MEGA INFRASTRUCTURES AND COMPLEXITIES OF STATE POWER IN ISTANBUL'S NORTHERN PERIPHERY: THE CASE OF AĞAÇLI AND GÖKTÜRK

By

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Abstract

This thesis aims to reveal complex dynamics of mega infrastructural development in Northern Istanbul, with a particular focus on state power and developmentalism, by examining two settlements: the Ağaçlı village and the proximate suburban area Göktürk. It begins by tracing the evolution of the Turkish state's developmental discourse under the Erdoğan-led AKP into neoliberal developmentalism based on authoritarian urban governance and ambitious mega infrastructures. The Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge and the Istanbul Airport in Northern Istanbul are prime examples of the state's infrastructural power. The thesis then delves into the analysis of Ağaçlı and Göktürk, two settlements located between these two megaprojects, which have undergone significant transformations by them. These settlements serve as illustrative examples of peripheral urbanization and offer insights into the temporality of infrastructural development. The study finally explores how the residents of Ağaçlı and Göktürk navigate and actively contribute to the urban and infrastructural transformation in pursuit of material and immaterial gains, modernization, and urban development. Based on semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of how peripheral urbanization unfolds in a megacity while providing a critical perspective on state-imposed mega infrastructures from the residents' perspective. The research seeks to deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between state power, mega infrastructural development, and agency in contemporary peripheral urban contexts.

Keywords: megaprojects, peripheral urbanization, temporality, state power

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My solidarity is with those in Turkey, both physically and mentally, including my dear friends, who tirelessly strive for a better world each day.

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Introduction

With the picturesque Bosporus strait stretching from north to south, accompanied by hills on both shores, Istanbul's topography has enabled the city's growth towards the north (Figure 1). Bridges have played a crucial role in Istanbul's urban expansion, facilitating the construction of new highways and the development of previously untapped areas. When the construction of a highway suspension bridge on the Bosporus was first announced in the late 1960s, the public opposition foresaw it as the initial step into the "bridge trap" that would irrevocably alter Istanbul's destiny, pushing the city to the north (Mimarlar Odası 1969). Today, Istanbul's expansion has surpassed the imaginations of those who had feared it back then.

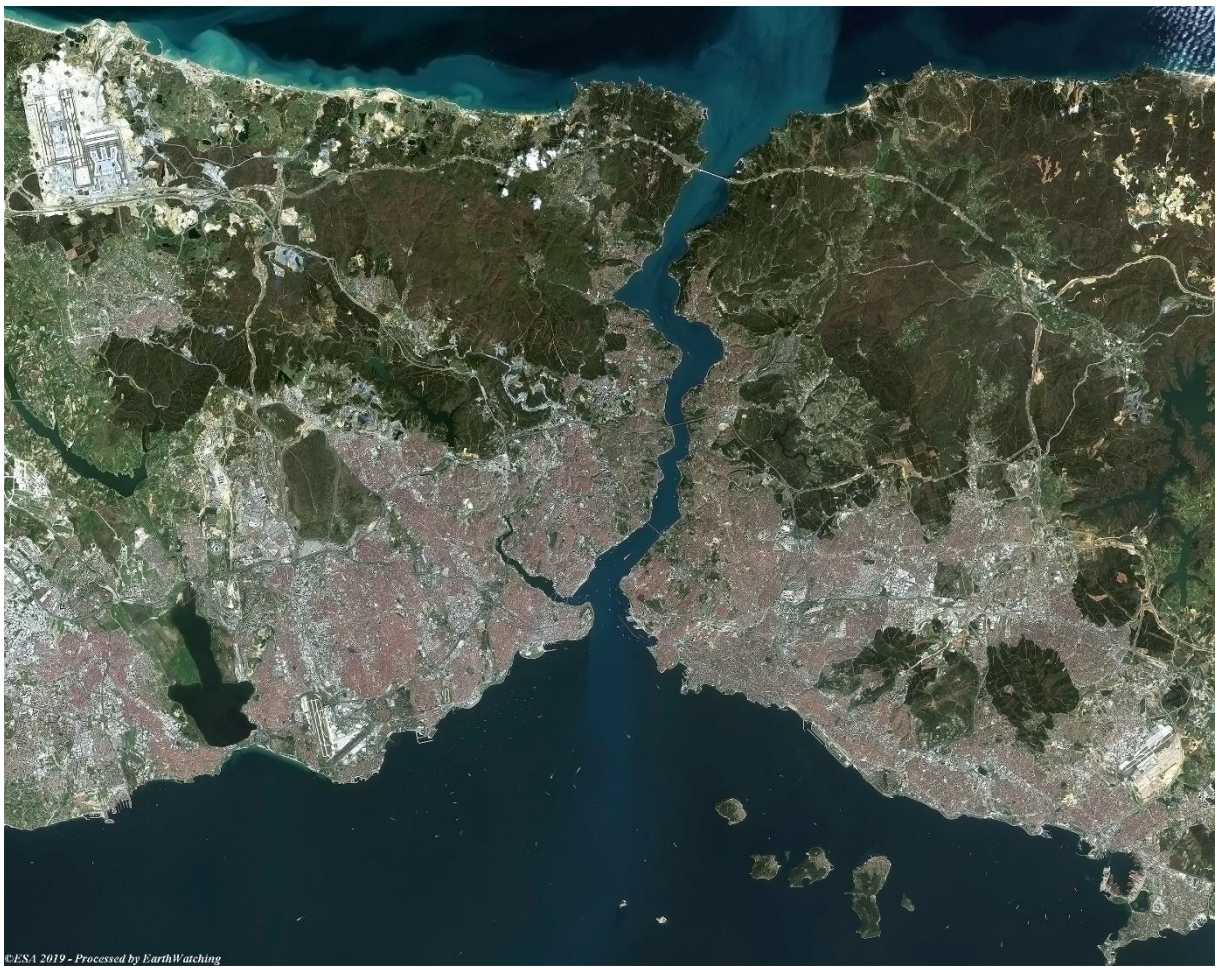

Figure 1: Three bridges and major highways of Istanbul, the mega airport is seen on the top left (2019). Source: https://earth.esa.int/web/earth-watching/image-of-the-week/content/-/article/istanbul-turkey-2019/

Istanbul as a Global City and *Crazy* Projects

Since the 1980s, Turkish national policies have aimed at positioning Istanbul as the central hub for a neoliberal strategy to integrate the economy with global markets (Enlil 2011, 14). The economic changes were evident through the rapid and visible transformation of Istanbul's urban landscape, with a focus on improving the city's image and promoting it in global markets for purposes such as tourism, business conferences, and international organizations (16). Consequently, Istanbul's core has been radically transformed by international capital flow, while the city quickly expanded towards its peripheries (Keyder and Öncü 1994).

It was the former Istanbul Mayor Ali Müfit Gürtuna who introduced the term "megaproject" in Turkey in 1999, as a part of the official "2023 Istanbul Vision" [1], but then a month after, the devastating earthquake of 7.6 diverted the urban governance discourse for three years (Yapıcı 2017, 44). The concept of the "megaproject" resurfaced in urban governance when Kadir Topbaş, the first mayor of the ruling AKP (Eng: *Justice and Development Party*), assumed power in 2004 and declared the chosen mission for 2023 to create a "corridor city" between the east and west (45). This announcement served as a precursor to the megaproject vision of the AKP.

The megaprojects that concern this thesis were announced in April 2011, well after the AKP had solidified its governance. Before the general elections in June, then-Prime Minister (now President) Erdoğan unveiled a *crazy project* to the public. The crazy aspect of the project which had previously been the subject of curiosity, turned out to be a huge artificial waterway, Canal Istanbul. A third bridge spanning the Bosporus would intersect this canal, and a new airport with a 60 million annual passenger capacity would be constructed in the northern

[1] 2023 is the centennial of the Turkish Republic.

periphery. [2] Upon this announcement, the concept *crazy project* became a buzzword among the public. Erdoğan deemed this project as his *dream*, therefore, as an infrastructure unimaginable to this country before his rule. Meanwhile, the opposing public used *crazy* ironically, referring to the insanity to build an artificial canal next to a natural strait.

Figure 2: The plan for Canal Istanbul, the airport, the bridge, and Ağaçlı and Göktürk marked in red. Source: https://www.indyturk.com/node/134316/t%C3%BCrkiyeden-sesler/kanal-istanbul-bir-emlak-spek%C3%BClasyonu-projesidir-3

Several months later, further details of the project were revealed with the announcement to construct a new city named "New Istanbul" centered around the village Ağaçlı. The new city would include a financial center, a port, marinas on the Black Sea, sports fields, thematic parks, cultural facilities, and luxury housing projects by the new canal.[3] This extensive project has not been yet realized; however, it enables us to think of these three mega infrastructures together within the broader ambition to urbanize northern Istanbul (Uzunçarşılı Baysal 2017, 37). The

[2] https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/iste-erdoganin-cilgin-projesi-kanal-istanbul-17648284
[3] https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/yeni-istanbulun-merkezi-agacli-olacak,GkEaYC69_EuULI6TpUQNXQ

projects facilitate the construction of housing in new satellite cities in the areas of Istanbul that had been long kept away from zoning and development, in other words, the lungs and the water sources of the city have now been opened for capital accumulation (Köksal 2017, 33).

Despite the fierce criticism and contestation against the top-down imposition of the projects, the third bridge [4] with a cost of over a billion EUR (Güney 2019, 183) was opened in 2016 and since then carries all the international commercial traffic of Istanbul, aligning with the corridor city mission. Istanbul Airport was opened in 2018 as the most expensive infrastructural project in Turkish history with a budget of over 30 billion EUR (184). [5] After a long period of speculation regarding its location, Canal Istanbul has been initiated in 2021 and is planned to be finalized in 2027, yet, due to economic and political instabilities, the future of such a giant project remains vague. In this study, I focus on the completed projects: The Third Bridge and the Istanbul Airport.

Figure 3: Satellite view of Northern Istanbul in December 2009 vs December 2016. Ağaçlı is marked in red. The bridge, highway, and airport (upper left area on the right image) are clearly visible.
Source: https://sarkac.org/2020/11/istanbulun-kuzey-ormanlarindaki-kayiplar-ve-etkileri/

[4] Although the official name is "Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge", I will follow the name "the third bridge" as a significant part of the population uses it in everyday life. Chapter 2 will discuss the neo-Ottoman ambitions over its naming.
[5] Despite the government's limited transparency regarding the costs, it appears that the highest bid in Turkish history for rent amounts to an astonishing 22 billion 152 million EUR. Furthermore, the current investment cost stands at a staggering 10 billion 247 million EUR, with the ongoing expansion of the airport. (https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/dhmi-istanbul-havalimaninin-acilmasiyla-32-4-milyar-avro-havacilik-sektorune-kazandirildi/2468675#)

Research Field

The northern coast of Istanbul's European side was home to large coal mines until the 1990s when natural gas became prevalent in the city. The coal produced in Istanbul was known as Ağaçlı coal, named after a small village, situated along the Black Sea coast. After the closure of the coal mines, stockbreeding was the primary livelihood as the region has also been famous for water buffalo. Ağaçlı, with its association with coal, water buffalo, and the new Istanbul project, became an intriguing location to observe the impact of megaprojects on urbanization.

