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Struggles for Housing – Legitimate, Self-Contradictory, or Both? Impacts of Clientelism and Rights-Seeking on Informal Housing in Ankara

Yelda Kızıldağ Özdemirli

Introduction

Following World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish nationalists moved the country’s capital from Istanbul to Ankara. In part, this symbolized the country’s renunciation of its Ottoman heritage and its growing modernization and Westernization. Despite being a ‘planned city’, with large new sections built next to an old settlement, informal urbanization became prevalent from the 1950s due to massive rural to urban migration from less developed regions of Eastern Turkey (Akçura, 1971), triggered both by rural push factors such as unemployment, particularly after the mechanization of agriculture, and by urban pull factors, such as the growing industrial and service sector in cities. And yet, the lack of social policies and affordable housing opportunities created a housing crisis that perpetuated the continued construction of informal housing, popularly known in Turkey as gecekondus, literally meaning ‘built overnight’, implying their makeshift character. Over time, these makeshift units expanded into neighborhoods surrounding Turkish cities. By the mid-1960s, more than half of Ankara’s urban population lived in informal settlements (Keleş, 2004). An informal dwelling in Turkey is typically a unit built on state-owned land not assigned for housing in official plans, thus lacking not only legal land titles but also licenses for construction and habitation and appropriate infrastructure. While they would be easily exposed to demolition by authorities during construction, once they are built, additional legal action is required to demolish a housing unit, due to legal protection mechanisms concerning the right of citizens to basic shelter. Thus, in order to avoid possible demolition, dwellings are mostly built in a very short time, sometimes overnight, which explains their makeshift character. Gecekondus remain in a continual state of construction and can be expanded vertically or horizontally according to the needs of the family.

Since the 1950s, national government policies addressing informal housing have fluctuated between two extremes. The first response to informal housing was banning further construction and carrying out clearances and demolition. The national government labeled informal housing a criminal activity and considered it temporary shelter, under the assumption that migration would either decrease or that migrants would return to rural villages. Later, however, national governments issued successive amnesty laws, and also engaged in the rehabilitation of informal neighborhoods, even enabling residents to acquire legal and additional development rights on the land where they resided. This study explores government policy, on one hand, and strategies and political struggles of informal housing inhabitants on the other. Three research questions are addressed: what strategies
have the governments adopted to address informality and the rights, needs and demands of informal housing inhabitants? What strategies have informal housing inhabitants formulated or utilized to claim their rights? What was the impact of these strategies and tools for the achievement of urban rights in Turkey? In order to answer these questions, we conduct a review of the history of informal housing in Ankara, from its initial emergence as a response to rural to urban migration, to its transformation into a commodified product in a highly politicized property market. This study draws from extensive reviews of international and domestic literature, relevant legislation, and documented informal housing interventions supplemented with key informant interviews, demographic analyses, census data, and relevant media coverage.

The following section will first introduce the concept of ‘informality’ in the Turkish context, focusing on informal housing in Ankara.

**Concepts of Informality within the Turkish Urban Context and Ankara’s Informal Housing**

The term *gecekondu* has been used by non-Turkish and Turkish-speaking scholars alike given its emphasis on the nature of the construction rather than its legal status. Comparable to terms that describe informal housing in other countries, such as *favelas* (Brazil) and *bastees* (Southeast Asia), it is important to note that the term *gecekondu* does not only refer to a type of housing, its quality or its legal status, but refers also to a way of political organization and action, which we hope to explain in this text. Many *gecekondu* settlements were equipped with main infrastructure by local governments and partial security of tenure with successive amnesties by central governments. Moreover, there were opportunities to get both informal and formal jobs, as well as formal education, especially for second generations. These were incentives for households to invest and upgrade their dwellings, so much that most informal neighborhoods in Turkey are in relatively good condition compared to informal settlements elsewhere.

**Informal Housing as Empowerment, Justice-Seeking, Profit-Seeking, and Clientelist Strategies**

Originally a small Ottoman town, Ankara experienced rapid population growth when it was designated as the capital of the new Republic of Turkey in 1923. Turkey’s first *gecekondu* emerged near Ankara’s city center, during the 1930s and 1940s (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 1996). Housing legislation at that time required the demolition of unauthorized buildings at the expense of their occupants. Initially, public authorities viewed informal housing as temporary, illegal structures that were detrimental to the city’s health and aesthetics. However, the political and economic shifts of the 1940s prevented the enforcement of these laws, allowing most informal settlements to remain in place.

