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**Urban Diversity: An Obstacle to Political Mobilization against Urban Renewal?
A Comparative Research on the Two Neighborhoods in the Istanbul City-Region**

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Urban Diversity: an Obstacle to Political Mobilization against Urban Renewal? A Comparative Research on the Two Neighborhoods in the Istanbul City-Regionⁱ

Introduction

Urban transformation projects (UTPs) have been the most prominent spatial interventions of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government in the last decade. These projects function as the primary means of property transfer and real estate-based capital accumulation in neoliberal Turkey. Since the beginning of its rule in 2002, The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has gradually consolidated its practices of urban renewal based on the interchangeably and flexibly operating discourses of natural disasters such as earthquake hazards (Candan & Kolluoğlu 2008; Saraçoğlu & Demirtaş-Milz 2014), and healthy urban fabric. Indisputably, however, a set of profit-making and rent-maximizing logic archetypal of neoliberal urbanism has been the primary motor of these practices. Central and local governments have redefined the parameters of urban governance and contestation, and redrawn the boundaries of the *informal* and *legitimate* in the low-income settlements known as the *gecekondu*s. Recent research has focused on these top-down practices of urban transformation and renewal of the low-cost, self-help housing areas as well as on the community resistance against these projects (Karaman 2014 & 2012; Lelandais 2014; Kuyucu & Ünsal 2010; Kuyucu 2013; Demirtaş-Milz 2013).^{ii & iii}

In this paper, I explore the role of *diversity* in mobilizations against urban transformation projects in Turkey. Briefly, I define *diversity* as an urban condition, which is strictly related but not simply limited to ethnic identity, gender or social class of immigrants residing in the metropolises of Turkey, Istanbul being the primary one. Diversity as I take in this paper refers to such affiliations which are accompanied by affinity to the state and mainstream values as well as political experience and past activism. As such, as the paper will demonstrate, *diversity* becomes more than a plurality of identities in urban contexts; rather it directs us to a relational concept which implies lived experiences of people trying to hang onto urban life for decades. Urban transformation projects has recently provided us with cases to explore the role of diversity in political mobilization. Therefore, I explore diverse forms and means of mobilization, ideological framing, and accumulated political memories of an –non-Sunni- Alevite squatter (*gecekondu*) community and of *muhacir* residents (Turkish emigrants from Bulgaria) of a semi-peripheral neighborhood. What are the implications of

diversity vis-à-vis UTPs in Istanbul, which have projected an ideal – safe, sterile, high-quality – urban life? What types of tension do inter-communal relations create within the context of an urgent act against a UTP? How do the local/central governments generate a socio-cultural space within which *diversity* has provided a hotbed for actual or potential conflicts between communities? How do these diverse communities negotiate diversity and difference in their search for solidarity among and between communities against UTPs? In its attempt to answer these questions, the paper will share the findings of 18 months of ethnographic research which consisted of participant observation, life-story and in-depth interviews, and archival research.

In the next section, I will briefly introduce the urban context of Gebze within which the UTPs and anti-UTP contestations took place. The section that follows will introduce the two neighborhoods in Gebze, and compare and contrast the role of differing factors of ethnicity and political memory in each community’s mobilization efforts. The first UTP area I will introduce is Cumhuriyet which is settled by Alevis; the second is Inonu where *muhacirs*, emigrants from Bulgaria are predominantly settled. The paper will end with concluding remarks.

Gebze, the industrial “backwater” of Istanbul

Known by most people in Turkey but mostly detested and considered a “backwater” of Istanbul, Gebze is a peripheral city located on the southeast border of Istanbul.^{iv} Gebze has been the spatial manifestation of two forms of migration processes: Migration of Istanbul’s inner-city industry and rural-urban, labor migration. The little town in the 1950s has gradually become a primary node of industrialization since the outset of the Turkish state’s policy of the decentralization of Istanbul-based industry in the 1960s. Gebze’s location vis-a-vis Istanbul has always been the reason for the skyrocketing land prices and an always active, in/formal speculative real estate market in the area.

