, especially on the new settlers' experiences who are the Syrian refugees, and other migrants. It would allow us to understand better the present situation of Okmeydanı with its changing texture through a comparative study between the first and last inhabitants' perspectives.

## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF NARRATORS

- Narrator 1: Male, 63 years old, elementary school, retired worker.  
Migrated from Erzincan, in 1973. Interviewed in 10 August 2018, in his house.
- Narrator 2: Male, 64 years old, elementary school, retired worker.  
Migrated from Erzurum, in 1972. Interviewed in 10 August 2018, in his house.
- Narrator 3: Female, 59 years old, elementary school, housewife. Migrated from Muş, in 1966. Interviewed in 22 March 2019, in her house.
- Narrator 4: Male, 62 years old, master's degree in philosophy, self-employed. Migrated from Sivas, in 1968. Interviewed in 22 April 2018 and 27 April 2019, in a café.
- Narrator 5: Male, 58 years old, university, head teacher. Migrated from Erzurum, in 1974. Interviewed in 21 October 2018, in a coffeehouse.

Narrator 6: Female, 67 years old, illiterate, housewife. Migrated from Dersim (Tunceli), in 1973. Interviewed in 8 July 2018, in her house.

Narrator 7: Male, 57 years old, elementary school, self-employed. Migrated from Sivas, in 1972. Interviewed in 10 August 2018, in his café.

Narrator 8: Male, 69 years old, elementary school, retired worker. Migrated from Erzurum, in 1965. Interviewed in 21 October 2018, in a coffeehouse.

Narrator 9: Male, 72 years old, elementary school, retired worker. Migrated from Erzincan, in 1964. Interviewed in 21 October 2018, in a coffeehouse.

Narrator 10: Female, 39 years old, university, journalist. Born in Istanbul, Okmeydanı. Her family migrated from Dersim (Tunceli), in 1972. Interviewed in 18 May 2018, in an association.

Narrator 11: Male, 37 years old, high school, self-employed. Born in Istanbul, Okmeydanı. His family migrated from Tokat, in 1971. Interviewed in 25 October 2018, in his shop.

Narrator 12: Male, 34 years old, elementary school, worker. Born in Istanbul, Okmeydanı. His family migrated from Sivas, in 1973. Interviewed in 20 April 2014, in Okmeydanı Cemevi.

Narrator 13: Female, 30 years old, high school, worker. Born in Istanbul, Okmeydanı. Her family migrated from Tokat, in 1970. Interviewed in 4 June 2014, in Okmeydanı Cemevi.

Narrator 14: Female, 32 years old, high school, accountant. Born in Istanbul, Okmeydanı. Her family migrated from Sivas, in 1973. Interviewed in 22 March 2019, her neighbor's house.

Narrator 15: Male, 68 years old, elementary school, retired worker. Migrated from Sivas in 1972. Interviewed in 22 March 2019, in his house.

Narrator 16: Male, 44 years old, high school, shopkeeper. Born in Germany. His family migrated from Erzincan, in 1962. Interviewed in 27 April 2019, in his shop.

Narrator 17: Male, 60 years old, PhD, medical doctor. Migrated from Nevşehir in 1990. Interviewed in 25 November 2018, in a café.

Narrator 18: Female, 50 years old, high school, retired worker. Born in Istanbul. Her family migrated from Erzincan in 1961. Interviewed in 5 February 2019, in an association.

Narrator 19: Female, 58 years old, elementary school, housewife. Migrated from Sivas in 1975. Interviewed in 5 February 2019, in her house.

Narrator 20: Male, 67 years old, elementary school, *Dede*. Migrated from Erzincan in 1965. Interviewed in 29 May 2014, in Okmeydanı Cemevi.

## APPENDIX B

### ORIGINAL TURKISH QUOTATIONS

1. Köyde rençperlik yapıyorduk. Mesela ot biçerdik, ondan sonra arpa buğday, çavdar ekerdik. Yani bizim o bölgede odur, arpa ekilir buğday ekilir, bir de çavdar ekilir, diğer bağ-bostan yok yani bizim orada bunlar gelmiyor, gelişmiyor. Köy diyelim yüz haneydi, nüfusu bin kişiye yakın. Köyün arazisi, merası veya tarlası, nüfus gelişti, yetersiz kaldı. Haliyle geçim nedeniyle göç başladı, yani ben o nedenle... Bir de eğitim meselesi var, okul yok, eğitim yok, bizim babalarımız, dedelerimiz hiç okumamış. Biz de sadece yarım yamalak bir ilkokulu okuduk, onun dışında baktık ki önümüzde eğer bir evlilik varsa, bir gelecek varsa çoluk çocuğumuz cahil kalmasın diye.

(Narrator 1)

2. Ben Erzurum'da okula gittiğim zaman, gittiğim köy muhafazakâr bir köydü, biz de çocuktuk, bir şey anlamıyorduk, kim olduğumuzu doğru dürüst bilmiyorduk. Orada o çocuklar artık büyüklerinden ne öğrenmişler ne gözle bizi görüyorlarsa, hep bir suç işleniyor üstüme kalıyor, anladın mı, üstüme... Ben de hani Türkçe doğru dürüst kendimi müdafaa edemediğim için, öğretmenin bir sopası vardı, durmadan vuruyordu bana. "Ben yapmadım..." Sınıfın yarısı, şimdi açık konuşayım değil mi? Sünni köyü, yani Sünni öğrenciler. O güne kadar Alevilik hakkında bilgileri yok, ne öğretilmiş, ne anlatılmış... Bizi gavur biliyorlar, dinsiz biliyorlar, imansız biliyorlar, anladın mı? Şimdi okulun içinde bir suç işlendiği zaman, mesela masa kırılıyor, kitap yırtılıyor, pano düşüyor veya Atatürk'ün fotoğrafı düşüyor, hep bana

yükleniyor, “o yaptı.” “Ben yapmadım,” diyorum, hepsi bağıyor, “o yaptı, o yaptı”. Öğretmen dışarı çıktı mı bu sefer de etrafımı sarıyorlardı, beni dövüyorlardı. Ama çok kötü de dövdüler beni yani, o çocuklar birkaç kere yüzümü gözümü hep şişirdiler, tabii canım... Neyse o köyde okula gittim, sonra iki sene sonra bizim köye gittim, bizim köyde o zaman bir öğretmen geldi, o ayrı bir olay onu istersen hiç konuşmayalım. [...] Bizim köye bir öğretmen geldi, tam bir militandı, ayırım yapıyordu, bizi dövüyordu, çok kötü dövüyordu. [...] Yani köyde durum bir yanıyla da buydu. Şimdi bacım Erzurum’da, o merkeze taşındı, hâlâ aynı dava. Kendi köyün dışında barınamazsın, mümkün değil. Hemen komşu köylerden bile düşmanlık vardır. [...] Amcalarımdan biri Almanya’daydı, biri de sonradan gitti. Onlar köyden direk Almanya’ya gittiler. 1960’larda Almanya işçi aldığı zaman amcam okuma yazma bildiği için, gençti de, Almanya’ya gitti. Sonra diğer amcam gitti. Sonra babam iki kere gitti, orada durmadı, çıktı geldi. (Narrator 2)

3. Biz köydeyken babam sıhhiyeciydi. Maddi durumumuz iyiydi, yani iyilerken diğerlerine göre iyiydi. Topraklarımız vardı, çayırlarımız, tarlalarımız vardı. Ama babam hep ağalarla sorun yaşıyordu. Çünkü onlara karşı çıkıyordu, köylülere davranışlarına itiraz ediyodu. O yüzden de ağalar babamı rahat bırakmıyolardı. Çayırlarını yakıyolardı, ekinlerini suya atıyolardı. [...] Sonra işte Varto depremi oldu, o da son damla oldu. Ben çocuktum ama hayal meyal hatırlıyorum, taşların yuvarlanışını, insanların bağırışını.... İşte o yıkımdan sonra biz göç ettik. [...] Bir şey daha var, o zaman İstanbul’daki ablam Almanya’ya gitcekti. Annemle babam da onun çocuklarına bakmak için, yani çocukları götürmedi. Buraya geldik işte, babam önce Şişli Etfal’de

