THE PRODUCTION AND INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF TERRITORIAL STIGMATIZATION IN URBAN RENEWAL: A CASE STUDY OF ROMA NEIGHBORHOODS (SULUKULE AND KÜÇÜKBAKKALKÖY) IN ISTANBUL

''WE WERE HERE BEFORE THE SKYSCRAPERS''

By
Sergen Gül

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Supervisor: Tamara Steger

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MESPOM

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Sergen Gül, candidate for the MSc degree in Master of Science in Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management (MESPOM) declare herewith that the present thesis titled "The Production and Instrumentalization of Territorial Stigmatization in Urban Renewal: A Case Study Of Roma Neighborhoods (Sulukule And Küçükbakkalköy) in Istanbul" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how territorial stigmatization is produced, instrumentalized, and capitalized in the context of urban transformation, focusing on the historical Roma neighborhoods of Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy, located on two different continents of Istanbul. Centering on the current living conditions of Roma communities displaced approximately 15 years ago, the study adopts a qualitative multi-case analysis approach, drawing on interviews with experts and rights advocates (n=9), semi-structure interviews with displaced individuals (n=8), and a document analysis of relevant legal, institutional, and media documents.

Wacquant's cope with territorial stigma strategies from dissimulation to stigma inversion are empirically tested across both cases. Framed by theories of 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant), the 'state of exception' (Agamben), and 'creative destruction' (Harvey), the research demonstrates that territorial stigmatization is not merely a manifestation of socioeconomic exclusion, but also a deliberate governance technique and a tool for capitalist accumulation. The findings reveal that Roma individuals could not escape marginalizing effects even in their new settlement areas, and that the spatial persistence of stigma continues.

This study offers a unique and comparative perspective on territorial stigmatization theory within the Turkish context. As one of the first systematic applications of the theory in Roma neighborhoods, it makes meaningful conceptual and practical contributions to debates on spatial justice, racialized displacement, and neoliberal urbanism.

Keywords: *Territorial stigmatization, Urban transformation, Roma, Sulukule, Küçükbakkalköy*

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INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Based on this historical background, this thesis demonstrates that spatial inequalities within Roma settlements were constructed and that their built environment has been systematically weakened. It can also be inferred that the stigmatization of Roma has historical roots and has persisted through different periods and regimes.

Throughout history, Roma communities have been identified with a nomadic lifestyle across various geographies and often associated as groups that devalue space. During the Ottoman Empire, it is known that nomadic Roma were labeled as "ehl-i fesâd" (people of corruption), "fısk-u fücûr" (immorality and debauchery), and "kavm-i şenâat" (a vile nation), and were sought to be controlled through various public order regulations. Additionally, “the state's inability to effectively tax these itinerant and nomadic communities branded them not only as a public order problem but also as ‘idle’ communities that failed to contribute to state revenues” (Gürboğa 2016, 123). A similar approach was seen in the Byzantine Empire, where, as in the examplee of Sulukule, Roma communities were forced to live outside the city walls, often in areas considered worthless and problematic in terms of security. Roma, who were not seen as part of the spaces belonging to the ruling and noble classes, were even subjected to "Gypsy zones" that restricted interaction with these groups (Ginio 2004)

Focusing specifically on Turkey, Roma settlements located in peripheral urban neighborhoods have, over time, become part of the inner city due to urban expansion, industrialization, and population growth, thus entering the economic and spatial boundaries of the city (Gezicier et al. 2024). However, during this process, rather than integrating with the city, Roma spaces in the city center have become notable for their economic and spatial inequalities and have turned into areas deprived of public services and urban rights(Fatoş Kaytan, Göktan Yıldırım et al.

2023). Similar to French suburbanization and American ghettoization, Roma neighborhoods have come to be depicted as the "other spaces of the city," centers of illegal activity and crime-ridden decay (Gezicier et al. 2024). As these areas gained value over time, the concept of "criminalized spatiality" was used to justify power transfer in favor of elites, making Roma neighborhoods targets of unjust urban transformation projects. The first target was Sulukule, one of the oldest known Roma settlements. This historic site, protected by UNESCO and home to Roma culture for ten centuries, became the subject of one of Turkey's first urban transformation projects. In contrast, Law No. 5366, which was meant to ensure the preservation and restoration of historic urban structures, was used to destroy the thousand-year-old Roma neighborhood. The project, completed just before Istanbul became the 2010 European Capital of Culture, resulted in the displacement of Roma people and the gentrification (or "gacolization") of their spaces.

Over the past 18 years, many Roma neighborhoods located near city centers and with high investment potential have become the focal point of urban transformation projects. These projects, often aiming at the "de-Romanization" of city centers, have led to the replacement of historical Roma neighborhoods with "new financial centers (Al Jazeera Türk 2014)" as in the example of Küçükbakkalköy, and "luxurious apartments with swimming pools (Yapı 2013)," as in Sarıgöl. In these transformations, various justifications have been offered, such as water basin protection in Sapanca's Gazipaşa neighborhood or landslide risk in Sarıgöl (Evrensel 2014). However, these areas were redeveloped with high-rise luxury housing.

Almost all urban transformation projects are decided in partnership between TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of Turkey), the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change, as well as municipalities, followed by so-called reconciliation efforts with residents. These reconciliation efforts are often manipulated through emergency expropriation decisions. In other words, declarations of disaster-risk zones (mostly by citing earthquake risk)

and urgent expropriation orders hinder active participation in transformation processes and negatively affect reconciliation. As seen in the urban transformation of Bursa's Kamberli neighborhood, homes in Roma areas were expropriated with meager compensation, which was directly deposited into the bank accounts of property owners (Kamberler Blog 2007). This highlights serious procedural violations in environmental justice concerning the related projects.

Each new urban transformation project planned in Roma neighborhoods is publicized with headlines such as "a first in Turkey, no one will be harmed, even tenants will become homeowners." However, these projects often result in the displacement of residents, the fragmentation of existing social networks, and ultimately, in victimization rather than fulfillment of promises. Instead of creating safer and more sustainable living spaces for Roma communities, these transformation projects deepen their socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities. In other words, this situation, which reinforces social exclusion, also leads to greater economic, social, and environmental fragility for Roma people.

To elaborate further, even before urban transformation begins, these neighborhoods, known as degraded areas, begin to face limitations in access to public services and serious discrimination in municipal service delivery. During the transformation process, Roma communities face dispossession and displacement, as well as increased environmental risks, such as waste accumulation, rubble piles, and asbestos exposure. After the transformation, individuals who face discrimination in the rental housing market for being Roma are systematically excluded from the real estate sector. As a result, they are pushed to the city outskirts, living in makeshift shelters or housing without access to basic services like electricity and water, and are more vulnerable to environmental conditions like heat, cold, wind, and rain. All these show that environmental risks have been and continue to be disproportionately imposed on Roma communities during these project processes.

Along with urban transformation, Roma people displaced from city centers are sometimes relocated to TOKİ housing on the outskirts. These mass housing areas, where spatial segregation becomes apparent, gradually turn into new ghettos. These buildings either entirely or largely inhabited by Roma differ significantly from other TOKİ residences in terms of construction, materials used, and environmental cleanliness (see: Samsun 200 Evler) (Cumhuriyet 2011). As was the case in pre-transformation Roma neighborhoods, these new settlements also experience problems in accessing public services. Moreover, Roma residents in TOKİ housing face high installment payments and maintenance fees; Roma people who previously worked informal jobs in city centers now face threats to their livelihoods. In addition to transportation costs, these new settlements are neither accessible nor usable in a way that meets Roma needs. For example, there is no storage space in TOKİ housing for Roma involved in recycling work, nor are there facilities like stables for Roma engaged in cart driving or animal husbandry. This clearly shows that urban transformation projects prioritize the needs of capital over those of Roma communities.

From exactly this perspective, this thesis examines how spatial stigmatization is produced, instrumentalized, and capitalized upon in the urban transformation cases of Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy. At the same time, it aims to analyze the coping and resistance strategies developed by Roma people displaced approximately twenty years ago—strategies as defined in Wacquant's (2011) theory—against urban transformation and stigmatization. Finally, the research aims to investigate the current situation of displaced Roma communities and the long-term impacts of urban transformation in these projects.

The thesis consists of six main chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical framework and focuses on the relationship between space, identity and stigmatization. The second chapter

discusses the research design and methodological approach, providing details on the research questions, case selection criteria, data collection methods, and analytical framework of the research. The third chapter presents the case studies in a chronological and descriptive manner, providing the reader with contextual background information on Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy. The fourth chapter examines the legal and political frameworks regulating housing and urban transformation processes in Turkey through document analysis, with a particular focus on the effects of these regulations on Roma people. The fifth chapter analyses the empirical findings of the study using thematic coding based on Wacquant's conceptual tools. Finally, the sixth chapter summarises and compares the main findings of the thesis, discusses broader social impacts, and presents recommendations for future research and policy development processes.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SPACE AND STIGMATIZATION

This chapter examines the relationship between space, social identity, and stigmatisation, which form the theoretical basis of the thesis, and draws on the theoretical contributions of Goffman, Bourdieu, Agamben, Wacquant, and Tyler to reveal the evolution of stigmatisation from an individual experience to a spatialised process, i.e., territorial stigmatisation. Considering the relevant theories, the discursive, action-oriented, and structural dynamics that lead to the definition of urban areas where Roma people live in Turkey as 'exceptional zones where the law is suspended' are discussed. Furthermore, the socio-political mechanisms that lead to the production, instrumentalization, and capitalisation of territorial stigmatisation in urban transformation projects are examined, and a theoretical foundation is provided for understanding the dynamics of urban transformation and displacement of Roma in Turkey.

1.1 Race, the Stigma of Place, and the Urban Roma

The formation of social identity is directly linked not only to an individual's self-perception and social affiliations but also to the physical and symbolic spaces they inhabit. According to Guy Di Méo's theory of space (2002) , identity is nourished by the continuity between the individual and space. This continuity gains strength through the reciprocal relationship established by individuals with their living environments. Di Méo emphasizes that social identities should be considered not merely as sociological categories but as socio-spatial forms. In his view, space is not only a carrier of identity but also a constitutive and reinforcing element of identity itself.

In this context, Alain Touraine's analyses of social structures offer a broader framework regarding the significance of space in identity construction. Touraine (1995) interprets the

transformation in modern societies as a shift from a vertically structured system centered on class conflicts and labor exploitation, to a horizontally stratified society marked by fragmentation and exclusion. In a sense, space should be understood not only as a physical entity but also as a domain where power operates, authority is produced, social relations are shaped, and identities are constructed. In other words, space serves as a stage where social inequalities are both rendered visible and reproduced.

The most visible manifestations of socio-spatial inequalities are found in settlements such as suburbs, ghettos, slums, and shantytowns, which are products of global urbanization. Although there are similarities between these spaces and the gecekondu phenomenon that developed in Turkey following industrialization, significant differences can be observed in terms of their formation processes and functions(Tatlıdil 1992).