The migration of the Istanbul-based industry in the 1960s triggered a parallel process of rural-urban, labor migration and Gebze turned from a tiny rural town into a gigantic city with a large industrial labor force in the past five decades: Since the 1960s, Gebze’s population has increased dramatically as hundreds of thousands of migrants from all over Turkey have flowed into the city and created ethnic enclaves. In 2007, Gebze’s population exceeded half a million (521 thousand) and the projected population for 2020 is 1.7 million.^v These migrants have provided the city with both formal and informal workforce for the industry in Gebze and have created *gecekondus* alongside the main highway connecting Istanbul to Anatolia.^{vi}

Since the 1980s, under globalization, export-oriented policies of the Turkish state have intensified industrial decentralization in Istanbul (Keyder & Öncü 1993). As Istanbul competed for

global city status through large-scale prestige projects, Gebze absorbed much of the industry heretofore located in Istanbul's inner-city. In this context of the "suburbanization" of Istanbul-based large-scale mass production industries, the 1990s witnessed a new wave of industrial land use: autonomous organized industrial zones where de-unionized labor and flexible employment conditions have been implemented.^{vii} The OIZs are of particular significance for this study as the areas surrounding them have gained importance for the high-rise luxury settlement for the white collar labor force working in them. The two neighborhoods under study are in close proximity to Organized Industrial Zones in Gebze.

Methodology

My analysis is based on the findings of two-step field research that took a total of eighteen months (January–August 2010 and November 2011–August 2012). The informants were migrant laborers involved in political mobilization, community members, trade unionists, former mayors, local officials, and NGO activists. The research is primarily qualitative, based on ethnography (participant observation), in-depth interviews, and archival research (local and national dailies). In the analysis, I rely mainly on my ethnographic findings, the in-depth interviews conducted in Gebze's Cumhuriyet and İnönü neighborhoods, field notes, and personal conversations. In order to create a genuine rapport, I also taught basic English to children in the Cumhuriyet community association's office every week for six months. I also regularly participated in community meetings and street demonstrations.

I adopt a comparative approach insofar as the two UTPs in question were taking place in a temporal and spatial continuum progressively between 2009 and 2011. The process began with the Gebze Municipality's sudden unilateral declaration of a specific location within the Cumhuriyet neighborhood as a UTP area. After an intense and efficient cycle of organization, protest, and negotiation by the community, the municipality "shelved" the Cumhuriyet UTP. The next UTP was declared in the İnönü neighborhood in 2011, but this time it was the Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality (Kocaeli MM; Turkish: *Kocaeli Büyükşehir Belediyesi*) that was involved. Therefore, it was imperative to compare the two UTPs as part of a whole series of actions by the state and communities, as the parties in negotiation and contention have reinforced each others' positions in a mutually constitutive way.

Sites of Research Cases: Cumhuriyet and Inonu Neighborhoods under UTP Threat

The areas determined for both projects provide comparative details regarding morphology and location. Located on the outskirts of Gebze, both neighborhoods are adjacent to the main transportation arteries (Istanbul-İzmit road and Anatolian highway respectively) and the Sabiha Gokcen international airport in Istanbul's Anatolian side.

A striking finding is that in both neighborhoods some portion of both UTP areas is private property of a local family whose wealth is primarily based on decades-long land speculation going back to Istanbul's early growth toward Gebze in the 1960s. These urban transformation cases exemplify a growth alliance between the local government and the property owners; housing is the locus of this alliance and conflicts, for that matter. It also shows that the local state acts as an agent of speculation and a property transfer mechanism (Kuyucu & Ünsal 2010), given the fact that members of this family has active roles in the local AKP organization.

Cumhuriyet

Cumhuriyet is one of the oldest squatter neighborhoods of Gebze. The UTP zone determined by the municipality is located on the mid-level of the steep Mudurnutepe hill. The neighborhood overlooks the Sea of Marmara, the E-5 motorway connecting Istanbul to Anatolia, and the factories it is located against. It is windy and sunny with fresh air on a nice day and on a foggy winter day it seems to be relatively free from air made vicious by gas emissions from the surrounding factories and workshops.