By the year 1945, the Republic of Turkey adopted a multiparty political system for the first time in its history. In 1948, there were around 25,000 *gecekondu* spanning Turkey’s largest cities (Keleş, 2004). Amidst a shortage of affordable housing for low-income groups, a special law for housing in Ankara was enacted in 1948 (Law No. 5218). The law pardoned the existing *gecekondu* housing and allocated land with a ten-year payment plan for those willing to construct *gecekondu* housing. Although this legislation was partly successful in regularizing the existing *gecekondu*, it was still insufficient in preventing further informal or illegal construction due to the large influx of rural migrants. Legalizing Ankara’s existing informal housing set the precedent for subsequent amnesty laws nationwide. In 1948, the central government passed Law No. 5228, which provided amnesty to all informal settlements in the country. Between 1948 and 1988, a total of 12 more amnesty laws were enacted. A further thirteenth amnesty law was canceled due to the 1999 Marmara earthquake, which displaced more than 250,000 people and resulted in around 20,000 lost lives and 44,000 injuries, raising awareness of the potential risks of low-quality housing.
In the 1950 elections, the right-wing Democratic Party came to power with the help of rural votes, and adopted liberal economic policies and a populist approach to urban migration, which had long-lasting effects on Ankara’s urbanization. Around the same time, the Marshall Plan and national policies expanding the mechanization of agriculture increased rural to urban migration dramatically, consequently perpetuating the expansion of informal housing in Turkey (İçduyu & Sirkeci, 1998; Geray, 1968; Keyder, 1993; Şenyapılı, 1996; Kongar, 1998). Turkey’s rate of urbanization increased from 25% in 1950 to 32% in 1960. In the province of Ankara, 65% of the population was urban by 1965. The central government enacted Amnesty Laws in 1953 and 1959 pardoning the existing informal housing but banned the construction of new gecekondu. This long history of amnesties made banning gecekondu irrelevant. Successive amnesty laws and the inability of the public sector to deliver housing resulted in Turkey’s total informal housing population increasing over 240% in just five years from 500,000 in 1950 to 1,200,000 in 1955. The proportion of informal housing within the total housing stock increased from 4.7% to 16.4% in the same period (Keleş, 2004). In Ankara alone, the total number of informal housing units increased almost six-fold between 1955 to 1960, from 12,000 to 70,000 (Table 3.1).

While informal housing residents were not members of a specific social class, most of them came from Turkey’s eastern underdeveloped regions, a situation that persists today. Initially, Turkey’s newest urban residents constructed jerry-built dwellings in outlying metropolitan areas, which were previously either not favorable for habitation or were not zoned for residential development. These auto-constructed communities were relatively distant from major city centers, but in close proximity to major industries and jobs (Erman, 2001). Their residents mostly consisted of single, young men who were venturing away from their home villages for the first time. Their families and relatives eventually joined them, taking advantage of established contacts in the city. During those years, gecekondu dwellers were usually seen as a transitional population between rural and urban (Yörükhan, 1968; Yasa, 1970, 1973; Geray et al., 1978). Kiray (1964) saw gecekondu as a ‘buffer mechanism’ that helped to integrate rural residents into urban areas.

Figure 3.1 Gecekondu housing in the Şentepe neighborhood of Ankara.
Source: photo by author.
Since the early construction of these settlements, three kinds of speculation occurred: land, building processes, and material sales (Şenyapılı, 1986). Of all gecekondu housing, 94% was built on government land, of which 51% was owned by central government authorities and 43% by municipal authorities (Ergener, 2002). The first-comers often divided land into smaller parcels, and sold them separately to recently arrived migrants (Şenyapılı, 1982b; İşik & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001). As a result, a number of gecekondu inhabitants became informal housing brokers, speculators or part of land mafias. Almost 78% of all gecekondu builders have obtained land from land mafias (Ergener, 2002). If and when landowners came to reclaim their land, cases were taken to court (Şenyapılı, 1986).