Due to the coal mine past, and the excavation business already started in the 1990s, extraction is not new to Ağaçlı. Yet, the recent transformation of Ağaçlı was enabled through a set of law amendments in 2012 that changed the legal status of the villages to neighborhoods in Istanbul.[6] With this amendment, the legal entity of the village was abolished, and the common properties of the villages were transferred to the municipalities, paving way for easier incorporation into the urban fabric. However, when the construction of the third bridge started in 2013, the village was torn apart by wide connection roads and viaducts. In the same year, a part of common and private properties mostly covering the grazing areas in Ağaçlı was expropriated by the TOKI (Eng: *Mass Housing Administration*) for the airport project. Expropriation of land is also known as eminent domain, compulsory acquisition of land, compulsory purchase, and land acquisition (Yalçın 2017, 591) can be employed urgently in exceptional circumstances where there are significant, vital, and time-sensitive investment projects (594). According to the Expropriation Law in Turkey, urgent expropriation can be justified when there is a requirement for homeland defense, when the Council of Ministers determines the urgency of the situation, or when special laws stipulate exceptional circumstances, and the expropriation process is normally subject to monetary compensation

[6] https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/12/20121206-1.htm

(594) despite the compensation being below the market value in Ağaçlı. The expropriation in Ağaçlı was carried out by TOKI, whose legal privileges will be scrutinized in the first chapter.

The expropriation posed the biggest threat to stockbreeding and resulted in the loss of a significant portion of forests and forages. Subsequently, in 2014, with the initiation of airport construction, Ağaçlı became the backyard of the construction site, serving as the primary supplier of raw materials for the projects. Ağaçlı's sand was extracted for the projects by the construction companies using illegally paved roads. The village faced numerous challenges, including disruptions to electricity, water, and communication networks, as well as road collapses. Access to the sea was blocked, impacting local fisheries, and even the operation of the primary school was temporarily halted due to road blockages.[7] The village's disruptions persisted after the completion of the projects. As the prospects for stockbreeding diminished each day, the village now contends with heavy lorry traffic and ongoing excavation works which increased in scale.[8]

Figure 4: Ağaçlı in 2017, during the airport construction.
Source: https://m.bianet.org/bianet/cevre/191886-3-havalimani-cevresinde-denizde-aglara-balik-degil-moloz-takiliyor

Only after I went to Ağaçlı for the fieldwork did I realize their co-dependency with the neighboring suburban area, Göktürk, and expanded the scope of my research to this pair of

[7] https://kuzeyormanlari.org/2014/12/15/agaclida-direnen-istanbulda-kazanir-14-aralik-agacli-eyleminin-ardindan/
[8] https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7wf5v8

settlements. A former village that transformed into a luxury suburban area in the 1990s, Göktürk's built environment could be described as a mega gated community and a static agricultural community that is symbiotically related (Esen and Rieniets 2008, 99). It is one of these peripheries marked by contestation, marginalization, and speculation, holding allure for investors, laborers, and urban residents looking forward to fulfilling their middle-class aspirations by investing their hopes in rapidly urbanizing frontiers (Gururani and Kennedy 2021, 1). Moreover, studying these two settlements is a unique opportunity to observe how peripheral urbanization unfolds in a megacity outside of the Global North, it makes one question the boundaries of rural and urban. Due to the charm and anxiety megaprojects bring, the residents of Ağaçlı perceive Göktürk as their possible future, while the old residents of Göktürk talk about Ağaçlı as their nostalgic rural past. They enable the investigation not only of spatiality but also the temporality of peripheral urbanization facilitated by mega infrastructures.

Conceptual Framework

This study aims to shed a critical light on developmental and authoritarian state power in the case of megaproject implementation. The anthropology of infrastructure will come up in every chapter as paying attention to infrastructure provides a framework for defamiliarizing and rethinking the political (Anand et al. 2018, 4). In developmental contexts, infrastructures embody aspirations and promise, but they also bring risks of unwelcome change, instability, and heightened vulnerability (Harvey and Knox 2015, 6). How does the Turkish state exert its power through mega infrastructures? What does the juxtaposition of Ağaçlı and Göktürk tell us about the unfolding of peripheral urbanization over time and the feelings it triggers? How do people in the peripheries shape the production of space? I argue that while megaprojects may initially appear as manifestations of an oppressive state in the peripheries, their significance extends beyond state power. With their promises and disappointments, these projects provide

an opportunity to observe the agency of individuals in shaping the development of these peripheral areas.

The thesis is organized into four chapters and follows an order from the state to the people's perspectives. The first chapter traces the shift in the developmentalist project of the Turkish state under the Erdoğan-led AKP. It explores the party's urban governance strategies and the role of mega infrastructures in this developmental project. Chapter two focuses on conceptualizing state power given its spatiality, incorporating infrastructure within state space and power. It aims to situate megaprojects within the Turkish state's exercise of infrastructural power. The third chapter finally zooms into the relationship between Ağaçlı and Göktürk, highlighting the temporality of peripheral urbanization and the transformative impact of megaprojects on both settlements. Lastly, chapter four is an exploration of urbanization from the perspective of the residents in Ağaçlı and Göktürk. It emphasizes the agency of these residents in negotiating state power and shaping the dynamics of their environment driven by various aspirations and desires.

Methodology

This thesis is based on fieldwork conducted between August – October 2022. The analysis relies on the combination of participant observation and semi-structured, in-depth interviews as well as informal conversations with the residents, local governors of Ağaçlı and Göktürk, and three activists of Northern Forest Defense, the most important activist network which has contested the megaprojects for years. Additionally, I relied on official sources, national and local news sources, written documents about the coal mine past of the area, and newspaper columns. I paid special attention to Erdoğan's speeches in the ground-breaking and inauguration ceremonies of these megaprojects and others. Dissard and Kurşunlugil (2020) suggest that infrastructural inaugurations present an ideal platform to observe what Brian Larkin has named the politics and poetics of infrastructures (1). Indeed, known to be a good

rhetorician, President Erdoğan gives a lot of significant messages during these speeches, point-blank expressions of state power.

Although I have not had any prior personal connections to Ağaçlı, my parental background helped me adapt more comfortably because hometown networks are quite significant in Istanbul as the city is mostly composed of migrants for at least three generations. "Where are you from?" is surely among the first questions you hear in a daily interaction in Istanbul. My mother's family came from Greece with the same population exchange in 1923 through which the founders of Ağaçlı and Göktürk settled, it helped me raise sympathy and a sense of familiarity. Meanwhile, my father is from the same city as Erdoğan, a town in northeastern Turkey primarily consisting of his supporters, especially my informants who lean towards Erdoğan were more comfortable talking about politics, and making jokes as my father is his countryman.

I believe that approaching Istanbul through the lens of infrastructure is fascinating, especially at its peripheries. I was born and grew up in this giant city, always under construction. When I was a seventeen-year-old in 2013, I attended the Gezi Resistance; the legacy of which provided me a novel lens to look at urban life. Just like many other people who live in different parts of Istanbul, I had never been to the northern forests until 2015, unfortunately after the megaprojects were initiated. I remember my astonishment at the barrenness of the landscape, with construction machines wending through the forest. How do the residents deal with this transformation that looks overwhelming even to me as an outsider? Hopefully, this study will shed light on the ordinary perspective of mega infrastructures, which often embody the top-down imposition of state power.

Chapter 1. The Shift in Turkish Developmentalism

> *"Turkey has long paid the price of being late in the development struggle in the form of neglect, backwardness, and poverty. Unfortunately, the development breakthrough in the first years of the Republic failed .... The most important reason for Turkey's backwardness in the Republican period is that the country has been in the hands of* ***this mentality*** *for a long time. Thankfully, we are past those days now. Now there is a Turkey that sets its sights on space, on high technology, on artificial intelligence, and on embracing the future. ... If Allah allows, we do not recognize a power that can stand in the way of the* ***construction*** *of a great and powerful Turkey."* [9]

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan uttered these words in 2021 in a dam bridge inauguration ceremony in Malatya, a large city in Eastern Anatolia, underlining how Turkey is being *constructed* both in the literal and symbolic sense under his party's rule. In this chapter, I intend to frame the evolution of the developmentalist project of the Turkish state and map the distinctive features of the Erdoğan-led AKP regime whose rule marks the last twenty-one years of Turkey. The AKP's rise to power initially can be seen as the configuration of the failure of this specific type of Kemalist modernism that Erdoğan refers to as *this mentality*. However, Erdoğan's new project is not a rupture from the developmentalism that the Turkish state has promised to its citizens for the last one and a half centuries.

In 2002, the AKP took power in Turkey following the economic instabilities brought by early neoliberal transformation and the decreased legitimacy of the Kemalist state. Since then, the party has forged its path of neoliberal developmentalism with Islamist undertones. A pivotal component of the AKP's developmentalism entails a novel urban governance strategy characterized by both neoliberal and authoritarian tendencies, thereby fueling a transformative process across Turkish cities, notably Istanbul. Mega infrastructures are also central to the AKP's new path of neoliberal developmentalism. This chapter sets the groundwork for a

[9] https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-ulkemizi-dunyanin-en-buyuk-10-ekonomisinden-biri-haline-getirmek-icin-daha-buyuk-projelere-daha-buyuk-yatirimlara-yoneldik

broader discussion of state power, megaprojects, and the facilitation of peripheral urban transformation in Istanbul that influences Göktürk and Ağaçlı as well.

1.1. National Developmentalism

During the first two decades following World War II, Turkey was deemed by social scientists a highly successful example of a modernization process that was universally defined (Bozdoğan and Kasaba 1997, 3). The trajectory of modernization in Turkey had begun with institutional reforms of the Union and Progress Party in the late Ottoman era and resulted in the establishment of a secular nation-state under Kemalism in 1923 (3-4). Along with secularism, nationalism, and developmentalism; one of the founding pillars of the Kemalist Turkish nation-state was corporatism in which society was imagined as an organic body with no religious, ethnic, or class differences (Çavuşoğlu and Strutz 2014, 137). The driving force behind this project was the modernizing elite, which sought to impose their understanding of modernity on the Turkish population through the implementation of institutional and behavioral changes. After all, modernization was not simply a matter of increasing rationality and efficiency in the public sphere, rather it was intimately tied to Westernization and everything that had made Europe modern, hence, the whole modernization process in Turkey involved a total transformation of social relations, including secularization (Keyder 1997, 37). In Turkey, secularization was also perceived as the prerequisite of Westernization rather than of democratization, it involved the state control of the public sphere, teaching and enforcing a modern way of life (Göle 1997, 49).

As a pillar of Turkey's trajectory of modernization, developmentalism has been examined by Ayşe Buğra (2017) within a Polanyian framework, considering the relative roles played by the market and the state. Buğra (2017) argues that the Turkish state remains central in both old and new forms of national developmentalism that find their contexts in two different historical periods of capitalism: before and after the 1980s which mark Turkey's integration

into the global market (39). If we take a closer look at the 20th century, right after the formation of the Turkish Republic on the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, elite cadres were involved in the creation of a national bourgeoisie consisting of Muslim Turkish businesspeople as a part of developing a national economy (Buğra 2017, 45). Following an etatist period during the Great Depression, import substitution as per the suitability of American policies and global economic conditions of the time, had allowed the Turkish state to regulate the economy under relatively closed circumstances (Keyder 1997, 41). National developmentalism that marked the pre-1980 era mostly fulfilled its economic promises. Just like most peripheral economies in the world, Turkey has seen considerable development, national economic integration, and an increase in levels of welfare (42).