çalıştı, sonra bakkal açtı. Ama biz çok şeyimizi kaybettik, şehre gelince fakirleştik. (Narrator 3)

4. Babamız burada çalıştığı için, onu yıllarca görme şansına sahip olmayan insanlar olarak artık babamızla birlikte olalım diye göç ettik. Geçim yerimiz bura olduğu için, buraya göç ettik. Babam burada, Unkapanı'nda bir demircinin yanında çalışıyordu. Köyde babam yoktu. Babamı senede bir kez, 10-15 günlüğüne izne geldiğinde biz görürdük. Dedem bize baktı, bana babalığı dedem yaptı. Sonradan dedem de buraya geldi, bir süre bizimle yaşadı. Bizde, amcamlarda kalıyordu. Sonra ben lisedeyken dedem vefat etti. (Narrator 4)

5. Ben buraya 1974'te okumak için geldim. İlkokulu bitirdikten sonra köydeki öğretmenim iyi bir öğrenci olduğumu düşünerek babamı beni buraya göndermesi için ikna etti. O zamanlar abilerim zaten buradaydı. Belki 5-10 yıl önce İstanbul'a gelmişlerdi. O zamanki göçün sebebini biliyorsunuz, memleketteki ekonomik koşullar nedeniyle. Sonuçta İstanbul büyük şehir, hayatlarını burada idame ettirmek için. Sonra insanlar akrabalarını, kardeşlerini, arkadaşlarını da getirdiler. Ben geldiğimde burada abimlerde kaldım. Önce Alibeyköy Ortaokulu'na sonra da Okmeydanı Ortaokulu'na gittim. Aslında ben buraya geldiğimde pek öyle yabancılık, zorluk çekmedim, çünkü aşağı yukarı bir köy de buradaydı. Bugün de olduğu gibi, köylülerimizin çoğu bu bölgedeydi. Bizim tanıdıklarımızın çoğunun birinci kuşağı buraya gelip yerleşmişlerdi. Ben köyümü ve babamı özlemek dışında

bir zorluk çekmedim. Bunun dışında bir yabancılık hissetmedim çünkü buradaki bütün aileleri tanıyoduk. (Narrator 5)

6. Büyük bir hayalle İstanbul'a geldik, işte kente gidiyoruz, güzel şehre gidiyoruz hayaliyle geldik ama geldiğimiz yer Okmeydanı gibi bir köy. Köyümüzden daha köy. Yani köyden köye geldik, bir hayal kırıklığı yaşadım... Babam bir gecekondu yapmıştı, hazırlığını yapmıştı, evi yaptıktan sonra bizi çağırdı. Dedemin aracılığıyla her şeyi sattık ve İstanbul'a göç ettik. Geldik baktık ki bizim köyden farklı olmayan, bizim köy evleri taş evlerdi, işte burada tek farkı briketlerle yapılmış çatısı kiremitten falan filan evler. Tek farkı buydu. Ama etraf bomboş tarla marla işte aynen köy, dut ağaçları vs. Burada Arnavutlar çiftçilik yapıyordu, buğday, çavdar, marul, turp, soğan gibi şeyler ekip biçiyorlar, onunla geçimlerini sağlayan insanlardı. Hayvancılık yapıyorlardı, mesela bizim evin bulunduğu yerin karşısında büyükçe bir mandıra vardı, aşağı yukarı yüz tane ineği vardı Meydin amcanın, Arnavut bir vatandaşı. [...] O zaman barınma imkanları çok kısıtlı, devletin öyle bugünkü gibi TOKİ'si yok, Okmeydanı boş bir arazi olduğu için, bu Haliç çevresinde tersanelerde, atölyelerde çalışan insanlar konut sorunlarını gidermek için Arnavutlardan kaçak, işte muhtarların ya da mahalle bekçileri var, onların şahitliğinde buralarda arsalar alıyorlar. (Narrator 4)

7. Ben köyde de çok çektim. Annem öldü, 7 çocuk başıma kaldı. En büyüğü bendim. O çocukları hep ben büyüttüm. Bir kız kardeşim 6 aylıktı annem öldüğünde. Annem 37 yaşında öldü, üç aylık hamileydi. Onun hastalığını

şimdi menengijit diye biliyorum. Üç gün içinde öldü. Ben 15 yaşında vardım. Bir kız kardeşim ameliyat oldu, o masada kaldı. Babam beş sene sonra evlendi, benden küçük bir kız aldı. Biraz saftı, tabii bir de köyde eskiden diyolardı “ağadır kızımızı verelim.” Babam sözde ağaydı, ağa çocuxuydu. Sen bizim köyü bilir misin? Ziyareti biliyo musun, hiç gittin mi? Aslında bizim köyde ağa yoktur, yani öyle yönetme falan değil, malı mülkü var ya, ondan ağa diyolar. [...] Sonra ben evlendim. Evlenmem de şey, eski töre vardı ya, öyle, he görücü usulü. O da yine halamın oğludur. Eskiden kuzen kuzene evleniyordu ya, öyle bir gelenek. Bizim de üvey anne vardı, biraz baskı yapıyordu. Üvey annem benden küçüktü. O çok yapmıyordu da onun annesi bize baskı yapıyordu. Sonra buraya geldik. Yerimiz çok kötüydü. 1,5 yaşında kızım vardı, hasta oldu, orada öldü. Hep akrabalarla oturduk, amcaları, bir sürü insan, her şeye ben koştum. (Narrator 6)

8. Babam gecekonduyu yapmıştı, iki göz bir gecekondtu. Daha sonraları, esas Okmeydanı yıkıldığı zaman 1973 yılında, ben lisedeyken, evin önüne bir camekan yaptım. Okmeydanı yıkılmaya başladı, Boğaziçi Köprüsü yapılıyordu, yol güzergahına geldiği için. Oradan artan güzel malzemeleri biz alıyorduk. Babamla onu getirdik, evin önüne koyduk. Babam çok çalıştığı için uğraşamıyordu, ben onunla uğraşmaya başladım. O yaşında ben kapının önüne camekan yapmaya çalışmışım, hiç unutmam. Onu yaptıktan sonra böylece bizim 2+1 evimiz oldu. İşte öyle bir süreç yaşadık, buraya alıştık, tek katlı gecekondtu evlerinde herkesin bahçeleri vardı, biber, domates, patlıcan gibi şeyler ekiyorlardı. Asma ağaçlarının altında kahvaltı yapardık. Güzel zamanlardı. (Narrator 4)

9. Bizim mahallemizde çeşmeler vardı, hep gecekonduydu. İşte özellikle dut ağaçları, meyve ağaçlarının yoğun olduğu, bahçelerde organik ürünlerin ekilip biçildiği bir yerdi. Ben gecekondu yaşamını çok seven bir insanım, yani köylüyüm ben, hâlâ köylüyüm, çünkü köy yaşamını biz burada Okmeydanı'nda bulduk. Aynı şekilde Gazi'de buluyoruz, Armutlu'da buluyoruz. Bunlar hani o otantik dokusu bozulmayan mahalleler. Baruthane Okulu barakaydı biliyo musun? Bu aşağıda, Sibel Yalçın Parkı'nın hemen aşağısında. O parkın olduğu yer Laz Mahmut abinin briket harmanıydı. Burada Arnavutlar otururdu, bir arsa konusu olsun, gecekondu yapılanması olsun, onlar bu arsayı tahsis ederlerdi. Bizler de gelen komşulara, gelen insanlarımıza yardımcı olurduk. O çocuk yaşta briket taşırdık, işte kum, çimento taşırdık. Veysel Amca vardı Talatpaşa'da at arabacı Veysel Amca, burada, Anadolu'da takılıyordu, at arabasıyla kum taşırdı, çimento taşırdı. İşte böyle bir hayata girdik, komşularımızla birlikte mutluyduk. Şimdi hastanenin olduğu yerde, o köşede bir kahve vardı, Anadolu Kahvesi oradan kalmış. Şark Kahvesi de aynı. (Narrator 7)