As urban migration continued and land became scarcer, gecekondu became an even more profitable business. Advertisements were placed in daily newspapers to attract potential buyers (Payne, 1982). Öğretmen (1957) describes not only how the land was purchased without deeds and sold to new urban residents for speculative purposes, but also how professional contractors with good relations with the national gendarmerie divided the neighborhoods amongst themselves for a certain fee. Along with securing land, they provided contractors and the addresses of places from which construction materials could be bought. For those who attempted to build gecekondu by themselves, contractors informed the gendarmerie and constructions were torn down. In doing so, the brokers monopolized the construction of gecekondu, which we classify as a second type of speculation (Şenyapılı, 1986). The third form of speculation was the sale of construction materials on credit. Since gecekondu dwellings were mostly built of discarded materials from demolished buildings, the demolition, storage, and sale of recycled building materials became a lucrative business. Some gecekondu dwellers either sold recycled building materials on their land or sold land on the condition that building materials were bought from them (Şenyapılı, 1986).

The liberal policies pursued by Turkey’s Democratic Party were opposed by many in Turkey and eventually culminated in the military coup of 1960 (Erman, 2004). The new military government replaced the 1924 Constitution in 1961. The 1961 constitution included an emphasis on housing rights and established a central governmental body known as the State Planning Organization (SPO) to revive the country’s former statist development model. Soon after Turkey’s transition from the military government, a newly elected coalition government came into power in 1961, adopting a planned economy favoring state intervention and import-substitution as a national economic development strategy. This system remained intact until the 1980s (Tekeli, 1998). The private sector was bolstered by import substitution policies. Industries took advantage of the low-wage, non-unionized jobs (Yağcintan & Erbaş, 2003). In this model, the gecekondu populations played an important role as cheap labor force and a large consumer base (Şenyapılı, 1982a).

### Table 3.1 Number of gecekondu housing units and population in Ankara between 1955 and 1995.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Estimated number of gecekondu housing units</th>
<th>Percent increase in number</th>
<th>Population living in gecekondu housing</th>
<th>Percent of gecekondu population in urban population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>62,400</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>364,000</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>520,000</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>144,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>748,000</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>202,000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1,156,000</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>240,000</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1,300,000</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>275,000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,450,000</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>350,000</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1,750,000</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>450,000</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2,850,000</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1963, the SPO introduced a five-year development plan to realize the country’s social and development goals. As part of this plan, SPO provided comparatively objective assessments of housing issues and established new principles for national housing policies (Keleş, 1989). However, there was still a disparity between the housing needs and the actual number of dwellings produced. Between 1968 and 1983, the housing need was 3.8 million units; however, 3.1 million legal units were produced. The 700,000 unit gap was filled by informal housing (Keleş, 1989).

In 1963, Law 307 was enacted, enabling mayors to be directly elected, which allowed gecekondu populations to gain power in local politics. By 1966, the number of gecekondu units in Ankara increased to 100,000 (Keleş, 2004). Central governments, on the other hand, seemed to see gecekondu dwellers as a reserve labor force, useful for reducing wages and weakening unionization, as Turkey’s economic competitiveness both domestically and internationally was based on this informality (Erman, 2004). The patron–client relationship between informal housing residents and the government also seemed to provide political stability, as it rendered citizens’ society docile (Yönder, 1982; Şenyapılı, 1998; Yalçun & Erbaş, 2003). The term gecekondu was legally recognized by the central government, as evidenced by the 1966 Law No. 775, which contained an official definition of gecekondu and listed three types of interventions to address them: prevention, upgrading, and clearance. State support for improving urban informal settlements further perpetuated the growth of informal housing and urban migration nationwide (Zürcher, 1993).

In contrast to the previous decade, the composition of gecekondu inhabitants diversified in terms of class through the mid-1960s. Gecekondus were now sought-after commodities, particularly in light of the scarcity of urban land (Erman, 2004). Existing residents often constructed additions to their homes and rented them out to new urban residents. Thus, besides providing shelter to Turkey’s poorest populations, gecekondus were a source of income for long-standing households, and formerly ‘owner’-occupied neighborhoods became a mix of rental and owner-occupied dwellings with more diverse income patterns.