Cumhuriyet and its vicinity have been a hotbed of infrastructural problems since the 1970s emanating from the absence of basic municipal amenities. Moreover, it is an area of migrant workers who worked in the factories surrounding the hill. They were active in the various waves of strikes in the 1980s and 1990s in Gebze. The neighborhood began to form in the early 1970s but its population increased tremendously in the mid-1980s. With no exceptions, my interviewees (mostly men) exemplify labor migration.^{viii} The majority of migrants in Cumhuriyet are from Eastern Black Sea region and there are many Alevi citizens in the neighborhood. They have their own place of worship where they get together for sermons, rituals, and funerals. Most of the settlers I talked to stated that Gebze was their second destination.^{ix} The first houses were actually just one-room shacks made of briquettes and built collectively. Until the early 1980s, the neighborhood had been devoid of basic infrastructure facilities such as water, electricity, paved roads, and sewage system. Throughout the 1980s, the right-wing municipality was engaged in occasional demolition but to no avail primarily because of the determined squatters' never-ending efforts and resistance. As was the case in all large cities at the date, local government of Gebze was not able or willing to stop squatter

settlements, even though there were various waves of demolition in 1985 and 1986. Exemplar of what Bayat (1997; 2000; 2004) calls ‘silent encroachment of the poor,’ Cumhuriyet community acquired infrastructure –albeit limited– and collective goods, either from the municipality itself or through mutual help.^x

Inonu

Inonu neighborhood is very close to Gebze’s traditional town center. In contrast to hard-to-reach morphology of the hilltop Cumhuriyet, Inonu is very much accessible even by 20 minutes walk from downtown; moreover, minibuses and public transportation are all available to and from even Istanbul. The area does not have any infrastructural problems. Similar to Cumhuriyet, İnönü is located against the region allocated to the Gebze Organized Industrial Zone (GOIZ). As the central business district sprawled towards northern part of the city, İnönü and its vicinity have become a semi-peripheral neighborhood. Houses and buildings are mainly multistory, well maintained with sidings. Neighborhood itself is organized, paved and planned; landscaping and public parks provide convenience. “This is not a *gecekondu* area,” as residents regularly underline during interviews implying the irregularity and lack of infrastructure are characteristics of *gecekondu* areas among others. Therefore, combined with its proximity to the GOIZ and the Trans European Motorway, regular settlement renders it a high-rent area for land speculators and construction companies.

Inonu residents are mainly Turkish emigrants who fled from the Bulgarian state’s oppressive policies in the 1980s. Community members cherish Sunni and Turkish nationalistic values. They have always been preferred by employers in the factories in Gebze based on positive stereotypes representing them as hardworking, obedient, and skilled laborers as opposed to other particular groups. Emigrants (*göçmenler*) are known to go along the legal and formal lines in order to ‘blend in’ the mainstream social life in Turkey. This also goes in tandem with the Turkish state’s support of these emigrants in labor market. Informants underlined the fact that since their first arrival in Gebze each and every family member worked hard to *legally* buy a plot of land from the owner rather than occupying it and built their houses themselves staying within the parameters of official construction, taxation, and property regulations. 31 years-old Hasan whose family emigrated from Bulgaria in 1989 stated that “both women and men have worked hard” since their arrival and quoted to me, with a grin in his face, a related positive stereotype uttered popularly that “even their cat works hard.” Inonu residents still maintain ties with their hometowns in Bulgaria, most retain their Bulgarian passports and pay regular visits. Some younger community members went to Bulgaria for college education.