The development of agriculture was seen as the main precondition of Turkish national developmentalism. Therefore, urban-rural politics in Turkey were shaped in favor of the rural population in line with Mustafa Kemal's vision of "peasantry as the lord of the nation". This was evident by the state policies that supported the agricultural sector through surprisingly low tax rates that were questioned by prominent Western economic planners, such as Keynesian economist Nicholas Kaldor, who was invited to advise on the tax reform by the State Planning Organization in the early 1960s (Buğra 2017, 46). Although the late blooming of Turkish industrialization and the accompanying urbanization around the 1950s started to reduce the importance of the countryside slowly, Turkey had mainly been an agrarian country for most of the 20th century with more than three-quarters of the population residing in rural areas (Adaman et al. 2019, 522). Agriculture constituted 35 percent of the total GDP in 1968 and 28 percent in 1973; by 1988, it had fallen below 20 percent (Keyman 2010, 38). However, the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey marked the end of the import-substituting national developmentalism era, also resulting in the diminution of the importance of rural players. The market ideology, which manifested primarily in the elimination of agricultural subsidies, was promoted as the exclusive

path to economic progress (Adaman et al. 2019, 522). Despite the neoliberal transformation kicking off, Hobsbawm (1995) observed that in the mid-1980s, Turkey was still an exceptional case of being the only stronghold of the peasantry in Europe and the Middle East (291).

The 1980 coup d'état in September also marked the first instance when the state, facing inflationary pressures and a growing deficit in the balance of payments, opted to adopt an economic stability package deemed necessary by the IMF earlier that year (Buğra 2017, 48). Then, the IMF and the World Bank gained increased influence in Turkish economic development policy. Despite coalition governments' commitment to the IMF-imposed structural adjustment programs during the 1990s, they were unable to effectively implement them, causing a series of government collapses and a surge in national debt (Tuğal 2023, 6). More concretely, the instabilities brought by the first decade of neoliberal transformation of the economy led to a series of worsening crises in 1994, 1999, and 2001, strengthening the hold of IMF and the World Bank on Turkey's economic development strategy even more (Buğra, 2017, 49). Meanwhile, the urban poor were suffering from socio-economic disenfranchisement without sharing the benefits of the new neoliberal economic climate, while it became clear to the rural communities that they lost the financial and social stability that had long characterized their relationship with the Turkish Republic (Adaman et al. 2017, 2).

In parallel with the tensions stemming from this economic transformation, decades of top-down modernization of the elite and military had resulted in cracks in the ideological climate of society. During the 1990s, various movements of Kurdish, Alevi, and Islamist opposition gained significant momentum, especially as the possibility of eventual European Union integration was discussed (Adaman et al. 2017, 2). These movements were supported by the country's liberal intellectuals who could no longer justify the inflexible actions of the nation-state in pursuit of the Kemalist vision of a secular modern society (2).

> *"The gap between the modernizing elites, whose discourse diverged radically from what could be popularly appropriated, and the voiceless masses gradually emerged as the axis around which the subsequent history of Turkish society was played out. No mediation developed between the modernizing discourse of the elites and the practice of the masses. Consequently, the Westernist ideal came to be identified with the statist and authoritarian stance of the modernizers ... Modernization dictated from above necessarily politicizes its object and turns their culture into a residual discourse. In this case, as the confrontation between elites and masses unfolded, this residual discourse animated populist projects of various hues, all of which stemmed from the particular forms in which the potential dialogues had been truncated, had atrophied, or had not been allowed to evolve."* (Keyder 1997, 45)

Keyder wrote these lines before the AKP was established, but today after two decades of authoritarian rule with all the capabilities of the state power, the party still discursively identifies with the masses, capitalizing on the ghost of the "modernist elite against our people" division.

1.2. Neoliberal Developmentalism and the New Vision of the AKP

This was the atmosphere in which the Erdoğan-led AKP was voted to power in 2002 with hopes and expectations. In one of his first interviews in the global media with the Washington Post, Erdoğan admits that *"Turkey needs a new vision, and I will modernize Turkey"*. [10] As a part of this vision, he emphasizes that the AKP approaches secularism as an important segment of Turkey's democracy, that it is not Islamist, as a political party is just an institution and cannot have a religious character. In fact, unlike its political predecessors that had been shut down due to their inconformity to secular principles, the AKP initially chose to put a distance between radical Islamism and focused more on cultural conservatism and philanthropy as a remedy to the societal disruption caused by Western modernization (Buğra 2017, 50). Initially, the party represented a modern, secular, what the public named *modest* (Turkish: ılımlı) Islam yet, once it consolidated its rule, it leaned towards radical Islam. What initially seemed like a democratized vision relying on Kemalist principles changed shape and

[10] https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2002/11/10/a-devout-muslim-a-secular-state/49415b1b-563d-4231-9d79-ffa35baec650/

diverged from the core Kemalist values. Nevertheless, the centrality of the developmental project persisted. Çavuşoğlu and Strutz (2014) argue that although the AKP broke many taboos of the nation-state by representing an explicitly religious insurrection, the party continues to make use of the discourse of Westernization, development, and modernization to also convince a secular electorate (138). Yet, this appropriation of developmentalism is not merely confined to convincing a segment of the population, it is a major source of power to generate consent, as they not only appeal to republican convictions of progress and modernization but also the nationalist and Islamic sentiments of a new national and religious grandeur (141). In this sense, it can be argued that the rule of AKP was not a total rupture from the existing structure of the state, it was rather a form change. Yet, what kind of political-economic and ideological character the new modernization and development agenda encapsulates is an important question.

From a political-economic perspective, the main rupture that came with the AKP was its initial successful implementation of neoliberal policies that Turkey had been attempting to implement for two decades (Adaman et al. 2019, 520). The cadres of AKP consisted of a new type of bourgeoisie that seemed to reconcile Islamic identity in ways that are compatible with capitalist development (Buğra 2017, 51). One of the areas where the new Islamist bourgeoisie was the most engaged was the construction sector. Mostly in Istanbul but everywhere, construction of hotels, business plazas, and shopping malls proceeded unscrupulously, along with mega investments in urban infrastructure, contributing to the continuing deagrarian transformation of the countryside; all these developments were presented as signs of the country's impressive economic progress envied throughout the world (54). Consequently, the construction sector became a major driver of GDP growth with increasingly state-controlled capital (Tugal 2023, 9). While the continuing neoliberal policies have weakened existing safety nets for most of the population, the AKP has promoted a booming economy with job opportunities in construction, extraction, and the informal sector (Adaman et al. 2019, 521). All

these developments enabled by the global conjuncture brought electoral success. The promise of employment combined with social assistance were the backbones of consent generation of the AKP until the 2008 financial crisis, however, the crisis and the loss of hope for EU membership rendered it difficult to sustain this system whose long-term sustainability was already questioned (Adaman et al. 2019, 521). Then, the neoliberal developmentalism of AKP took an authoritarian turn with continuing populist strategies (521). Both this authoritarian populism and extractivism (with a renewed focus on infrastructure construction) are contemporary features of neoliberal developmentalism that mark the AKP era (516).

Cihan Tuğal (2023) challenges the concept of "neoliberal developmentalism", asserting that Erdoğanist growth heavily invests in low-tech sectors (5). However, I view developmentalism as a component of Turkey's modernization trajectory, not in the precise political-economic sense employed by Tuğal (2023). He proposes the term "neoliberal statism" where the government controls leading enterprises and megaprojects without owning them (5). According to Tuğal, the AKP's continued commodification of natural resources and urban landscapes, coupled with its reliance on global financial institutions, exemplifies its adherence to neoliberal principles. Nevertheless, the amalgamation of statism and neoliberalism within the AKP regime grants the state a more prominent role in shaping economic outcomes, with this form of "neoliberal statism" prioritizing state-driven growth through megaprojects and infrastructure investment (5). The extensive involvement of the state in Turkey corresponds with Saskia Sassen's (2006) overarching argument that, contrary to the commonly held belief that neoliberal globalization undermines the nation-state, contemporary globalization relies on the enhanced capabilities of national economies that have become integrated into globalizing processes through partial denationalization (13). I will briefly discuss this topic in the second chapter when examining the exercise of state power under global neoliberal transformation.

1.3 Authoritarian Urban Governance and Megaproject Vision

Following the 2001 economic crash, one aspect of the neoliberal policies that the AKP "successfully" implemented included a series of legal and institutional reforms that radically reshaped the governance of real estate markets and transformed Istanbul's socioeconomic geography (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010, 1484). These reforms included the Criminal Code in 2004 that led to the demolition of gecekondu areas, two distinct Municipality Laws that authorized Istanbul's local municipalities to conduct transformation projects in "desolate, unsafe" inner city areas, and regeneration projects in "derelict" and "obsolescent" areas within historical or natural protection zones, paving the way to a fully commodified urban regime (1485).

Refuting neoliberalism's premise of eroding state power as emphasized above, the Turkish government gradually increased its authoritarian role and intervention in urban planning through legislative and institutional power (Güney 2019, 182). TOKI (Eng: *Mass Housing Administration*) has played a pivotal role in this governing mechanism. Initially established in 1984 as a governmental institution to provide affordable housing, TOKI was granted exceptional privileges for urban development through significant amendments to the "mass housing law" in 2004 (183). Moreover, it was transformed into an institution directly governed by the Office of the Prime Minister,[11] with little consideration given to public opinion or the perspectives of affected local municipalities (183). TOKI enjoys considerable privileges, including the ability to acquire land at its desired price without consulting the privatization administration, the authority to devise plans, exemption from project-related taxes, and freedom from oversight by the court of auditors or any other financial institution (Çavuşoğlu and Strutz 2014, 142).

[11] This was when Erdoğan served as the Prime Minister before 2014.

In 2012, the AKP introduced a series of new laws that significantly bolstered TOKI's power including the “disaster law” which granted the authority to expropriate land and housing, ostensibly to safeguard residents against earthquakes and other natural disasters, albeit with vaguely defined criteria (Güney 2019, 183). Utilizing this contentious legal regulation, TOKI embarked on a larger scale government-led displacement and dispossession, acquiring land, and facilitating the development of new public mass housing projects and mega infrastructure initiatives in the peripheries of Istanbul (183). The mass housing and disaster laws were arbitrarily applied for TOKI to expropriate land surrounding the construction sites of the third bridge, airport, and Canal Istanbul. This is also how a part of the immovable and private property land in Ağaçlı was expropriated by TOKI, through the urgent expropriation decision meant to be used in only extraordinary circumstances for public interest. Then, TOKI sold inexpensive land in the city’s Northern periphery to government-affiliated companies (186). TOKI provides a primary example of a centralized public institution acting as an entrepreneurial company, that reveals the complex relations between state and capital in Turkey (185).

Gavin Shatkin (2022) observes that major metropolitan regions in the Global South have become focal points for massive infrastructure investments aimed at accelerating peri-urbanization. National state actors strive to establish infrastructure-centric political regimes for state empowerment, entailing the formulation of infrastructure agendas through financial reforms, land-based accumulation, and competition among influential domestic corporate entities for these land and infrastructure contracts (847). Shatkin suggests that the multipolarity of the global economy is fostering the emergence of more statist approaches to the implementation of infrastructure megaprojects to adapt to the changing investment priorities of transnational financial actors (850). Although Shatkin primarily focuses on Southeast Asia, he argues that Turkey presents another case where the politics of infrastructure-led mega-suburbanization is reshaping national politics (856). Similarly, Cihan Tuğal (2023) argues that

megaprojects have been central to what he names neoliberal statism in Turkey (2). He underlines that unlike the common framing of megaprojects and their supposed depoliticizing impacts, the case of Turkish megaprojects is marked by increasingly *productive* state involvement in megaprojects that is explicitly *ideological and political* (3) as evident in TOKI's role. Tuğal raises the question of who benefits from TOKI-led projects aside from the AKP-affiliated companies. Despite the unreliability and non-transparency of the existing data about TOKI, he infers that the lower classes who support Erdoğan also reap advantages from mass housing and land value changes unless they are subject to displacement (10).

