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Yardimci, Oznur [orcid.org/0000-0002-2398-9857](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2398-9857) (2020) State stigmatization in urban Turkey : Managing the 'insurgent' squatter dwellers in Dikmen Valley. ANTIPODE. pp. 1-20. ISSN 0066-4812

<https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12651>

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# State Stigmatisation in Urban Turkey: Managing the “Insurgent” Squatter Dwellers in Dikmen Valley

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**Abstract:** This paper contributes to the accounts of territorial stigmatisation by examining the state role in it in the case of Turkey, a country that suffers from growing state power. The existing debates are mainly restricted to its function as an economic strategy paving the way for capital accumulation through devaluing working-class people and places. Drawing on textual analysis of political speeches, local newsletters and mainstream national newspapers and fieldwork material that include interviews and observations in Dikmen Valley where some squatter communities mobilised against the state-imposed urban transformation project, I demonstrate that state conceptualisation of “problem people” targets the “insurgent” rather than the “unprofitable” groups. Stigma in urban settings functions in inciting the desire to meet the patterns deemed appropriate by the state, rather than the market. Moving from that, I argue that stigma is used as a state-led political strategy, which is integral to the growing authoritarianism in Turkey.

**Keywords:** state stigmatisation, urban transformation, Dikmen Valley, right to shelter struggle, insurgency, Turkey

## Introduction

The cities that we will construct, new houses, workplaces and living spaces will become the nucleus of the Turkey that we will erect. In a globalised world, Turkey cannot have a place with deteriorating houses, temporary buildings, and un-aesthetic architecture that does not put our people in serenity. This we are changing. (Hürriyet 2013a)

The citation above is from the then prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as he promoted the urban transformation campaign that has been continuing all over Turkey. Immediately after coming to power in 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government imposed a country-wide campaign of urban transformation that favoured large-scale projects that rapidly transform urban space (Türkün 2011) in line with neoliberal ideas of profit. These areas were formed by rural-based migrants in response to the absence of a formal social housing policy and were later partially regularised and improved for political patronage (Erman 2001), thus going beyond an innocent attempt to solve the housing problem.

The transformation of the squatter neighbourhoods sprawling around big cities such as İstanbul and Ankara constituted an important part of the promotion of

the neoliberal urban transformation campaign. In this process, the squatter started to be represented as a “ghetto” (Eraydın and Taşan-Kok 2013:123) and those areas were stigmatised as centres of urban decay and blight (Bartu-Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008). State-led urban transformation projects were prescribed as tools to modernise the city by transforming the “primitive” squatter dweller into homeowners in the mass housing estates. This evokes accounts of territorial stigmatisation (Paton 2018; Wacquant 2007; Wacquant et al. 2014), which highlight the link between stigmatisation and profit, arguing that the former advances the future investment of capital (Paton 2018). However, urban (and particularly squatter) transformation enabled the state actors in Turkey to extend their power and authority as well as the logic of profit. Thus, an analysis centred mainly on economic processes of profit maximisation may fall short of uncovering the political interests invested in activating and avoiding the stigma in urban context. As a country suffering from growing state power, Turkey provides a suitable case to address that lacuna.

The fieldwork I conducted in the squatter neighbourhood in Dikmen Valley revealed the function of stigma beyond paving the way for profit maximisation. The neighbourhood was home to a diverse squatter community, some of whom formed the so-called Right to Shelter Bureau against the greater municipality’s attempts to forcefully remove the squatter dwellers to transform the neighbourhood and resettle them outside the valley. Since they started to undertake housing struggle demanding resettlement within the valley in affordable houses, which caused interruptions in project implementation, they were the target of state stigmatisation. As I will detail below, a shared narrative in the unstructured interviews with activist dwellers was the spontaneous and bottom-up mobilisation by dwellers lacking any political agenda beyond their right to shelter. For many, they had to, rather than chose to, defend their houses against the state that seemed to lose its mercy towards the poor. They understood urban transformation as a process in which their relationship with the state was reframed, and emphasis on the lack of choice was an attempt to avoid the stigma associated with insurgence within the framework of a progressively more authoritarian regime.

To the extent that stigma is related to broader notions of power and domination (Tyler and Slater 2018), this article will unpack the political interests invested by the state in activating the stigma targeting squatter dwellers in neighbourhoods opposing urban transformation. The empirical discussion that will follow draws on an examination of how the local and national state actors use stigma targeting the squatter activism in Dikmen Valley. The area is particularly important as the conflicts it prompted were deeply shaped by shifts towards a revision of state approach to squatter neighbourhoods throughout a turbulent decade of progressively more authoritarian urban governance (2006–2017). The existing accounts of territorial stigma are mainly restricted to its function as an economic strategy paving the way for capital accumulation through devaluing low-income places and people. Drawing on textual analysis of political speeches, municipal newsletters, mainstream newspapers and data from ethnographic fieldwork, I will show that state stigmatisation in urban settings targets the insurgent, rather than