The concept of the ghetto was first used in 10th-century Venice to refer to areas where Jews were forcibly settled; over time, it came to describe areas inhabited by ethnic or religious minorities excluded from city centers. While these structures initially contributed to the preservation of cultural identity, in the long term, they have exacerbated social exclusion (Turan 1997)

The term slum, on the other hand, is used in Anglo-American literature to describe socioeconomically disadvantaged areas characterized by low-quality housing, limited access to public services, and high crime rates. Unlike ghettos, slums tend to have a more heterogeneous composition (Türkdoğan 1996, Altuntaş 2001))

The term "varoş" originates from Hungarian and is generally used to describe both formal and informal settlements located on the peripheries of cities(Bozkulak 2005) While this term is used in post-industrial Europe to refer to the urban fringes inhabited by rural migrant working

classes facing intense social exclusion, in Turkey, it encompasses a broader spatiality, including inner-city areas where impoverished groups reside(Etöz 2000, Yücel 2016)

In contrast, gecekondu settlements in Turkey emerged as a result of rural-to-urban transition, acquiring a distinct character oriented towards social mobility, urban integration, and access to public services(Keleş 1972, Tatlıdil 1992, Türkdoğan 1996). In this regard, gecekondu should be seen less as a marginalized space and more as a spatial expression of migrants' search for belonging and upward mobility. Furthermore, the use of the term "varoş" as a substitute for gecekondu has been contested in the literature, as the adoption of this foreign term is considered indicative of a linguistic codification that frames residents as "foreign" or "other," representing a discursive manifestation of spatial exclusion (Etöz 2000)

In understanding the spatial exclusion and social marginalization faced by Roma communities, Giorgio Agamben's concepts of "camp" and "homo sacer" have increasingly become essential theoretical tools in critical urban studies. This dynamic is thoroughly examined in Egemen Yılgür's (2018) article "'Bir Biyopolitik Süreç Olarak Mekansal Damgalama: Hacihüsrev Örneği (Territorial stigmatization as a Biopolitical Process: The Case of Hacihüsrev)." Referring to Sigona (2005), the article asserts that the construction of camps for Roma is underpinned by cultural prejudices concerning their allegedly nomadic nature, thereby legitimizing social segregation. According to Sigona, Agamben's concept of the camp as a "space where the law is suspended" is particularly apt for explaining Roma settlements. In these spaces, unlawful interventions by state authorities transform them into spatial manifestations of a permanent "state of exception." In other words, in areas inhabited by Roma, fundamental rights such as property ownership, housing, and access to essential services can be systematically violated, and policies enacted by local and central authorities may perpetuate this condition. These spaces, where law is applied selectively and conditionally, become focal points for the criminalization of Roma communities, social exclusion, and territorial

stigmatization. Consequently, the camp space emerges not only as a physical location but as a symbol of the structural inequalities, precarity, and perpetual vulnerability to intervention experienced by Roma. Similar views are supported by Marinaro (2009), who argues that camps force Roma into zones of exception, subject to state intervention yet devoid of legal protection.

The state of exception applied to Roma, the human rights violations they endure, and the forms of exclusion they face can be interpreted through Romain Cames' (2013) notion of the "homo sacer." This figure elucidates how the spaces inhabited by Roma are transformed into "spaces of exception," where law is systematically suspended and fundamental rights are rendered invisible. These exceptional conditions are not merely temporary measures but evolve into normalized administrative practices over time.

Moreover, drawing on Wacquant's (2008) concepts of "ghetto" and "hyperghetto," Cames notes that hyperghettoization accelerates marginalization, producing a permanent practice of exclusion in the camp space, where "anything becomes possible." Illuzzi (2010) situates this process within a historical context, highlighting how, in Germany and Italy, Roma have been cyclically criminalized, reduced to the status of "natural suspects" through administrative and police measures.

On the other hand, recent studies have taken the arguments on this issue even further. For example, Creţan, Kupka et al. (2022) revealed that Roma communities in the Czech Republic and Romania are exposed to racialized urban encounters in stigmatized neighborhoods, emphasizing that stigmatized identities are reproduced through exclusionary practices in everyday interactions. In 2023, Vincze, Bădiţă et al. (2023) and Hossu argued that cultural prejudices form the basis of spatial injustice in Roma settlements across Europe, and that local governments are the very agents producing this injustice. Maloutas, Frangopoulos et al. (2024), in their study on Roma settlements in Greece, suggested that spatial proximity to non-Roma

communities does not always lead to social integration; on the contrary, administrative neglect and structural discrimination may further increase social distance.

In Turkey, these exceptional practices targeting Roma spaces range from unjust urban transformation projects to the unequal provision of municipal services and the concentration of police interventions in Roma settlements. However, the most conspicuous way in which space is rendered exceptional is through lynching attacks directed at Roma neighborhoods. The first reported lynching attack against Roma in Turkey occurred in 1970 in the Bayramiç district of Çanakkale. Shaped by the region's ongoing dynamics of economic competition and social stratification, this incident targeted Roma individuals working in the transportation sector. Baseless allegations such as "Gypsies harassed Turkish girls" were used in fueling the conflict, and these narratives turned the incident into a societal lynching targeting all residents of the Roma neighborhood (Gezicier et al. 2024).

Similar narratives appeared during the 2006 Şuhut incident. Accusations of child abuse were attributed to all Roma, paving the way for the burning and attacks on their homes. The legal processes, as in the Bayramiç case, ended in impunity. The Selendi events, which began at the end of 2009 and lasted until early 2010, were sparked when a non-Roma coffeehouse owner said, "No tea for Gypsies." Following the ensuing altercation, a group of over 1,000 people marched toward the Roma neighborhood chanting religious slogans, causing damage to Roma homes, businesses, and vehicles. Hundreds of Roma were subjected to forced relocation by state authorities. In subsequent years, similar lynching attacks occurred in 2013 in the Güneştepe neighborhood of Osmangazi, Bursa over an "animal waste" issue, and in İznik the same year due to a "right of way" dispute (Gezicier et al. 2024).

In all these cases, large crowds targeted Roma spaces while chanting anti-Gypsy slogans, and most of these incidents ended without any legal consequences. Another striking common

element is the insufficient intervention of public authorities. With an approach that views Roma spaces as zones of exception, local governments, law enforcement, and judicial institutions failed to adequately intervene; in some cases, these institutions were even alleged to have supported the attacks. In other words, these events facilitated the displacement of Roma, stigmatized in society as "dangerous others", from their spaces, leading to the de-Romanization of these areas or serving as an intimidation tactic for those who remained (Gezicier et al. 2024).

In conclusion, as stated above, space in the construction of social identity is more than just a backdrop, it is a place where social identity is produced and developed. Moreover, it is an active element in which prejudices against identity, exclusionary attitudes, and hate attacks are also constructed. Both the transformation of urban areas and informal settlements, and the conversion of neighborhoods inhabited by Roma into "zones of exception," reveal that space is not only a stage for social inequalities but also a means through which these inequalities are produced. The lynching attempts targeting Roma neighborhoods represent one of the most visible forms of this state of exception and demonstrate how spatially based discrimination has become institutionalized. The following section will address the part of the theoretical framework of the study, focusing on how stigma transforms into territorial stigma.

1.2 From Stigma to Territorial Stigmatization

Although there is no absolute consensus in the literature regarding the concept of stigma, the theoretical foundations of this field have been largely shaped by the works of Erving Goffman(1963). In his seminal book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman defines stigma as a characteristic that devalues an individual's social worth, marking them as deviating from what is considered a "normal" and "whole" person. This leads the individual to be perceived socially as deficient, tainted, and excluded (Goffman, 1963: 3).

Goffman categorizes stigma under three main headings (1963: 33):

- Various physical deformities of the body,
- Individual character flaws perceived as weak will, unnatural passions, or deserving of oppression, such as mental disorders, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicide attempts, and radical political behavior,
- Ethnic stigmas based on race, nationality, and religion, which can be transmitted across generations through kinship.

Pierre Bourdieu (1989: 21), through his concept of "symbolic power," argues that the effectiveness of symbolic power lies in its ability to ensure the misrecognition of the arbitrary foundations of social divisions and hierarchies, leading the dominated to internalize and accept their position.

Wacquant (2007), synthesizing the perspectives of both theorists, posits that stigmatization now extends not only to individuals but also to space, arguing that this "blemish of place" produces significant social consequences. This synthesis leads to the concept of "territorial stigmatization." This concept represents the most pronounced symbolic feature of social exclusion defined as "advanced marginality," which has emerged with the fragmentation of wage labor in modern metropolises (Wacquant 2007, Wacquant 2008, Wacquant 2010). In particular, the presentation of specific neighborhoods in post-industrial metropolises as zones reserved for "social pariahs" illustrates that territorial stigmatization is not merely symbolic, but also materially impacts those residing in stigmatized spaces (Wacquant, 2008: 169).

Wacquant, Slater and Pereira (2014) expands Bourdieu's idea that symbolic power shapes social space by cutting across it, by emphasizing the emotional and social significance of place. In other words, place acts as an instrument shaping the formation or dissolution of collectives through social struggles and conflicts, legitimizing their claims over the built environment.

As Wacquant, Pereira, and Slater (2014: 1273-1275) indicate, contemporary processes of territorial stigmatization differ from historical narratives about poor neighborhoods in at least five ways. First, modern territorial stigmatization has partially detached itself from traditional markers such as poverty, lower-class ethnicity, deteriorated housing, moral decay, and street crime. This detachment has led to the use of generalized labels that define these areas as "threats," such as the French "banlieues" or the English "sink estates." Second, territorial stigmatization today has become widespread on a national and democratic scale, facilitated by media and popular culture, making certain urban areas widely known and despised across all social classes (for instance, some areas being nationally coded as "urban hellholes") (Wacquant, 2007: 67).

Third, these areas are perceived as centers of social disintegration, seen as entirely fragmented and disorganized compared to former industrial ghettos. Fourth, these areas are selectively stigmatized through racism and cultural differences, with their populations often portrayed as more exotic and sinister, constructing them as an "excluded" group. Lastly, these neighborhoods are subjected to policing and punitive measures aimed at eliminating problems and restoring order, often through quasi-military interventions(Wacquant, Slater et al. 2014)

Furthermore, through territorial stigmatization, poverty is no longer a temporary condition; with the fragmentation of wage labor, the detachment of marginalized neighborhoods from the economic system, and the transformation of the welfare state into a coercive apparatus, poverty has become a permanent condition, described as the structural reality of advanced marginality (Wacquant, 2007: 67). This transformation is analyzed particularly through the examples of the American ghetto and the French banlieue, explaining the spatial and social dynamics that underpin the formation of the precariat.

As Wacquant (2007: 67) highlights, the "penalized spaces" (Pétonnet, 1982) that become entrenched in the urban fabric are subjected over time to an intensifying "discourse of stigmatization," which permeates everyday social interactions as well as media, political, bureaucratic, and even academic discourses. These discourses, rather than being exceptional, deliberately generate a space-specific stigma that compounds existing social stigmas related to poverty, ethnicity, or immigrant status.

Moreover, territorial stigmatization, resembling Goffman's (1963) category of stigmas based on "race, nation, and religion," can be transmitted across generations (Wacquant, 2007: 67). However, unlike Goffman's individual stigma, territorial stigma can sometimes be mitigated or concealed through geographical mobility.

As Wacquant (2007) states, territorial stigmatization is not merely an external labeling process but a phenomenon that deeply affects daily life practices and interpersonal relationships. For instance, individuals living in the impoverished suburbs of Paris often act with an internalized sense of shame due to the negative image associated with their residence, resorting to strategies such as hiding their address, avoiding hosting guests, or using defensive language when discussing their place of living. As a result, their self-perception and social interactions are under a constant, though often invisible, pressure (Pétonnet, 1982: 148).

Territorial stigmatization is not confined to social perceptions constructed through language; it is also shaped by public policies. When these residential areas are defined through media and political discourse as "lawless zones" or "outlaw estate," such representations legitimize special interventions that deviate from legal and administrative norms. As Wacquant (2007: 69) illustrates, the urban interventions targeting São João de Deus in Porto, a neighborhood predominantly inhabited by Roma and Cape Verdean communities, serve as a concrete example of this process. Labeled in the media as a "drug hypermarket," the neighborhood became the

focus of police operations under the guise of urban renewal, with addicts, the unemployed, and the poor being displaced. In this way, territorial stigmatization has become a tool that reproduces social exclusion and displacement.

In some cases, as seen in Wacquant's examples of the American ghetto and the French banlieue, the living conditions of stigmatized and segregated neighborhoods are romanticized. Wacquant notes that a "golden age" where life was sweet and social relations harmonious and fulfilling never actually existed in these areas (Wacquant 2007: 70).

Communities living in marginalized and spatially stigmatized neighborhoods face serious barriers to employment. Excluded from the labor market, with little hope of finding stable, long-term jobs, residents often survive through temporary and low-wage work. To sustain themselves, these individuals may resort to personal coping strategies such as "self-provisioning," underground labor, the informal economy, or even criminal activities. However, rather than alleviating broader issues of precarity, these strategies tend to reinforce existing inequalities in industrial societies. The distribution of such informal labor is not coincidental; rather, it is a product of the inadequate social policies prevailing in these neighborhoods (Wacquant 2007)

In summary, territorial stigmatisation can be understood as the extension of the theorized process of stigmatization from individuals to spaces, whereby spaces become a focal point and mechanism of social exclusion reproduction. Furthermore, following Wacquant's theory, this section explains how stigmatised spaces are shaped by policies, discourses, and structural injustices that unjustly affect historically marginalised groups such as the Roma. The following section explores the production and instrumentalisation of stigma.