Factors of Diversity Compared: The Role of Ethnic Identity and Political Memory in Community Mobilization

In terms of their differences in migration experience (in migration-transnational migration or ‘voluntary’-refuge), ethno-religious affiliation (Turkish Alevi – Turkish Sunni, *muhacir*), and political memory and activism experience (left/socialist, il/legally organized – forced socialist, voluntary assimilation), these two communities were in sharp contrast with each other. In addition to these research-wise comparative features, what brought them together in my research was the attempted (Cumhuriyet) and actual implementation (Inonu) of top-down UTP by Gebze and Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipalities. The two UTPs under study were taking place in a temporal and spatial continuum in a progressive manner between 2009 and 2011. The process started with Gebze Municipality’s unilateral and sudden declaration of a specific location of the Cumhuriyet neighborhood as a UTP area. After an intense and efficient cycle of organization-protest-negotiation by the community, the municipality “shelved” the Cumhuriyet UTP. The next UTP was declared to be in the Inonu neighborhood in 2011 but this time the Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality was involved. Rather than a detailed comparison of each community, in this presentation I am offering a comparison of the role of ethnicity, political memory and activism experience in their mobilization.

Cumhuriyet: *The Power of Political Memory of Activism*

Although today the majority of the households (40-45 percent) in the vicinity of Cumhuriyet are said to be pro-AKP, some community members such as Faruk, a retired welder at his 50s, implied that their being Alevi is a factor in the authorities’ decision to choose their location for the project. A community member, Ismet, stresses the leading role of Alevis in the mobilization because they are, “firstly, smart to grasp what is going on, and second, have never seen goodness and kindness in any historical period, therefore they have no trust [in state] whatsoever.” Community members have an established memory and experience of leftist politics going back to the 1970s, the heyday of trade unionism and socialist mobilization.

Portrayal of *gecekond* life through urban-rural, civilized-uncivilized dichotomies is not new. Municipality’s language of legality puts the illegal situation of housing and ‘irregular’ or ‘unhealthy’ conditions of the neighborhood into question. In opposing this legalistic logic, dwellers frequently adopted a set of counter-discourses that can be classified around the themes of *class bias* and *labor* they embedded in their neighborhood during the years of formation. Cumhuriyet

residents emphasized their long time labor and efforts to overcome the difficulties to make the locality a habitable neighborhood. Moreover, they openly voiced that the UTP is a class project working for the gains of upper classes' consumption. At the base of these efforts to reclaim their neighborhoods were the memory of socialist left, and political experience in trade unionism and labor struggle.

In other words, the UTP rendered the Cumhuriyet dwellers to operationalize activist experience and political memory, which were noticeable throughout their mobilization, organization and counter-action. Interviewees' sympathy for the socialist past of the 1970s was quite apparent during my household visits. I did not even need to delve into their political stance during my life-story interviews which mostly was a critical threshold in my conversations. A community elder, Yaşar (62), narrated how the first seeds of leftist activism were sown in him during his childhood. His eyes were tearful when he mentioned the killing of revolutionary guerillas by gendarmeries in 30 March 1972, in the countryside of his hometown. He was in primary school when the news reached their nearby village. This memory and many more shed significant light on the political memory of the community.

For instance, Nazif, a self-described, "old-time communist" (61) emphasized that *squatting* is an everyday process, "an everyday challenge for those with limited income in a capitalist social order."

It's me who knows what *gecekondu* is and what *gecekondu*-isation [*gecekondulasma*] means. Settling in *gecekondu* means you are the slave of the bourgeoisie. I mean a slave with everything you own. Destroy, construct, buy, and sell. It means you constantly, every single day, transfer your children's subsistence money to bricks and cement. *Gecekondu*-isation means nothing but this.

After mentioning the irrational terms of exchange that the UTP imposed upon community, Nazif continued explaining what the UTP would make of the *gecekondu* people: i.e. customers:

Municipality will get your house and in its place, build a multi-story apartment [complex]. On the one hand, all of a sudden, you become a client. You are ready-to-make customer. On the other hand, you don't want to leave your own place; you say it's my own neighborhood, my own street. On top it, they find customers by indebting you and they do not pay for the land.