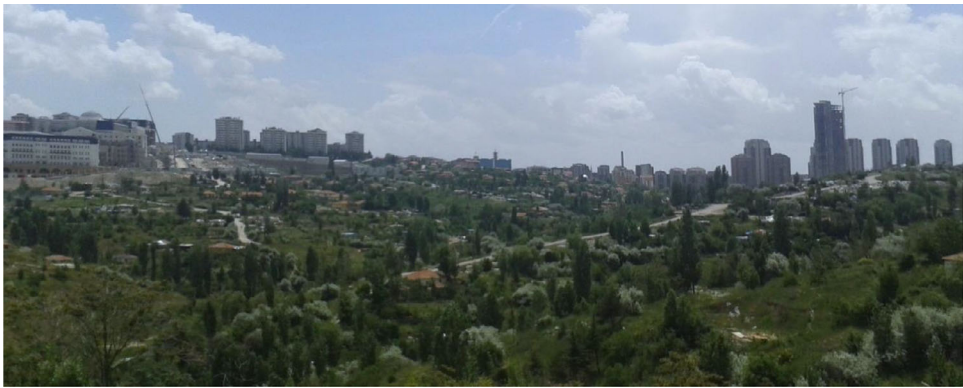
the unprofitable groups, and stigma functions in inciting the desire to meet the patterns deemed appropriate by the state. Moving from that, I will argue that stigma is used as a state-led political strategy, which is integral to the growing authoritarianism in Turkey.

## Methodology and Data

This paper examines the role of the state ideology operating in stigmatisation in the urban context by focusing on Dikmen Valley in Ankara. It draws on textual analysis and ethnographic fieldwork. Textual analysis of the news regarding the right to shelter struggle in the Dikmen Valley in the most widely circulated mainstream *Hürriyet* and *Hürriyet Ankara* newspapers and the *Metropolitan Ankara* newsletters was undertaken to assess how the squatter dwellers, who were most directly targeted by the neoliberal logic of profit, were stigmatised by the state actors and in the mainstream news media. While conducting the media analysis, I searched for keywords “Dikmen Valley”, “Dikmen Valley squatter”, “Dikmen Valley right to shelter” and “Dikmen valley urban transformation” to depict the news and articles about the urban transformation process in the valley.

To assess state stigmatisation with evidence from below, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted over a nine-month period in 2015 (January–October) by the author in the squatter neighbourhood in the 5<sup>th</sup> phase of the urban transformation project area, located in the southern part of Dikmen Valley. The rural migration started in the 1960s onwards and in the mid-1970s leftist socialist groups took control in the neighbourhood leading to a homogeneous demographic structure dominated by mostly left-leaning households, particularly Alevi people. This changed after the military coup in 1980, which led to the suppression of leftist opposition in the whole country. Accordingly, when I did my fieldwork, the demographic composition was heterogeneous with the presence of Sunni and right-leaning individuals alongside Alevi and left-leaning ones. Two members of the leftist civil society organisation called “People’s Houses”<sup>1</sup> were also active in coordinating the weekly meetings, consulting people about their legal rights and undertaking negotiations with the municipality. Few people had been actively engaged with the right to shelter struggle from the beginning and some people took part over time, while for some, involvement in the weekly meetings was grounded in self-interest, as the former groups complained. All the dwellers, except for seven households, lacked legal title-deeds.

By the time I conducted my fieldwork, the negotiations between the greater municipality and the right to shelter struggle were still continuing. The neighbourhood was suffering from physical and social decline as the municipal services had been cut off and many dwellers had moved away from their squatter houses gradually after the right to shelter struggle started. At the same time, often high-rise and luxurious buildings were being constructed in its surroundings, contributing to the extension of the rent gap in the area. These include the construction of the campus of the private Altın Koza (Ipek) University<sup>2</sup> in the east, the prestigious 50-storey One Tower shopping mall and gated housing complexes in the south and south east (see Figure 1). As such, the project area exposed “the



**Figure 1:** The squatter neighbourhood in the 5<sup>th</sup> phase of Dikmen Valley project area and the bordering construction of the campus of the private Altın Koza (İpek) University (on the left); the construction of One Tower shopping mall (on the right) and surrounding high-rise residential and commercial compounds (source: Author, 19 July 2015) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

unequal and contradictory effects of processes of neoliberalism leading both to spaces of decay and privileged spaces” (Bartu-Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008).

I conducted 32 semi-structured in-depth interviews with current and former squatter dwellers, who were involved in the right to shelter struggle. They were recruited through snowballing and networking. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and three hours, and were recorded (except for two) and transcribed. Anonymity has been retained for all respondents. I also undertook participant observation and informal conversations attending the weekly meetings held in the “Dikmen Valley Right to Shelter Bureau” over 26 weeks. Taken together, these multiple sources enabled me to develop insights about the political functioning of state stigmatisation in the urban context.

## Stigma in the Urban Context

The scholarship on stigma underlines its function in urban regeneration settings to realise profit (Kallin and Slater 2014; Paton 2014, 2018; Wacquant et al. 2014). Devaluing working class people and places in urban regeneration serves to realise the potential value and profit (Paton 2014). Stigmatisation of working-class neighbourhoods acts as a neoliberal alibi for capital accumulation (Gray and Mooney 2011). Obviating policies aimed at fixing the structural problems that cause inequality and deprivation, stigma provides ideological justification for a thorough class transformation, usually involving demolition, land clearance, and then the construction of housing and services aimed at a more affluent class of resident (Kallin and Slater 2014).