1.2.1 The Production and Instrumentalization of Stigmatization

As discussed in the previous section, territorial stigmatization is not a random or spontaneous phenomenon; rather, it is actively produced as a tool by political actors, the media, and capital interests.

In her 2013 work *Revolting Subjects*, Imogen Tyler argues that stigmatization has become a central strategy of neoliberal governance. Focusing on various groups relegated to the status of "waste" by neoliberal policies such as asylum seekers, irregular migrants, politically and economically marginalized youth, Roma and Traveller communities, and people with disabilities, Tyler posits that neoliberal governmentality generates an intersectional marginality both in Britain and on a global scale (Tyler 2013: 8). Through what she terms "social abjection," emotions like stigma and disgust are deployed as instruments of governance, generating public consent for the restriction of social policies. Simultaneously, these groups, despite being excluded, are rendered functional in defining the boundaries and authority of the state, and are retained within the system through a logic of "inclusive exclusion." In Tyler's terms, these groups represent a surplus that threatens internal order but cannot be entirely expelled from the system, as their existence is necessary for delineating the limits of the state and legitimizing the prevailing power structure (Tyler 2013: 20).

Alistair Sisson (2021: 408) contends that territorial stigmatization is not merely the imposition of a negative image onto a place, but a process that constitutes that place through discourse and practice. In this process, stigma functions as a tool of governance; it conceals the structural causes of social inequalities, legitimizes them, and enables the reproduction of space. By portraying stigmatized individuals as the source of social problems, the grounds are laid for harsher interventions and the transformation of space (Tyler 2013).

Kirsteen Paton's study of the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow highlights how stigmatization processes emerge in targeted impoverished neighborhoods (Paton 2018) By examining stigmatization from the perspective of those who stigmatize rather than the stigmatized that is, "from above, Paton focuses on the role of public institutions and private sector actors in profiting from stigmatization. In this context, the question becomes: who benefits from stigmatization? Here, stigma functions not only as a mechanism of social exclusion but also as an integral component of capital accumulation, positioned as a technique of governance that legitimizes private capital interests through state-supported projects.

Similarly, David Harvey (2008: 9) argues that cities are restructured through initiatives driven by finance and the private sector to sustain capital accumulation; a process that often results in the displacement of the poor and politically marginalized groups under the guise of "creative destruction." According to Harvey, this transformation represents a form of violence that reshapes the social fabric (Harvey, 2008: 9). However, various social movements have emerged in response, advocating for alternative visions of urban life and resisting exclusionary transformation practices. These movements demand that urban spaces be reorganized not according to capital, but based on social justice (Harvey, 2008: 11).

In summary, in the production and instrumentalization of stigmatization, the state apparatus may simultaneously contract social support mechanisms while becoming a punitive, regulatory, and disciplinary force over space. Thus, urban transformation projects are deployed to eliminate problematic urban areas and present them to an elite class; these projects should not be viewed solely as physical interventions into space, but also as social engineering initiatives. Furthermore, the strategy of creating "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2008: 11) becomes a key tool in the orientation of capital towards urban space, and territorial stigmatization serves both ideological and economic functions within this context.

The transformation processes of Roma neighborhoods in Turkey must be considered within this general framework. Territorial stigmatization offers a critical theoretical lens through which to interpret urban transformation policies applied in historically marginalized Roma neighborhoods which are communities long subjected to the stigma of being "Gypsies." This framework enables an analysis that goes beyond physical transformation, incorporating the historical continuity of stigmatization, social exclusion, political under-representation, and cultural erasure experienced by these groups in Turkey.

This study explores how stigmatization has been produced and used strategically by different actors involved in state-led urban transformation projects in the historic Roma neighborhoods of Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy in Istanbul. Using Loïc Wacquant's theory of territorial stigmatization as a framework, the research also examines the full spectrum of coping strategies identified by Wacquant (2011b)—from submission to resistance—including ''dissimulation, mutual distancing and elaboration of microdifferences, lateral denigration, retreat into the private (family) sphere, exit, studied indifference, defense of neighborhood (individual or collective), and stigma inversion (hyperbolic claiming)''.

Moreover, by examining the commonalities between these three cases, the study seeks to provide a framework that reveals the specific forms of displacement in urban transformation processes targeting Roma neighborhoods in Turkey, how these projects are presented to the affected communities, and how they are marketed and legitimized to capital interests—thus addressing a gap in the literature. In this context, drawing on David Harvey's theory of "creative destruction" and Kirsteen Paton's approach of analyzing stigmatization "from above," the study discusses how public institutions and private sector actors managing these processes derive profit from stigmatization. Additionally, based on Alistair Sisson's theory that views stigmatization as a tool of governance, it examines how spatial transformation is legitimized (Tyler, 2013).

Furthermore, the study also analyzes how Roma neighborhood residents respond to territorial stigmatization during urban transformation, their coping mechanisms, and forms of resistance. By tracking the conditions of Roma communities in new residential areas, their strategies of struggle, and evolving forms of stigmatization over the 15 years following processes of gentrification and displacement in these three cases, the study aims to offer a unique contribution to the literature on territorial stigmatization. The following section will present research design and methodology, including how the study solves the problem that was established in the theoretical framework, as well as data collection methods, selection of fieldwork, and ethical principles.

CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The second chapter of the thesis presents the epistemological foundations, research questions, and methodological tools used to examine the processes of territorial stigmatization and displacement in Roma neighborhoods affected by urban transformation in Istanbul. Multiple case studies, semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis form the methodological design and analytical framework of the research. The chapter also details how data were collected, interpreted, and thematically analyzed through an analytical framework inspired by Wacquant's theory of territorial stigmatization. In addition, it addresses the rationale behind the selection of case studies, ethical considerations, and the academic contributions of the research.

2.1 Research Questions, Objectives, and Academic Contribution

2.1.1 Research Questions

1. How has territorial stigmatization been produced, instrumentalized and capitalized through urban transformation in the cases of Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy?

2. How have the Roma communities in Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy, who have been subjected to territorial stigmatization and displacement, responded to these processes socially and politically, and to what extent do their coping and resistance practices align with the strategies identified by Loïc Wacquant ranging from dissimulation to stigma inversion?

3. What are the current social, economic, and spatial conditions of the displaced Roma communities following urban transformation, and what are the long-term social impacts of this transformation?

2.2 Research Objectives

1. Based on these case studies, to analyze how territorial stigmatization has been produced in Roma neighborhoods in Turkey, and how this process has been instrumentalized and capitalized through urban transformation projects, with particular attention to the analysis of relevant policies and legal frameworks
2. To examine the social, cultural, and political resistance strategies developed by Roma neighborhood residents in response to territorial stigmatization, and assess the impact of these strategies within the transformation processes.
3. To investigate the current circumstances of displaced Roma communities and discuss the long-term effects of urban transformation.

2.3 Significance and Contribution of the Research

There is currently no comprehensive study in the literature that addresses the transformation processes in the neighborhoods of Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy collectively, and analyzes these two cases holistically from the perspective of territorial stigmatization. In this respect, this thesis constitutes one of the first research endeavors in Turkey to critically engage with the concept of territorial stigmatization through the lens of Roma neighborhoods. Moreover, existing literature on urban transformation projects affecting Roma communities has generally focused on isolated cases; comparative analyses of these processes and the dynamics of stigmatization have been largely neglected.

For instance, there is a significant lack of studies examining the resistance strategies developed by Roma communities against these transformation processes, as well as the long-term spatial impacts of such transformations. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill an important gap in the

literature by tracking the conditions of Roma in their new living environments over a period exceeding 15 years, and by analyzing the long-term effects of territorial stigmatization.

Accordingly, this research represents a valuable resource for academics working in the fields of urban studies, environmental and spatial justice, Roma studies, and human rights, as well as for urban planners, public policymakers, civil society organizations, and, most critically, for the Roma communities directly affected by these processes.

2.4 Methodology

Due to the complexity and multidimensional nature of the territorial stigmatization, displacement, and gentrification experiences of Roma communities in the context of urban transformation—experiences that cannot be reduced to numerical data—this thesis adopts a qualitative approach aimed at understanding relationships, causal connections, and underlying social dynamics. Qualitative research, as a method based on meaning-making and aimed at comprehending social phenomena within their natural contexts (Yıldırım and Simsek 1999), was crucial for capturing the contextual depth of the study. An additional key factor influencing this choice was the presence of three relatively under-researched urban transformation case studies (Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy). Multiple case studies are particularly suitable for detailed understanding of lesser-known phenomena and for extending existing theoretical frameworks (Yin, 2009: 19), as well as for incorporating multiple levels of analysis, making them an effective methodological tool (Eisenhardt, 1989: 537). The use of a multiple case study approach allowed each neighborhood's transformation process to be examined within its own historical, social, and spatial context, while also facilitating comparative analysis to uncover shared dynamics, thus enabling a multifaceted exploration of Roma experiences with spatial transformation and stigmatization.

2.5 Case Selection Criteria

Specific criteria guided the inclusion of Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy neighborhoods in this research. The primary criterion was that all two are recognized as historic Roma neighborhoods in Istanbul, with even the most recently established of them having over a century of history. While other ethnic groups (e.g., Kurdish, Pomak, Alevi) have also resided in these neighborhoods, the Roma population has been dominant, and these areas are commonly defined as Roma neighborhoods, exhibiting similar territorial stigmatization processes and serving as spaces of Roma culture and spatial memory.

Another key factor shaping the sampling strategy was that Istanbul represents the city where urbanization, neoliberalism, power relations, and territorial stigmatization are most deeply rooted in Turkey. Additionally, the fact that the urban transformation/squatter redevelopment processes in these neighborhoods commenced around the same period, and that at least 15 years have passed since their onset, constituted another selection criterion. The rationale for this was to analyze the current socio-economic conditions of the displaced Roma and to understand the long-term impacts of urban transformation. Furthermore, each of these projects involved different public institutions in state-supported initiatives, which include such as local municipalities, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, and TOKİ (Housing Development Administration), allowing for an analysis of the role of the state and various public actors in the construction of stigma. Based on these considerations, these three Roma settlements were selected as the case studies for the research.

2.6 Data Collection Methods

The research utilized various qualitative data collection tools, including multiple case studies, interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, which were integrated to construct a comprehensive dataset.

2.6.1 Primary Data

Expert and Advocacy-Oriented Semi-structured Interviews

The research employed purposive sampling. Participants were selected from individuals who had witnessed or been directly affected by the transformation processes in Sulukule, and Küçükbakkalköy or who had engaged in rights-based civil advocacy for fair outcomes. Nine individuals were interviewed through open-ended questions. The interviewees were listed in table 1

Table 1 Characteristics of Participants in Expert and Advocacy-Oriented Interviews

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Role / Affiliation
EA-01	57	Female	Founder of the Sulukule Platform; civil society activist (Hacer Foggo Yıldırım)
EA-02	55	Female	Photographer, filmmaker, and activist with the Sulukule Platform (Nejla Osseiran)
EA-03	30	Male	Romani rights activist focusing on urban transformation
EA-04	40	Male	Former activist in the Sulukule Platform; engaged in housing and Roma rights advocacy
EA-05	38	Female	A civil rights defenders working closely with displaced Roma from Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy

EA-06	35	Male	A civil rights defenders working closely with displaced Roma from Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy
EA-07	45	Male	President of a Romani Federation; former resident of Küçükbakkalköy
EA-08	35	Female	Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakkalköy
EA-09	55	Female	An author and a civil society activist specializing in displacement issues

The interviews were conducted via Zoom, each lasting between 50 and 120 minutes. With the participants' consent, audio recordings were made, transcribed, and used for thematic analysis.

Displacement-Oriented Semi-structured Interviews with Roma Individuals

In December 2023, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Roma individuals displaced from Küçükbakkalköy, in collaboration with the Association for Roma Memory Studies. These interviews, held in three different districts of Istanbul, followed a set of common themes while allowing participants to convey their unique experiences. The interviews were structured to understand the social, economic, and spatial conditions of Roma families in their new living environments. The interviews were lasting between 40 and 45 minutes. With the participants' consent, audio recordings were made, transcribed, and used for thematic analysis. The interviewees were listed in table 2

Table 2 Profiles of Displacement-Oriented Interview Participants

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Backround /Experience
DO-01	65	Female	Romani; displaced from Küçükbakköy
DO-02	55	Male	Abdal; displaced from Küçükbakköy
DO-03	33	Male	Romani; displaced from Küçükbakköy
DO-04	45	Female	Romani; displaced from Küçükbakköy
DO-05	38	Female	Romani; displaced from Küçükbakköy
DO-06	43	Male	Romani; displaced from Küçükbakköy
DO-07	25	Female	Romani; displaced from Küçükbakköy
DO-08	68	Male	Romani; displaced from Küçükbakköy

In addition, participant field observations were conducted in the new neighborhoods, with detailed notes taken regarding the physical environment, social relations, and community dynamics. A further interview was held with an organization working with these communities, and its findings contributed to the analysis.