How these megaprojects drive consent is not limited to their expected economic benefits. According to Hande Paker (2017), the megaprojects became tools of hegemony building of the AKP through a strongly developmentalist discourse, and a large degree of arbitrariness made possible by circumvention and amendment of existing laws and regulations (108). The emphasis on grandeur is evident from the inauguration of the third bridge as a "civilization project", and the Istanbul Airport being the biggest to increase the global power and respectability of the Turkish state (109). The allusions to the centennial of the Turkish Republic in 2023 symbolize the projected future of Turkey whose economic standing as a developed country will be reinforced by the megaprojects. This discourse of grandeur is further polished by a personality cult around Erdoğan (109) as the leader who makes it all possible. On the other hand, the AKP utilizes a neo-Ottomanist discourse, bringing the glorious past and bright future together with these projects as will be discussed in the second chapter.

Paker (2017) further shows how the AKP uses its infrastructural power to frame the spatial policies, especially the megaprojects, as "politics of service" for the people, yet this kind of politics of service is used to block any criticism of the governing elite that the party has nurtured in two decades (105). Although national developmentalism of the 20th century offered infrastructural projects as services for many decades, the AKP creates a stark distinction

between the past and its current vision to stiffen hegemony (110). By criticizing previous governments for utilizing top-down state power to impose their agenda, the AKP argues that under its rule, state-led infrastructure initiatives have been mobilized solely to serve *the people*. Despite these shifts towards an authoritarian neoliberal and anti-Kemalist modernism, developmentalism remains a fundamental pillar of the Turkish state under Erdoğan's leadership. The infrastructural power of the megaprojects is crucial to this developmentalist endeavor. In the following chapter, I will present a theoretical framework for understanding state power, before delving deeper into the symbolic dimensions of Turkish state's infrastructural power.

Chapter 2. Infrastructures and State Power

Infrastructures can be defined as *"technologically mediated, dynamic forms that continuously produce and transform sociotechnical relations"* (Harvey et al. 2017, 5). With the partial convergence of social sciences and science and technology studies, infrastructures are now understood as extended material assemblages that produce effects and shape social relations (6). The "assemblage" and "sociotechnical" emphases are important as they underline the relational aspect of the concept by bringing social and material together. The way infrastructure and its relationality are tackled in various ways is the result of a shift in social theory. Influenced by the post-war French scholarship, *infrastructure* was used almost as a synonym for *structure* in a broad area of social sciences from structural linguistics to late-twentieth-century Marxism (Carse 2017, 35). However, as the 1980s saw the rise of the post-structuralist critique, social theory moved away from deep structures and started analyzing the mix of materials, practices, and meanings that contain what we call infrastructures (35).

Contemporary megaprojects encompass more than just mega infrastructural projects; they extend to fields such as space exploration and DNA mapping (Schindler et al. 2021, 3). However, for this thesis, my focus is specifically on mega infrastructural projects and the associated infrastructural developments or disruptions they bring about. Megaprojects transform landscapes rapidly, intentionally, and profoundly in highly visible ways and necessitate coordinated applications of capital and state power (Gellert and Lynch 2003, 15-16). They are not only quantitatively but also qualitatively different than smaller projects in terms of their level of aspiration, actor involvement, time, complexity, and impact (Flyvbjerg 2017, 3). Having explained my understanding of (mega) infrastructures, in this chapter, I first aim to conceptualize state power considering its multiscalar spatiality. Then I will briefly explore developmentalism and governmentality as well as symbolic dimensions of

infrastructure, finally locating the megaprojects in the Turkish government's use of symbolic power.

2.1. Unfolding the State Space and the Neoliberal State

State power has long been perceived as naturalized and homogenous within the borders of a nation-state due to the conception of the nation-state in the Treaty of Westphalia as the sovereign power within a given territory (Brenner et al. 2003, 2). This understanding of state space has been proved inadequate in the late twentieth century, bringing critical attention to the changing spatialities of state power and political life (3). Geographer John Agnew names this conceptualization "territorial trap", as it presents a static view to perceive state power and social space (Agnew 1994, Brenner et al. 2003). Agnew (1994) argues that the critical theoretical concern is the historical relationship between territorial states and the broader social, economic, and spatial practices in which these states operate. One must think along the lines of historical-geographical consciousness to release the theory from the conquest of time by territorial space (77). Understanding state space with its history and geography brings us to the question of whether the state spaces exist within a nested hierarchy ranging from global to local or it is characterized by complexity. Following the latter, Brenner et al. (2003) approach state space as a part of tangled, contested, and rapidly changing scalar hierarchies involved in the political regulation of social life under modern capitalism (4). Similarly, Swyngedouw (1997) emphasizes how places and spaces of different geographical scales are involved in events that have local, national, and international implications (139).

Conceptualizing geographical change and restructuring in terms of a given spatial scale is problematic as spatial scale is the outcome of social struggle for power and control, it is heterogeneous and contested (140). Thus, looking at "the political economy of scale" is critical (Brenner et al. 2003, 5). In this thesis, the political economy of scale necessarily interacts with the urban question. Brenner (2011) argues that the urban question has increasingly become

interwoven with the scale question, because the urban, rather than a merely localized arena for global capital accumulation, is a strategic coordinate in which multiscalar restructuring of state spatiality occurs (28). Transformations in urban peripheries can also be conceived with attention to multiscalar processes. Gururani and Kennedy (2021) highlight that urban peripheries in the Global South have become key sites for investments, due to their proximity to city-based human and capital resources, transportation infrastructures, relatively cheaper land, and less regulated governance regimes. As states adapt to global economic conditions and compete, they go through an economic and political restructuring that gives rise to the emergence of new state spaces, that in turn shape urban processes (4).

Theoretical attention to the dynamics of restructuring of the state to globalization is fruitful. As I argued in the neoliberal authoritarianism of the Turkish state and urban governance in the first chapter, a significant strand of political-economic research has asserted that under present geoeconomic conditions, national states are undergoing qualitative transformations rather than outright dismantlement (Sassen 2006, Brenner 2004). Neoliberalism as a political project involves enhanced state intervention to roll forward new forms of governance (including state intervention) that are purportedly more suited to a market-driven globalizing economy (Jessop 2008, 107). The overarching structural conditions of neoliberal globalism do not predetermine the specific policy responses of individual states, rather they necessitate negotiation and fine-tuning at the level of the nation-state, and other scales. Hence, contrary to the narrative of state powerlessness, governmental intervention may indeed intensify in certain areas while being scaled back or restructured in others, including infrastructural investments (Peck 2001, 449) as we saw in the way that the AKP manages megaprojects.

2.2. Spatiality and Governmentality of State Power

Michel Foucault (1984) considers space as essential to any exercise of power (252). Some aspects of state power are evident. For instance, despite the differential democratic mechanisms among nation-states, the state has the legal power to regulate a territory, as we can see in all the legal measures that the Turkish state takes to impose its own will for urban transformation through TOKI. State power encompasses multifaceted dimensions that go beyond mere direct exercises of legal power. Its influence extends beyond the boundaries of legality and materiality, incorporating spatial and symbolic elements that may not be immediately evident.

Henri Lefebvre (2003) presents the state as the social architecture of the production of social space as political domination gets naturalized in everyday life in the state space (84). He argues that the state and territory interact in such a way that they are mutually constitutive (87). Along with a material-natural and social space, the state occupies a mental space that includes the representations of the state that people construct in various ways. Mental space cannot be easily differentiated from the former two (84-85). He defines the state mode of production constituted by growth, urbanization, and spatialization (84). The crucial point with the state mode of production is that it is characterized by the space of state control, which is also a space of exchange: Control marks the homogenous character of space, whereas exchange fragments it, creating a paradox (88). Thus, the strength of the state is that it manages to present space -in fact, fragmented- as homogenous to sustain its presence and surveillance in the most remote corners of the space (86). As an illustration of the representation of homogeneity that also resonates with the territorial trap discussion in the previous section, we could maybe employ the imaginary of the Turkish nation-state in competition with the other nation-states, i.e., how the *"Germans would envy the Istanbul Airport."*[12] Of course, this type of discourse does not

[12] https://www.aksam.com.tr/ekonomi/hizlanan-3-havalimani-almanlari-kiskandiriyor/haber-667807

necessarily create a tremendous impression on every citizen, but in different degrees, the fact that space is occupied by a state, territorially and symbolically, helps the state conceal the fragmented nature of space by capital exchange.

As a dimension of his theorization of state space, Lefebvre (2003) explicitly talks about infrastructures. He underlines the role of energy production and its technostructures: as the state masters them, it both controls the units of production and partitions space with the double surveillance of its technicians and the police (90). The state is the only actor capable of managing the space *"on a grand scale - highways, air traffic routes - because only the state has at its disposal the appropriate resources, techniques, and 'conceptual' capacity."* (90). This could shed light on the understanding that the Turkish state can dominate its interests over the users, as well as the necessary means to exert power through the implementation of infrastructural projects.

Another facet of state power is symbolic. For Pierre Bourdieu (1979), symbolic power is the power to construct reality, and symbols implement the consensus on the sense of the social world, which helps reproduce the social order (79). Bourdieu further argues that the dominant fractions, whose power is based on economic and political capital, seek to impose the legitimacy of their domination either through their symbolic production (discourse, writings, etc.) or through the intermediary of conservative ideologists who fulfill the interests of the dominant fractions (80). However, what we should also get into the picture is how the dominated locate themselves in this power relation as Bourdieu also looks at the objective structures and subjective representations in a dialectical relationship (Bourdieu 1989, 15). Social space, which has a crucial place to understand this dialectical interaction, is established by a social distance determined by the fundamental powers of economic cultural, social, and symbolic capital (17). This conception differs from a Marxian understanding of class; since for him, the class must be constructed through political work (17). When I look at my field from Bourdieu's perspective,

the people whose lives have been transformed, or will be transformed by the megaprojects, share similar material conditions but they might not compose a class, instead, their similar positionality in the social space might be a more suitable compass to think about them. Moreover, Bourdieu (1989) points to the state as a powerful actor in the struggle for symbolic power (22), a struggle that the Turkish state likes to undergo by turning the construction of megaprojects into a war of culture against the Kemalist historical legacy of the country as I will show in the next section of the chapter.

Bringing a historical perspective to the question of space and state power, Foucault (1984) argues that from the eighteenth century, there is a shift in the role played by space in terms of exerting political power, a shift in a way to include reflections upon urbanism, collective facilities like infrastructures, hygiene, private architecture in discussions of politics (240). With this shift, the cities gave up on their position of being islands in vast territories, but they became the model for *governmental rationality* that applied to the whole territory (241). Meanwhile, he points to infrastructures as integral elements of power, particularly underlining two kinds of infrastructures as the effector of the novel relationship between space and power: railroads and electricity. The rise of these networked infrastructures transformed the links between spaces, provoked forms of resistance, and changed the behavior of the population (243).

Governmentality and the significance of modern infrastructures to governmentality provide a useful lens to think about developmentalism. Building on his extensive research about the Thaba-Tseka rural development project that included works of infrastructure, livestock, and range development in Lesotho, James Ferguson (1994) approaches development as an institution in which the intentionality of planning and the strategic intelligibility of the outcomes engage in a complex relation; a relation that comes with an unintended constellation of power (20). Similarly, based on the case of resettlement programs in Indonesia, Tania Li (1999) adopts

a Foucauldian lens to explore governmentality to understand development as a project of rule and power. She contends that development is a modern state's attempt at rule, considered always as fragile and contingent accomplishments (295). Development can be viewed as a prominent aspect of "everyday state formation" (Joseph and Nugen 1994, as cited in Li 1999) of a nation, offering a platform, like education, public administration, and land law, where "the state" can consistently reaffirm its purpose of existence and establish a presence in routine procedures and occurrences (296).