10. Şimdi biz geceleri gelip kazıyoruz, ölü kafaları çıkıyor. Kardeşim de geldi, sekiz sene benim yanımda kaldı. Biz inşaatta çalışıyoduk, gece de gelip buraları kazıyoduk. Gecekondunun zeminini düzeltiyoduk. Gündüz inşaatta, gece burada. Herkes gece çalışıyordu zaten. Önemli olan zemini yapmak, yeri düzelttiğin zaman, akşam briket getiriyosun, o gece sabaha kadar yapıyosun. Ama yaptığın zaman sonuçta düzenli değil yani. Öyle briketleri üst üste diziyorsun. Yine de kendi evini kendin yapıyorsun yani, kendi çabanla, o

başka bişey. Şimdi kimse öyle bişey yapmaz. Ama ertesi sabah biz bir geliyoruz ki zabıta girmiş her tarafı yıkılmış, bakıyorum benimkine karışmamışlar. Onlar yıkıyordu, komşular yine yapıyordu. Öyle adam var ki on kere yıkılmış. Amcamınkini de yıktılar yine yaptı, ama benimkine dokunmadılar. (Narrator 2)

11. Burada gecekondulu mafyası yoktu. Ama duyduk yani burada da girişimde bulunmuşlar, o fırsatı bulamamışlar. Burada Şark Kahvesi'nde öyle bir oluşum vardı, bişeyler yapmaya çalıştılar. Halk izin vermedi, onları kovdu burdan. Ama şöyle bişey vardı, iki evi olan insanlar yine ev yapıp yapıp sattılar. Onun dışında arsa ya da ev satan olmadı. Toplu yıkım olmadı, bizim buraya dozer girmedi. Sadece zabıta geliyordu, balyozlarla duvarlara vuruyodu, yıkıp geçip gidiyodu. Ben rüşvet vermedim. Zaten istesem de veremezdim ki. Veren vermiştir belki, onu bilmem. Birinin bir evi varsa, diğerini yıkıyolardı. Ama o adam durumu görünce bize yardım etti. Bana dedi "git şurda güzel taşlar var, onları getir döşe ki rutubet çekmesin." Önce bana sordu; "senin başka evin var mı?", dedim; "ya ne evi, gelin bakın." Geldi baktı ki bir tek yatak var, biraz kapacak var, başka bişeyimiz yok, o yüzden benimkine dokunmadı. Yani ben şimdi vicdanımı mı atıyorum? (Narrator 2)

12. Bir zaman gecekondulu mafyası vardı, Ali Rıza isminde bi adam, bu Şark Kahvesi'nin sahibi, geldi Örnektepe'de kendisine ait olmayan arazileri sattı. Gece mafya tipi adamları getirdi buraya koydu, epey yer sattı millete. Sonradan bizim gençler araya girdi. Biliyosun, bu sağ-sol davası vardı o zamanlar, işte bizim gençlerimiz onu burdan kovdu. Ama adam zaten yükünü

almıştı da devam edemedi. Gençlerimiz sayesinde, Bülent Demir, onun arkadaşları, Allah rahmet eylesin, Dev-Sol'un liderlerinden biriydi. Sonra o öldürüldü. O duyduğu zaman işte böyle haksızlığa el koydu. Dedi "sen bu haksızlığı yapmıycaksın." O şekil mahalleyi o mafya tipinden kurtardı.

(Narrator 8)

13. Zabıta geldi, evleri iki kez yıktılar, ama yerel seçim zamanlarında, insanlar hep onu kolluyodu, o zamanda insanlar gecekondulaşmaya başlıyodu.

Kimse müdahale etmiyodu, öyle yaptılar. Bir de gecekondulaşılırken şöyle bişey vardı, büyük bi dayanışma vardı, insanlar toplanıyodu, beraber yapıyodu. Bir yandan da herkes çevresinde yakınları olsun istiyodu. Güvenlik için, demografik yapıyı, inanç yapısını korumak için. Tanıdık bi çevrede rahat edebilmek için, daha iyi komşuluk ilişkileri geliştirebilmek için.

Toplanıyolardı, bi gecekondulaşıyorlardı. Gecekondulaşma hemen bir günde bitiyodu. Öyle planlı bişey yoktu yani, zaten gecekondulaşma dediğiniz şey plansız yapı. Ha burada gecekondulaşmasının nedeni, benim şahsi görüşüm, Haliç'in hem sağı hem solunda, Alibeyköy'den Eminönü'ne kadar her taraf fabrikaydı. Fabrikanın olduğu yerde de işçi olması lazım. Peki, işçinin barınması gerekiyo, çok uzak yerlerde barınma şansı da olmadığına göre.

Devlet bu soruna bir çözüm bulamıyo, o yüzden de müdahale etmiyo.

Fabrikalara en yakın yerlerde genelde gecekondulaşma çok olmuştur, bunun sebebi orada iş buldunuz, burada da ev yapıyorsunuz, ulaşım sorununu da çözmüş oluyosunuz, yürüyerek gidip geliyorsunuz. Ama fabrikalar kapanınca n'oldu? Anlaşma bitti. (Narrator 5)

14. Burada kanalizasyon falan yoktu. Benim lisede okuduğum dönemde gençlik hareketinin daha aktif olduğu bi alandı buralar. Kanalizasyon sistemini devrimci gençlik hareketi kendi inisiyatifiyle yaptı. Özellikle ev yapımında vesaire birinci derecede etkili oldular, yardım ettiler, yapım aşamasında epey bi faydaları oldu yani. Gelen insanlar da çoğunlukla köyünden gelmiş, tutunamama durumu söz konusu. Gençlik o anlamda çok faydalı oluyodu. Sosyal yönden de fayda sağlıyodu, insanlar arasında dayanışmayı sağlamak açısından. Her birimiz bi köyden geliyo ama yine de biraz feodalite hakimdi, gençliğin şöyle bi etkisi oldu, o feodaliteyle beraber başka bi dayanışma ruhunun gelişmesine katkı sağladılar. O kanalizasyon sistemi tamamen burdaki insanların çabasıyla, gençlerle birlikte yapıldı. Gecekondu yapıyorsunuz, alt yapısı yok, tuvaletleri dışarda, kanalizasyon sistemi yok. Yani insanlar biraz daha çevresini sahiplenmeyi öğrendiler. Burasını geliştirmek için, daha yaşanılabilir bi yer yapmak için dayanışma içinde olmayı öğrendiler. Malzemeleri belediyeden temin ediyosunuz, ama işçilik size ait. Hepimiz o yapım sürecinde çalışmışızdır. (Narrator 5)

15. İlk geldiğimizde hayat şartları zordu, inşaatlarda çalışıyoduk, kiradaydık. Sonradan kendimize ev aldık. Herkes diyodu ki “bir gecekondu olsun, ben geliyim altında oturuyım.” O dönemde öyle fazla yiyecek bişey yoktu. En güzel kahvaltı Sana yağ, peynir. Binde bir böyle bi misafir geldi mi git iki tane yumurta al, bi tane de sucuk al, misafir gelmiş. Şimdi her şey var, her şeyimiz var, sıcak su, doğalgaz, ama insanlık yok, toplum yok. Bitmiş yani, bana göre her şey bitmiş. Ama o dönem daha güzel hayat vardı, insanlık vardı, toplum olarak birbirimize gidip geliyoduk. Şimdi törelerimiz kayboldu.