In Turkey, there has been notable attention to the stigmatisation of squatter areas and its linkages with neoliberalisation in the country. Up until the 1980s, the *gecekondu* (the word for squatter in Turkish) was considered as a transitional category expected to melt away through urbanisation (Bartu-Candan and

Kolluoğlu 2008), and the squatter dweller was represented as “innocent/rural other expected to be assimilated into the modern urban society” (Erman 2001:985). The first wave of neoliberalisation that started in the 1980s attempted to cultivate entrepreneurial behaviour in squatter dwellers and deter them from engaging in radical activism by “giving them the hope to become rich” (Erman 2001:987). Such populist policies that enabled obtaining wealth from the illegally occupied land were successful in reaching out to the disadvantaged and weakening the grassroots basis of the urban movements (Eraydın and Taşan-Kok 2013).

In the 1990s, official spokesmen began to adopt a much more sweeping and exclusionary tone, now stigmatising squatter dwellers as “invaders” (Türkün 2011). In the mainstream news media, they also started to be represented as “varosh”. Referring to the neighbourhoods outside the city walls in Hungarian (Erman 2001), the term represented the urban poor as unruly masses threatening the city with their radically different political views, conflicting social values and “inferior” culture (or “lack of culture”) and confronting it with vandalism and violence. This was alerting because it symbolised a fundamental shift in their representation, as “varosh” indicates being pushed out of the present and future of the modern and urban (Bartu-Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008). The latter implied that the squatter people not only strongly reject getting urbanised, but also pose a serious threat against the well-being of the city (Yonucu 2013).

This echoes the accounts of territorial stigmatisation that saw a shift in the spatial taint from images of counter-society towards vectors of social disintegration and racialisation of populations of disparaged districts in post-industrial metropolis (Wacquant et al. 2014). By the late 1990s, the urban poor in Turkey were increasingly seen as a race apart with a particular culture productive of degeneracy and criminality concentrated in the neighbourhoods they reside (Gönen and Yonucu 2011). Importantly, this is aligned with the urban transformation projects that started in the 2000s facilitating the fantasy of non-antagonistic cities attractive to foreign capital and global investment, “secured and freed from crime and/or urban poor” (Gönen and Yonucu 2011:77). Bartu-Candan and Kolluoğlu (2008:7) talk about the creation of a new “stigmatising topographic lexicon” in a way that marks the areas populated by the urban poor as dangerous, a breeding ground for illegal activities, and areas of social decay or social ill; and urban transformation projects are offered as a remedy to such activities. These illustrate the function of state stigmatisation in enabling primarily squatter transformation projects (Bartu-Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008), and thus neoliberal remaking of urban space.

A common characteristic of stigmatisation in Turkey and elsewhere is the crucial and multi-sided role the state played in this process by constructing the blemish of place it then purports to remedy (Kallin and Slater 2014). The state activates territorial stigmatisation in a way that enables the widening and facilitation of the closure of rent gap (Kallin and Slater 2014). Despite acknowledging the key role played by the state in stigmatisation, these accounts tend to view the state as an extension of the market mainly concerned with capital accumulation. Prioritisation of the economic characteristics of neoliberal governance, however, might reduce the *raison d'état* of the state to the rationale of profit and leave underexplored



the political interests invested by the state in activating the stigma in urban transformation settings. To prepare the ground for this, the next section will shed light on the transformation of the state power within the framework of the neoliberal urbanisation in Turkey.

## Neoliberal Urbanisation and Growing State Power in Turkey

In the pre-1980 period, the squatter neighbourhoods burgeoned around the metropolises as a result of the populist coalition between industrialists in need of cheap and flexible labour, political parties seeking loyalty and political patronage and lower-class urbanites in search of affordable housing (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010). During the first wave of neoliberalisation that started in 1980, a series of amnesty laws were enacted, with which many squatter dwellers became right holders of the area that would be redeveloped by improvement plans. This was done through giving them an “official document for ownership rights” (*tapu tahsis belgesi*) (Türker-Devecigil 2005:214), which could be converted into official title-deeds after development plans were prepared (Türkün 2011). In line with the ideology of the time that valued wealth and individual ambition over education (Erman 2001), such populist policies targeted the support from those negatively affected by the new economic policies (Eraydın and Taşan-Kok 2013). Those who were able to legalise their ownership status profited from either selling their piece of once-public land or developing their properties into larger units (Kuyucu 2014), while the remaining legal ambiguities made the rest of the dwellers vulnerable to government action (Erman 2001).

The squatter transformation projects and the abovementioned mediatic portrayals of squatter areas revealed the shift in the state approach in the post-2002 period characterised by what Karaman (2013:719) calls “the dispensability of squatter housing”. With the enactment of the Criminal Act in 2004, the construction of illegal settlements was made punishable by imprisonment for up to 5 years, which was in direct contrast to previous punishments (demolition or civil penalty) (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010). The new “zero squatter policy” (Erman 2012) meant terminating a vibrant channel of vote-seeking and wealth redistribution for the sake of vast potentials of rent (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010) as the focus shifted to opening channels for certain capital fractions (Somali 2013). These projects created a new entrepreneurial group (property developers) who enjoyed exceptional advantages and in turn provided electoral and financial support to the government (Eraydın and Taşan-Kok 2013). Some low- and middle-income groups, particularly the early migrants, also had an opportunity to profit, and there were some special conditions for the disadvantaged as they could purchase an apartment in the mass-housing units built by TOKİ with state-subsidised credits and long-term payments (Akçay 2015; Yıldırım 2009). Yet, new migrants or certain religious or ethnic groups lacking legal claims were excluded (Eraydın and Taşan-Kok 2013) and faced direct displacement as in Sulukule.