In the case of Sulukule, information on the current situation of Roma communities was gathered through the perspectives of association representatives and activists. The uncertainty about where the displaced Roma were relocated made field visits difficult, which is noted as a limitation of the research.

2.6.2 Document Analysis

This research was conducted through document analysis in light of the legal and administrative frameworks regulating the urban transformation process in Turkey. This analytical method, which involves the identification, reading, note-taking, and evaluation of sources for a specific purpose (Sak, Sak et al. 2021), was used to examine legal texts such as Law No. 5366 on the

"Preservation by Renewal and Sustainable Use of Deteriorated Historical and Cultural Real Estate Assets" and Law No. 6306 on the "Transformation of Areas Under Disaster Risk." While these laws constitute the legal basis for most large-scale urban transformation projects, they have been reported to result in significant losses for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, particularly in the form of forced displacement and dispossession (Karaman 2013, Lovering and Türkmen 2011).

Following the document analysis, municipal council decisions, expropriation notices, zoning plans, and publicly available project documents were examined. These documents were evaluated through Bacchi (2009), critical policy analysis approach, focusing on the justifications provided for the interventions and the mechanisms through which rights violations were legitimized. In addition, national and international agreements related to the right to housing were also analyzed in this context.

Document analysis served as the primary method for examining legal and administrative texts, while the collected data were interpreted using critical policy analysis. This analytical framework offered a lens through which to understand the assumptions, exclusions, and power relations embedded in the documents. Rather than merely linking policies to specific situations or events, the study aimed to demonstrate how these policies legitimize existing inequalities and create conditions for new ones to emerge(Taylor 1997, Yanow 2000).

The methodological approaches used in the research design are presented in Table 3. As mentioned in the previous section, it was not possible to visit or conduct observations in the new settlements of the displaced Roma from the Sulukule case due to time and financial constraints. One of the major obstacles in this regard is the fact that former residents of Sulukule are now dispersed across multiple locations both within and outside of Istanbul, making it difficult to reach individuals. However, information about the current conditions of

the Sulukule victims was gathered from civil rights advocates who are still active in the field, and their testimonies have been taken as the primary source.

Table 3 Comparative Overview of Methods Applied in the Two Case Studies

Case Studies	Semi-structure Interviews	Document Analysis	Observation (Current Situation of Displaced People)
Sulukule	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	No (-)
Küçükbakkalköy	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)

2.6.3 Analytic Framework and Thematic Data Analysis Process: Operationalizing Wacquant's Strategies of Territorial Stigmatization

The collected data were evaluated through a deductive or theoretical thematic analysis, which is a 'top-down' strategy that tends to be driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in a specific area and allows for the testing of theories (Boyatzis 1998). This thematic structure was developed by aligning Wacquant's strategy typology with the interview statements obtained during the fieldwork. The thematic analysis method used throughout the research was based on the six-phase model defined by Braun & Clarke (2006), which includes: familiarization with the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing the report (Braun and Clarke 2006). After the interviews were coded, discourse patterns corresponding to each strategy were identified, and themes were derived from these codes. The themes matched with Wacquant's strategies are presented in Figure 1.

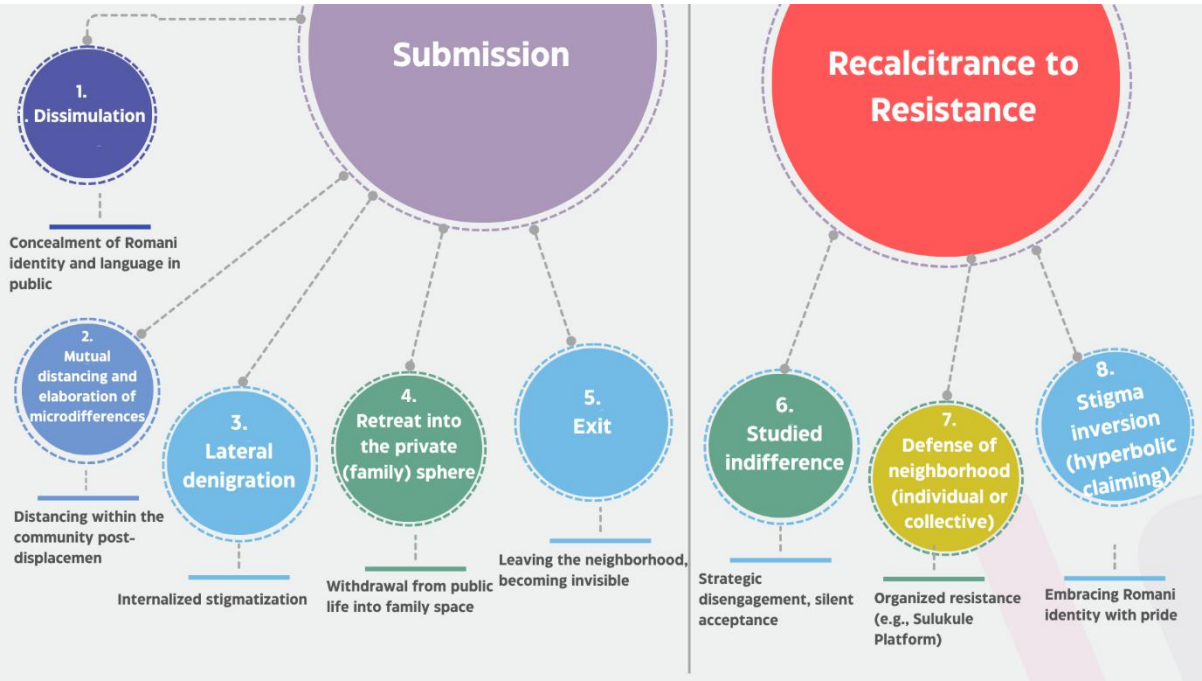


Figure 1 Presents the thematic categories identified in the data in relation to Wacquant's stigma management strategies.

In addition to these, themes such as territorial stigmatization, displacement, social exclusion, and forms of resistance were also included. The data obtained from participant observations and document analysis provided supportive insights within the framework of these themes. Furthermore, a critical policy analysis was conducted on media reports and official documents, examining how stigmatizing language and narratives were employed to justify and promote urban transformation policies.

In the following chapter, the case studies that form the foundation of this research are introduced in detail.

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES DESCRIPTION

The third chapter of the thesis provides a chronological and detailed account of the socio-spatial dynamics and operational process of urban transformation in Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy, two historic Roma neighbourhoods located on different continents in Istanbul. The district of the neighbourhoods is shown on the map in Figure 2.

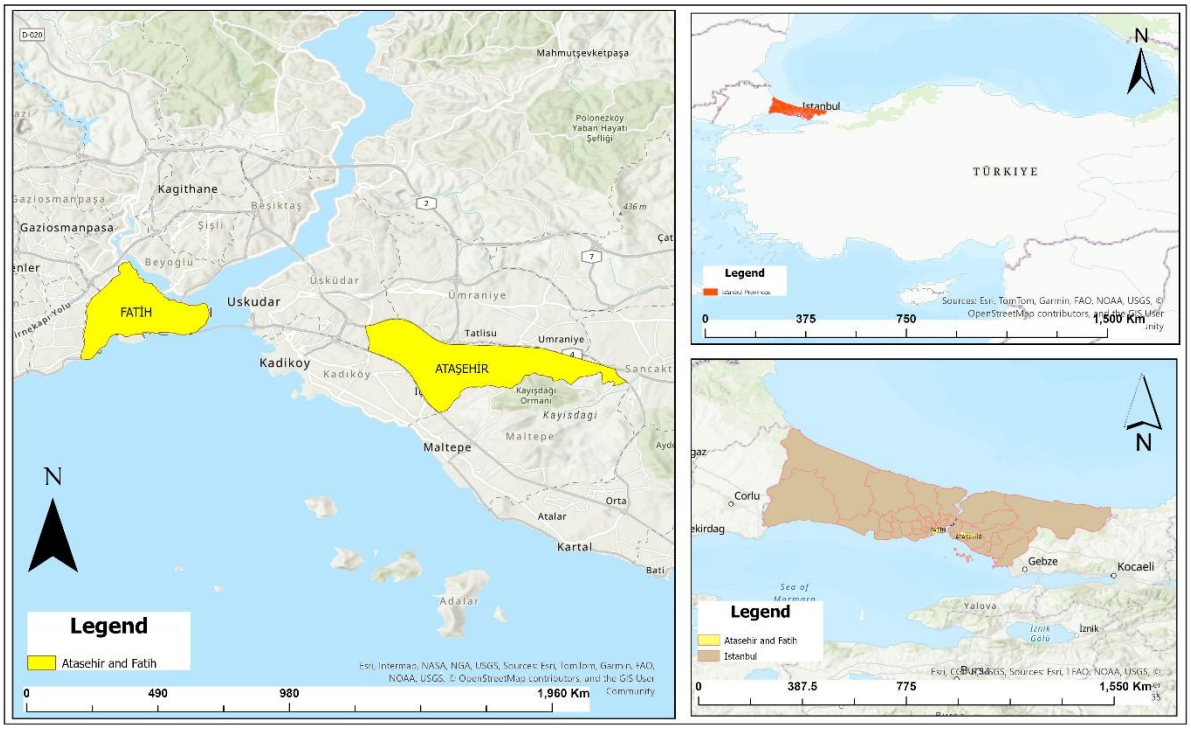


Figure 2 Study Area of Case Studies

These neighbourhoods, long recognised as important Roma settlements in Istanbul, were known as cultural memory spaces and cultural heritage sites for the Roman community. However, these neighbourhoods were demolished as part of urban transformation policies, and luxury residences and a financial centre were built in Küçükbakkalköy, while luxury residences with Ottoman-style architecture were built in Sulukule.

In this chapter, where the cases are introduced, the aim is to situate each case within the broader dynamics of spatial branding, thereby establishing a theoretical and historical foundation for the empirical analysis to be conducted in subsequent sections.

3.6 Brief History of Sulukule Case

Sulukule, one of Istanbul's most historic neighborhoods, is also regarded as one of the oldest Romani settlements in the world. Carrying significant cultural heritage for the Romani community, the area was officially designated as the Neslişah and Hatice Sultan Neighborhoods. Known by its unofficial name, "Sulukule" derives its name from a spring bubbling inside a cave near the city walls and a tower situated above that cave. Thus, the area came to be called "Sulukule" (Alpman 1997).

It is known that Romanis began living in Sulukule during the Byzantine era. However, in the 11th century, the Byzantine authorities declared Romanis to be "heretics" and relocated them outside the city walls, specifically to the area near present-day Edirnekapı. After the conquest of Istanbul, Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror brought the Romanis back to the region to help revitalize city life and commerce (Bianet 2005). While some Romanis were settled in Balat, others were dispersed throughout the vast area between Edirnekapı and Topkapı.

During the Ottoman period, Romanis excelled in crafts considered valuable at the time, such as tinsmithing and basket weaving. Sulukule became renowned for producing some of the best muleteers and basket weavers of the era (McDaniel 2010).

Following the early Republican period, Sulukule experienced its golden age in the 1950s and 1960s. During this time, entertainment venues in the neighborhood became regular spots for many famous artists, including Zeki Müren and Müzeyyen Senar. However, beginning in 1952, the construction of Vatan and Millet Avenues led to the demolition of parts of the city walls in Edirnekapı and 29 homes in Sulukule. This period, known as the "Menderes demolitions,"

forced many households to relocate. Nonetheless, over time, many Romani residents returned and resettled within the original boundaries of Sulukule (Yılgür 2006).

After the 1980 military coup in Turkey, the Ministry approved the “Entertainment Houses Project” (Gösteri Evleri Projesi) in 1985, leading to a sharp increase in the number of entertainment venues in Sulukule—from three to thirty-four. It is known that approximately 3,500 people were employed in these establishments (Giritlioğlu 2023).