Bak sen burada büyüdün, evladımın, biz yoldan geçsek birbirimizi tanımayız, meraba demeyiz. Ondan dolayı bizim o şartlar daha güzeldi şimdiki duruma bakarsan. Fakirlik vardı ama insanlık da vardı, dürüstlük vardı. Birisinin kömürü geldi mi herkes can-ı gönülden, el arabalarıyla o insanlara yardım edip kömür taşıyodular. Mesela birisinin gecekondusu mu yapılyo, herkes birlikti. Gider biri kiremit verir, biri ağaç verir. İşi beceren biri çıkar çatıyı yapar. Yani o dönem ilişkiler çok güzeldi. Gitgide kentleştikçe, binalar yükseldikçe, tuğlalar yükseldikçe, insanlık, toplumluk kayboldu gitti. (Narrator 9)

16. Düğünler, kına geceleri o bizim meydanda olurdu, aynı bugünkü gibi. Düğün salonları yoktu, kışın binalarda yapıyodular. O zaman dernek falan bişey de yoktu. Yeni yapılan bi binanın altında, boş binada millet toplanır takı töreni orada yapardı. Arabaları alıp konvoy yapardı, mahalleyi dolaşıp gezip gelirdi. Şimdi artık düğün salonlarında. Aslında bi yandan da iyi bişey. Çünkü mahalle karıştı, kimseyi tanımıyosun. Adam geliyo araya giriyo, gençlik biliyosun, oynar, uyumaz. Gençlerin arasında bir münakaşa çıktı mı da olaylar oluyo. Polis zaten karışmaz, diyor kendi önlemini kendin alcaksın. Siyasi olaylar olduğu için, bazı aşırı hareketler olduğu için artık böyle bi etkinlik oldu mu polis gelmiyo. Sorumluluk düğün sahibine kalıyo. Bir de sokak ortasında eğlenceleri devlet yasakladı. Onun için hepsi düğün salonlarına kapandı. Eskiden gençler Hızır'da böyle eğlence falan yapardı. İhtiyar kılığına girip karı-koca gibi, evlerden un, yağ toplardı, kimisi tuz verir, kimisi şeker verir. Onlarla helva yapardı, zerfet biliyo musun? İşte zerfet yapardık, şir yapardık. Hem oyun oynar hem eğlenceler yapar hem de

yemek yedik. O zamanlarda burada fazla kimse yoktu, hep bizim insanlar, akrabalar vardı. Bişey olmuyodu. Ama sonradan bunların hiçbiri kalmadı. O zamanlar gerçekten güzellikler vardı, insanlık vardı. Kavga mavga olayları da pek yaşamadık. Çünkü hep aynı toplum, aynı insanlar. Eskiden iki kişi kavga etti mi büyükler araya girerdi, barıştırdı. Şimdi artık öyle bişey yok.

(Narrator 9)

17. Öğretmen olup atanıp geldikten sonra buradaki değişikliği çok net hissettim, şimdi buralar daha zor yani, demografik yapının değişmesinden dolayı. İkinci olarak insanların artık biraz daha ferdileştiğini düşünüyorum, bu da ekonomik koşullarla alakalı olabilir, belki daha rahat olduklarından olabilir, kimseye ihtiyacımız yok gibi düşünüyorlar. İnsanlar arasındaki o bağın biraz daha zayıfladığını hepimiz görüyoruz. Bütün bunları engelleyebilmek için de dernekleşme adı altında bir faaliyet içerisine girdi insanlar. Şimdi her köyün bi tane derneği var, o dernekler vasıtasıyla kültürümüzü, dayanışmamızı korumaya çalışıyorlar. Ama her şeyden önce eskisi gibi güvenli değil. Sorarsanız herkes de aynı şeyi söyleyecektir, daha güvenli bir alandı çünkü herkes birbirini tanıyodu. Apartmanlaşma çok yoktu. Apartman hayatı kendisiyle birlikte bir şey daha getiriyo, insanların birbirinden korkmalarına neden oluyo. Nüfus arttı, gecekonduların yerini apartmanlar aldı. Kiracı konusunda da çok seçici davranmıyo insanlar, sadece bir kira geliri gelsin. Ben üniversiteden gelince evlerin apartmanlaştığını gördüm. 2-3 sene içerisinde epeyce değişim olduğunu gördüm. İnsanlar gecekondularını yıktılar, bi şekilde apartmana çevirmeye çalıştılar, elde avuçta ne varsa oraya döktüler. Ama çarpık bi kentleşme oldu tabii ki. [...] Buranın en büyük

sorunu Őu anda tapu sorununun hâlâ çözülmemesi, o problem. O evler deđiŐti bi kere, apartmanlaŐmaya baŐladı, ama öyle hemen olmadı yani, bi apartman 2-3 sene sürdü, kaba inŐaat, sıvası yok vesaire. Ama o dönemde de yine dayanıŐma oldu, evini yıkan adam kendi komŐusunun, akrabasının apartmanı varsa, kullanmadıđı bi katı varsa orada kaldı. Orada da bi dayanıŐma vardı. Sonra tabii yol geldi, ama öncesinde yol falan da yoktu, insanlar kendi imkanlarıyla yolları düzeltiyodu. Burada yaŐayan herkesin bunda emeđi vardır, bunun için çaba harcamıŐtır. Özellikle bunu bilmenizi isterim, yazmanızı isterim. (Narrator 5)

18. Eskiden gerçekten birlik beraberlik vardı. Bu dernekler açıldı, insanlar köylere bölündü. Eskiden öyle biŐey yoktu, hepimiz kardeŐ gibiydik. Őimdi herkes kendi köyünün derneđine gidiyo. “Gelin birlikte bir Őey yapalım?” Kimse gelmez... Her adım baŐı bi dernek. Halbuki gir içeri bak, on kiŐi ya var ya yok. İyi biŐey deđil yani. Beraber olsak, birlik olsak daha iyi deđil mi? (Narrator 9)

19. Dernekler aracılıđıyla sorunların üstesinden gelmeye çalıŐıyoruz. İnsanları dernekler etrafında toplamaya çalıŐıyoruz. Bu sadece bu mahalleye özgü biŐey deđil, Gazi Mahallesi’nde, Alibeyköy’de, Örnektepe’de, Sultanbeyli’de de aynı bölgeden gelmiŐ insanları bir araya getirmeye çalıŐıyoruz. Bizim amacımız bu, ama bazen başarılı oluyosunuz, bazen de başarılı olamıyosunuz. Őimdi her köyün bir derneđi var, siz de zaten duymuŐsunuzdur. (Narrator 5)

20. Bence köy dernekleri iyi bişey değil. İnsanları ayırıştırıyo. Herkes kendi köyünün derneğine gidiyo, ayrı ayrı piknik yapıyolar, etkinlikler düzenliyolar, bakıyosun biri diğerininkine gitmiyo. Zaten çoğu da adı dernek ama kahve aslında. Dernek olarak bi faaliyeti yok. İşte amcalar orada sosyalleşiyö, oyun oynuyo ama kadınlar evde oturmak durumunda. Gençler için de pek uygun ortamlar değil. Bana sorarsanız köy dernekleri köyde kalmalıydı. Şimdi mahalle derneklerimiz var, keşke daha çok oralara gitseler. Hem erkeklere özel bir alan da değil, kadınlar da girebiliyo. Gençler çeşitli aktiviteler yapabiliyo. Demek istediğim, artık memleketçiliği bırakıp yaşadığımız yerin sorunlarına odaklanmamız lazım, hep birlikte. Bugün artık sen oradan gelmişsin, göç etmişsin, ben buradan gelmişim bi anlamı yok. Hangimiz memleketimize gidiyoruz? Memleket mi kalmış? Hepimiz buralıyız artık, bu mahalleliyiz, İstanbulluyuz. (Narrator 10)

21. Ben çok iyi hatırlıyorum, komşumuzdan birinin annesi ölmüştü, Allah rahmet eylesin, camide cenaze namazını kılmaya gelmedi, çıkmadı hoca. Çok iyi biliyorum onu, unutmam. Dedi ki “bunlar camiye girmiyolar ben de cenaze namazını kılmıyorum.” Orada, o taraftan birkaç kişi kızdı da başka bi hoca geldi cenaze namazını kıldı, çok iyi biliyorum. Gelmedi adam, kılmadı namazı. Sene 1972-1973, o dönem öyleydi yani. Şimdi bizim cemevleri yapıldı biz kurtulduk yani, çok iyi bişey. Onun için o çileden kurtulduk. (Narrator 8)