By the 1970s, intra–urban migration accompanied the ongoing rural to urban migration nationwide, which further accelerated the proliferation of gecekondu, particularly in Ankara. Between 1970 and 1975, the number of gecekondu units in Ankara increased 40%. Accordingly, local politicians were willing to provide title deeds and services in return for electoral support (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2007), making gecekondu dwellers critical to the nation’s political future (Kongar, 1998). Local land mafias made sizable profits from the sale of unprotected state land, often bargaining and even bribing public authorities for infrastructure improvements and services on behalf of gecekondu dwellers (Heper & Sayari, 2002).

During the 1950s and 1960s, most gecekondu residents were politically conservative and in strong support of the economic development policies of the right–wing Democrat Party and Justice Party. However, as the oil crisis of the 1970s hit Turkey, many gecekondu residents turned to the nation’s left-wing political parties. In 1978, the left-wing Republican People’s Party came into power, adopting a populist strategy for informal housing, which considered gecekondu working-class neighborhoods (Erman, 2004). In a 1978 meeting, Turkish President Ecevit stated that:

> The housing needs of low and middle income [households] as well as the land and housing speculation can be cured best with social housing, but it wouldn’t be feasible to expect the problem to be solved in a short time … the informal housing population in Turkey are creative people, and [can] find solutions that are different from other countries. If the creative power of people, municipalities and central government would unite, then the problem would be solved by the people themselves.

Gecekondu dwellers understood that they played a critical role in addressing the nation’s housing crisis; they used this as a means to leverage political power (Şenyapılı, 1982b; Erman, 2001).
The 1980s were a time of major changes with regard to informal housing in Turkey, administratively, legally, and politically. In 1980, Turkey faced a second military coup resulting in the banning of all political parties. Leaders of the coup adopted a ‘Turkish-Islamist’ ideology, which would strongly influence Turkish political and cultural life afterwards (Bozdoğan & Kasaba, 1997). A new constitution was issued in 1982, in which the right to housing was emphasized in relation to the 1961 Constitution, with some significant differences. After the military intervention was over, the center-right Motherland Party formed the Özal government in 1983, with strong support from gecekondu votes that had previously gone to the leftist Republican People’s Party (Bozdoğan & Kasaba, 1997).

The national developmentalist model came to an end and neoliberal policies were adopted. As the private sector lost its state protections, it began to seek profits in the real estate and construction sector (Heper & Sayari, 2013). The government responded to the demands of the private sector and gecekondu dwellers with new legislation. In 1984, planning preparation, approval, and control were passed from the central government to local governments, and a new Amnesty Law (Redevelopment Law No. 2981) was issued with an emphasis on urban redevelopment. Although previous amnesties legalized or provided security of tenure and upgraded public infrastructure and services in gecekondu, the Redevelopment Law went one step further and provided development rights to gecekondu owners to build up to four storeys. As a result, by the mid 1980s informal housing was subject to large-scale, high-density urban redevelopment using a 'build-and-sell model' developed by the market, based on contracts between landlords and developers. In valuable inner-city locations, high land prices enabled developers to profit by offering gecekondu residents a share of the new buildings in exchange for land.

Urban redevelopment did not take place in every gecekondu settlement, but they enabled many dwellers – particularly those located near the city center – to acquire multiple properties which they either sold, rented out, or gave to relatives. In fact, in a 2008 survey, previous gecekondu owners indicated that their preference for redeveloping their homes was driven both by the prospect of improved living environments and by the potential opportunity to acquire more than one dwelling unit (Özdemirli, 2012). As a result, redevelopment was not simply a mechanism for addressing housing needs; it became a lucrative business. By 1985, tenant shares in gecekondu rose to 30% in the three largest Turkish cities. In addition to benefiting gecekondu dwellers, the redistributive impacts of urban redevelopment also bolstered small builders, who also saw their influence on local politics grow, through their negotiations with public authorities for more development rights (Şahin, 2007). Therefore, it should be noted that informal housing residents did not only gain basic rights, but pursued increased returns.