Deepening the existing social and spatial inequalities, large-scale urban transformation projects have been important mechanisms in redefining the role of

priorities of urban policy and planning according to neoliberal ideas rather than public interest (Penpecioglu 2013), in which state intervention has played a key enabling role (Penpecioglu 2011). AKP undertook a series of institutional, administrative and legal reforms that ignited a construction boom, expanded mortgage markets and led to the creation of a regeneration policy (Kuyucu 2018). Only between 2002 and late 2007, 78 laws and 10 by-laws, totally or partially concerning the production of the built environment, were enacted (Balaban 2012). The state has become the main subsidiser of housing in Turkey, with 500,000 housing units produced by TOKİ between 2002 and 2011 (TOKİ 2017) and a target of 700,000 more by 2023. This differs from global policies characterised by the large-scale state withdrawal from the housing sector in support of a stronger and larger market-based housing finance model (Rolnik 2013). Moreover, TOKİ, which operated directly under the Prime Ministry, was gradually exempted from parliamentary oversight and auditing (Kuyucu 2014), while being granted extended authority in urban redevelopment areas. These include the power to determine right holders and the values of their houses (2004), to determine the squatter prevention areas and take-over of the land owned by the Treasury for free (2005) and to approve and reject all plans developed for the boundaries of squatter rehabilitation, refinement and prevention areas within the borders of the local administrations (2007) (Yılmaz 2013).

Kuyucu (2018:1156) argues that the underlying principle of the central-local state relations has been “administrative unity and tutelage of the centre over localities”. Despite initial attempts to increase the administrative and financial powers and capacities of local administrations between 2003 and 2009, most authority was shared between central state institutions particularly in the field of urban regeneration. Especially after 2010 when the ruling AKP gained the victory after the constitutional referendum, centralisation became more aggressive with a direct impact on urban regeneration as municipal administrations became subservient to the centre in project implementation.

Within this context, urban redevelopment processes in Turkish cities have become a showcase of growing state power as neoliberalisation enabled centralisation of power through legal and institutional changes (Eraydın and Taşan-Kok 2013; Kuyucu 2018) that equipped state officials with immense power and allowed more direct and unilateral ways of state intervention into the built environment mainly through large-scale urban transformation projects (Gündoğan 2019; Penpecioglu 2011, 2013). The local and central state actors have been key actors in building the neoliberal hegemony over urban redevelopment processes mainly through large-scale urban transformation projects that impose pro-market rationales (Gündoğan 2019) and serve to transform urban planning in line with neoliberal logic of profit (Özdemir and Eraydın 2017; Penpecioglu 2011).

As Wacquant (2010) argues, neoliberalism is a political project aiming to remake the nexus of market, state and citizenship from above. The contemporary statecraft assumed new roles in addition to its “economic” functions, in managing social marginality, which ambidextrously involves authoritarian and assistential wings of the state (Peck 2010). Thus, a functionalist reading of state intervention into the built environment as market-oriented operations towards privatisation,



commodification and property transfer offers limited insight into the ways the state-citizen relations are transformed. This paper examines the role of the state actors in activating stigma when implementing urban transformation projects. Using the case of Turkey in which neoliberalisation *enabled* monopolisation of power, I argue that the state also endeavours to differentiate categories according to established conceptions of moral worth and mould behaviour (Wacquant 2010). As I demonstrate below, the local and central state actors use stigma in urban settings to pathologise political dissidence and enhance the desire to comply with official policies in a way that makes the (housing) rights dependent upon meeting the “appropriate” patterns of behaviour and norms defined by the state. Consequently, stigmatisation enables the state to legitimise itself as the main authority to define who is worthy to benefit from the prosperity promised by urban transformation, which in turn shrinks citizen power. Thus, the paper argues that the state intervention in neoliberal urbanisation has implications that are not limited to market expansion and legitimation, and these can be revealed by looking at how stigmatisation complements benevolence in reasserting the state authority.

### **State-Led Reframings of Worthy and Unworthy Dwellers**

To legitimise the urban transformation campaign and discredit opposition, the state actors in Turkey used a discourse based on security (Lelandais 2014; Tansel 2018). It was no coincidence that in the opening speech of the First Housing Congress, the then Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan referred to the squatter areas as a “tumour surrounding our cities” (Sabah 2006bb), which helped to promote the urban transformation projects as social policy measures as addressed above. A wave of demolition followed to pave the way for the implementation of urban transformation projects. The so-called urban transformation was officialised with a law passed specifically for Ankara in 2004 (Bektaş 2014), which defined a project to redevelop an area of 16 million square metres containing 10,500 squatter units in northern Ankara (Batuman 2013). By 2014, approximately 47% of the total residential terrain in Ankara, 22% of which was squatter areas, fell within the scope of urban transformation (Bektaş 2014). Up until mid-2017, more than 20,000 squatter units in Ankara were demolished by large-scale municipal-led projects (Milliyet 2017).