By 1990, police raids on Sulukule’s entertainment venues had intensified, resulting in the closure of most of these businesses. In 1994, Fatih Mayor Saadettin Tantan ordered the evacuation of the few remaining venues, which once again led to the economic decline of the area (Mimarizm 2008).

After the enactment of Law No. 5366 on July 5, 2005 “Conservation by Renewal and Sustainable Use of Deteriorated Historical Urban Fabric” the Fatih district’s Neslişah and Hatice Sultan neighborhoods were declared an urban renewal area just five months later, in November 2005. By 2006, the area commonly known as Sulukule was officially approved for redevelopment by a decision of the Council of Ministers, and a joint budget of approximately 40 million TL was allocated to the project by Fatih Municipality and the Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ) (McDaniel 2010). Sulukule thus became the first case of "urban transformation" implemented in Turkey, marking the beginning of social restructuring in centrally located, impoverished neighborhoods with high profit potential.

Despite the law’s stated aim to protect the urban fabric, Sulukule, a neighborhood with 1,000 years of Romani cultural heritage and UNESCO protection, was destroyed (Duvar 2019). In December 2006, the government turned its rhetoric “We will save Sulukule from monstrosity” into action by issuing an emergency expropriation order for properties in the area (Politeknik, 2008; Uzpeder, 2008). Property owners were offered compensation between 7,000 and 25,000

YTL over five years, essentially pushing residents to choose what was seen as “the lesser of two evils.” As a result of this pressure, most locals were forced to sell their homes to third parties (Uzpeder, 2008).

Marketed by Fatih Municipality as “the world’s most social project,” the Sulukule urban renewal led to the displacement of around 5,000 people, 3,500 of whom were Romani, and their forced relocation to the Taşoluk neighborhood, 40 kilometers from the city center. Many of the displaced were tenants and thus had no legal right to compensation. Although Fatih Municipality allocated 204 flats for these tenants in Taşoluk in December 2007, the required deposits, ranging between 800 and 1,300 YTL,were unaffordable, preventing contracts from being signed (Uzpeder, 2008).

Romanis, who had sustained themselves through music, flower selling, and paper collection in central areas like Taksim, were unable to adapt to life in distant Taşoluk. Of the 437 families relocated, only five remained in Taşoluk; the rest returned to areas like Balat, Ayvansaray, and Lonca. Many residents experienced homelessness during this period and were forced to live in unhealthy, unhygienic housing conditions.

In December 2007, the Sulukule Association for the Advancement of Romani Culture and Solidarity, along with four Romani citizens, filed a lawsuit against Fatih Municipality’s urban transformation project at the Istanbul Administrative Court. The plaintiffs argued that the project violated the Constitution, international legal norms, and laws protecting historical, cultural, and natural heritage. They demanded a stay of execution and the annulment of Decision No. 2007/156. On January 28, 2008, the court requested a defense from the municipality.

Despite ongoing legal proceedings, Fatih Municipality continued with demolitions in Sulukule. In February 2008 alone, more than 50 houses were demolished. In March 2008, the homes of

seven Romani families were torn down, leaving approximately 15 people homeless (*Uzpeder, 2008*). As no alternative shelter was provided, the plaintiffs reapplied to the court for an injunction. On March 14, 2008, a third request to halt the project was submitted.

Twelve years after the case was filed, in 2019, the 9th Administrative Court of Istanbul annulled the decision of the Conservation Board (Decision No. 51) as well as Fatih Municipality's supporting council decision (No. 2012/60). The court ruled that the project was not in compliance with Law No. 5366 and did not serve the public interest. This long-delayed justice came too late: by then, many Romanis had already been displaced, their property and housing rights had been violated, and Sulukule's cultural fabric had been irreversibly damaged.

3.2 Brief History of Küçükbakkalköy Case

Küçükbakkalköy was one of the historical Romani settlements on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. Before its demolition, this neighborhood was home to approximately 150,000 Romani people and was considered the largest Romani neighborhood on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. According to archival records and participant accounts, the neighborhood was founded during the Ottoman period by Romani people historically referred to as "Kıpti," even before the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.

The displacement of the Roma community in Küçükbakkalköy began at dawn on a hot summer morning, July 19, 2006, around 5:30 a.m., as part of a sudden operation. In just one day, 256 homes were demolished. On Tevfik Fikret Street alone, 78 houses were torn down along with the belongings inside, without allowing the Roma residents any time to vacate, by a police force numbering approximately 1,500 officers(Bianet 2007). According to statements from residents recorded in the report *"We Are Here"*, no official notice was delivered prior to the demolitions, and no information was given. On the day of the demolition, residents were

allegedly misled by police officers telling them, “The police need your help to clean the neighborhood,” thus luring them out of their homes(Uzpeder 2008).

Human rights defender Hacer Foggo, who visited the site after the demolitions, recounted the following: “The day after the destruction, the Roma built makeshift shelters from the nylon, cardboard, and wooden pieces they salvaged from the rubble of their homes. In one of these shelters lived an 18-year-old engaged young woman named Birgül and her mother. When I first met Birgül, she said: ‘If the demolition hadn’t happened, we would have had our wedding here in a week. All my dowry is buried under the rubble now. My pots, my scarves, the curtains and sheets I saved up for with so much effort – they’re all under the ground’” (Bianet 2007).

A few weeks after the initial demolition, around 30 Roma families continued to live in makeshift shelters amid household and construction waste. However, on November 23, 2006, all of these shelters were demolished. The only house not destroyed by the bulldozers belonged to a non-Roma family (Uzpeder 2008).

The urban transformation process in Küçükbakkalköy did not only destroy the built environment of the Roma community—it also devastated their family ties, health, sources of income, childhood memories, cultural values, and spatial memory. The 256 houses demolished were not just numbers—they represented the labor, hopes, and life stories of thousands of people. One such story is that of Hüseyin Gani, which clearly illustrates the human rights violations caused by urban transformation and squatter clearance projects. According to Hacer Foggo (fictional names used for narrative purposes):

Before July 19, 2006, Hüseyin Gani lived in a red-painted squatter house with his four children, who gave meaning to his life, and his beloved wife, Sarıkız. On the morning of July 19, their red house was razed to the ground. Hüseyin was given a one-square-meter tent and a few coins. His children were sent to different provinces, to other tents. Sarıkız, unable to cope with the

trauma, began to suffer from severe psychological issues. The family collapsed before the dust of the demolition had even settled. It didn't end there. Every morning, Sarıkız would run through the tents talking to herself, searching for their red house. By April 1, 2010, Hüseyin Gani died of hunger in a one-square-meter tent, just 50 meters behind the Ataşehir District Governor's Office, despite numerous applications for aid. Although the doctor's report cited hunger and neglect as the cause of death, officials claimed he died from "statelessness." They said, "We couldn't help him because he had no identity card," even though it was the same authorities who demolished his home despite knowing he had no identification (Ysrdnl 2010; source: Hacer Foggo).

Due to both the lack of financial means to rent an apartment and the discrimination they faced during the rental process, the Roma community built makeshift shelters on the same land where their demolished houses once stood. Fourteen months after the so-called "Roma Opening," on June 28, 2011, municipal teams once again demolished these shelters, which lacked electricity, water, toilets, and bathrooms. Fifty families migrated to live with their relatives, while the remaining families struggled to survive in tents they constructed from blankets, bed linens, tarps, and similar materials in the backstreets near the ruins of their former shelters (Artizan 2007, Demokrathaber 2011)

Among the construction debris, 60-year-old Aydoğan Dalkoparan, who suffered from a respiratory illness, lived for weeks outdoors, attached to his oxygen machine, with only a bed and an umbrella for shelter. His wife, Nazmiye Dalkoparan, wiping away her tears with her hands, stated quietly:

> When I told the Director of the Foundation under the District Governor's Office, a man named Hüseyin, that my sick husband was left lying in the rubble on the street, he mocked us and said, 'I am sick too. I don't care where you sleep.' Because we have no

> electricity connection, we cannot plug in the oxygen machine. That's why I have to spend the 25 TL I earn every day by collecting paper on refilling the oxygen tank. While prefabricated houses are being built for everyone else in this country, no one speaks out about our suffering. Is it because we are Roma?

After the demolition of Küçükbakkalköy, the lives of its Romani residents continued to be disrupted for years. On January 5, 2015, for example, the makeshift homes of around 100 Romani families who had settled behind the Kayışdağı water reservoir—amidst skyscrapers—were torn down during a dawn operation on the grounds that they were occupying private property. Despite heavy snowfall, the demolitions were carried out with the support of police and municipal officers from the Ataşehir Municipality, without allowing residents to even collect their belongings. One of the victims, Neriman Dalkoparan, told Bianet: "Thank God my baby wasn't crushed under the rubble. Why don't they just throw us into the sea and be done with it? What difference does it make?" (Bianet 2015). Even nine years after the initial wave of demolitions, over 500 Romanis from Küçükbakkalköy were left homeless (Emlakkulisi, 2015).

One of those whose house was demolished despite holding a title deed allocation certificate was Yüksel Dum. He had refused to sell his land to contractors and instead continued to live there in a self-built shack, resisting the destruction. He opened a flower stand in front of the shack and tried to support his nine children and eight grandchildren. In November 2007, he filed a lawsuit against the Kadıköy Municipality and Istanbul Governorship for damages but was denied legal assistance. In 2010, Kadıköy Municipality sent him a notice stating that in order to gain full ownership of the land, he would have to pay 2,150 TL per square meter—a total exceeding 430,000 TL. Dum could not afford this sum, and the land was sold to someone else (Bianet 2014). He launched a legal battle and eventually won the case in 2014. The court annulled the sale and ruled that Dum should be granted a one-year payment term. However, he

passed away in the shack he had built next to his flower stand before he could benefit from this legal victory (Milliyet 2014).

Before his death, Dum shared the following with Bianet:

> *I was born and raised here. My family has been here for two and a half centuries. Eight years ago, they demolished our homes with 1,500 riot police while our belongings were still inside. They exiled the whole neighborhood. Many of my neighbors slept in garbage bins for a long time. Now everyone is scattered—some live in tents, others on the street.*
>
> *I stood my ground. I've been fighting for eight years in this shack I built. The municipality asked for 430,000 TL for the land. How can I pay that? We live day to day. We sell flowers, sometimes collect recyclables. The municipality auctioned off my land even though I had a deed allocation certificate. My children's whole future was tied to this place." (Bianet 2014)*

Even though 18 years have passed since the demolition of Küçükbakkalköy, for many of its Romani residents, time remains frozen on July 19, 2006. Today, they continue to live in informal settlements in places such as Ümraniye Dudullu (Cumhuriyet 2021), around Nişantepe and Özyeğin University, and parts of Çekmeköy and Paşaköy (Bahadır 2020). In these areas, they face dire housing conditions, environmental hazards, and major difficulties accessing basic services like electricity and clean water.

In summary, the Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy cases are examples of a multifaceted form of violence directed at Roma culture and the erasure of their memory spaces, in addition to physical interventions in Roma neighbourhoods during urban transformation processes.

In the next section, national laws and international conventions related to housing rights and urban transformation will be examined, and legal frameworks that pave the way for rights violations or fail to prevent them will be better understood.

CHAPTER 4: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR HOUSING AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION

The fourth chapter of the thesis examines the legal basis of the right to housing in both international human rights law and Turkish national legislation. It looks at how housing is defined and protected in major international treaties and constitutional regulations, and analyses which legal tools are used to regulate urban transformation processes in domestic law. Throughout the chapter, both protective mechanisms and gaps that pave the way for rights violations, such as forced evictions, are evaluated through document analysis.

4.1 Housing (Right to Shelter) in National and International Texts

The right to housing was first recognized in international documents in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This article states that: *"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control"* (United Nations 1948). The inclusion of the right to housing alongside other rights in this article illustrates the interconnectedness and intersectionality of all human rights.