Almost half of the land in Ankara has been subject to the so-called ‘Improvement and Redevelopment Plans’. Numerous informal settlements were subject to redevelopment, with mixed results due to locational disadvantages and ownership disputes. In her study, Tasan-Kok (1996) found that homeownership was considerably inaccessible to families living in formal rental housing compared to those living in informal housing during the same period. Those choosing to reside in formal rental property could not achieve homeownership as gecekondu dwellers. Therefore, improvement and redevelopment plans served as a redistributive mechanism for gecekondu dwellers, builders, and developers (Kongar, 1998), but failed to redistribute benefits to other groups (Tasan-Kok, 1996; Dündar, 2001). Middle-class and non-gecekondu low-income populations criticized these plans on the grounds that illegal behavior was being rewarded. Others expressed similar sentiments towards gecekondu dwellers, referring to their activities as ‘plundering’, ‘spoiling’, and receiving ‘unjust gains’ from the city (Ekinci, 1993; Kongar, 1998; Erman, 2004). Nevertheless, access to homeownership had an equalizing effect on income distribution overall (Bağlevent & Dayoğlu, 2005).

By the end of the 1980s, as a result of anti-inflationary policies, large-capital firms began investing in speculative housing construction. Middle-income housing was particularly profitable (Türel, 1995; Balaban, 2008). Meanwhile, the Municipality of Ankara came up with a new housing model called ‘Urban Transformation Projects’ for redevelopment of gecekondu through public-private partnerships,
in which Ankara again served as a precedent for the rest of the country. This model enabled local
governments to provide, coordinate, and regulate planning and infrastructure while capturing value
from projects themselves through the sale of some of the units produced. It also enabled the partici-
pation of households through cooperatives. After the 2000s, the central government further modified
this model in order to earn shares from urban redevelopment, essentially employing market strategies
to capture land value in Ankara’s most desirable areas.

As previously mentioned, gecekondu dwellers have always been a significant electoral group in
Turkey. The dominant center-right Justice Party of the 1960s and the left-of-center Republican
People’s Party of the 1970s attracted gecekondu votes because of their commitment to addressing
the material and political needs of gecekondu citizens. By the 1990s, gecekondu dwellers shifted
dwellers did not necessarily embrace Islam, but built an opportunistic relationship with the party.

By the 1990s, economic conditions and growing income disparity also had an impact on local
politics. More Turkish citizens began to support the pro-Islamist Welfare Party. Through the
support of religious communities, the Welfare Party organized and systematized aid networks
that distributed food and coal packages to poor working families and gecekondu neighborhoods.
Additionally, clientelism continued to define pro-Islamic political parties as a method to mobilize
the votes of the urban poor (Sayari, 2014). Reinforcing the Islamists’ growing popularity among
the urban poor, Ankara citizens elected Welfare Party member Melih Gökçek as mayor in the
1994 local elections. Since then, Gökçek has been re-elected in four successive elections. In
Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from the Welfare Party was elected mayor, which was also the
result of the party’s popularity among low-income citizens. During the local election campaigns
in 1994, when Erdoğan was asked whether he would demolish gecekondu, he said “no, I myself live in a gecekondu”. The Welfare Party was banned in 1998 and Erdoğan later became one of the
founders of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2001. The party has won the five most
recent legislative elections in Turkey, ensuring an almost monopoly of power. Since then, how-
ever, Erdoğan’s rhetoric has shifted from support to hostility towards gecekondu (Demirtaş, 2009),
for reasons we now explain.

By the 2000s, an increasingly globalized marketplace had rendered gecekondu dwellers ‘redundant’
in their function as a source of cheap labor in Turkey. In contrast, land occupied by gecekondu became
more valuable with increased demand for large plots of land for shopping malls, condominiums, and
large office buildings. Thus, the government’s emphasis on gecekondu rights shifted, and the old binary
of formal versus informal was reintroduced, criminalizing both the poor and informal housing.

The government’s discourse started to emphasize ‘cleaning’, ‘fixing’, and ‘removing’ elements of
crime, ignorance, and poverty through gecekondu redevelopment. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip
Erdoğan, during a speech delivered at the Housing Development Administration in 2006, referred to
Urban Transformation Projects as “surgical tools” that can remove the “tumors that have surrounded
our cities”. In the same speech, the Turkish prime minister defined informal housing as an “offence
to citizenship rights”. The president of the Housing Development Administration, Bayraktar, talked
similarly in a speech “… terror, drugs, psychological and health problems and opposition to the gov-
ernment, all come out of gecekondu and irregular areas. For this reason, if Turkey wants to be part of
the global community, and wants to join the EU, we should get rid of these illegal dwellings”.