James Scott (1999) seeks an answer to the question of why top-down planning fails as the states tend to impose top-down, standardized schemes on society to simplify and regulate complex systems. According to him, the state is a powerful entity that seeks to exert control over society, often at the expense of people. However, the main scope of Scott's work is high modernism that is shaped by specific social and temporal circumstances whose high tide is marked by from the early to mid-20th century (5). Li (2005) makes a refined contribution to Scott's work suggesting looking beyond authoritarian high modernism to the broader problem of "improvement," which emerged historically as Foucault argued when the purpose of the rule was recast in terms of governmental rationality (384). She highlights that attention on governmentality uncovers the conjunctures, histories, spatialities, and practices of rule (388). Indeed, Erdoğan's Turkey does not belong to a "high modernist" scheme, we could even say that it emerged as a response to Kemalist high modernism. However, the state power exerted through infrastructures still enables the state to attempt to impose its will.

2.3. Politics and Poetics of Istanbul's Megaprojects

At the ground-breaking ceremony of the third bridge in 2013, Erdoğan likens the bridge to a beautiful pearl necklace on Bosporus (Dissard and Kurşunlugil 2021, 3). It is a great example of how infrastructures exist as forms separate from their purely technical functioning, and that they carry within them forms of desire and fantasy (Larkin 2013, 329). Massive

infrastructural projects can be used to represent state power to its citizens, yet the political effects of these projects drive complicated emotional investments, and the affectual relation people have to infrastructures -in terms of awe and fascination- is an important part of their political effect (334). The affective aspect of infrastructures could be a form of poetics *"to rearrange the hierarchy of functions so that the aesthetic dimension of infrastructure (rather than its technical one) is dominant."* (336). Thus, the state holds significant material and symbolic elements of power that could be exerted through infrastructures.

Undoubtedly, symbolic power is an important pillar for the Erdoğan regime including the framing of the megaprojects. This symbolism often takes the shape of neo-Ottomanism, Erdoğan *constructs the reality* (Bourdieu 1979) of a certain segment of the population by evoking the glorious days of the Ottoman Empire six centuries ago. The ground-breaking of the bridge mentioned above took place on the 29th of May, the anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans in 1453. This time, four years later, in 2017, the contractor of the third airport construction project celebrated the 564th anniversary of the conquest with a parade of 1453 trucks in the construction area, a combined signal of both economic and symbolic power (Güney 2019, 184). This attempt to power is also evident from the controversial naming of the bridge after Yavuz Selim, the famous Ottoman sultan known for his zeal for conquest, aligning with the sentiments shared by many supporters of the regime. Yet, much of Turkey's Alevi population was offended by the name choice, since Yavuz Sultan Selim massacred many of the community's leaders in the 16th century (Dissard and Kurşunlugil 2021, 15).[13] Similar Ottoman-resonated names were also discussed in the case of the mega airport. Before the construction of the mega Istanbul Airport, Istanbul had another, well-connected airport on the European side named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Despite its logistical importance and well-functioning, the government had closed the Atatürk airport except for cargo operations, this closure even created

[13] As I mentioned in the Introduction, it is a reason why I generally follow the naming "the third bridge".

an economic loss for the state.[14] The replacement of a functioning airport with the mega one revealed another terrain for material and symbolic power over the infrastructures. The fact that the new airport would not carry the name Atatürk had sparked debates and demands, including a law proposal by a nationalist party in the parliament to name the new airport Atatürk.[15] However, eventually, the name Istanbul was chosen aligning with the global importance of the airport.

Infrastructural inaugurations present an ideal platform to observe what Brian Larkin (2013) has named the politics and poetics of infrastructure (Dissard and Kurşunlugil 2021, 1). It is important to note that a neo-Ottomanist sentiment existed in a part of society deemed marginal before the rule of AKP. Yet, currently, the 1453 commemorations have evolved beyond merely honoring Fatih Sultan Mehmet and his triumphant Ottoman army. They now encompass a broader focus on the contemporary situation, specifically the recent takeover of Political Islam in opposition to Kemalism (10). Hence, by associating himself with the Sultan, Erdoğan foregrounds what he perceives as his own contemporary "conquest" of the city - not a military conquest, but a more techno-political, socio-cultural, and civilizational conquest (11). Moreover, by framing the infrastructures as *monuments*, Erdoğan claims they hold value not only for the nation but also for a forthcoming civilization that embraces both its history and its future (12). Bringing together the *glorious* history with the *bright* future vision springs the idea that infrastructures have a temporal dimension along with the spatial one. In the next chapter, I will zoom on Göktürk and Ağaçlı and focus on how the temporality of infrastructure unfolds in the northern periphery of Istanbul.

[14] https://tele1.com.tr/sovun-bedeli-ataturk-havalimaninin-kapatilmasi-milyonluk-zarar-ettirdi-111287/
[15] https://www.lodoshaber.com/gundem/iyi-parti-istanbul-havalimani-icin-harekete-gecti-adi-ataturk-olmali-348814

Chapter 3. Peripheral Urbanization and Temporality in Ağaçlı and Göktürk

Ağaçlı derives its name from the Turkish word for "treed", a reference to the forest that characterizes the region. For generations, the livelihoods of its residents have relied primarily on forestry and stockbreeding, particularly water buffalo (Uzunçarşılı Baysal, 2020, 24). Upper Ağaçlı is where the village was originally established by Balkan communities displaced during the late 19th-century partitioning of the Ottoman Empire (12). The village was initially named Kömürcüpınarı, which translates to "Charcoal Spring" in English. Coal exploration and extraction in Ağaçlı began in 1914 when the Ottoman Empire had to turn to domestic resources due to the disruption of coal imports during World War I. This led to the construction of a light railway line connecting Ağaçlı to Silahtarağa Electric Power Plant, the very first electric power plant in Istanbul. However, the line remained operational for only a brief period (Kaştan, 2016, 2). Later, the opening of coal mines in the 1950s, operated by the Kutman Mining Company led to labor migration from Anatolia, resulting in the village's growth. While the grandchildren of the Balkan migrants were granted private ownership of land and have maintained their land titles since the Ottoman era to this day, labor migrants established informal settlements within the village. Located 3 kilometers northeast of Upper Ağaçlı, Lower Ağaçlı emerged as a second center of the village along the coast. Excavation activity increased during the 1970s and 80s, marking the beginning of a transformation that would escalate with the implementation of recent megaprojects (Uzunçarşılı Baysal, 2020, 20).

My first visit to Ağaçlı was on a hot sunny day in August. The village was a hive of activity with excavation trucks moving back and forth, stirring up dust. Alongside the road, water buffaloes were resting in small pools of water near the road to escape the heat. This scene reminded me of the words of Nihal, an informant of mine who is an environmental activist and scholar:

> "Although the coal mines of the past led to ecological degradation in this area, after their closure, a new life emerged for buffaloes thanks to the rainwater that filled in the holes left by the mines. You know they love hanging out in the water. Nature renews itself in surprising ways. However, when you put concrete everywhere, there is no way back from that."

Nihal was referring to the fact that Istanbul Airport was built on a dried lake, Kulakçayırı. Located just 18 kilometers away from the airport, Ağaçlı has been transformed by recent megaprojects that have dramatically increased the scale of the excavation and sand mining activity in the area. Today, nearly two thousand trucks a day rumble through the village, dumping construction materials from ongoing logistical extensions at the airport, as well as from construction sites all over Istanbul, including Göktürk. They then fill their tanks with sea sand to sell. But while the excavation business has boomed, the once-beautiful beach in Ağaçlı has not operated in the last decade.

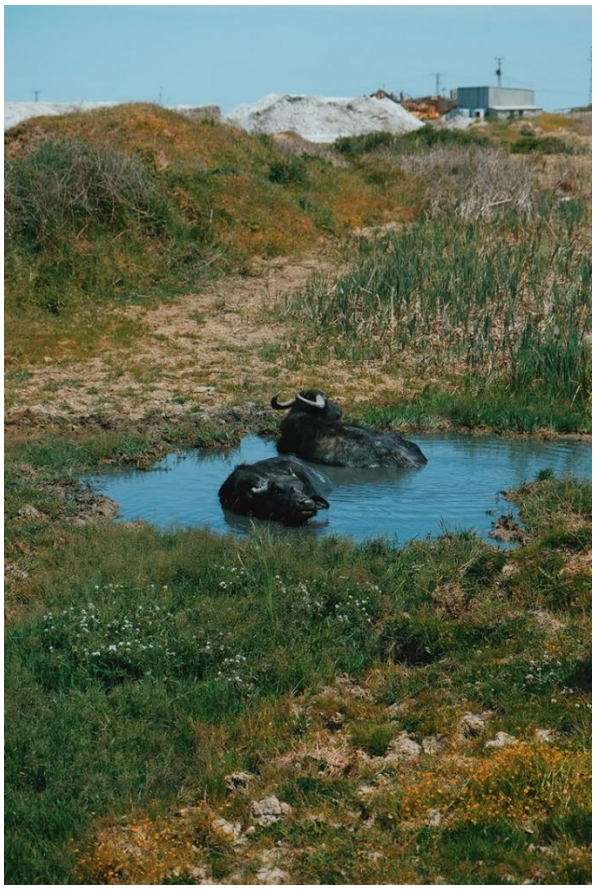

Figure 5: Water buffalos in the pond in Northern Istanbul shown in Istanbul Biennale. Source: https://cooking-sections.com/Wallowland.

Figure 6: The activity on Ağaçlı's coast. My picture.

Figure 7: The trucks are driving toward the sea in Ağaçlı. My picture.

Ağaçlı is a remote village with limited access to transportation and goods, as the only public transportation available is a bus line to Göktürk that runs once in two or three hours and is subject to frequent disruptions and cancellations. There are only two small convenience shops in the village with a very limited selection of products. Even for necessities like groceries, residents must commute to nearby Göktürk, often relying on those with cars to deliver their orders. The *muhtar*[16], who is usually driving outside of the village for meetings, is one of those delivery people. During my visits, he often drove me to Göktürk as well. The landscape changes gradually in just a 15-minute drive from Ağaçlı to Göktürk. Unlike the presence of only one single coffee house in Ağaçlı that is usually closed, here we can find three branches of Starbucks, a variety of restaurants from world cuisine, and upscale bars.

As someone who was born and raised in Istanbul for 25 years in a relatively central area on the Asian side of the city, I had never witnessed such a stark contrast from free-roaming water buffalos to high-end night clubs in such a short distance. It makes one question where the boundaries of the urban start. Leading from this puzzle in my mind, in this chapter, I argue that as a relatively new urban enclave surrounded by agricultural activity, Göktürk offers an opportunity to see the process of peripheral urbanization in a megacity like Istanbul. Moreover, the relationship between Ağaçlı and Göktürk points to the temporality of peripheral urbanization and infrastructures since the increasing influence of the megaprojects in the area is catalyzing a transformation in both settlements, ambiguating the future. To support my argument, I draw upon the insights gathered from the interviews I have conducted.

[16] Muhtar in Turkish means the elected representative of the smallest residential unit, village, and neighborhood.

Figure 8: Ağaçlı, Göktürk, the airport, and the bridge. My screenshot from Google Earth.

3.1. Peripheral Urbanization and the Suburban Question

By reframing our understanding of suburbs beyond the narrow perception of them as simply residential enclaves that lack the complexities of the central city (Keil 2018, 18) and as idyllic and isolated spaces beyond the city's boundaries (20), we can begin to understand the forces that are causing the dissolution of urban centrality and the emergence of a polycentric urban form (Soja 1996, 2000). Much of the modern era can be characterized as the suburban age, as the urban population, built environment, and economic activity experience expansion and contraction mostly in peripheral areas (Keil 2018, 12).