Izzettin, a coffee shop proprietor in his mid-40s has lived in the Cumhuriyet neighborhood for 35 years explained the "absurdity" in municipality's efforts to play the legality card in a half-sarcastic way. Referring to the early years of the neighborhood which in fact was just a bare muddy and rocky hill and to squatters' struggle with the natural topography, he pointed to an old tree he planted

with his bare hands and said: “They say I have no title deed! Here! This tree is my title deed!”^{xi} Accounts as such, indeed, testify that community members emphasized their concrete labor and lived experiences of urban space against the abstract and commodifying logic of the law and property rights. Ibrahim, a community elder who had been in organized grassroots activism for years defined the UTPs as another battle in the class war:

In my terms, it is a class war. I get urban transformation projects as another front of the conflict between the rich and the poor, labor and capital, and the battle of classes. [...] I evaluate all this as an assault of the rich against the poor.

Inonu: *Devotion to Legality and Turkishness*

Compared to Cumhuriyet residents who emphasized the class dynamics behind the UTPs, Inonu contenders’ perception of the UTP was less ‘macro-political,’ so to speak. This was due mainly to their trajectory and political experiences of emigration from Bulgaria in the late 1980s. Throughout their organizational efforts and protests, Inonu contenders appealed to Turkish nationalist and Sunni ideals by oft-repeating oppression they, as Muslims and Turks, had to survive in Bulgaria. The symbols of the state such as national anthem, the martyrs, and the flag always stayed intact and were reproduced through performances and in their speeches during public demonstrations. This tactic worked out to assure security forces and officials that theirs was not a “terrorist” act. Needless to say, within the context of decades-long Kurdish armed resistance, the very word *terrorist* operates as a stigma that reduces all the attributes of any political demand to a mere against-the-state attribution. For instance, a public protest on March 25th, 2012 started with a “moment of silence for martyrs” followed by national anthem which was not the case during a protest march of the Cumhuriyet contenders in the summer of 2009.^{xiii}

During community meetings, Inonu contenders always differentiated between the government and the Turkish state, and they always directed their grievances to local government and officials, and more loosely to central government, but definitely not to the *Turkish state* in its abstractness. They always felt the urge to repeat their loyalty to Turkish state. For instance, Kemal, a 30 years-old factory worker who emigrated from Bulgaria at the age of 11 stated that he sensed “ill-will” (*kötü niyet*) of the politicians in the whole UTP process. He added that “I don’t believe that the state would harm its own citizens; it’s all about personal gain.”

Inonu contenders’ ideological framing and political identity formation overlapped with state’s dichotomizing portrayal of *gecekondu* life through legal-illegal or regular-irregular categories. One example is how Inonu contenders deployed the ethnic and settlement-type

distinctions vis-à-vis the *gecekondu* areas. They reproduced state's legalistic attitude, which promoted legality as the only source of legitimacy in the UTP process. During community association meetings they have always underlined the legal and legitimate ways of land purchase and building as the only source of their rightful cause. For instance, 54 years old Selim who came to Gebze in 1989 explained the tendency of emigrant community's to go along the lines of formality despite the strong currents of informality in housing in the 1990s:

I take this project as usurpation. [...] We bought the plot [of my house] according to regulations [*imarli ifrazli*]. We are coming from the communist system. You have no property ownership there. There was no private property. You long for it [property] and you want to say "it is mine." As I said "the car was mine; only mine." That is why I wanted the plot to be zoned and parceled [legally] for it would be only mine.

This sort of devotion to property attained by legal means is expected to translate into ardent and keen opposition to the UTP. However, the emigrant community of Inonu was relatively apathetic to mobilization compared to Cumhuriyet community, which was quite proactive, fast and well-organized.