The AKP government pursued a construction-centered model of economic growth. Big real-
estate investment and mega-projects have not only been perceived as beneficial by voters and attracted
inflows of foreign capital but have also created skilled and unskilled jobs. For the AKP, construction
has also been a functional instrument for creating its own new state bourgeoisie as the sector
relies heavily on local and central government decision-making, such as land use planning, building
licenses, land allocation, and the selection of companies in public tenders. The AKP’s urban redevel-
opment strategies – especially concerning informal housing – have been the hallmark of both central
and local politics, urban policy and development, and local and national economic development.
Ankara

Through so-called new ‘Urban Transformation Projects’ low-density gecekondu neighborhoods have been demolished and turned into high-rise apartment blocks, in which the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ, a central government body) and the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization played an active role. Unlike the improvement and redevelopment plan model of 1980s, these projects were rather detrimental for some of the gecekondu populations. Gecekondu dwellers have often been given an apartment unit as compensation for their land, provided that they agreed to pay the difference in value. Many gecekondu households contracted loans for up to 15 years for those payments and faced additional housing costs such as homeowners association fees for maintenance. Electricity and water services were billed strictly. Residents no longer had access to gardens where they would be able to grow fruits and vegetables and socialize with neighbours, implying a major social shift, and residents often encountered challenges in adapting to their new environments.

These conditions led many gecekondu dwellers to sell their newly acquired units to middle-class buyers. Some residents were moved outwards from the city center, distancing them from their jobs and existing networks. Property transfers, relocations, and displacements damaged the social fabric and mutual support mechanisms of gecekondu dwellers. Many of these displaced residents continue to experience social and economic challenges in their new neighborhoods (Dündar, 2001; Uzun, 2003; Türker-Devecigil, 2003; Güzey, 2009; Erman, 2011a; Lovering & Türkmen, 2011; Batuman, 2012). As a result, gecekondu dwellers started to adopt various tactics of resistance in order to protect their interests against authorities and developers. In some cases, citizens managed to change projects in critical ways, despite state enforcements, lack of experience, internal divisions, and the divide-and-rule tactics of developers (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010).

By the year 2012, the government took a step further by linking redevelopment policy to natural disasters, with a special emphasis on earthquakes, with the Urban Transformation Law for Risk Areas (Law No. 6306). Most of the administrative, regulatory, and planning authority related to urban development was transferred to the TOKİ and the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization. As a result, 14 million of the 19 million housing units in Turkey are now within the scope of that particular law. As part of the legislation, approximately 7 million units are expected to be redeveloped within a 20-year period, which includes, but is not limited to, informal housing. The massive amount of ongoing redevelopments all over the country reduced the estimated number of people living in gecekondu from almost 50% in some areas to 7% by 2013 (DSD, 2013).

Concluding remarks: Legitimate Rights, Clientelist Mechanisms and Self-Contradictory Outcomes

This chapter questioned and outlined the strategies adopted by successive Turkish governments to address informality and the rights, needs, and demands of informal housing inhabitants. Second, it addressed the tools informal housing inhabitants have used to claim their rights and obtain trade-offs and gains. Lastly, it addressed the impacts of these strategies and tools on informal housing areas and their inhabitants in Ankara. Analysis has shown that in every era, successive governments used a variety of tools to co-opt gecekondu dwellers and buy off their support, consolidating power. Gecekondu dwellers have profited and in many cases have seen their gains increase. Governments have done so first by ‘buying’ votes in exchange for amenities and legal titles, then with provision of infrastructure, later by offering citizens the right to expand dwellings vertically, and lastly offering new units by redevelopment in exchange for land. The tools and strategies used by gecekondu dwellers have been more reactive rather than proactive. These include agreeing to support a political party – irrespective of their ideological preferences – which promised title deeds, additional development rights or upgrades in city services, occasionally protesting when redevelopment did not fulfill their expectations.
important moment during the political emancipation of gecekondu dwellers happened when they came to realize that by voting they could influence both local and national elections. Since gecekondu residents represent a large proportion of the population in Ankara, they have exerted considerable influence in local and central politics.