Peripheral urbanization, or peri-urbanization is understood as a complex set of processes that involves the transformation of predominantly rural areas into a mixture of rural and urban landscapes and livelihoods (Follmann 2020, 2). Particularly in the Global South, these areas are marked by significant changes, including dynamic land conversion, rapid population growth,

shifting economic activities, and altering resource flows (2). While suburban and peri-urban are often used in the literature synonymously, some proponents of the concept of peri-urbanization strongly oppose the universalizing of Northern theory to the diverse processes of suburbanization in the Global South (Follmann 2020, 9). However, according to Keil (2013), including the Global South in discussions on global sub/urbanism is not simply adding more cases of peripheral expansion to an existing script. Rather, it involves a fundamental acknowledgment that urban theorizing must be completely rewritten (14). Acknowledging peripheral urban development is part of the contemporary urban world (Wu and Keil 2020, 947), global sub/urbanism necessarily takes a post-suburbia perspective that considers plural dynamics related to residential, industrial, infrastructural, financial, and broader urban and rural dynamics (949), which all reflect the spatiality of capitalism.

Calderia (2017) utilizes the notion of peripheral urbanization to explore the production of the urban areas that differ from those of the North Atlantic both in terms of socio-spatial formation and theory making. Hence her conception of peripheral urbanization does not necessarily refer to the spatial margins of the city but rather to a way of producing space (4). Caldeira presents Istanbul as a textbook case of peripheral urbanization in the Global South, referring to the changing logics of *gecekondu*[17] autoconstruction and the state's construction of a new regime of property (11). Güney (2019) focuses on the construction of high-rise mass housing projects and subsequent suburbanization in Northern Istanbul. He contends that Istanbul makes a unique case of diversity in massive suburban development due to its rapid population growth, authoritarian governance of the housing market, and speculative housing prices (181). While the speculative pricing Güney exemplifies is valid for Göktürk as much as for the other peripheral neighborhoods, Göktürk presents a slightly different case in Northern

[17] Gecekondu means "built overnight" in Turkish and it is the primary mode of informal housing that marked the mid-20th century urbanization of the big cities in Turkey.

Istanbul as its urban expansion has relied on low-density construction, and the town is marketized as an idyllic village in line with the expectations of the new residents in villa-type houses. It is presented as a conventional suburb in mid-20th century white, middle-class American suburbs, yet it is a peri-urban area marked by segregation. Hande, an informant in her mid-40s who resides in a gated community was saying: *"I love Göktürk. I am sad because of the current expansion and migration after the megaprojects, but when I go out from here towards Istanbul and come back, I say 'Oh, I am coming back to my village'. I like it. People don't understand this, but I am happy."* However, Murat, a long-term male resident in Göktürk who works in the housing site management was hesitant to perceive it as a village anymore: *"Have you seen a village with a Starbucks?"*

3.2. Göktürk as a Periphery

Originally called Petnahor (Greek: Rooster Village) until 1958, Göktürk hosted a mixed ethnic and religious population before the population exchange between Turkey and Greece in the 1920s, then the population consisted of Turkish re-settlers from Thessalonica region (Esen and Rieniets 2008, 92). For most of the 20th century, Göktürk was a small village and a *gecekondu* area that served the nearby brick manufacturers and coal mines (Bozdoğan 2013, 109). Yet, compared to Ağaçlı and other villages around, Göktürk's location is more favorable in terms of proximity to the roads that lead to the central areas of Istanbul, including the financial center Maslak. Today, Göktürk is approximately 25-30 kilometers away from the central areas of Istanbul like Taksim and Şişli; the residents can drive in half an hour when there is no traffic but commuting used to take longer before the recent highway. Until the expansion of the industrialized areas around the mid-1970s, Göktürk was predominantly agricultural, coal mining was not remarkably dynamic except for one mine. As the rise of gated communities in Istanbul started in the 1980s in the shadow of economic liberalization (Esen and Rieniets 2008, 84), the environmental attractions, including the peacefulness of being enclosed in the forest,

have made Göktürk a particular region for luxury housing projects (Nasrollahzadeh and Koramaz 2020, 79). After the administrative status of Göktürk changed from a village to a town in 1993 by the Istanbul Municipality that paved the way for a new construction plan for urban development, a private developer, Esat Edin, began building the luxury residential community of "Kemer Country," marking an important first in what would soon be a pervasive trend (Bozdoğan 2013, 109). Moreover, my informants underlined that the Gölcük Earthquake in 1999 facilitated the rush of the upper-middle class population towards the northern side of Istanbul. As the active fault line passes through the southern coast of Istanbul from the Marmara Sea, the Northern areas of Istanbul are further, hence considered safer. The earthquake contributed to the further expansion of Göktürk. From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, land values in Göktürk increased by 500 percent (Bozdoğan 2013, 109). In the process, many villagers have sold their land to investors to ensure their share of the emerging real estate boom, and the investors launched new projects feeding the growing appetite for luxurious residences (Nasrollahzadeh and Koramaz 2020, 57).

Göktürk today is a neighborhood of 55,000 people. Agricultural activity is a significant dimension of peripheral urbanization in Göktürk. Partially due to the demand from the upper-middle class population who are happy to live in what they consider a village, Göktürk is still seen as a famous location for dairy products. However, due to the long-running deagrarianizing transformation, few dairy shops in Göktürk continue their stockbreeding activities in Ağaçlı and sell their products in Göktürk. Now that this transformation that has been accelerated by the megaprojects is reaching the Black Sea coast, a few farms and shops have started turning to the other agricultural provinces in proximity to Istanbul as the gazing areas have shrunk. The shift of agriculture in the whole area blurs the boundaries of the rural and the urban: as the urbanization process expands, agriculture and stockbreeding follow it, yet, without completely disappearing.

Figure 9: Aerial view of Göktürk
Source: https://www.intowndergisi.com/gokturkte-evi-olanlara-ve-yeni-ev-alacaklara-onemli-bilgiler/

Ananya Roy (2016) argues for the significance of acknowledging the rural as the "constitutive outside" of the urban, underlining the perpetual state of incompleteness in the urbanization process. This entails comprehending the entanglement of agrarian and urban

questions (813). Adopting a comparable standpoint, Gururani (2020) describes an urbanism that does not erase or assimilate the rural, but an urbanism in which agrarian and urban dynamics sustain and produce each other, which she names agrarian urbanism (984). Understanding the interaction and coproduction of the rural and the urban is helpful to reveal the complex processes of suburbanization and adding an important dimension to the map of global sub/urbanisms (Keil 2018) as opposed to the standard conceptual terrain of the urban theory that overlooks the rural (973). The Göktürk-Ağaçlı route is one of these nods where peripheral urbanization unfolds outside of Global North, in a megacity like Istanbul.

3.3. Megaprojects and Uncertain Futures

After the transformation brought by the megaprojects, the future of the peri-urban in the north of Istanbul is changing. During my visits to Ağaçlı and Göktürk, I often heard stories of speeding cars hitting water buffaloes in the lack of traffic lights on the highway at late night. These cars are usually taxi drivers driving passengers to the airport. The mega infrastructures of Northern Istanbul put the buffaloes' lives at risk. Hence, alongside the shrinking grazing areas, safety is another reason why the people of Ağaçlı are unsure about the future prevalence of stockbreeding in the area. The megaprojects are shaping the future in ambiguous directions.

While infrastructural projects are building *"material forces that allow for the possibility of exchange over space"* (Larkin 2013, 327), they are simultaneously building time and temporalities (Appel 2018, 44). Certainly, the fact that infrastructures are not merely bound in space calls for a temporal perspective on infrastructures and the transformation they bring forth. Akhil Gupta (2018) suggests a view that looks at infrastructure as an open-ended process characterized by multiple temporalities and potential futures (62). Infrastructure offers a clear illustration of how the future shapes the present, not only because of the irreversibility of the capital investment but also how the location of an infrastructural project generates further infrastructural impacts in terms of new housing, educational, and commercial areas (63). This

point helps me think about the temporality of the infrastructure and peripheral urbanization together, as the former facilitates the latter in an urban periphery. For instance, now the airport metro that will pass through Göktürk is under construction, and my informants state that a metro line would have been unimaginable if not for the airport.

The iron law of megaprojects is that they typically exceed their budget and cause delays (Flyvbjerg 2017, 10). From an anthropological point of view, Alize Arıcan (2020) considers delays not unintended outcomes of construction, but rather the way that urban transformation operates, and power is exerted (20). She suggests paying attention to delays (re)temporalizes urban transformations that are often conceptualized as merely spatial forms of accumulation by dispossession in neoliberal cities (4). Indeed, delays were inevitable for such a giant project. Thanks to the very ambition of Erdoğan to have the inauguration of the Istanbul Airport the Republican Day on the 29th of October for evident developmental motivations, it was announced that it was going to take place on that day in 2017.[18] Yet, eventually, the airport was opened on the 29th of October in 2018 without being completed. Despite a few symbolic flights, the actual date that the main technical facilities would move from the Atatürk Airport was delayed three times until April 2019.[19] As Erdoğan underlined in the inauguration ceremony of the Istanbul Airport, all phases of the Istanbul Airport are expected to be completed by 2028.[20] During his speech at the ceremony, Erdoğan also heralds a future-positive (Harvey 2018) image for the airport:

> *"This place will operate as a smart airport that appeals to the world of the future. ... Since Istanbul will now be the most important transfer point, the routes of intercontinental flights will also change to a large extent. It is not a coincidence that this work, which will leave its mark on history with its location and features, was built*

[18] https://web.archive.org/web/20160403045750/http://www.ibb.gov.tr/tr-TR/Pages/Haber.aspx?NewsID=22505#.VwCi1XbP23B
[19] https://www.dw.com/tr/i%CC%87stanbul-havaliman%C4%B1na-ta%C5%9F%C4%B1nma-tarihi-nisana-ertelendi/a-47686652
[20] https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/99488/istanbul-havalimani-nin-acilis-toreninde-yaptiklari-konusma

in our country. Especially in the last 16 years, Turkey has prepared itself for this future …"[21]

No matter how the future will be for Istanbul and Turkey, the uncertainty of the future persists for Ağaçlı. Some residents of Ağaçlı do not currently perceive themselves to be "affected" by the airport in comparison to Yeniköy and Tayakadın, two other villages right next to the airport. However, they never stop referring to their future when they are asked about megaprojects. They always anticipate something unclear. As mentioned in the Introduction, the megaprojects have been a part of the plan to build a new city in Northern Istanbul centering Ağaçlı. No one knows whether this plan will eventually be realized. During the daily conversations, some think it was a lie, and some think a future like Göktürk is not far from Ağaçlı. It was more than not often I heard sentences such as *"We might be like Göktürk in 5 years"*. However, being Göktürk might be a good-case scenario as there is another possibility that intensifies the curiosity and anxiety about the future: the expansion of the logistics center of the airport.