Highlighting Turkishness was not a matter limited to political mobilization. Years of identity performance as such created certain ethnic boundaries *within* the Inonu neighborhood, which culminated in an – unexpected – impediment to their mobilization. A smaller portion of the UTP zone in Inonu is informal *gecekondu* area settled by Kurdish families in the 1990s. The ethnic boundaries at Kurdish/Turkish axis were reinforced during a rather tense community meeting that aimed at gathering residents of three settled areas of the Inonu UTP zone. The meeting was initiated by the association led by 'emigrants,' held in the yard of a coffee house (a 'neutral' zone). A leading figure of the organization efforts started with a rather blunt statement on the "apathy" of both Blue Blocks (*Mavi Bloklar*) and *gecekondu* residents. He said that "it would not make any sense if we cry out at the very last moment when we became victims [of the UTP]." He specifically criticized *gecekondu* residents of being expectant of lucrative returns at the end of the UTP process (hence, their assumed apathy). His talk resumed with an elaborate calculation of the returns if they "act together and be strong" under the association. When a *gecekondu* resident intercepted his speech demurring with an apparently Kurdish accent that it was the contenders' voting for AKP and hence, the UTP. In response, a presumption based on prejudice regarding the Kurds in *gecekondu* section recreated the ethnic boundaries there and then. The popular assumption that Kurds were categorically against the Turkish state and pro-violent was implied at a moment when he said:

First, we are not engaged in politics here. Second, we gathered in the city square [to protest]; we made a press statement. Chief of police, district commissioner were there; we

were neither clubbed nor rebuked. We will, like human-beings, in a civilized manner, [Indistinct protest from others] claim our rights. Neither do we ask anybody to be beat up nor attack the police office; no offense but I will tell you something but I am afraid I'd be misunderstood! We love our land and our nation. We love our state. Never have we been biased against any state institution or any political party. Therefore, we do not do politics here. We are worried about our property.

This moment of encounter shows that the affinity of Inonu contenders with state's discourse of legality regarding the *gecekondu* areas and the mainstream nationalistic ideals created an overlap between ethnicity (Kurdish/Turkish) and property situation (formal/legal vs. informal *gecekondu*). This overlap, however, became a hindrance in terms of an inclusive mobilization.

Conclusion

Research on urban renewal in the global south in general, and urban transformation projects (UTPs) in Turkey in particular has so far consolidated our knowledge on informal housing for low income communities and their counter-mobilizations. Research shows that within the context of 'variegated neoliberalization,' practices of neoliberal urbanism show variety and locally-specific characteristics. My paper contributes to the discussions on urban diversity and mobilizations against urban renewal in the global south and struggles against them. I compare various sources of *diversity* such as ethno-religious affiliation, socio-economic status, resources and means of mobilization of the two communities in Gebze, an industrial satellite city of the Istanbul city region, which has recently been a stage of UTPs. I suggest that ethnic and socio-economic configurations of communities under the threat of urban transformation make it imperative to examine the role of *diversity* in organization, mobilization, and cultural and ideological framing of struggles against UTPs. I argue that within the context of expanding scope of UTPs which have recently targeted 'regular' areas of non-squatter characteristics, communities which have long formed closer affinities toward mainstream values (i.e. Turkishness and Sunnism) are emerging on the political scene.

No doubt, there are many factors comparable in each community's mobilization. In this presentation, however, I have specifically focused on the role of political memory and experience, and ethnicity in community mobilizations. In Cumhuriyet, the UTP area in the neighborhood is mainly settled by Alevis. Inonu contenders were predominantly Turkish-Sunni emigrants who took refuge in Turkey escaping from Bulgarian state's assimilationist policies throughout the 1980s. Whereas the Cumhuriyet community believed that the municipality targeted their neighborhood because of its past activism and their Alevi identity in addition to its high differential rent, Inonu

contenders were quite careful in repeatedly highlighting their affiliation with the Turkish nation and state and Sunni ideals as well as creating a distinction from squatter settlements.