Overall, informal housing in Turkey has been a vehicle for economic and political empowerment, serving as a solution to the nation’s housing crisis. Informal urbanization has been a redistributive and income-generating mechanism for low-income citizens. The respective but often concurrent interests of the political elites, construction industry, real estate sector, and the informal housing dwellers all contributed to the persistence of informality. Besides, desirable results were obtained through the legitimate discourses of right to shelter and rights to the city. However, the eminently clientelistic relationship between citizens and State has been a serious obstacle for the true empowerment of gecekondu dwellers. We believe this chapter has successfully demonstrated that informality is not something external to the formal State, but rather one of the tools used by citizens to achieve their right to the city, all the while serving the interests of economic and political elites.

Notes

1 Law Number 486, issued on 16 April 1924. The original name of this law is ‘Umur-u Belediyeye Muteallik Ahkam-ı Cezaiye Hakkindaki Kanun’.
2 The Marshall Plan, or the European Recovery Program by the United States, was in effect between 1947 and 1951, with a stated aim to rebuild and create a stronger economic foundation for 16 countries in Europe, including Turkey. The aid included the introduction of intensive use of tractors, fertilizers, irrigation systems, and new agricultural products.
3 The statistics on quantity and quality of gecekondu housing are very scarce in Turkey. Most of the numbers rely on estimations of researchers. Even for formal housing, the only available official data collected are building censuses in the years 1965, 1984, and 2000. Although there are a huge housing production and dynamic changes in the composition in the stock due to ‘Urban Transformation Projects’, which redevelop gecekondu areas into formal high-rise apartment blocks, there are no comprehensive data collected by the state after the year 2000.
4 For example, Article 16 of the Constitution called for housing as an indispensable right and Article 49 noted that “the state shall take measures to provide the poor and low income families with dwellings that meet sanitary requirements”. Low housing costs helped keep industrial wages down, thus ensuring a cheap labor force for the private sector. This was seen as a boon for Turkey’s economic competitiveness domestically and internationally (Yönder, 1982; Şengül, 2003).
5 The major housing policies of that period included the 1959 legislation, which held the state responsible for providing disaster housing and for enacting the Cooperative Law Number 1163, which established a Land Office in 1969.
6 This figure translates to over 42% increase compared to 1960. At that time Ankara comprised 30% of Turkey’s total gecekondu stock. The major Turkish cities of Istanbul and Izmir housed 19.4% and 11.6% of the country’s total gecekondu stock, respectively (Geray, 1968).
7 Article Number 2 of gecekondu Law No. 775 reads: “The terminology of (gecekondu) which is mentioned in this act, refers to buildings constructed independently of building and urban codes and on someone else’s land without prior consent of its proprietor and public authorities” (translated by the author).
8 ‘Prevention’ involved the development of low-cost dwellings to avoid further gecekondu construction. This included the construction of condominiums for low-income households with long-term low-interest mortgages and core houses with available loans for completion. Additionally, preventive measures included the allocation of serviced sites, prepared building projects, and credits to cooperative housing organizations. ‘Upgrading’ involved the rehabilitation of existing gecekondu deemed to be in relatively good condition. This included infrastructure improvements and the provision of credits to households for renovations. ‘Clearance’ involved the demolition of existing gecekondu deemed uninhabitable and the relocation of gecekondu residents to new housing.
9 These laws led to the displacement of three gecekondu neighborhoods in Ankara (Duyar-Kienast, 2005). Since the law prohibits the clearance of gecekondu dwellings unless alternative shelters are provided, municipalities often avoided clearance and resettlement projects (Tokman, 1984).
Many *gecekondu* residents voluntarily worked in the provision of these services. Erman (2011) quotes from a woman in her research: “We went to the municipality to ask politely for electricity, running water, steps and roads. We asked for them and the municipality provided them. Every day, one neighbor would serve lunch for the laborers. the municipality gave us drainage pipes, our men carried them on their backs … they would start digging canals. We, the wives, held the lamps to provide light for the works. We provided our labor, we did it all together”.

The Democrat Party is a right-wing party established in 1945. The party won the 1950 and 1954 elections and was de-seated by the Military Government in the 1960 coup.

Not to be confused with the Justice and Development Party established in 2001. The Justice Party is another right-leaning party established in 1961 and which was in power between 1965 and 1971 alone and as part of the coalition governments during most of the 1970s. It was banned in the 1980 coup and re-established in 1995.


The military administration led by General Kenan Evren in 1980 viewed leftist groups as the greatest threat to its authority and sought to diminish their influence by promoting a “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” (Yavuz, 2003).