An often-repeated claim in the campaign was the voluntary involvement of the people, particularly the most directly targeted squatter dwellers in projects. Erdoğan revealed this in the later parts of his above-cited speech by saying that:

Despite the mistakes they have made, we prepared the ground for the people, who in fact undeservingly occupied the land without the right to live there, to consent to be resettled in more modern houses in a different place after paying compensation. (Sabah 2006a)

By activating the “invader” stigma associated with squatter dwellers Erdoğan was presenting the campaign as an opportunity for “getting modernised” to the

squatter dwellers already marked as the “uncivilised” (Erman 2001). This echoes the function of stigma in managing impoverished and disadvantaged populations (Paton 2018; Paton et al. 2017) by enhancing low levels of aspiration to be more aligned with neoliberalism (Paton 2014). The “politics of aspiration” underpinning urban regeneration is focused less on displacing working class residents and more on making them more productive by becoming more affluent users of private rather than collective goods, i.e. through becoming home-owners rather than social renters or benefit claimants. Stigma operates in this context as a form of “soft power” to “shame those who do not or cannot become more productive neoliberal consumer citizens” (Paton 2018:923).

In Turkey, deprived groups with the low likelihood of benefitting from the regeneration projects mobilised resistance to stop demolitions and evictions in squatter neighbourhoods in metropolitan cities (Eraydın and Taşan-Kok 2013). Stigma was used against those who fail to respond appropriately to “benevolent” state efforts to upgrade their residential conditions despite their “illegality”. In the same speech cited above, Erdoğan referred to them saying:

There are those trying to arouse pity during the demolitions of illegal settlements: “The poor thing had only a house, and look, they demolished it!” How come are they the poor thing? There is an illegal occupation there! The one you call the poor thing can purchase a house, paying monthly 200 TRY instalments. But, no! Ghettos are being formed and think about what is going on in them! (Sabah 2006b)

There, Erdoğan provoked the existing anxieties fed from the “varosh” discourse by referring to the housing struggles as attempts to form ghettos. When mentioning the Dikmen Valley right to shelter struggle as “a few looters” (Hürriyet 2006), “terrorists and anarchists” (Evrensel 2007) in local and national TV channels, the former Mayor of Ankara was mimicking Erdoğan.

The Dikmen Valley Urban Development and Housing Project started to be implemented in 1989 by the greater municipality, which was then under the social democratic party. There were 4092 squatter dwellings hosting 18,415 inhabitants in five neighbourhoods in the project area (Karayalçın 2009, cited in Topal et al. 2019:640). The project aimed to rehabilitate the valley as a natural park and recreational area through a relocation model based on self-financing and participation (Uzun 2005). A significant proportion of the cost of transforming the squatter dwellers into apartment buildings was financed through marketing luxury housing for high-income groups in the project area (Türker-Devecigil 2005) (see Figure 2). Also, Metropol İmar Co. established with the collaboration of municipality, stakeholders and developers periodically organised face-to-face meetings with the squatter dwellers to keep them informed. Despite the top-down practice of participation in decision-making, the initial phases of the project were implemented without effective opposition.

Rather than becoming a model for Turkey, the project evolved into a different model with more explicit rent-seeking goals and a more authoritative implementation when a right-wing party won the local elections taking over the project in the mid-1990s (Topal et al. 2019). Participation was lost as the meetings with the squatter dwellers were cancelled and the greater municipality now owns 99% of



**Figure 2:** The apartment houses constructed for the former squatter dwellers (above) and higher income groups (below) in the first phase of Dikmen Valley Housing and Environmental Development Project (source: Uzun 2003; used here with permission) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

the Metropol İmar Co. (Eğercioğlu and Özdemir 2006). With the intensification of density and luxurious residential uses that led to speculation, the housing project turned into state-led gentrification (Mühürdaroğlu 2005) that marks the current transformation projects in many inner-city squatter areas such as Tarlaşaşı, Fikirtepe or Başibüyük in İstanbul.

Immediately after the enactment of the Metropolitan Municipalities Law (Law no. 5216) in 2005 with which the greater municipalities gained planning authority at all scales, Dikmen Valley was labelled as a municipal project area, and the Çankaya District Municipality was removed from the project (Mühürdaroğlu 2005). With its extended power, the greater municipality announced the urban transformation project in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> phases in 2006. It had different regulations for different tenure types as in other urban transformation projects in Ankara and elsewhere that “exploited the existing legal ambiguities of informal housing” (Tansel 2018:329). Those holding title deeds granted with the amnesty laws in the 1980s were defined as the true right-holders, and were eligible to purchase new units to be built in the valley under conditions set by the greater municipality or they could sell their land for a unit price below the market value. On the other hand, non-titled dwellers were offered to pay 16,000 TRY to purchase 200 m<sup>2</sup> of land in Doğukent to be paid over 10 years. However, there was no infrastructure or built environment in that area and the duration of the project and the date of delivery of houses was not specified. Alternatively, they were offered apartments

to purchase in the mass-housing units in Mamak to be paid over 15 years. But the bureau members told me that apartments were 50 m<sup>2</sup>—although they were said to be 80 m<sup>2</sup>—and instalments were unfixed with a high interest rate that would almost double the price. There was no place for negotiation as both groups had to relinquish their houses and leave the valley as soon as signing the contract (Aykan 2011).