The anti-UTP mobilizations in Cumhuriyet and Inonu reveal the relationship between the grassroots mobilization and communities' past experiences with the state, ethnic and religious identity, and the memory of activism – if it ever exists. These factors combine and operate differently in moments of conflict and determine the means of mobilization, ideological framing of demands and grievances, and eventually the faith of the neighborhoods. Cumhuriyet neighborhood's efficient activism, direct –and sometimes loud – demand making brought a halt in the UTP in 2009 when the metropolitan city council did not pass the UTP bill. In the summer of 2012 when the ethnographic research ended, Inonu community had recently founded their association but had not reached a significant result as part of their mobilization.

The paper also shows a case of expanding scope of AKP-led UTPs which have recently targeted 'regular' areas of non-squatter characteristics. The communities of these areas such as Inonu in Gebze have long formed closer affinities with the state and society through mainstream values (i.e. Turkishness and Sunnism) have to find outlets of contestation to negotiate the UTP terms. Some others such as Alevis of Cumhuriyet *gecekond* area, who have long been accumulating memory and experience of contestation have effectively operationalized their activists' toolkit. The paper also shows that structural and cultural configurations, and political memory of communities in mobilization not only affect the willingness and ability of these communities to organize, but these factors also determine the forms and extent of their resources as well as the outcome of their protests.

In sum, the paper shows that *diversity* in itself does not constitute an impediment toward nor is a facilitator of mobilization for communities. Even though diverse settings such as Gebze may have created distances between communities due to stereotypical representations of certain groups, structural shifts in urban governance force them to negotiate such differences. As the cases of urban transformation projects show us communities find themselves in various situations such as negotiating taken-for-granted affinities towards mainstream values and the state – which do not suffice to crack the hard shell of state anymore – or reactivating their past activism and carry their political memory and experience to a new level when it comes to protect their houses and communities.

Endnotes

ⁱ This paper is based on a research that I conducted in Gebze in 2010 and 2012. The research was funded by the Middle East Research Competition (7th Cycle) grant and a research grant from the Foundation of Urban and Regional Research.

ⁱⁱ In this paper, due to time and space limit, I am only citing some of the recent researches on urban transformation and neoliberal urbanism in Turkey. AGFE, A. G. on F. E. (2009). *Report to the Executive Director of the UN Habitat Programme, Mission to Istanbul* (Mission Report) (p. 61). Istanbul: UN Habitat Programme.; Bezmez, D. (2008). The politics of urban waterfront regeneration: the case of Halic (the Golden Horn), Istanbul. *International Journal of Urban Regional Research*, 32(4), 815–840. Candan, A. B., & Kolluoğlu, B. (2008). Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: a gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 39, 5–46.; Demir, H., & Yilmaz, A. (2012). Measurement of Urban Transformation Project Success Using the Analytic Hierarchy Process: Sulukule and Tepeüstü-Ayazma Case Studies, Istanbul. *Journal of Urban Planning and Development*, 138(2), 173–182.; Demirtaş-Milz, N. (2013). The Regime of Informality in Neoliberal Times in Turkey: The Case of the Kadifekale Urban Transformation Project. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37(2), 689–714.; Karaman, O. (2012). Urban Renewal in Istanbul: Reconfigured Spaces, Robotic Lives. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 1–19.; Karaman, O. (2013). Urban Neoliberalism with Islamic Characteristics. *Urban Studies*, 50(16), 3412–3427.; Karaman, O. (2014). Resisting urban renewal in Istanbul. *Urban Geography*, 35(2), 290–310.; Kuyucu, T. (2014). Law, Property and Ambiguity: The Uses and Abuses of Legal Ambiguity in Remaking Istanbul’s Informal Settlements. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38(2), 609–627.; Kuyucu, T., & Ünsal, Ö. (2010). “Urban Transformation” as State-led Property Transfer: An Analysis of Two Cases of Urban Renewal in Istanbul. *Urban Studies*, 47(7), 1479.; Lelandais, G. E. (2014). Space and Identity in Resistance against Neoliberal Urban Planning in Turkey: Resistance against neoliberal urban planning in Turkey. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38(5), 1–22.; Saraçoğlu, C., & Demirtaş-Milz, N. (2014). Disasters as an ideological strategy for governing neoliberal urban transformation in Turkey: insights from Izmir/Kadifekale. *Disasters*, 38(1), 178–201.