The 1961 provisions noted that “the state shall take measures to provide the poor and low income families with dwellings that meet sanitary requirements”. Article 57 of the 1982 Constitution provisions invalidated the previous constitution’s emphasis on “the poor and low income families” by noting that: “the state shall take measures to provide for the housing needs considering the characteristics of the city and environmental conditions, and supports mass housing initiatives”.

The Turgut Özal government between the years 1983 and 1989, characterized mainly by the introduction of neo-liberal policies which are often considered similar to Thatcher’s in Britain.

‘Build-and-Sell’ is the translation of the Turkish words *Yap-Sat*. It refers to a speculative house-building model in which *gecekondu* residents were able to own legal housing in the new constructed areas with reduced or no down-payments and the builders were able to start construction with minimum capital investment since they were paying for the land with housing units after construction. The units that were not given to *gecekondu* dwellers were sold by the builder at market prices (Uzun, 2005).

This share varied according to the location. For instance, in Ankara, interviewed developers indicated that landholders in the Şentepe neighborhood were given a 30% share of new buildings, while in Dikmen, which is more centrally located to the CBD, landowners were given up to a 50% share (Özdemirli, 2012).

For instance, in 2009 newspaper columnist Örty Egin wrote that *gecekondu* dwellers and middle-class populations do not share the same values; while the activities of *gecekondu* dwellers are considered immoral to the middle-class, *gecekondu* dwellers aspire to middle-class values of homeownership but through the exploitation of others’ property (Egin, 2009).


Erdoğan, from the Welfare Party, later became one of the founders of the Justice and Development Party in the year 2001.

In 1998, the Welfare Party was banned from politics by the Constitutional Court of Turkey for violating the separation of religion and state as mandated by the constitution.

Those of 2002, 2007, 2011, June 2015, and November 2015, winning 34.3%, 46.6%, 49.8%, 40.9%, and 49.5% respectively.

A newspaper article claims that *gecekondu* areas are potential crime centers: www.yenisafak.com/arsiv/2004/aralik/06/g03.html.

Radikal, 9 April 2006.

www.arkitera.com/h8253-sehri-ur-gibi-sardilar-niye-zavalli-oluyorlar.html [accessed 03.05.09].


The rate of employment in the construction sector increased from 4% to 8% between 2002 and 2016 (TURKSTAT Household Labor Force Statistics).

New business classes emerged, often referred to as ‘Green Money’, ‘Islamic Capital’ or ‘Anatolian Tigers’. The Independent Businessmen and Industrialists Association (MÜSİAD) was established as the ‘business arm’ of Islamist politics in Turkey in 1990 and has also played an active role (Karatepe, 2016).

Urban Transformation Projects from the 2000s are different from those from the end of the 1980s in the sense that the latter were municipality–private-sector partnerships, whereas the central government became the major actor in the 2000s. They are also evidently different from the Improvement and Redevelopment Model where the local authorities’ role is planning and regulating the ‘spontaneous’ processes of market-driven gradual redevelopment on a plot basis.

Erman (2011b) quotes from a former *gecekondu* dweller interviewed in her research: “In the summer time, after I woke up in the morning, I would immediately go out into my garden. I would work in the garden,
watering the trees and taking care of them. I would eat their fresh fruits. I had a bird; it would visit the garden everyday, twittering cheerfully. I loved being in my garden”.

33 Several studies indicate discontent in gecekondu dwellers in urban transformation projects. For instance, Poyraz (2011) quotes from an interviewee saying: “Here it is like a detention camp … . Many families were separated and fell apart. For instance, my son and his wife were living with us in gecekondu which was appropriate for the whole family. After this process begun, I wanted to move into bigger houses in Eserkent; yet, they gave these houses to people who bribed them … I moved into a smaller one, and my son rented a house apart from us”. Another interviewee says: “My relative is the headman of Derbent. They (the municipality) made a special offer two or three times to the headman, the headman’s brother and my father. They tried to make a deal with us and offered primacy and priority to choose the place. If we go, this neighborhood collapses and the solidarity is broken. Everyone knows this … Both Gökçek and Mesut Akgül made special offers. We do not want special offers. We just want our rights, our neighborhood” (Poyraz, 2011).

34 This number excludes the 5 million housing units built after 2000.

References