When the project was announced there were 1084 titled households and 1200 non-titled households (Deniz 2010). Having legal security, almost all the former group signed the contract and left the valley by the end of 2006; however, some of those lacking documents were reluctant to do so due to the uncertainties and high level of debts. As detailed in the interviews, a few households came forward and started to undertake home visits to explain to people why they should not sign the contracts inviting them to come together and claim better terms for inclusion in the project. They wanted to be resettled within the valley equally with the titled dwellers, as their contributions to the maintenance of the land for years in the absence of affordable housing made them an equal right claimer on the land. One of them was Aysel, and with her own words, “they were trying to explain in their own way as they had never rebelled against the state” (Interview, 1 February 2015). The process of mobilisation was not easy with the “doors shut to their faces” and “swears and insults they heard” as they attempted to talk to the people, which revealed strong prejudices and insecurities about insurgence against the state.

The municipality targeted this division within the community, enacting a municipal committee decree to demolish five of the houses where leading activists lived. When people saw the demolition teams and the police in their neighbourhood, they forgot their fear and tried to prevent the demolitions as expressed by many in our conversations. This was followed by the municipal-led raid with 5300 policemen on 1 February 2007, in which clashes with the police lasted all day and 14 people were taken into custody. As the whole neighbourhood was targeted to be cleared for construction, the state violence was evident such as in Başbüyük in Istanbul (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010). Its magnitude enabled the formation of solidarity among dwellers tied through customs and religious and ethnic identities who “had not interacted much” as Haydar remembered (Interview, 20 March 2015). After that, people started meeting weekly in what they called the “right to shelter bureau” (see Figure 3) to discuss resistance strategy, collaborating with and learning from other right to shelter movements in Turkey. They created a website and organised annual festivals to attract broader attention like the left-leaning groups did in the *1 Mayıs* neighbourhood (Lelandais 2014). With the help of voluntary lawyers and experts from the Chamber of Architects and Chamber of City Planners, the bureau also took legal action which succeeded in interrupting the demolitions, like in Başbüyük (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010).

Following that, stigma that marked squatter areas in direct contrast to the city and urbanity was refabricated by local and national media and the local state. The neighbourhood was stigmatised because of the political insurgence claimed to be blocking the transformation project and leading to the victimisation of true right-holders, that is the titled dwellers, and social and physical decay in the centre of Ankara. In the online archive of the *Hürriyet Ankara* that goes back to 2008,





**Figure 3:** Squatter dwellers waiting in the garden of the “Dikmen Valley right to shelter bureau” before the weekly meeting (source: Author, 26 July 2015) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Dikmen Valley was mentioned more than 300 times up until the end of 2015. One-sixth of these were about the clashes between the demolition teams and the struggling groups. The news was supported by visual images of masked protestors throwing stones and setting fires using a vocabulary of warfare including “volley of stones to the police” (1 July 2011), “scenes of war” (30 November 2011), and “battlefield” (12 April 2012). Through selective attention to the clashes with the police and the demolition teams without mentioning the violence of the latter, the insurgent was racialised (Wacquant et al. 2014).

The greater municipality’s response to insurgence was punitive, such as cancelling public transport, periodically cutting off electricity and water, pouring garbage and rubble onto the roads in the neighbourhood, and raids in various times to deter effective mobilisation and encourage people to move away from the neighbourhood. The weekly *Metropolitan Ankara* newsletter dated 14–20 November 2011 had on the front cover two contrasting aerial perspective images of different parts of the Dikmen Valley (see Figure 4): the first depicts the regenerated valley with luxurious apartment buildings, parks, ornamental pools and cafes, which together form a well ordered, ostentatious view; whereas the picture below displays the undeveloped valley, with small-scale squatter houses, poplar trees and the Dikmen stream, a messier, if unpretentious view. The text in yellow title is “Here is the Dikmen reality” asking in red bubbles whether the valley should “Become like this?” (above) or “Stay like this?” (below) (Yardımcı 2018:2).

The neighbourhood had received a negative reputation in the 1970s as a place where left-leaning and Alevi individuals and groups associated with disloyalty to the state authority reside, and the local state drew on this already existing stigma. The municipal newsletter deemed the right to shelter struggle illegal because of being led by “particular marginal groups waiting for an opportunity for their ideological protests and to create tension”. Those involved in it were pictured as “provocateurs” spreading terror in the valley with the support of political organisations and parties. This resonated in the narratives of Bekir, a former squatter dweller, who explained the objectives of their struggle, saying that:

We are opposing the profit logic behind urban transformation, not the transformation itself. Of course, we want to sustain the cities, to become urbanites. I mean, we already are urbanites, progressive ones indeed. But, he [the Mayor] reflects us in such a way that as if we are contra the city, contra urbanisation, and contra ordered way of living. (Interview, 5 July 2015)

Stigmatisation of the insurgent was, thus, used as a political strategy to legitimise the transformation of the area as a tool for social order as well as modern urbanisation. This led to surfacing of fragmentation within the community revealed by competing political views (Özdemir and Eraydın 2017) concerning insurgence. Haydar (59), a current dweller and one of the leading figures in the struggle, told



**Figure 4:** The cover page of the weekly *Metropolitan Ankara* bulletin dated 14–20 November 2011, demonstrating two photos of different parts of the Dikmen Valley urban transformation project area (public domain) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



me: "If we defend our rights here, struggle for our lands and you proclaim us terrorist; then, yes, we are terrorists!" (Interview, 20 March 2015). Nevertheless, in most of the interviews and conversations, narratives were in line with that of Bekir cited above. Aysel (44), also a current dweller and an active figure in the struggle, for instance, described herself as a "regular person mainly concerned with welcoming her husband in the evenings and providing a good future for her kids" (Interview, 1 February 2015). She explained that her activism was motivated by the frustration with state's top-down attempts at urban transformation and different regulations for titled and non-titled dwellers, rather than explicit disloyalty to the state. For Kardelen, the help of chambers and voluntary lawyers in the process was very important as she said that "all those well-educated people supported us, right? Had our struggle been illegal, would they do so?" (Interview, 22 February 2015). Referring to the help of "literate" people as a source of legitimisation of the struggle revealed the existing anxieties regarding engagement with political insurgency.