22. Biz Alevi olduğumuz için, biliyosun, her zaman böyledir. Kerbela’dan, Dersim’den tut Gazi’ye, Madımak’a, bizi her zaman tehdit olarak görüyolar,

düşman olarak görüyolar. Biz ne kadar barıştan yana olsak da 72 millete bir nazarla baksak da, incinsen de incitme sözüne inansak da onlar öyle davranmıyolar. Ama ben öyle körü körüne inanan biri değilim, bence kendimizi savunmamız lazım. Biz sessiz kaldıkça, biz kurban olmayı kabullendikçe, onlar da bundan faydalanıyolar. Biliyosun, Gezi şehitleri, hepsi Aleviydi, Gezi'den sonra Okmeydanı yandı, kimse görmedi. (Narrator 11)

23. Politik anlamda huzur yoktu. Mesela bir Ferhat Tüysüz 9 kişiyi öldürdü burada. Sağcı militanın, faşistin biri. Öğretmenler öldürüldü, insanlar öldürüldü, Orhan Karaca öldürüldü. Bir Ferhat Tüysüz sadece tek başına 9 kişiyi öldürdü benim bildiğim. O zaman sağ-sol davası var, mahalleler ikiye bölünmüş. Yani huzur yoktu, her gün bişey. Şimdi de öyle, aynı devam ediyö, değişen bişey yok. Ama o zaman iki cephe açılmıştı. Mesela amcamların ordaki kahveyi taradılar, Memet kahvede yaralandı, Hanifi yaralandı. Oradaki kahveyi kaç kere taradılar, yangın da çıkardılar. Beni iki kere 2. Şubeye aldılar, ben işkence gördüm. Solcu olarak görüyo seni, devlet nezdinde terörist olarak. Şimdi şöyle bişey, seni alıyo, sadece şüphe üzerine, 5-10 kişiyi bu mahalleden toplayıp götürüp 2. Şubede dövüyo, sonra senin geçmişini araştırıyor ki senin bişeyin yok. Sadece Alevisin, sol meyillisin ama öyle militanlığın yok. Ben o zamanlar Demirdöküm fabrikasında çalışıyodum, sendikadaydım. 12 Eylül'den önce bize saldırdılar. İki kere bizi taradılar, nasıl kaçıyoruz. O zamanlar herkese şüpheyile bakılıyodu. Ben şahsen yürüyüşlere katılıyodum ama öyle git birine suikast, git saldır, silah milah öyle bir huyum yoktu. Ama bir öğretmen öldürüldüğünde, mesela

Kemal Türkler öldürüldü gittim yürüdüm yani. Hem de en önde yürüdüm.

Hani bir cenaze yürüyüşüne katılıyodum protesto etmek için, ama öyle şiddetle falan alakam yoktu. (Narrator 2)

24. 1977’de biz devrimci olduk, devrimcilere sempati duyduk. Kendi kendimize duvarlara yazılar yazardık. Üniversiteye gidince siyasetle ilgilenmeye başladım, ama okula gidemiyorduk can güvenliğimiz nedeniyle. [...] Sonra ben cezaevine düştüm. Bana bir sürü mektup geliyordu, herkes sempati duymuş, solcu olmuşlardı. Sonra yattık 9-10 ay, çıktık dışarı. O dönemlerde mahallelerde ayırım vardı, herkes kendi bölgesinin güvenliğini alırdı. Yani silahlı insanlar caddede dolaşıyordu güvenliği sağlamak için. Sağ-sol davası deniyor ya biliyorsun, faşist saldırılar vardı, halk da bu saldırılara karşı kendini savunuyordu. Dört yol sağ militanların olduğu bölgeydi, orda faşistler vardı. Biz orda da yazılama yapıyorduk, biz burada varız, burada hakimiz, bunu kanıtlamak için. Bi yerde solcuların yazısı varsa, orası solcu mahalledir. Sınırları genişletmek istiyoruz. O dönemde faşistlerle çok mücadelelerimiz oldu, güç mücadeleleri. Bir sürü çatışmalar oldu, bir sürü insanı vurdular, kahveleri bastılar. Öyle bir süreç yaşadık. [...] Ama çok güzel işler de yaptık. Halkla birlikte kanalizasyon sistemini yaptık. Her ev bizi sevmeye başladı. Girmedığımız ev yoktu. Mesela bir kilo et alırdık giderdik, evde çocuklar et ne onu bile bilmiyorlar. Beraber yemek yapardık, beraber yemek yerdik. Çok hoş günlerimiz oldu, her günü başka bir güzellikti, yani mutluyduk. (Narrator 4)

25. Ben buraya geldiğimde Cemevi'nin gençlerinin hepsi CHP'yi destekliyodu. Ben onları sosyalist yaptım. Ben zaten Okmeydanı'nın siyasal kültüründen geliyorum, ama biraz araştırma yapınca Aleviliğin içinde sosyalizmi buldum. Sosyalizmle Aleviliğin birçok ortak noktası var. Ama Okmeydanı gençliği Cemevi'ne gelmiyo, çünkü o zaman devlet diyo ki “cemevleri terörist yetiştiriyö.” O yüzden siyaset içindeki arkadaşlar Cemevi'ne gelmiyo, Cemevi'ne laf gelmesin diye. [...] Bana göre Alevilik bir yaşam biçimi. Bir din ya da bir inanç diyemem. Siyasal boyutu da var. Siyasal boyutu Aleviliğin doğuşundan beri var. Mesela Hüseyin'in boyun eğmemesi, Pir Sultan'ın direnişi... Bunlar siyasi meseleler. Şimdi biz siyasetten bahsettiğimizde bazıları sanıyo ki siyasi partilerden bahsediyoruz, mesele o değil. Biz siyaset dediğimizde direnişten bahsediyoruz, baskıya, adaletsizliğe başkaldırmaktan bahsediyoruz. Bazıları Aleviliğe siyaset karışmasını diyolar, ama bilmiyolar ki siyaset Aleviliğin özünde var. Yani, Aleviliğin tek bir tanımından bahsedemeyiz. Bir inanç biçimi dersek, eksik bir tanımlama olur. (Narrator 12)

26. Ben Cemevi'ne kültürümüzü, geleneklerimi öğrenmek için, inancımızı öğrenmek için geliyorum. Cemlere katılıyorum, diğer etkinliklere, konserlere katılıyorum, konferanslara ya da kültürel etkinliklere katılıyorum. Ama Berkin'in cenazesinden sonra, Uğur abinin ölümünden sonra artık daha başka bi anlamı var benim için. Buraya geldiğimde, yerdeki kanı hatırladığım zaman kötü oluyorum. İşyerim buraya yakın, duyunca hemen geldim. Yerdeki kanı görünce şok geçirdim, onu asla unutamam. Bahçe bizim oturup sohbet ettiğimiz, şakalaşıp güldüğümüz bi yerdi, ama şimdi her şey değişti.

Düşünüyorum, “Bunlar neden bizim başımıza geliyor?” diyorum. Aslında ailem artık buraya gelmemi istemiyo, çünkü korkuyorlar. Güvenliğimizden emin değiliz. Ama buraya gelmemiz gerek, bugün korkarsak, ilerde başkaları da öldürülür. Bu olayı unutmamız gerek, bu çok önemli. Bunu unutursak, anma törenleri yapmazsak, bunun gibi daha çok olaylar olur. Anma törenleriyle, kitlesel protestolarla böyle şeylerin tekrar etmesini engellemeye çalışıyoruz. Bence bu olaydan sonra Cemevi’ne eskisinden daha çok gitmeliyiz. Direnmek için birlik olmalıyız, hâlâ burada olduğumuzu göstermeliyiz. (Narrator 13)

27. Ben iki yıl önce taşındım ama hâlâ ayda bir iki kez mahalleme gelirim. Ben evlenince taşındım, eşimin Alibeyköy’de evi olduğu için. Ama onu tekrar buraya taşınmaya ikna etmeye çalışıyorum, çünkü mahalleme özlüyorum, yine Alibeyköy’de de kendi insanlarımızın arasında oturuyoruz ama aynı şey değil. Ben burada büyümüşüm, ailem burada, komşularım burada, akrabalarım burada, onları özlüyorum. Buraya geldiğimde, bu duvarlardaki yazıları görünce “işte Okmeydanı” diyorum. Başka hiçbir yerde duvarlarda böyle resimler, yazılar göremezsiniz. Belki diğer Alevi mahallelerinde, o da hepsinde değil. Mesela yaşlılar Zazaca konuşuyor, ben onlarla konuşmayı çok seviyorum. [...] Mahalleye girince, evim gibi yani, ben öyle hissediyorum. Herkes selam veriyo, soruyo işte “Niye gelmiyosun, nasılsın?” Benim için burası güvenli. Dışarıdan insanlar tehlikeli diyorlar ama bize göre en güvenli yer, çünkü tanıyoruz, biliyoruz, herkes birbirini tanıyor. Tehlikeli demelerinin sebebi de işte bi olay olmuş, polis gelmiş, gaz atmış bilmem ne, öyle şeyler. Biz bunlara bağışıklık kazandığımız için. Zaten ben eşime diyorum, gelsen

sen de alışırısın, ama daha çok onun ailesi korkuyo çünkü bilmiyolar.