According to the declaration in Article 11, paragraph 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted on 16 December 1966, State Parties are required to ensure an adequate standard of living for their citizens. In the relevant section, the right to an adequate standard of living encompasses "adequate food, clothing, housing, and the continuous improvement of living conditions"(Nations 1966) Within this article, the "right to

adequate housing," recognized as an extension of the right to an adequate standard of living, is emphasized as being of critical importance for the realization of all economic, social, and cultural rights. Furthermore, State Parties are obligated to take necessary measures to realize these rights and to conduct this process based on the principle of international cooperation.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which entered into force in 1981 and to which Turkey became a party with significant reservations, addresses the right to housing in Article 14/2 (h). According to this article, "State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women living in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, their participation in and benefit from rural development, and shall grant to such women, in particular, the following rights; (...) h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communication services" (Nations 1979)

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on 20 November 1989 and entered into force on 2 September 1990, states that " *States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development*." This article emphasizes the responsibility of parents in ensuring an adequate standard of living for their children. It also explains that State Parties are obligated to "provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing, and housing," where needed(Nations 1989)

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted by the United Nations in 1965 and entered into force in 1969, was established with the aim of eliminating racial discrimination and ensuring that all individuals equally enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms. Article 5 of the Convention, which Turkey signed in 2002, states the following regarding the right to housing: "In compliance with the

fundamental obligations laid down in Article 2 of this Convention, State Parties undertake to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights: (…) e (iii) The right to housing"(Gazette 1965)

The Vancouver Declaration (Habitat I), published in 1976, emphasizes that access to housing and social services is a fundamental human right and states that governments must assist the most vulnerable segments of society in accessing these rights (Nations 1976). The Istanbul Declaration, adopted at the end of Habitat II in 1996, focuses on providing adequate housing for all, creating sustainable human settlements, and improving the quality of life. It grants the right of equal participation to all stakeholders (not only states, but also private, official, and non-governmental partners) (HabitatII 1996)

In General Comments No. 4 and No. 7, attributed to Article 11 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights regarding housing and forced evictions, it is emphasized that everyone has the right to adequate housing and that this right must be implemented without discrimination(Committee on Economic 1991, Committee on Economic 1997) .The "dignity inherent to the human being" is addressed through the "right to adequate housing," supporting not only the possession of a physical shelter but also the right to live in a safe, peaceful, and dignified manner. In paragraph 8, the Committee defines the right to adequate housing as involving legal security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, and cultural adequacy. In addition to the elements mentioned, the following aspects have been further developed by the UN Special Rapporteur:

- physical security,

- participation and access to information,
- access to land, water, and other natural resources,
- protection against expropriation, harm, and destruction,
- resettlement, restitution of property, compensation, non-refoulement, and return,
- access to legal remedies,
- strengthening access to education and rights.
- prevention of violence against women.

When examining the right to housing in regional documents, Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter envisions ensuring access to housing of an adequate standard for everyone, preventing and gradually eliminating homelessness, and making housing affordable for those with insufficient resources (Europe 1996) The European Committee of Social Rights states that the right to housing must be consistent with the United Nations' concept of the "right to adequate housing" (European Committee of Social Rights, Council of Europe). Furthermore, Articles 16, 23, 30, and 31 of the Revised European Social Charter also address the right to housing. Finally, it should be noted that Article 11 of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, as well as the Protocols on the Rights of Women and Children of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, are documents that safeguard the right to housing (States 1948, Union 1981). In conclusion, the right to housing is not a privilege granted to individuals but an inherent human right. The right of every person to live in adequate and healthy housing, in a manner compatible with human dignity, is guaranteed by international conventions and established as an obligation for State Parties.

4.2 Forced Evictions and Human Rights

The term "forced eviction" is defined in General Comment No. 7 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as "the permanent or temporary removal against their

will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection" (Committee on Economic 1997). Such evictions are considered violations of human rights under international conventions. According to General Comment No. 7, forced evictions are practices contrary to human rights and often involve violations of other human rights as well. Paragraph 4 of the recommendation highlights intersecting rights violations by stating: " while manifestly breaching the rights enshrined in the Covenant, the practice of forced evictions may also result in violations of civil and political rights, such as the right to life, the right to security of the person, the right to non-interference with privacy, family and home and the right to the peaceful enjoyment of possessions" (Committee on Economic 1997). Paragraph 10 of the relevant recommendation identifies groups particularly vulnerable to forced evictions, including "women, children, youth, older persons, indigenous peoples, and ethnic and other minorities." Articles 2 and 3 of the Covenant address the obligation of governments to take appropriate measures to prevent discrimination in situations where evictions occur.

Moreover, paragraph 13 states that particularly in cases of large-scale evictions, all alternatives should be explored, minimizing or avoiding the use of force, and conducting consultations with affected groups (Committee on Economic 1997). The following paragraph (paragraph 14) emphasizes that evictions must be carried out in full compliance with the relevant provisions of international human rights law and in accordance with the principles of legality and proportionality.

Finally, paragraph 16 underscores the obligation to provide alternative housing and resettlement for those subjected to forced evictions, stating: " Evictions should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights. Where those affected are unable to provide for themselves, the State party must take all appropriate measures, to the maximum of its available resources, to ensure that adequate

alternative housing, resettlement or access to productive land, as the case may be, is available"(Committee on Economic 1997)

Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights emphasizes that "no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his home or correspondence" (Nations 1966). The European Social Charter highlights the need to "develop housing policies for disadvantaged groups." Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe obliges member states to protect the housing rights of Roma and to take measures against unlawful evictions.

In conclusion, according to the relevant regulations, forced evictions may result in homelessness and lead to multiple human rights violations. In cases where individuals affected by eviction are unable to meet their own needs, states are required to provide solutions such as alternative housing and resettlement by utilizing available resources.

4.3 The Constitutional Foundations of the Right to Housing and Environment in Türkiye

In Türkiye, the right to housing was first addressed in the 1961 Constitution, Article 49, paragraph 2, in connection with the right to health, stating: "The State shall take measures to meet the housing needs of poor or low-income families in accordance with health conditions."

In the 1982 Constitution, the right to housing is specifically titled under Article 57, which states: "The State shall take measures to meet the housing needs within the framework of a planning that takes into account the characteristics of cities and environmental conditions, and shall support mass housing initiatives" (Türkiye 1982)

Article 56 of the Constitution, within the scope of the right to environment, refers to the rights to life, health, and housing, and states that all individuals have the right to live in a healthy and

balanced environment. This article assigns the duty of protecting, improving, and preventing pollution of the environment to both the State and its citizens. The provision reads as follows:

"Everyone has the right to live in a healthy and balanced environment. It is the duty of the State and citizens to improve the environment, to protect environmental health, and to prevent environmental pollution"(Türkiye 1982)

This provision ensures the recognition of the right to environment as a fundamental human right and obliges the State to take the necessary measures to protect this right. Additionally, Article 57 of the 1982 Constitution is the first to explicitly title "the right to housing," reiterating: "The State shall take measures to meet housing needs within a planning framework that considers urban characteristics and environmental conditions, and shall support mass housing initiatives." This provision obliges the State to plan and implement housing policies in accordance with the characteristics of cities and environmental conditions, while also emphasizing the importance of addressing housing needs through the promotion of mass housing projects.

4.4 Legal Regulations Regarding Urban Transformation in Türkiye

The Squatter Housing Law No. 775, enacted on July 20, 1966, includes measures aimed at regulating existing squatter settlements, demolishing them, preventing the construction of new ones, and implementing related actions (Gazette 1965). For those who migrated from rural areas to cities after the Second World War, squatter houses (gecekondus) became the only shelter option (Genç 2014); however, this law led to demolitions and displacements (Akkan, Deniz et al. 2011). During this process, many individuals living in squatter areas were evicted from their homes and had to be relocated to new settlement areas.

The Mass Housing Law No. 2985, enacted in 1984, established the first legal framework for mass housing and defined the principles and procedures for projects implemented to meet the housing needs across the country (MevzuatPortalı2985) Under this law, the autonomous Mass Housing Fund was created, and through Decree Laws No. 412/414, this legal entity was institutionalized as two separate entities: the Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ) and the Public Partnership Administration (TOKİ2024)

By 2005, the Municipality Law No. 5393 was adopted, granting municipalities the authority to carry out urban transformation projects through Article 73. According to this provision, "by decision of the municipal council, it is possible to create residential, industrial, commercial, technology parks, and social infrastructure areas; deteriorated urban spaces may be reconstructed and restored." The law stipulates that urban transformation projects must be between a minimum of 5 hectares and a maximum of 500 hectares, and that "negotiation shall be the basis for vacating, demolishing, and expropriating the structures within project areas" (MevzuatPortalı5393)

Approximately one month after the Municipality Law, on July 5, 2005, the "Law on the Renewal, Protection, and Use of Deteriorated Historical and Cultural Immovable Assets through Restoration" (Law No. 5366) was published (Lexpera 2024, Avcıoğlu 2016). This law imposed temporary restrictions on designated renewal areas and enabled transformation and restoration projects in historical districts such as Tarlabaşı, Sulukule, Fener-Balat, and Ayvansaray. However, these processes led to the erasure of spatial memory, damage to cultural values, and violations of property rights. Low-income homeowners and tenants were forcibly displaced from these areas(MekandaAdaletDerneği 2021). This situation was particularly evident in the destruction of Sulukule, one of the oldest Roma settlements in Türkiye prior to its demolition.

Some of the Roma neighborhoods demolished under Law No. 5366 include:

- Kamberler Neighborhood in Bursa,
- Tenekeli Neighborhood in İzmir,
- Selamsız in Üsküdar,
- Küçükbakkalköy,
- Kağıthane,

Roma neighborhoods in Gaziosmanpaşa–Taşlıtarla (ensonhaber 2010) Published in the Official Gazette on December 15, 2012, Law No. 6306 aims to identify, demolish, and replace risky buildings, areas, and designated reserve construction zones located in regions under disaster risk, with the construction of safe structures (ResmiGazete 2012). However, in some projects where this law has been implemented, there have been concerns and inconsistencies regarding the “disaster risk” justification. Among these is the designation of certain areas as "risky," even though they are marked as “safe zones” on earthquake risk maps (MekandaAdaletDerneği 2021)

Emergency expropriation is a form of expropriation granted by presidential decree in extraordinary or special circumstances, such as national defense, and is regulated under Article 27 of the Expropriation Law No. 2942. Although initially intended for exceptional cases, this form of expropriation has also been applied to urban transformation projects. This practice, which grants administrative bodies the authority to directly intervene in and seize private property, has led to serious violations of property rights(Gözlük 2008).

In the case of Sulukule, an emergency expropriation decision was issued by the Council of Ministers on October 19, 2006, published in the Official Gazette on December 13, 2006. Subsequently, on February 12, 2007, the Sulukule Association for the Development and Solidarity of Roma Culture filed a lawsuit requesting a stay of execution. Two years after the

decision, demolitions began in Sulukule and were completed in 2011, followed by the construction of new housing (Mimarizm)

Twelve years after the lawsuit was filed, in 2019, the Istanbul 9th Administrative Court annulled both the Protection Council Decision No. 51 and the approval granted by the Fatih Municipality with its council decision dated August 10, 2012 (No. 2012/60). The court reasoned that the project did not comply with Law No. 5366, nor did it serve the public interest, and that no actual "protection" was present. Sulukule and two other case studies are discussed in detail in the case analysis section.

In addition, according to information provided by Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, one of the most important figures fighting against urban transformation in Roma neighbourhoods, more than 10,000 Roma were displaced between 2006 and 2013 as a result of relevant legal regulations. Within the scope of urban transformation, urban renewal and slum transformation projects, in 2006 in Istanbul, 650 Roma families in Sulukule, 140 Roma families in Küçükbakkalköy (Ataşehir), approximately 60 Roma families in the Kâğıthane district, in 2013, over 600 families in Gaziosmanpaşa Sarıgöl, over 200 families in Bursa Kamberler since 2006, and 20 families in the Roma neighbourhood of Örnekköy in Izmir were displaced. In 2013, the homes of over 400 Roma families living in the Gazipaşa neighbourhood of Sapanca district in Sakarya were expropriated for very little money(Agos 2013).

In conclusion, although legal frameworks such as the Squatter Housing Law No. 775, the Mass Housing Law No. 2985, the Municipality Law No. 5393, and Law No. 6306 were introduced with the aim of addressing housing problems, their implementation has been marked by significant injustices. Therefore, ensuring that urban transformation projects are conducted in a more transparent, participatory, and equitable manner is crucial for preventing human rights violations.