One afternoon, while Erdem, a young local of Ağaçlı was driving me to another village for a meeting, we passed by a huge, circulated area with earth movers working. Then he explained to me that it was the construction of the logistics center of the airport, and it is expected to expand more towards Ağaçlı in the future which comes with the risk of displacement. Earlier, Rıfat, an old man that I met sitting in the coffee house said: *"Göktürk is full of luxury housing projects but there are rumors that here (Ağaçlı) will be included in the logistics facilities of the airport instead of opening for housing development. We do not know; we are only hearing things."*

In light of the megaprojects, it is not hard to see the hopes and anxieties of potential futures in Ağaçlı. Alongside their similar histories that diverged in the 1990s with Göktürk's

[21] https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/99488/istanbul-havalimani-nin-acilis-toreninde-yaptiklari-konusma

transformation, it is currently the megaprojects that shape the relationship between these two settlements. The mega infrastructures work by rendering the future unambiguous for both places. As it already has reached a certain level of urban density, Göktürk residents are of course, not as anxious as those of Ağaçlı; they refer to the traffic and overpopulation problem. Hande who earlier said she considers Göktürk as *her village* was expressing her worries about the new lands in the gecekondu part of Göktürk opening for construction. In general, like the residents of Ağaçlı thinking about their future with Göktürk, the residents of Göktürk often refer to Ağaçlı as their past form.

In Turkey in general, it is not uncommon to hear "development" and "destruction" from the way the same people talk about urban development. I also encountered that in my field. In his theorization of the future as ruins, Gupta (2018) is concerned with the afterlife of construction, demonstrating ruins as those of large infrastructure projects that in their heyday symbolized the rise of a civilization, yet then suspended (69). Although Gupta underlines the *half-ness* of these infrastructural formations whose time passed, I think the very *ongoing-ness* of megaprojects of Northern Istanbul can provide the same feeling. Hence for an infrastructure to "ruin" the future, it does not have to be uncompleted, it could be *successfully* ongoing, yet, ruining their vicinity:

"This is how life is now. Everyone will detach (from rural life). How is the picture that I showed you from this street 25 years ago? Well, we were like Ağaçlı at that time. In the 90s, when the municipality was newly established. Then this place started to change, park, garden, sewerage, then urbanization. It has taken 20 years to become such a city. But if Ağaçlı were to change today for these projects, they would ***ruin*** *it in 5 years, not 20 years. Current technology didn't exist 20 years ago. Now a building gets a plate overnight. As I said, the fate of Ağaçlı will change in 3-5 years if someone wants it. You will maybe happen to go there 5 years later and then, you will say, 'Oh, what happened here?'"*

Here, Hakan, a shop owner who grew up in Göktürk reflects both on their past, and the future of Ağaçlı referring to ruin and the acceleration of construction technology. Development and ruin are both sides of the same coin, which raises important questions about the costs and

benefits of urban transformation. Going back to Nihal who reminded me how water buffalos enjoy their time on the ruins of the past that have been filled by water, but how about concrete as the ruins of the future? We have yet to know.

As an unbuilt and unfinished infrastructure that calls for a broader conception of infrastructures, time, and socio-material relationships (Carse and Kneas 2019, 11), the ghost of the ongoing Canal Istanbul project is also there. It is going extremely slow, yet if it is completed, it will be the craziest megaproject of not only Istanbul but also Turkey. When I ask the mayor of Göktürk whether she expects the canal project to be completed, she says *"Well, it probably won't but it is between his two lips. Who can prevent him? You will never know; he can come up with something. A lot of things are slipping through our hands."* Yet, how do they cope with this transformation if the prospects of development and ruin are between the president's two lips? The last chapter will be about how the residents of Ağaçlı and Göktürk navigate the past, present, and future transformation.

Chapter 4. Peripheral Urbanization from Below: Negotiation and Promise

The authoritarian nature of the Turkish government under Erdoğan has limited the potential for direct mobilization in the case of megaprojects. However, this does not mean that state power is omnipotent in shaping urbanization outcomes. The contemporary state is a potent force in people's everyday lives, yet the political should not be reduced to state presence: agencies beyond those of state institutions and established political organizations must be considered (Harvey and Knox 2015, 5). Hence, this final chapter is the exploration of urban transformation from below: the perceptions of the state power of the residents in Ağaçlı and Göktürk, their aspirations, negotiations, and bargains with capital. Drawing on the promises and disappointments of mega infrastructures, I aim to highlight forms of resistance and agency in the production of space, thus shedding light on the complexities of peripheral urbanization.

Periphery is not a dependent or subordinate category, peripheral urbanization highlights the heterogeneity of the socio-spatial forms that coproduce the urbanizing frontiers (Gururani and Kennedy 2021, 6). The residents inhabiting the peri-urban areas actively exercise their agency to shape the dynamics of their surroundings. Their actions are driven by aspirations for development, tied to the pursuit of upward social mobility, but enjoying a rural rhythm of life on the fringe of a chaotic city could also be a desire. Their aspirations are imbued with a sense of anticipation, motivated not only by material gains but also by intangible desires for modernization and urban development. The infrastructure projects initiated by the state hold significance for individuals when they directly impact their daily lives. Below, I will first narrate the mobilization led by the Northern Forests Defense, and then the promise of infrastructure and aspirations of urbanity in Göktürk and Ağaçlı, revisiting the near history, and ideals of the future. I rely on my interview materials and field notes, as well as media representations.

4.1. Objecting to the Projects

In May 2013, ambitious urban projects triggered Turkey's largest urban rebellion, the Gezi Park protests, which started against the destruction of forests and urban parks, eventually drawing around 3.5 million people to the streets (Tuğal 2023, 4). The claims for citizenship and the right to the city in Turkey flourished after the Gezi. The social movement network Northern Forests Defense was a product of this process: Only a month after the Gezi, the organization was established by environmental activists, and members of various professional chambers. The organization aimed at drawing attention to the changing topography of northern Istanbul and the environmental destruction by the megaprojects (Pelivan 2020, 507):

> *"We aim to bring together those who struggle to protect their life spaces against the creative destruction of the capital, against all kinds of profiteering projects that kill the ecosystem, including 'megaprojects' such as the third airport, the third bridge, and Canal Istanbul."*[22]

The organization held several forums in some of the northern villages of Istanbul, bringing the villagers and activists together for several months in mid-2016. I had reviewed many media sources to map the whole process of mobilization in the villages between 2014-2018, but when I went to Ağaçlı in the summer of 2022, I realized that the protests were not as popular among the residents as I assumed based on my readings. Even the usual informative meetings and forums that do not have a "rebel" context were not so crowded. Moreover, I learned during my field visits that some residents of Ağaçlı did not even initiate a legal case against TOKI although their grazing lands were among those that were expropriated. However, most of the villagers still chose to organize to sue TOKI. A lawyer they initially consulted did not want to *"go under this process"* seeing that the name Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was mentioned in the expropriation documents (Uzunçarşılı Baysal 2015, 250). Then thanks to the legal assistance of the lawyers in the Northern Forests Defense, the residents brought a suit for the

[22] https://kuzeyormanlari.org/hakkinda/

cancellation of urgent expropriation, but it was concluded against them.[23] My informant Zafer, who is both from the village and an activist in the Northern Forests Defense reported that the process is at the European Court of Human Rights now, they are waiting for a decision. However, he expresses his disappointment at fellow villagers:

> *"Some residents tried to do something, yet in general my fellow villagers are very ignorant and insensitive … There is no unity in this village. We have seen contrary examples in some other places we went to with the Defense. If the local people of that region are strong, no one can touch the place. Hence, it would have been different if our villagers were united. We tried to tell them about the consequences of these projects so many times. I have been involved in the Northern Forests Defense for the last six years or so, and finally, I said I wouldn't do anything about Ağaçlı. I told my friends I can attend our protests everywhere, but not here, not in my own village. Other activists also stopped coming here since I have taken this attitude."*

Why was unity for mobilization not achieved? The scale and the rapid implementation of the projects, extreme intolerance of the security forces against any form of mobilization protesting these projects, the constant negative statements and criminalization by the government, and the use of court cases against activists made organized responses difficult (Pelivan 2020, 508). Nihal also underlined that she was very aware of the criminalization narrative, and she was feeling alienated when she was seeing more activists than locals in the protests held in Ağaçlı. On the other hand, many residents stated they do not believe that the protests were going to change the situation as the state is so oppressive anymore. Erdem expresses it in this way: *"At the time of the coal mines, there was the land mafia, but you had some state mechanism to initiate your complaints. Now the state is the mafia itself."*

Equating the state with the mafia is a notable indication of how the state is perceived. It does not necessarily refer to mere illegality as the TOKI is authorized to expropriate land for urgent public purposes, discussing the urgency of building a mega airport in the middle of a forest area remains beyond the legal aspect of it. The informants were admitting that the law

[23] https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/yukari-agacli-nin-toprak-feryadi-2507529

follows the plans of Erdoğan. Rather than illegality, the mafia analogy refers to non-transparency of the whole process, and the sense of injustice felt by the residents. Nevertheless, the state used certain extra-legal mechanisms to discourage people from mobilizing. The residents of Ağaçlı stated that they were receiving calls from the gendarmerie, the district governor and other state offices not to be involved in the protests so that the village's problems would be resolved in their favor. The muhtar characterized this as a "divide-and-rule tactic" and admitted falling into the trap of the state. The current muhtar was not on duty before the 2019 local elections, but he was speaking as a resident of Ağaçlı. It is also worth noting that he and other local governors often jokingly remarked, *"Write about us in your thesis carefully, otherwise we might be exiled"* even though they were not advocating anything explicitly radical.

By talking about the changing perceptions of state power, I am not claiming that the understanding of state and citizenship in Turkey was radically different before Erdoğan's rule. Multiple factors, such as class structure, identity, and historical relationship with the state also affect the chances of mobilization in a place. However, even if the residents of Ağaçlı did not take radical action given the uneven power dynamics, we have seen that many people would still seek their rights in legal ways, or negotiate, and demand in other ways through what we could call infrapolitics.

4.2. Negotiating the State

Far from being a mechanical top-down operation, the transformation of agricultural and forest lands into tradeable real estate takes place with several intermediaries, including local actors with knowledge and contacts (Gururani and Kennedy 2021, 5). The people of Ağaçlı know very well which company operates where in the area, and which line of government these companies are close to. Before even the megaproject plans were announced, TOKI informally asked the Ağaçlı residents to sell their lands to gather more land parcels for speculation purposes

beyond those that could be subject to urgent expropriation. However, those who live in the village refused to sell their lands for a price that they admit is ridiculous compared to the market value of the lands.

Nikhil Anand (2017) narrates how informal settlers in Mumbai make their claims on the city's water through infrapolitics – what he calls unobtrusive, invisible, and often illicit kinds of connections (20). Invisibility is key to James Scott's (1990) infrapolitics, which encompasses the acts, gestures, and thoughts that are not quite political enough to be perceived as such and that operate beneath the political radar due to a lack of opportunities to use institutional or conventional channels (Massicard 2018, 4). Indeed, the muhtar is a very central actor in the mitigation of infrapolitics in Ağaçlı. Although the abolishment of the legal entity of the villages and incorporation in metropolitan area in 2012 limited the authority of the muhtar, the position of muhtar is still the key to any demand and political contestation.

The previous muhtar was not present in the village during my fieldwork, but I was told that he had quite a good relationship with the companies operating in the area and that he was non-transparent to the residents about the processes. However, in 2017, he also led a protest of the excavation trucks with a group of villagers. Their banner was *"Yes to Referendum, No to Forestry Operation Directorate"*.[24] The first part refers to the referendum that introduced the presidential system and is not directly related to Ağaçlı's demands. Yet, it is there to show loyalty to Erdoğan and to be differentiated from the Northern Forests Defense by not targeting the state, but a smaller governance unit that they can challenge – Forestry Operation Directorate. The muhtar and a group of villagers were calling the Forestry Operation Directorate to redirect the roads for excavation as the truck traffic was unbearable. The same muhtar was outvoted in the 2019 local elections. Besides, for the metropolitan district and the Istanbul municipality, the

[24] http://eyupflashaber.com/agacli-koyu-referanduma-evet-kemerburgaz-orman-sefligine-hayir/

majority of Ağaçlı voted for the main opposition for the first time in two decades partly because of dissatisfaction with the adverse impacts of the projects on the village. Although muhtars cannot be members of political parties, the current muhtar is supporting the opposition. He runs from meetings to meetings to push for the demands of Ağaçlı, mostly by pressuring the local government, Forestry Operation Directorate, Istanbul Municipality, and the environmental management company of the municipality. Thanks to his pressure in a town meeting, he managed to have the bus road covered with asphalt. My favorite strategy of his was that with the support of a group of residents, he was discussing with various institutions to get a specific status for the sea daffodil, the rare flower species grown on Ağaçlı's sand with the hope that the coastline can be freed from further destruction.