Buradaki insanları tanımıyolar. Herkesin birbirini tanıdığını bilmiyolar. Biz Alibeyköy’de sitede oturuyoruz, öyle mahalle kültürü falan yok, tek başınasın, bütün gün evde otur. Burada dışarı çıkıyosun, komşularla oturup sohbet ediyosun, bi bakıyosun akşam olmuş. (Narrator 14)

28. Gecekonduılara her seçim döneminde göz yumuyolardı. Biz altyapıyı düşünmedik, tapulu olsun diye, imar girsin diye düşünmedik, önce başımızı, bi baraka olsun da başımızı sokalım, genellikle böyle düşündük. Bunlar olduktan sonra, sonradan bi hata olduğunu anladık. Bugünkü aklım olsaydı ben bu işe girmezdim. Yani bak tapusuz ev, bize kalır mı kalmaz mı Allah bilir. Burda gecekondu yaparken yol yok, yordam yok. Ta caddeden el arabasıyla, sırtımızda taşıyoduk her şeyi, yokuştan buraya. Gecekondu, bir oda, önüne bir de salon, kömür aynı yerde, kap kaçak aynı yerde, yatak aynı yerde. O zamanlar gençtim, detaylı düşünemiyodum, İstanbul’u bilmiyodum, yeterince adapte değildik. Başka bi yere gidip bir arsa satın alabilirdim. Aslında burayı satmayı düşündüm. Adamın biri geldi söz verdi, “Yarın paranı getiririm,” dedi. Ama bizim hanım oturdu ağladı, başka yere gitmek, kiraya girmek istemedi çünkü biz sanıyoduk ki artık ev bize ait olacak. Bi de tabii bütün akrabalar burada, ben de vazgeçtim. Buraya yerleşmişiz, kökümüz burada. Ama işin doğrusunu sorarsan, hata bizdedir. Şu anda hepimiz çelişkideyiz. Ev garanti değil, tapu yok, daha dün akşam kahvede konuştuk, devlet nezdinde kaçak durumda. Nasıl olacak? Burada ömrün geçmiş, her şeyini bu betona yatırmışsın, emeğini, ömrünü, çocuklarının geleceğini...

Burada garantisi yoksa insan endişe duyuyor. Alır dağ başında bir yer verir sana... (Narrator 2)

29. Bizim mahallenin sorunlardan biri bizim mahallede çok evlerin kaçak daha, tapuları yoktur, insanlar mağdur durumda. Bunu herhalde çok kötü bişeyler yaparlar, bu AK Parti böyle devam ederse çok kötü olur. Niye biliyo musun? Ha bire zorluklar çıkarıyo, çok şey yapıyo. Çoğunun tapusu yok, ama ne olacak? Bu insanların sonu ne olacak? İnsanlar işsiz, fakir, bişey yok, hayat pahalı çok. Bunlar çok önemli. Birlik beraberlik olmazsa daha çok kötüye giden şeyler var. (Narrator 9)

30. Ben Okmeydanı'nda büyüdüm, Okmeydanı benimle büyüdü. Başka yerde yaşayamam, başka bi yerde yaşamayı asla düşünemem. Bu mahalleyi çok seviyorum. Her şeyden önce, burada büyüdüm. Çok güzel anılarla bugüne kadar geldik. Bundan sonraki yaşamım ne kadar sağlıklı olur bilmiyorum, ama buradan kesinlikle ayrılmam. Çünkü yoldaşlarımın, devrimci dostlarımla bedenlerini omuzlarımda taşıdım burda. Cemevi olsun, mahalle dayanışması olsun, nice zorlu mücadeleler verdik. Onun ötesinde, devrimci bi mahalle, burada bi çok şeye şahitlik ettim, hep birlikte çok güzel şeyler başardık. Bugün bile, haftada bir çıkar mahallemi dolaşırım, bana mutluluk veriyor. Sibel Yalçın Parkı'na gidiyorum, Anadolu Parkı'na gidiyorum, derneklerimize, kurumlarımıza gidiyorum. Çünkü biz burda büyüdük, dostlarımızla burda çok şeyler paylaştık. Okmeydanı gibi varoş dedikleri, yani faşizmin varoş dediği yerler bizim için bi barınma yeri, yurdumuz,

vatanımızdır. Burası bi vatan gibidir, bi onur, bi namus gibidir. Böyle bi mahallede yaşamanın onurunu ömrüm boyunca unutmam. (Narrator 7)

31. Yabancı bi yerde olsaydım mümkünü yok barınmazdım. Kendini yalnız hissediyosun. Kendini, nasıl diyim yani ıssız bi yerde hissediyosun. O insanlarla adapte olana kadar acaba başından ne geçer? Genellikle insanlar birbirini çekiyor. Yapı aynı, inanç aynı, yol aynı. Çoğunlukla bu seni çekiyor, orayı araştırıyosun. Sana ben bir örnek veriyim, babamın amcasının oğlu İsmail Almanya'dan geldi, gitti Boğaz'da o zaman 700 bin dolara kendine şey aldı. O, köyden Almanya'ya gitmişti, o hikâye uzun, ben sana anlatıcam da onun senin tezinle alakası yok, o ayrı bir zaman. İşte kendine bir şey almıştı, bu Boğaz'ın yapılarına ne diyolar? Villa, he, kendine bir villa almıştı, Bebek'te mi ne, bilmem. Onun kardeşi İbrahim şeker hastasıydı. İbrahim bunun evinde şeker komasına giriyor. Çevrede biri yardımcı olmuyor yani, kimseyi çağırıp da gel... Ondan sonra sırtına alıyor, yola çıkarıyor, kimse bile yardım etmiyor. İbrahim o yüzden öldü. İsmail getirdi cemevinden kaldırdı. Çevresi yok çünkü orda. O yüzden biz çıkıp gitmiyoruz. Ya mümkünü mü var? Memet gitti Bahçelievler'e, orada daire almıştı, bir sene zor kaldı. Yine evini taşıdı getirdi, orada barınamadı yani. Çünkü ayak uyduramıyosun. Benim kaynanam kalp hastasıydı komşular arabayla gece yarısı hastaneye taşıyodu. Çıkıp bağırıyosun "Memet gel, çocuğu hastaneye götürücez!" Adam yataktan kalkıp koşuyo. Bak bu yanımızda komşu var, kendisi yabancı, karısı bizden. Neden 20 senedir bizim aramızda, neden çıkıp gitmedi? Demek ki bize güven duydu, bizim kültürümüzü öğrendi, çocukları bu kültürle büyüdü. Biz insan ayırmıyoruz. O yüzden de fakiri, evsiz barksız, göçeri

buraya, bizim aramıza geliyo. Bu Suriyeli çocuklar için bazıları diyo ki bitli. Ama o gözle baktığım zaman zaten insanlığın biter. Bitliyse bir nedeni var, pireliyse, kirliyse bir nedeni var. Önce bunu düşünürsün. (Narrator 15)