The stigmatisation of the local state drew on these anxieties to manoeuvre the insurgent. Differing from the mediatic representations, the municipal newsletter defined the "worthy" right holder with reference to allegiance to the state policies and authority, rather than possession of legal documents. The non-titled dwellers were portrayed as "poor people in Dikmen Valley", "citizens cheated with disinformation", and "puppets used by conflicting ideological groups". The "innocent" dweller was invited to take the side of the municipality and benefit from the project, whereas stigma selectively targeting the insurgent groups claimed to be sowing chaos in the city.

When an earthquake with a moment magnitude of 7.2 struck the south-eastern cities in Turkey on October 2011, killing hundreds of people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless, an opportunity arose for further shrinking the power and legitimacy of urban movements. Only three days after the earthquake Erdoğan spoke in the Extended Assembly of Provincial Heads, in a way that revealed the shift in their emphasis on voluntary participation in urban transformation projects:

From now on, we are going to give our Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning full authority, if necessary, in terms of solving the problem of illegal housing in our cities. We are going to expropriate this type of buildings without taking the consent of the locals who do not demolish them and demolish these buildings by ourselves. We are not going to take any notice of whether we lose their political support or not.

The extent of the destruction enabled the state actors to inscribe the natural disaster threat to promote the urban transformation campaign and implement exceptional measures. Immediately after the earthquake, the Law on the Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk (Law no. 6303) was enacted to demolish unpermitted/risky buildings and restore old buildings. While the authority to determine risky areas and buildings was fully given to the Ministry, definition of risky was left vague to speed up the process (Bektaş 2014). Moreover, the law brought penalties to any locals who object to the local administration's transformation plans and denial of utility services for those who refuse to leave their dwellings marked for demolition.

Following that, more comprehensive urban transformation projects started throughout Turkey, bringing a new era with zero tolerance to opposing voices that undermine dwellers' attempts to take part, the most popular example of which was Fikirtepe, which could only proceed after it was declared "a risk area" by the central government (Tepe 2016, cited in Tansel 2018:329). The law and its enforcement also enabled the state to portray the opponents of urban transformation as obstacles to the state commitment to serve its "worthy" citizens who sensibly take the side of the state in urban transformation.

Dikmen Valley was similarly declared as risky based on Law no. 6303 in 2012, and the demolition of the 503 remaining squatter houses in the valley was now beyond dispute (Hürriyet 2013b). Shortly after that, the former mayor of Ankara announced that the demolitions as part of urban transformation projects would now be carried out by private firms (Sendika63.org 2014). In February 2013, the workers of the construction company that won the tender to demolish the area, accompanied by police forces, came to the valley, with some of them carrying sticks and guns, and this led to violent clashes, as a result of which two journalists got wounded. In *Hürriyet Ankara*, in three successive days following that day, there were reports about these clashes with headlines such as "Terror of Shotgun in Dikmen" and "Dikmen Chaos", in which the squatter inhabitants were pictured as militants, supported by illegal associations, carrying guns and leading to bloodshed, with no mention of the violence of the subcontracted workers or the police.

State stigma increasingly fed from those images in line with the growing intolerance to opposition. The municipal newsletter dated March 2013 quoted the captions of mainstream *Hürriyet* and *HaberTürk*, saying "Is this a place out in the sticks?" and "War of Demolition in Ankara" successively (Ankara Büyükşehir 2013). Tele-photographs of a clash between the squatter dwellers and the subcontracted company workers were accompanied by headlines saying, "Terror is active again in Dikmen Valley" and "Terrorist protest in the heart of the capital with stones, sticks and guns". On the other hand, it was repeated that non-titled dwellers were offered land in Doğukent described as "one of the rising attraction centres in Ankara". The emphasis on the benevolence of the state even towards those lacking legal claims further criminalised opposition as was done by the Mayor's quotation that refusal of municipality's offers suggested concerns with "spreading terror rather than housing struggle".

By the end of 2013, more people moved out from the neighbourhood, including those who had been engaged with the struggle, and one of the main reasons was the "worries about limiting the chances of their children to find jobs" as one of the former dwellers expressed during a chat. The void from these dwellers was attempted to be filled by the radical leftist People's Houses; and its political agenda based on the multi-layered struggle against neoliberal policies was integrated into the right to shelter struggle. This, first of all, intensified the already existing political divisions within the community. Eren (29), a current dweller, for instance, complained about seeing the banner of People's Houses and hearing slogans about right to education and health in their protests, which resulted in him withdrawing his support from the struggle. Secondly, it helped the local state directly associate the right to shelter struggle with hostility to the state in its

attempts to manoeuvre the insurgent. This was reflected in the ways Ali, a current dweller, talked about and defended the right to shelter struggle, saying that “we are not asking anything from the state, not asking for charity, or there is no other stuff, *we don't do anything political*, we only claim our rights” (Interview, 10 May 2015, emphasis added).