4.3. Land, Urbanity, and the Promise of Infrastructure

This section concerns what the promise of infrastructure signifies for those in Ağaçlı and Göktürk. While infrastructure debates focus on the 'supply-side' dimensions of infrastructure, there has been surprisingly little about how individuals engage with, adapt to, challenge, and are subjected to or enabled by infrastructure (Graham and McFarlane 2015, 2). Infrastructure projects undertaken by the state might bear great significance for individuals resonating with national sentiments, yet their everyday impacts often override those of the national level.

The production of the city, particularly in the Global South, takes place on this land in a context where the future of the middle class is neither guaranteed nor stable (Denis 2018, 3). Turning land into profits not only concerns big institutional players but also concerns more modest forms of investment in micro-parcels of land, reflecting an emerging type of city and enabling us to observe the effects of a desire for urbanity that is shared far beyond formal city boundaries. The rising value of land is where urban desires reside (1). In Ağaçlı, almost half of the grazing lands are controlled by three or four individuals who hold them as investments,

anticipating that their value will rise in the future due to megaprojects. Some of those landholders are the locals of the village, buying up the land of those who were short of money over the years, one is an outsider who started buying up land fifteen years ago. These individuals have been instrumental in the legal objection process against expropriation as they have more hope invested in land. Just like almost everyone in Ağaçlı, they eagerly await a zoning permit. However, their interests clash with some of the other villagers who prefer a rural way of life. For the latter, obtaining a zoning permit is crucial for accessing gas connections, and legally expanding and restoring their houses. Nonetheless, they cannot make sure that the outcome of the zoning permit will align with their modest desires. Yet, the priorities of the investors in and out of the village, as well as the middle-class families who have purchased their houses in Ağaçlı as a summer residence revolve more around the land value. The variations of the desires for urbanity gain meaning when the people of Ağaçlı look at the trajectory of Göktürk. The zoning permit was central to the transformation of life there in the last two decades. Some inhabitants who owned properties gave their lands to the developers, getting their share of the land rent, and gave up stockbreeding. Meanwhile, some other inhabitants of old Göktürk are employed as gardeners, security guards, and cleaning staff of the new gated communities (Bozdoğan 2013, 109).

With less chance of land rent, the residents of Ağaçlı were mainly pursuing the shifting employment opportunities from 1990 onwards with the population decrease due to the closure of the coal mines. Those who remained were finding ways to make use of the excavation dumping business that had been slowly developing. Besides, my informants talked about the young people of the village selling their animals and buying trucks for excavation. However, with increased supply, the excavation business had lost its lucrative charm. Today, as expected, employment is a significant measure that people use in the evaluation of megaprojects, rendering them disappointing. The megaprojects not only led to the closure of a few remaining

mines and stone quarries but also failed to fulfill their promise of employment, as the subcontractor companies have their recruitment structures in which geographical proximity is not necessarily a factor. Indeed, I heard from many people that in comparison to the opportunities provided by the coal mines of the past, the megaprojects failed to benefit the people of Ağaçlı. On a day that I went to Akpınar, the neighboring village, the muhtar of Akpınar mentioned that he brought it up during a recent meeting with the minister of interior affairs Süleyman Soylu. He was proudly talking about how he criticized Soylu by saying *"A candle should first lighten its bottom."*, forming an analogy with the projects and the villages at the bottom.

The anticipation of urbanization is not confined to material benefits coming from employment, subsistence needs, or land rent. Such a desire also brings intangible desires of feeling clean or included into the urban fabric. Hakan states that:

> *"When I was in primary school, there was a painting contest in which we had to draw the Göktürk we dreamed of. We drew supermarkets, cafes, and hospitals. At that time, it really felt like a dream. And then they all became true."*

Despite the spatial segregation, many old residents of Göktürk stress that they have more opportunities than in the past now, from better school opportunities for their children to the variety of products available. On the other hand, the lack of a chain supermarket was a main issue for the women of Ağaçlı as they are those who think about the household economy and shopping. Such expectations matter. Murat described the previous situation in the square of Göktürk, how they used to change their boots full of mud, to go to the city; compared to how now they buy the sneakers their children demand, adapting to the new lifestyle they had been exposed to. Juxtaposing the muddy shoes and the branded sneakers might easily signify the promise of emancipation from the backward rural life. Meanwhile, Zafer made an interesting remark: *"We have defended Ağaçlı to remain as it is, but sometimes I get sick of it and say it would be great if there was a café here so that I spend some quality time."*

This desire for inclusion is related to the fact that the extraction in the area did not start with the megaprojects, hence it is the realization of a long promise. The residents of Ağaçlı and Göktürk emphasize the continuity in the extractive activities since the 1990s as Istanbul's neoliberal expansion took off. People in Göktürk often draw attention to the well-connectedness the highway has brought compared to how the lorry traffic in Göktürk was awful before the highway, and how it fixed the minor roads. This pride is not experienced on behalf of the state, but gains meaning in people's everyday lives. Ibrahim, who owns a dairy shop in Göktürk was always referring to getting rid of being the backdoor of the central city anymore: *"Yes, such projects might be a bit bad for nature, but human needs come first."* Of course, the inclusion of Göktürk also comes together with the stiffening of the hinterland position of Ağaçlı, it is the ironic aspect of their relationship. Nevertheless, in both settlements, people often support incorporation attempts with the expectation of better service in terms of garbage collection or infrastructural improvement. When Göktürk gained municipality status in 1993 in line with the neoliberal vision of the urban government (Esen and Rieniets 2008, 96), in fact, there was bottom-up pressure demonstrated by a referendum that resulted in "Yes" by 92 percent. Göktürk residents I talked to still refer to it cheerfully referring to how the conditions improved. Similarly, when the status of Ağaçlı turned into a neighborhood in 2012, most of the population had positive opinions about that due to the expectation of better infrastructural services. But what they found were infrastructural disruptions during the megaproject construction. Therefore, it is not hard to understand why Ibrahim is content with the clean proper roads the highway provides.

In conclusion, the residents' negotiations through infrapolitical means and their tangible and intangible desires demonstrate the multifaceted nature of urbanization from below. Despite the potency of state power, people have been shaping the peripheries through demands and political pressure for many decades. However, there are also clashes and tensions between these

desires. Göktürk was loaded with the promise of urbanization, can mega infrastructure fulfill the same promise for the people of Ağaçlı? The discussion will be the basis of the concluding section.

Conclusion: Infrastructures and Development for Whom?

On my very last visit in October, the lorry traffic in Ağaçlı had stopped. It turned out that a part of the road used for excavation was the title deed property of the Kutman family that operated the coal mine for several decades. The muhtar explained to me:

> *"The family's lawyer came and had their private property sealed off. Because the few people who have bought land here for investment purposes were also complaining about the dust and dirt, and the mess in the sea. They were influential in this legal action. Hence, excavation trucks can't use our road anymore. We can hope that it will stay like this. I wonder if this is a bargaining chip. What if Kutmans are expecting the companies to offer a share from the lucrative excavation business to let them use the road again?"*

The muhtar's suspicion points to how infrastructures expose and reproduce certain types of class inequalities. They must ally with or get support from certain types of people for a common cause, such as the closure of the road that has damned the village, but what if these allies have a larger field to play?

The whole urbanization trajectory of Göktürk and the implementation of the megaprojects in the last decade say a lot about the costs and benefits of urban development, and who gets to benefit from them. However, it is not a recent issue. In a group chat, Erdem was commenting on the relationship between the mining operators who are often land mafias, and Ağaçlı villagers in the past:

> *"All these years, people of Ağaçlı sold their lives for such small things. For example, a villager's daughter has a wedding, and this mining operator gives them gold as a present. Or someone else's son is assigned to an unfavorable location for military service, then this rich and powerful guy solves the issue with a single phone call. These fellow villagers were also saying, 'We brought home the bread thanks to them.' Yes, this is the minimum he could have done, he is making this money out of the whole village's property."*

This remark was among the most impressive that I have heard during my fieldwork. Although he emphasizes agency by saying "villagers selling their lives for small things", are these rewards small for the people who have little bargaining power against capital? How to

solve the puzzle of the uneven deal between the state, capital, and lower classes of the periphery in sharing the benefits of development? This unevenness might point to the limits of the agency and raise broader questions about why people pursue the ambitions that they pursue.

Class is a central issue when it comes to power. Just like it is central in the interests of the state in the form of facilitating capital exchange, I tried to show that it is significant for people to climb the class ladder or urban development ladder. These ladder metaphors are useful in laying the tensions within and between the settlements, revolving around the binaries of rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, or modern and traditional. Multiple informants from Ağaçlı have exposed these class and urbanization-related tensions between Ağaçlı and Göktürk, critically asking why for some locals of Göktürk working as a salaried gatekeeper of a gated community is necessarily better than being shepherds as they were two decades ago. However, for Göktürk residents, it also shows that the promise of urbanization goes beyond material benefits and touches on living a modern life, or even witnessing it.

This contradiction sometimes exposed the hypocrisy of the upper classes of Göktürk who are seeking to escape to a suburban utopia, then kicking away the class ladder. As a local of Göktürk who is in favor of the megaprojects, Ibrahim expressed this as:

> *"The latecomers of Göktürk say this all the time: 'Oh what happened here, Göktürk was beautiful and natural, but they have cut the trees for the megaprojects' Excuse me? Where did you come from? The nature changed here so that you could come and live in your houses with private pools and your children can play in the playgrounds."*

Especially, the advertisement of the gated communities in Göktürk as idyllic places, and the way that residents perceive their environment as secluded away from the problems of the core city in an environment where nature is *simulated* exclude two specific things: despised and feared social classes as well as the dirt and dust perceived as *bad nature* (Akbulut and Bartu Candan 2014, 288). I think Ibrahim's comment successfully exposes the

anxiety of these classes from being faced with these two things by questioning the reason why they chose to come to Göktürk if they loved nature this much. Leaving aside these class puzzles unsolved, to me, a major limitation of this thesis is that the story is calling for more attention on political ecology, as environmental destruction is very central to the megaprojects in Istanbul and anywhere else, as well as the contestations they raise, or how people frame it. Of course, I heard a myriad of things about how people perceive nature, but I could not go into the depths of it in the scope of this research.

Although my wish is to go beyond the conceptualization of top-down imposition of state power, and the idea of people being crushed under this bulldozer called the state, a question that persists is the possibility to raise a more organized claim to state power. It would require a more comprehensive approach to inequalities and injustices integral to urbanization and the distribution of urban rent. In the 1970s, gecekondu movements were central in raising such claims, however after the 1980 coup d'état and the broader global transitions, these movements increasingly lost legitimacy when we came to the 2000s (Erder 2014, 380). Then we know the oppressive turn after the Gezi. Nevertheless, a new wave of claims against the state power in Istanbul and beyond seems to be critical, especially given earthquake threat whose cataclysmic effects the country witnessed on the 6th of February 2023. If we can get out of this mega-ization, we can maybe approach infrastructures from a new angle.

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