32. Bu mahallenin %90'ı Alevidir. Biz de Aleviyiz, Kürt Alevisiyiz biz.

Sonradan Hanefi Kürtleri geldi, sonradan Suriyeliler geldi, şimdi zenciler var, Afganlar var, Moğollar var. Ha bundan şikayetçi miyim, değilim. Çünkü herkesi insan olarak görüyoruz. Bizden farklı olabilirler, kültürleri farklı, yaşam şekilleri, her şeyleri farklı olabilir ama bize saygısızlık yapmadıkları sürece biz de onlara saygısızlık yapmayız. Sonuçta onlar da bizim gibi etten kemikten insandır. Bizim gibi olmak zorundalar mı? Hayır, değil çünkü biz onlar gibi değiliz ki onlar da bizim gibi olsun. Ben bu şekilde bakıyorum, bilmiyorum belki çok hümanist olarak görebilirsiniz ama bu bizim dünyaya bakışımızla alakalı, çevremizde olan bitenle alakalı. Bizim analizlerimiz diğer mahallelere göre farklıdır. Biz bi yerde haksızlık varsa mahalle olarak haksızlığa karşı geliyoruz, böyle bi yapımız var. (Narrator 16)

33. Ben başka bi semtten ev aldım, burada ev fiyatları çok yüksekti, tapu da olmadığı için bu bölgeden almak istemedim. Hem de yaşam alanı, oyun alanları, parklar, bahçeler, çocuklarım daha güzel bi yerde yaşasınlar diye. Yani sosyal imkanlar açısından. Benim iki tane kızım var, şu an orda sokakta voleybol oynuyorlar mesela parklarında, bahçelerinde, ama Okmeydanı'nda ben çocuğumu sokağa bıraksam kaybolur mu, nolur diye düşünürüm. [...]

İşimi taşımayı hiç düşünmedim. Ben Okmeydanı'nı çok seviyorum. Şunu

bilin Okmeydanı'nda oturan insanlar başka yerde yapamıyolar. Hem etnik kökenden, hem siyasi yapısından, bu mahalle farklı bi mahalle. (Narrator 16)

34. Okmeydanı'nda sosyal hayat var, insanlar sosyal çevresiyle var olurlar.

Oradan koptuğun zaman karaya vurmuş balık olursun. Benim sosyal hayatım, siyasi hayatım burda, maneviyat gibi şeyler de var. Tek başına yemek içmek iyi yaşamak değildir ki. İyi yaşamamanın başka yönleri de var, bunları burada yapabilirim. Okmeydanı halkı beni tanıyor, çok iyi ilişkilerimiz var. Herkesi tanıyorum ben, kime nasıl davranacağımı biliyorum. Başka bir yerde bunları yapamam, eksik kalırım. (Narrator 4)

35. Kentsel değil rantsal dönüşüm buradaki. Bunlar baskıyla, sömürüyle insanların 50-60 yıllık emeklerini çalmaya çalışıyolar. Mesela Keçecipiri mahallesinde 8-9 dönümlük bir arazi üzerinde spor tesisi inşa ediliceğine dair plan var. Peki sen ordaki insanları nereye yolluyacaksın? Oradaki insanların hakkını ne yapıcaksın? Orası etnik köken olarak, dünya görüşü olarak farklı olan insanlar ama sonuçta benim komşularım. Ben onlar için de aynı hakları savunuyorum. Sonuçta oraya bi bedel ödemiş, 30-40 sene elektrik, su, her türlü vergisini almışsın. Bu insanları nereye yolluyacaksın? 8-9 dönüm üzerine spor kompleksi yapıyomuş, aman çok büyük bi olay. Hasköy'e yat limanı yapıcakmış, sanki benim çok yatırım var da bi tanesini getiriyim Hasköy'e koyim. Zaten bizim için yapılmıyo bunlar. Neden "Okmeydanı'nı Şanzelize yapıcaz" diyolar? Şanzelize ne? Zenginlerin faydalandığı bi yer, onlar için yani, sıradan halk için değil. Ama bu insanların hakkını ne yapıcaksınız onu bi açıklasaydınız önce, ondan sonra gelip belediye başkanlığına adaylığınızı

koysaydınız. Mahallenin aşağısı yukarısı, sağı, solu yok. Şu anda bu mahallede yaşayan insanların kaygısı, “benim çocuklarıma ne olacak” kaygısı. Ben 25 senedir burada esnafım, kentsel dönüşüm geldiğinde ben buradan nereye gidicem? Ben bu emeği tekrar başka yerde harcamak zorunda kalıcam. Benim hayatıma, benim çocuklarıma hayatına nasıl yön vericeksiniz? (Narrator 16)

36. Biz tapu komisyonu kurduk 2002-2003 yılında. Köy derneklerinden ordan burdan temsilcilerle 50-60 kişilik bir tapu komisyonu kurduk sağ-sol demeden. Ankara’ya gittik, geniş bir toplantı yaptık tüm partilerin temsilcilerini çağırdık. Mecliste tapu verilmesi kararı çıktı. Burası normalde vakıf arazisiyken hazine arazisiyle değiş tokuş yapıldı. Yakacık tarafında bir yerle takas edildi ve burası tapularını almaya hak kazandı. Planları yapıp tapular verilecek dendi ama yıllardır yapılan bu plan müstakil bir plan değil, kentsel dönüşüm planı oldu. Onun da güvencesini vermedikleri için ona karşı direniyoruz, davalar açıyoruz şu an. O davaların birçoğunu kazandık. Şu anda devam ediyor ve tapu süreci de bu güvensizlikten dolayı yürümüyor. Sözleşmelerde aleyhimize çok maddeler var. Güvenmiyoruz sözleşmelere yani, açık seçik şeyler değil. Bunlardan dolayı şu an süreç devam ediyor. [...]

Burda yaptığımız en iyi çalışma Tayyip Erdoğan’ın belediye başkanlığı döneminde buranın önemli yerleri sit alanı ilan edildi, yıkılıcağına plana göre. Biz o planı bozmak için mücadele ettik. Burada bir büromuz vardı, bir ay boyunca biz gece gündüz itiraz dilekçeleri hazırladık avukatlarla, plancılarla birlikte. Çok örgütlüydük yani biz. Ekiplerimiz vardı, yürüyüşler yaptık, mitingler yaptık. Hatta bi gün hiç unutmam, biz üç kişi Hacıhüsrev’de

Tayyip Erdoğan bir toplantı yaptı, oraya sadece 3 kişi gittik, fazla gidersek hemen saldırıyorlar. Sadece üç kişi olmamıza rağmen etrafımızı sardılar, söz alıp bir soru sorduğumuz için. Ben orada yanlış olan şeyleri açıkladım, adam kendi planını bilmiyor. Anlattığı yerlerde mezarlık var onun farkında değil. 5-6 katlı binaların olduğu yeri boş bir tarla gibi gösteriyor. Dedim “O gösterdiğiniz yerlerde binalar var, binlerce insan yaşıyor, bu plana göre oralar yıkılacak, yani bu insanlar ne olacak?” Birden ortalık karıştı, anlattığı o güzel plan herkes eyvallah derken, birden ortalık karıştı herkes ses çıkarmaya başladı, doğru falan filan. Hiç unutmam onu. (Narrator 4)