His emphasis of the absence of a political agenda other than claim for housing showed the power of stigma in reasserting the authority of the state. The “politics of aspiration” underpinning state stigmatisation in urban transformation settings in Dikmen Valley operated through inciting the desire to meet the patterns of norms and behaviour deemed appropriate by the state, rather than the market. The careful delineation between the worthy and unworthy dwellers targeted this desire as well as being a “divide and rule strategy to undermine resistance” (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark 2014). Stigma was used as a political strategy to pathologise those who fail to obey the state authority and policies, and disqualify them from (housing) rights. The separation between the insurgent and the innocent thus reflects how punitive and benevolent faces of the state are ambidextrous and complement one another in reasserting the state authority (Peck 2010; Wacquant 2010), and thus in reframing the state-citizen relations.

Aysel told me how involvement in the right to shelter struggle helped her transform from a submissive dweller and taught her how to claim her rights, for which she was grateful. She mentioned that the whole process changed her daily life for the better as she started expressing her thoughts in public with more confidence. Like Ali, the way she described her neighbourhood echoed the state separation between the “innocent” and the insurgent:

Our neighbourhood was so beautiful and decent a neighbourhood that the (bordering) police station never had a complaint against us. I mean our neighbourhood was a proper one. There was no fight, brawl or anything. I mean really, even though the literacy status is low, all of them are decent, proper families. Everyone was just going to their work in the morning and coming back home in the evening sitting and chatting with their family ... Today, we are still the same 300 households waiting here. (Interview, 1 February 2015)

The intensified state stigmatisation and fragmentation within the movement led most of the current dwellers and long-time activists like Aysel to navigate between different and often contradicting accounts regarding insurgence. At the same time as refusing the state and mediatic stigma about the neighbourhood, she portrayed the right to shelter activists as decent, that is, *non-threatening* individuals. This manifested the power of state stigmatisation in urban transformation settings in asserting allegiant citizen behaviour as the basis of qualification for rights.

## **Conclusion: Beyond Market Expansion**

This paper examines stigmatisation in the urban transformation settings in Turkey by focusing on the role of the state actors in stigmatising the squatter activism in Dikmen Valley and demonstrates how stigmatisation has become a key form of power integral to the growing authoritarianism in the country. The discussions

show the function of state activation of stigma in defining who is “worthy” to be included in the cities of the new Turkey that was being constructed based on allegiance to the state authority and policies. While the state invited the socially and spatially marginalised squatter dwellers to “get modernised” through urban transformation projects, stigma was activated targeting the squatter activism in places like Dikmen Valley. It drew on the long-lasting prejudices about left-leaning and Alevi individuals and groups who were already associated with disloyalty to the state authority and tendency to criminal/marginal political ideologies, and thus, assumed to be threatening for the well-being of the urban society. As this helped underline the state authority to define who is “worthy” and “unworthy” to qualify from (housing) rights based on allegiance, it showed that stigma in urban settings is a key form of power integral to the growing authoritarianism in the country.

Analysing the role of the state from this perspective extends the debates of territorial stigmatisation contributing to a deeper insight into the dynamics of neoliberal urbanisation in an authoritarian context. The existing debates in Turkey and elsewhere are mostly restricted to the operation of the market logic in stigmatisation as it enables capital accumulation through paving the way for urban transformation and gentrification of neighbourhoods marked by stigma. These discussions draw on a conceptualisation of the state mainly concerned with market expansion through attempts to ensure commodification of land and housing (Gündoğan 2019; Penpecioglu 2011) and cope with its effects through intensification of coercive forms of state intervention (Peck et al. 2009) or through “civilising” the working-class residents by enhancing poor levels of aspiration (Paton 2018; Paton et al. 2012; Uitermark et al. 2007). While these are still extremely important today, the Dikmen case illustrates that stigma also functions as a political strategy in urban settings that precedes over the market ideology in remaking the urban landscape. The municipal newsletters and narratives of squatter activists in Dikmen Valley revealed that the implications of stigma involve a reframing of state-citizen relations. As addressed by Eraydın and Taşan-Kok (2013), the neoliberal agenda could also entail transforming the society in a fashion aligned with the state’s political project, which aims at conservative citizenry in the case of Turkey. This is a global phenomenon visible in the neoliberalising cities in Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America (Eraydın and Taşan-Kok 2013) as well as more advanced countries like the UK where stigmatisation of defamed neighbourhoods is used to elicit support for the regressive welfare reforms currently sweeping across Britain (Slater 2015). Thus, the role of state ideology in stigmatisation in an urban context is a timely and important question, which necessitates further exploration to understand its implications for citizenship.

## Acknowledgements

This paper draws upon the PhD project by the author, “Promises and Costs of Gentrification: A Case of Dikmen Valley”. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

I would like to thank the anonymous referees for their most useful comments that extensively improved the quality of the manuscript; and Daryl Martin and Andrew Sayer for their time in reading the earlier drafts of this paper and their much needed comments. I would

especially like to thank the dwellers and activists in Dikmen Valley, who contributed to this research with their valuable memories and opinions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> People's Houses is an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal civil society organisation. Its current activist agenda involves struggling for civil rights to education, health, shelter, transportation and environment (<http://www.halkevleri.org.tr/>).

<sup>2</sup> This university was closed by the first decree enacted as part of the state of emergency following the failed coup attempt. Today, the campus hosts the public Ankara Social Sciences University.

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