In the next chapter, the empirical findings of the study are analysed using a thematic coding method based on Wacquant's conceptual tools. In addition, the production of regional stigmatization in the cases of Küçükbakkalköy and Sulukule is discussed in terms of its instrumentalization and capitalization in urban transformation processes.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

The fifth chapter of the thesis comprehensively examines empirical findings on territorial stigmatisation, urban transformation, and the strategies of submission and resistance of the Roma people, using the examples of two historical Roma neighbourhoods in Istanbul, Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy. Analyses conducted within the framework of Loïc Wacquant's concept of 'territorial stigmatisation' and David Harvey's concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' examine how Roma neighbourhoods are systematically constructed as 'urban problem areas' and how urban transformation processes are legitimised and converted into capital through these discourses. In addition, the chapter concludes with a comparison of the two cases. By analysing the differences between the collective resistance that emerged in Sulukule and the more silent, fragmented reactions in Küçükbakkalköy, which gained national and international awareness, the unique experiences of Roma in the struggle for urban justice and their contributions to social memory are evaluated.

5.1 Territorial Stigmatization, Demolition, And Resistance in Sulukule

As mentioned in the section overview above, the remainder of this chapter will present insights into how the urban problem was constructed, how stigma was utilized as a form of capital, and the lived struggles of the displaced Roma over the past 15 years. The photograph taken by Nejla Oserian, featured in Figure 3, offers visual impressions of this struggle in practice. With no other "Sulukule" to go to, many Roma tried to continue living in their partially demolished homes for a certain period of time.

Figure 3 A Roma Family in Sulukule.

Source: Nejla Ossiran Archive

5.1.1 The Production of Territorial Stigmatization: Constructing the "Urban Problem"

In Sulukule, one of the oldest known Romani neighborhoods in history, the dynamics that initiated the transformation process went far beyond the officially stated reasons such as "the neighborhood's building stock being vulnerable to natural disasters" or "the need to restore historical buildings in the area." What underpinned the process was a discursively constructed effort toward "ethnic cleansing" and the de-Romanization of city centers. Through discourses that implicitly harbored "anti-Gypsy" sentiment, Sulukule was labeled by state actors, local governments, and the media as a "criminal neighborhood" and a "zone of urban decay," thus attempting to legitimize what would ultimately be an unlawful urban transformation.

Indeed, Sulukule—a Romani neighborhood with a 1,000-year history—was publicly described in 2007 by AKP MP Köksal Özer as "a place where 13-, 14-, and 15-year-old girls are pushed into prostitution (Foggo 2008)." That same year, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan referred to Sulukule as "monstrous in appearance" and emphasized the need to purge it of this image (Uysal 2012). In interviews conducted for this study, participants also highlighted that Sulukule was heavily stigmatized in the media through images like "brothels in entertainment houses" and "drug dealing." Participants highlighted historical prejudices against Roma people and how these prejudices facilitate urban transformation processes with the following words:

> They said prostitution and drug dealing were happening in the entertainment houses. They could say this so easily because they saw Romanis as immoral—and society believed them. Because people didn't know Romanis back then. You fear and even hate what you don't know.

(EA-09, 55, female, author of a book on the subject and civil society activist)"

> The widespread prejudices held against Romanis made it easier to target these neighborhoods. There was this common mindset: 'This transformation will clean up the neighborhood.' But these urban transformation projects eventually became more than physical interventions—they turned into a form of ethnic cleansing. I remember that back then, Fatih Municipality labeled Sulukule as a 'zone of urban decay.' This label didn't just refer to buildings—it also targeted the people living there. Romanis were equated with decay itself; the neighborhood became synonymous with crime, poverty, and an unwanted population.

(EA-01, 57, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

These accounts, which reflect the shift from individual to regional stigmatization described by Wacquant, also relate directly to Imogen Tyler's (2013) concept of social abjection. According

to Tyler, marginalized groups are othered in order to define the boundaries of society, yet they are simultaneously included in order to reproduce those boundaries and legitimize existing social order. Transforming Sulukule into a neighborhood "in need of cleansing" is a manifestation of this inclusive exclusion strategy. In this way, spaces systematically stigmatized through stereotypes become legitimizing tools for neoliberal state-led urban transformation policies.

Participants also indicated that the Romani identity in Sulukule, previously accepted as "joyful entertainers" through their association with music and dance, was selectively folklorized and publicly embraced at times, but under changing political conditions, those same images were redefined as signs of moral threat and urban decay.

> Sulukule's significance in the entertainment and cultural sectors made it a constant target for right-wing governments. Even Adnan Menderes had tried to demolish it. In the '90s too, there were demolition attempts. So, there's been a persistent effort to tear it down. The Romanis were squeezed into a corner with discriminatory and hateful discourses targeting their entertainment culture, and I think that was a key reason they were targeted.

(EA-03, male, 30, Romani rights activist focusing on urban transformation)

> There were entertainment houses in Sulukule—some semi-official, others informal. Initially, there were maybe three to five of them, but over time that number rose to 40 or 50. These places were visited by both local and foreign tourists—famous artists from Turkey and abroad even spent time there. Of course, from time to time, police raids and shutdowns happened under the pretense of prostitution and drugs. But during the era of 'Hortum Süleyman' (Süleyman Ulusoy, former police chief of Beyoğlu), it wasn't just Romanis—trans people and sex workers in Taksim were also brutalized. His nickname

> was ‘Hose’ because he beat people with hoses. After that period, the entertainment scene in Sulukule seriously declined.

(EA-09, 55, female, author of a book on the subject and civil society activist)

Beyond the capital-focused governance style of right-wing governments, the Sulukule case also reveals a political-ideological confrontation with lifestyles seen as contrary to the ruling power’s vision. The eradication of the historically secular fabric of old Sulukule and the construction of luxury Ottoman-style housing in its place reflected the ideological perspective of the government being imposed onto the urban landscape. It was defined by a participant as follows:

> At first, they wanted to build houses resembling Ottoman architecture, and there was this intention to construct a new and alternative history rooted in their own ideological past. Especially in conservative and Islamist-dominated areas like Fatih, this policy sells quite well.

(EA-03, male, 30, Romani rights activist focusing on urban transformation)

In conclusion, the Sulukule case demonstrates how long-standing prejudices against Romanis were systematically projected onto space and framed as an “urban problem.” Through media and political rhetoric, the neighborhood was criminalized at different points in time, with the aim of securing public support for the transformation project.

The next section will explore how this territorial stigmatization moved beyond ideology to become an economic tool that served the process of capital accumulation.

5.1.2 The Capitalization of Stigmatization and the Mechanism of Expropriation

The neoliberal policies that gained momentum in Turkey after the 1980s accelerated the transformation of Istanbul, turning the city into a kind of "showcase." Within this new image of Istanbul, Romani neighborhoods were seen as "inappropriate spaces" that did not align with modern and touristic urban plans. The lifestyles of groups like the Romanis were considered incompatible with capital accumulation and the emerging capitalist order. In other words, these groups were not seen as "good consumers" in a capitalist system, which turned Romani neighborhoods with high rent potential in city centers into prime targets for transformation. The following participant statements reflect this view:

> After the 1980s, during Özal's era and the rise of liberalization and free-market policies, a period of showcasing began. Istanbul was turned into a display window—focused solely on being looked at, where the lived realities behind the scenes were ignored or considered irrelevant. Of course, Romanis and their spaces didn't look good in that showcase, the 'new Istanbul.' Because Romanis, by their very existence, opposed the system's imposed notions of modernity and consumption-based living. For example, they were groups that didn't acquire more than they needed and weren't good consumers in the capitalist economy. So, the state pushed this community—whom they did not see as modern—out of sight to Taşoluk on the city's outskirts.

(EA-09, 55, female, author of a book on the subject and civil society activist)

> When you look at Kadıköy, Beyoğlu, and Fatih districts, you see they are touristy areas that attract both domestic and foreign tourists. One thing these three districts have in common is their appeal to tourism. In such places, no municipality would want to have a Gypsy neighborhood. From the state's perspective, it was more desirable to open these

areas to commercial enterprises, to sell real estate to foreigners. That was the preferred strategy.

(EA-03, male, 30, Romani rights activist focusing on urban transformation)

Another crucial factor in the commodification of stigmatization is the longstanding exclusion and discrimination experienced by the Romanis in Sulukule, which led to their limited access to basic services like education and, therefore, increased their vulnerability. To capital holders, they were seen as "unable to defend their rights, easily deceived, easy targets." It emphasized our participant as follows:

> It was easier to evict Romanis like that. They might think twice before doing the same to Kurds, but since Romanis didn't have a strong tradition of resistance, they were seen as easy prey. They said, 'Let's give them some money and take their homes.

(EA-09, 55, female, author of a book on the subject and civil society activist)

"They could be tricked so easily. They believed whatever they were told. So, what happened in Sulukule was even more brutal." (EA-02, Nejla Osseiran,55, Female, photographer, filmmaker, and activist with the Sulukule Platform)

In the Sulukule urban transformation, this social vulnerability directly served the process of capital accumulation. As soon as the transformation began, the Council of Ministers issued an urgent expropriation order in 2006, which essentially stripped the Romanis of their property rights through state intervention. With this decision, the Romanis were presented with an ultimatum: "Either sell your home or we'll seize it." Hacer Foggo, founder of the Sulukule Platform, described the process as follows:

> In 2006, the government issued an urgent expropriation order for Sulukule. So right from the beginning, they moved forward with expropriation. These were poor people

> living there. The authorities said, 'If you don't sell your home, I'll seize it at 500 lira per square meter.' The state was saying, 'Whether you sell or not, I've already expropriated it. I'll transfer the money to your bank account.' Of course, people were scared.

(EA-01, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, 57, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

In summary, interviewees' accounts of the expropriation process in Sulukule align well with David Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession." In this case, the state disregarded property rights and used legal instruments such as urgent expropriation to seize the homes of Romanis, transferring these assets to capital owners. This strategy, which also overlaps with Harvey's notion of "creative destruction," demonstrates how regional stigmatization was instrumentalized for capital accumulation. In place of the demolished historical neighborhood, a more profitable urban space was designed.

The next section will examine the long-term effects of the Sulukule urban transformation on the Romani community, focusing in particular on how regional and social stigmatization has been sustained over time.

5.1.3 Long-Term Effects and the Inescapability of Stigma

Nearly twenty years have passed since the urban transformation of Sulukule. According to the interviewees, Sulukule's Romani residents lost far more than just their homes during this process—they also lost a thousand-year-old cultural heritage, their way of life, neighborly relations, livelihoods, and solidarity networks. Along with their past, they have come to the brink of losing their future. Moreover, the loser was not only the Romanis—Sulukule was also a loss for Istanbul, which forfeited a unique site of cultural memory. These reflections represent the collective views expressed by multiple participants during the interviews.

> With this urban transformation, Sulukule residents lost an entire world of their own. Not just their homes—they lost their history, their children's future, their neighborly bonds. That's what they thought, and that's exactly what happened. In a sense, the people of Sulukule lost both their history and their future. People who were born there, who raised their children and grandchildren there, were displaced. A vibrant culture of life was extinguished. When you send these people to Taşoluk, 40 km away in apartment blocks on the outskirts of the city, it's not just spatial destruction—it's also the destruction of identity and culture. The Romanis couldn't continue the lifestyle they had in Sulukule, and because they knew they couldn't, they deeply mourned Sulukule.

(EA-09, 55, female, author of a book on the subject and civil society activist)

> Who lives in Taşoluk? You're sending people to the middle of nowhere. These people's livelihoods were tied to the city center, to urban jobs... I went to Taşoluk to make a second documentary, and I was devastated. I was emotionally wrecked and couldn't recover for a long time.

(EA-02, Nejla Osseiran, 55, Female, photographer, filmmaker, Sulukule Platform member)

The physical destruction of Sulukule did not eliminate the social stigma directed toward its Romani residents. On the contrary, the process of territorial stigmatization, as described by Wacquant (2007), continued even after the transformation, symbolically preventing the Romanis from returning to their former space. Many Romanis who were moved to Taşoluk were forced to return to neighborhoods near the old Sulukule due to social and economic hardships. However, the large gate erected at the entrance to the "new Sulukule" became a literal and symbolic boundary of exclusion—a spatial marker of who is allowed in and who is not. It explained by one of the participants as follows:

> Most of the Romanis who went to Taşoluk eventually moved back to neighborhoods adjacent to the old Sulukule. They had built a large gate at the entrance of the new Sulukule, specifically so Romanis wouldn't enter or pass through. It's very clear that there's still an effort to create a peopleless, Romani-free Sulukule.