ⁱⁱⁱ This literature has shown that the UTPs have had such common characteristics: First, they are always designed top down; from inception to implementation, project designers and local officials have not consulted the community members who are directly affected by these projects. Second, community members are threatened and intimidated by officials or police forces. There have been forceful evictions. Finally, UTPs destroy years-long solidarity networks, neighborhood relations and social texture in these neighborhoods

^{iv} I offer two theoretical interventions into urban research in Turkey that is inherently developed throughout the paper. By presenting Gebze as part of the Istanbul city region, I do not take Istanbul simply contained within its official borders on the southwest of which Gebze is located as a district of Kocaeli province. Secondly - and based on this relationality- my point also concerns the predominant emphasis on Istanbul as THE city and to invite urbanists to devote more effort to understand the peripheries of Istanbul (and for that matter, other cities and places beyond Istanbul).

^v Census results; Turkish Institute of Statistics. Between 1955 and 2000, the population of Turkey increased almost threefold (from 24 million to 67 million). Gebze’s population, in this period, increased almost 17 times (from 25 thousand to 421 thousand).

^{vi} For migrant experiences in Gebze see: Ayşe Güneş-Ayata. 1987. “Migrants and Natives: Urban Bases of Social Conflict.” In *Migrants, Workers and Social Orders*. London: Tavistock; Ayşe Güneş-Ayata. 1992. *CHP: Örgüt ve İdeoloji*. 1st ed. Gündoğan Yayınları; Engin Yıldırım. 1996. “The Metal Workers of Gebze.” In *Work and Occupation in Modern Turkey*, edited by Erol Kahveci, Nadir Sugur, and Theo Nichols, 149–72. Mansell. For recent research see Serkan Öngel. 2012. *Kapitalizmin Kıskaçında Kent ve Emek: Gebze Bölgesi ve Otomotiv Sanayii Üzerine Bir İnceleme* İstanbul: Nota Bene; Tolga Tezcan. 2011. *Gebze: “Küçük Türkiye”nin göç serüveni*. İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi.

^{vii} Construction of the Gebze Organized Industrial Zone (GOIZ) started in 1986 and production started in 1990. In 2011, about 19 thousand people were employed in GOIZ. In the broader Gebze area, there are nine OIZs covering a total of 3,129 hectares. Five out of nine zones work at full capacity (Öngel 2011, 139).

^{viii} When they first settled in Gebze in the early 1970s, the migrants in Cumhuriyet neighborhood represented the first-wave of migration: first, the young male of the household worked in Istanbul as a seasonal worker, and then migrated permanently with the help of earlier relatives and fellow townsmen who provided information, money, and accommodation.

^{ix} Mainly young men migrated from their hometown to Istanbul, found manual jobs at a factory with the help of fellow migrants and relatives, and temporarily moved in with relatives and acquaintances. Through word of mouth, they heard about the available lands in Gebze, ‘available’ meaning vacant state lands ready to occupy (or ‘buy’ from an early gate keeper) (Güneş-Ayata 1992).

^x One of my informants, Tarik’s account shows that community was sometimes in collaboration with the then-social democrat municipality:

We brought our own tap water to our houses by digging the earth 400 meters deep. We erected power poles by ourselves. We dug our own sewage canals collectively; we gathered money, rented excavators, and collectively bought the pipe drains for sewage. We paved our streets. [Ultimately] we turned it [neighborhood] into a habitable area. First primary school was built as late as 1987 or 1989. We had a mosque, then a *Cemevi*. By itself, the neighborhood became a city. By itself, it developed.

^{xi} “*Tapu diyorlar! Aha işte bu ağaçtır benim tapum!*”

^{xii} During their preparation meetings, Inonu neighborhood’s association members were insisting on not giving any impression that this protest was affiliated with a political party or ideology.

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