37. İlk yaptığım işlerden birisi, biliyosun orada ciddi bir tapu sorunu vardı, benim ilk yıllarımda, oraya dava açılmıştı çünkü benim hastanenin olduğu yer de dahil olmak üzere orası geniş bir arazi vakıf arazisiydi. Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakfı arazisiydi. Buradaki binalar kaçak yapı, iş yerleri ve evler. 1950’lerden itibaren yapılmış ve görmezden gelinmiş. Aslında yapılan biraz devletin orada, yöneticilerin ya da belediyenin görmezden geldiği, zımni olarak yol verdiği bir çeşit çarpık kentleşme, başka bişey değil orada yapılan şey. Adam ne yapsın? Sokakta yatacak hali yok, kendine yer-yurt yapmaya çalışıyor. Sen ona arsa göstermezsen, doğru düzgün bir kentleşme sunmazsan ne yapacak? Gidecek ondan bundan alacak orayı üzerine bina yapacak. Bir süre sonra sayı artınca da onlara bir oy potansiyeli olarak bakan bir yönetim var. Tapu meselesinde, ilk fark ettiğim şey buydu, dava açılmış, üzerinde oturan insanlar depresyondaydı. Çünkü bu ev ona ait değil ve bizim insanımız çok kıymet verir mekâna, ahirette iman dünyada mekân derler. Ev sahibi olmak çok önemli bir şey. Ev sahibi olmak aslında anılarla birlikte, bir hafıza

oluşturuyor. Bu yüzden hâlâ “Burada doğdum ama Hafikliyim ya da Alucralıyım” diyorlar. Ama gitmeyecekleri de ortada, Hafik’e dönmeyeceksin, Alucra’ya da dönmeyeceksin. Oralı olmanın yolu neyse oralı olmak ve orada olmak, İstanbullu olmakla ilgili bir kent kültürü, bir kent bilincinin oluşmasının yolu o hafizadır. Bu oynaklıktan kurtulması lazım. Bu yüzden ben o dönemde işimi gücümü bıraktım, belki 2 yıl boyunca tapu alma komisyonu başkanıyım. Bir doktor olarak ne işim olabilir ki orda? Ben orda sadece sıradan bir sağlık işletmecisi olmadım. Bunu da öneriyorum, olmamak lazım. Eğer siz hastanızın sadece ağrıyan yerlerini dinlerseniz, hekim olarak işinizi yapmış olmazsınız. 70 yaşında, depresyona girmiş, bitmeyen eklem ağrıları olan bir kadını dinlediğiniz zaman, bir oğlunun uzun ölüm oruçlarında öldüğünü öğreniyorsunuz, birinin de cezaevinde olduğunu öğreniyorsunuz. Bu kadın zaten iyileşmez. Ben ona Prozac versem ne vermesem ne? Ya da işte aşağıda koltuk iskeleti yapan bir marangoz, çekler karşılıksız, batmış, işi bitmiş. Kaza geçirmiş, elini makineye kaptırmış. Şimdi ne yapacaksınız? Çok pahalı bir iştir tendon dikmek, sinir dikmek. Bir ara ben koltukçuları bir araya topladım, “Bir sandık yapalım” dedim. Onlarda kaza sık oluyor, o para orada dursun, herkes her ay oraya 100 lira versin, ben de katayım. O parayı kullanalım bu tür durumlarda. Böyle formüller icat etmeye çalışmıştım. Yani bana geldi, ben bunun sinirini 3000 liraya dikerim, yoksa da dikmem diyemezsin. Orası öyle bir hastanedir, öyle bir semttir. Hâlâ da öyle. (Narrator 17)

38. Dışarıda Okmeydanı’yla ilgili çok büyük bi korku yaratılmış, mesela benim oğlumun okulundaki velilerle biz arkadaşız, onlarla bi grubumuz var, gün

yapıyoruz, birlikte çocukları sinemaya, bir yere götürüyoruz. Gün sırası bana geldiğinde, hepsinin kocası ben sizi bırakırım, çıkışta ben alırım sizi, arada arayarak, ne oldu, nasıl oldunuz? Yani Okmeydanı’yla ilgili algı, “terör var burada,” “tehlikeli bir yer,” duvarlar yazılı, onu görünce de korktular. Bi de onların geldiği gün olay da olmuştu, onları kaçıracak bir taksiyle başka sokaktan yolladık. Ama onlar da şunu gördüler, bu mahallede yaşayan insanlar da kötü insanlar değil aslında. Bu televizyonlarda tabii “Okmeydanı’nda bu oldu,” “Okmeydanı’nda olay oldu” diyince, o insanlar o kadar korkuyo ki burdan. Ben bi gün minibüste bir öğretmenle tanıştım, Sorgun’dan gelmiş, ya dedi “Siz burada mı oturuyorsunuz?” “Evet” dedim, “Ya burası çok tehlikeliymiş, beni de buradaki okula verdiler ama ben Gültepe’de ev tuttum, burada ev tutma dediler bana.” Dedim “Valla ben 50 yıldır bu mahallede oturuyorum, bi sorun yok, mahalle halkına zarar verilmiyo burada.” Devrimci çocuklar da yapıyosa bişey iyiliğine yapıyolar, uyuşturucuya karşı yapıyolar, yararlı şeylere destek oluyolar. Bence Okmeydanı algısı değişmeli, dayanışmanın çok güzel yaşandığı bi yer. Ama şey gibi görülüyo, bunlar Alevi, bunlar terörist. (Narrator 18)

39. Ben gençlere kızıyodum, çünkü astımım var, her gün mahalle gaz altında, bıkmışım yani. Çocuğu olan insanlar var, bebeği olan insanlar var. Bi sürü insan bu olaylarda öldü. O yüzden çok kızıyodum, diyodum “Niye siz rahat durmuyosunuz?” Ama şimdi bakarım çoğu da alınmış, meydan boş, mahalle tehlikeli oluyo. Torbacıdır, hırsızdır, her türlü pislik buraya gelmiş. Her gün mahallede tuhaf tuhaf insanlar görüyorum. [...] Nasıl polisi ararım? E sen biliyosun ki zaten bize terörist diyolar. Ancak bi eylem oldu mu gelirler, bize

düşman gibi davranırlar. Burada akreple bi çocuğu ezdiler. Suriyeli bi çocuk, ama o da yine bizim evladımızdı... Yani bişey olduğunda gençlerimizi çağırıyoruz, ama şimdilerde kimse yok yani hepten yalnız kalmışız, çünkü hepsini aldılar. İşte mahallede güvenlik yoktur, ama o suçlular için tam özgürlük. (Narrator 19)

40. Belediye otobüsleri girmiyö mahalleye, ta bu Perpa'nın önünden dönüp gidiyolar, neymiş, araç yakıyolar, hayır! Biz burda komiteler oluşturduk, belediyeye gittik. Biz gidip otobüslere girip araçları mahalleye zorla getirdik. Çünkü niye, o yoksul çocukların cebine para koyup gidin şurada barikat kurun, burada ateş yakın, biz mahalleye baskın yapalım. Eline molotof verip araçlara attırıyolar. Defalarca tanık olanlar var, ben de tanık oldum. Polisin 10 metre ilersinde uyuşturucu satıyolar çocuklara, bunlara ses çıkarılmıyo. İnsanlar artık evine gitmeye korkar oldu. Biz haftanın iki günü geceleri devriye dolaşırdık mahallenin içinde. Çünkü insanlar otobüsten inip onca yolu yürüyo, benim kızım iki defa tacize uğradı. Kendi sorunlarımızı kendimiz çözmeye çalışıyoruz, o zaman da terörist oluyoruz. Ben bu mahallenin en eskilerinden biriyim ama bugün ben yabancı oldum mahalleimde. Çok üzücü ama ben korkar oldum mahalleimde gezmeye. Çok acı ama gerçek. Çünkü kimin ne olduğu belli değil. Çoluk çocuğun elinde silah var. Devrimciler tutsak düşünce böyle oldu. Artık güvenliğimiz yok. (Narrator 7)

41. Ben cenaze için Cemevi'nin avlusundaydım, Uğur Kurt vurulduğunda çok yakınındaydım. Bazıları diyor ki polis beni hedef almış, ama ben

inanmıyorum, Cemevi'ni hedef aldığını sanmıyorum, buna inanmak istemiyorum. Bu olaydan sonra bir dede olarak soğukkanlı olup provokasyonları önlemeye çalıştım. [...] İnsanlar yasal haklarını kullanıyorlar, ama polis onlara saldırıyor. Okmeydanı'nın doğası budur, her gün bir olay var. Biz yüzünü kapatan, silahlı insanları desteklemiyoruz, ama polis de herkese saldırıyor, olayın içinde olsun olmasın. Ben yaşlıyım, hastayım, her gün aynı şeyi yaşamaktan yoruldum yani. Belki Okmeydanı Cemevi'nden ayrılırim böyle giderse. (Narrator 20)



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