(EA-03, male, 30, Romani rights activist focusing on urban transformation)

In conclusion, all participants in the interviews stated that Sulukule residents are worse off than they were before the transformation. One recurring sentiment was: "At least in Sulukule they had a roof over their heads—now they're all renters." Many shared that, especially after the economic crisis in Turkey, they struggle to pay rent. Additionally, many Romani children dropped out of school after the Sulukule transformation, showing that the urban renewal also disrupted access to education. All participants confirmed that Sulukule's former residents are now in a more socially and economically vulnerable situation compared to the past.

5.2 An Examination of the Strategies Proposed in Wacquant's (2011) Theory of 'Territorial Stigma': The Case of Sulukule

5.2.1 Strategies of Submission and Withdrawal

Dissimulation

According to interviewees, some Romanis in Sulukule chose to downplay their ethnic identity or presented themselves using identities that were more socially accepted in order to avoid stigmatization. It emphasized one of the participants as follows:

> They used to say, 'Thank God, I'm Muslim. I'm Muslim first, then Romani.' There was also a group in Sulukule that would say, 'I love my country, I'm a devout Muslim—what's there not to like about me?' These kinds of expressions were, in a way, survival

> strategies. They clung to widely accepted values like religion because they belonged to a community that was stigmatized as godless, different, and marginal.

(EA-09, 55, female, author of a book on the subject and civil society activist)

This approach reflects a strategy of conforming to the socially accepted norms of the "ideal citizen," which involved suppressing stigmatized cultural identity in favor of a religious identity that offered greater public acceptance. In some cases, this effort was reinforced by claiming "Turkishness," while omitting any reference to being Romani. The effort to seek legitimacy through religiosity in the Sulukule case should be seen as a defensive reflex in response to stigmatizing discourses. This reflex may have contributed to the Romanis' withdrawal and submission in the face of transformation.

Mutual Distancing

Organized resistance within the neighborhood was deliberately undermined by the municipality and other transformation stakeholders. In Sulukule, a second association was established in opposition to the organization leading the resistance, promoting the narrative that the urban transformation would be beneficial. This explained by Hacer Foggo as follows:

> Suddenly, another association appeared in Sulukule to counter us. They had started receiving support from the municipality. This is something the municipality always did—divide, conquer, and rule. Years later, I heard that the people who founded that association regretted it.

(EA-01, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, 57, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

The propaganda disseminated by the municipality-backed association may have deepened divisions within the community and undermined the collective strength of organized resistance.

Lateral Denigration

No direct evidence of lateral denigration (horizontal denigration within the group) was found in the interviews conducted for the Sulukule case.

Retreat into the Private Sphere

Many Romanis in Sulukule withdrew from public resistance because they were unaware of legal avenues for defending their rights. Those who were aware of such mechanisms through organized struggle often refrained from pursuing them due to the time and financial costs of legal action. A major factor was their perception of the state as an overwhelmingly powerful institution. In other words, "suing the state" or "challenging it" was associated with fear and potential repercussions. As a result, many avoided conflicts and quietly left their homes instead of engaging in organized resistance. A participant described this situation as follows:

> *They were afraid of being stigmatized, of being pushed around, of something bad happening to them. The power they were up against was much bigger than them, and since there was no precedent, they believed they would be ignored again. At the time, it was rare and extraordinary for a Romani to file a lawsuit and win. Besides, the process was very long and costly.*

(EA-09, 55, female, author of a book on the subject and civil society activist)

Exit

The urgent expropriation decisions issued in 2006 accelerated the departure of residents from the neighborhood and further diminished the already limited hope. These decisions effectively stripped Romanis of their property rights, and the reconciliation processes were manipulated. In the end, most residents were forced to leave Sulukule and disperse to various districts across Istanbul. Hacer Foggo explained that manipulation as follows:

"They said, 'If you don't sell your house, we'll seize it at 500 lira per square meter.' People were scared."*(EA-01, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, 57, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)*

5.2.2 Recalcitrance to Resistance

Defense of Neighborhood (Collective Resistance)

Sulukule represents the first instance of organized resistance by Romanis in Turkey. The organization of the resistance emerged as an early warning reflex against the threat of urban transformation and was shaped through rumors and news. Sulukule's historical significance as a symbolic site and its permeable structure—where Romanis often hosted non-Romanis and formed social contact—were important factors in the growth of the resistance. Additionally, its geographic accessibility and proximity to rights-based civil society organizations contributed to the sustainability of the resistance.

In the Sulukule resistance, various NGOs united around the awareness that urban transformation was not merely a physical change, but a threat to the historical and cultural existence of Romanis. However, this form of rights-claiming, which Romanis had almost never experienced before, brought both hope and anxiety. A participant who conducted fieldwork during the demolition process and later published a book expressed the community's anxiety as follows:

> The Romanis were a community just living their lives. Sulukule had been their home for 1,000 years. Until the transformation began, they didn't know what it meant to sue the state or fight for their rights—they were experiencing it for the first time. To be honest, they were afraid of using lawsuits to claim their rights. But at the same time, they were hopeful. They dreamed that if they won, their homes wouldn't be demolished.

(EA-09, 55, female, author of a book on the subject and civil society activist)

The "40 Days 40 Nights" festival organized in 2007 became a turning point in nurturing this hope. Through this event, the foundations were laid not only for protest but for developing practices of solidarity against the planned demolitions. The multi-layered collaboration formed among Sulukule's Romanis, independent activists, civil society representatives, academics, journalists, and filmmakers created the necessary social ground and collective strength to protect Sulukule.

The Sulukule Association for the Promotion of Romani Culture and Solidarity enabled local residents to raise their voices directly, while lawyers, architects, and academics offered technical and strategic support. Hacer Foggo, one of the leading organizers of the neighborhood resistance, explained the formation process as follows:

> I met Şükrü at the local coffeehouse. They wanted to form an association. They asked, 'Can you help us?' I wrote their statute and helped with paperwork. Later, we established the Sulukule Platform. It was a spontaneous structure. For example, I met Nejla through Sinan. She took photos of the demolitions and documented rights violations. Another journalist said, 'I can't come to the neighborhood often, but I can organize media contacts.' Derya, who had an art history background, focused on the historic homes. Aslı was an architect and worked with professors from Mimar Sinan University. I, along with Neşe and others, spent most of our time in the field—supporting people being evicted, confronting bulldozers. I also acted as a bridge between Romanis and the municipality, submitting legal appeals together with residents.

(EA-01, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, 57, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

The resistance against the threat of transformation in Sulukule was not merely a reaction to victimization—it evolved into a spontaneous yet powerful form of social organization. The

collective solidarity, united by the Romanis' determination to be heard, quickly became a strong platform supported by contributions from people in various professional fields. The Sulukule Platform was shaped as a pluralistic network with a horizontal structure, where everyone contributed with their own skills. This spirit was best captured by activist and filmmaker Nejla Osseiran:

> In the Sulukule Platform, we quickly became a very effective team. Academics came from universities; journalists gave their support. It became a good combination. I photographed the demolitions and rights violations, someone else wrote the news story, and another person sent it to newspapers and handled the publishing. We were a great team. You could say we worked some magic.

(EA-02, Nejla Osseiran, 55, Female, photographer, filmmaker, Sulukule Platform member)

The collective network established by the Sulukule Platform used not only strong local ties and activism but also weak ties to access national and international public attention. Through a well-organized and strategic resistance, the voices of Sulukule's Romanis were heard in media outlets and on television across the globe. Famous artists and filmmakers visited Sulukule in solidarity, and international human rights representatives turned their attention to the neighborhood. This process was clearly explained by Hacer Foggo as follows:

> *Sulukule received an enormous amount of national and international media coverage. I mean, it was featured in newspapers in Japan, Vietnam, the U.S., the UK—you name it. The voices of Sulukule residents—and Romanis more broadly—were heard everywhere. European Commission representative Thomas visited Sulukule, then UNESCO delegates came too. I remember UNESCO even wrote a report describing it as a gentrification project. Also, Gogol Bordello visited to help stop the demolitions and even wrote a song for Sulukule. World-renowned Romani filmmaker Tony Gatlif*

> *also came and met with the Fatih mayor. In the meeting, Mayor Mustafa Demir said the residents of Sulukule weren't Romanis. Tony Gatlif responded, 'Look, Mr. Mayor—I'm Romani too. I can recognize a Romani person anywhere in the world. Every single one of them is Romani.'*

(EA-01, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, 57, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

Thanks to the Sulukule Platform's efforts, a Children's Art Workshop was founded for children affected by the demolitions. Academics from Istanbul Technical University and conservatory students conducted rhythm, dance, music, and rap workshops for Romani children. These children's centers, one of the first examples in Romani neighborhoods, later inspired the creation of similar centers in many other parts of Turkey. Founder of the Sulukule Platform described those good practices as follows:

> Another major contribution was the children's centers we created during the demolitions. We worked with children who were psychologically affected by the destruction. The idea of setting up and spreading such centers in Romani neighborhoods was born in Sulukule. For example, the study center I proposed to the Mediterranean Romani Federation was modeled after Sulukule. The centers in Ankara's Kale neighborhood, like Çimenev and Hayalev, were also inspired by Sulukule. I can say the children's center in Sulukule became a model for all of Turkey.

(EA-01, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, 57, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

The Sulukule resistance not only made the voices of Sulukule's Romanis heard but also helped shed light on broader rights violations experienced by Romanis in Turkey. According to Hacer Foggo, the resistance laid the groundwork for the 2010 "Romani Opening" initiative launched by the Turkish government.

> After Sulukule, people in Turkey started studying Romanis. Before that, issues like access to education for Romani children or equal access to fundamental rights weren't even on the national agenda. Prejudices against Romanis began to break down a little after the Sulukule transformation. Romanis started forming more associations, and many even used the statute I had written for the Sulukule association. In fact, Sulukule was the reason for the Romani Opening. Even the government at the time admitted that. When I spoke with State Minister Faruk Çelik during the opening, I told him they had made mistakes in Sulukule, and he admitted it.

(EA-01, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, 57, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

Even though the Sulukule resistance could not stop the demolitions, it left a lasting impression as an ethno-cultural struggle for existence. It also served as an important example for successful practices of activism and resistance in Turkey. According to one participant, it was impossible for the Sulukule resistance to succeed, because if the government had backed down there, it wouldn't have been able to carry out similar rent-driven urban transformation projects across Turkey.

> They wanted to launch an era of rent-based transformation to feed the construction sector in Turkey. If the government had backed down in Sulukule, it wouldn't have been able to push forward urban transformation projects 15–20 years later. Other targeted areas were more organized and politically active. The government had to complete Sulukule's transformation in order to proceed boldly elsewhere.

(*EA-03, male, 30, Romani rights activist focusing on urban transformation)*

In conclusion, the wide range of resistance actions in Sulukule—from musical events and press releases to legal interventions and alternative proposals—represented more than just physical

opposition to urban transformation. They embodied an ethno-cultural struggle for existence by the Romani community.

Stigma Inversion

One of the most significant outcomes of the Sulukule Children's Art Workshops was the formation of a rap group called Tahribat-ı İsyan, founded by a group of local youth. These young people resisted the demolitions through rap music and became symbols of the Sulukule urban transformation resistance. Producing songs that reversed the stigma imposed on their Romani identity and neighborhood, the group also used their music to express protest against the human rights violations that occurred during the transformation process. The lyrics of Tahribat-ı İsyan's song "Wonderland" are a strong example of this stigma reversal:

Hey! I carry that blood / I don't live in Sulukule, but I'm alive
People here are restless, the joy is gone
The reason is TOKİ, now I'm bringing it up
We're performers, there's art in the streets
Celebrities are nothing more than our fans
Now don't listen to me, just go to work
We pissed on the foundation of the newly built house
Because I really had to go, TOKİ!
Sister Funda, introduce me to him – who is he?
Sulukule can't be demolished with just a few cranes
I'm telling you you're wasting your time
People, come out and look at Maalem
Live here, don't conform to the world
Music, dance, shantytowns, happiness
And you—be grateful for your villa.
Lyrics from "Wonderland" by (Tahribad-ıİsyan)

The song written by Gogol Bordello for Sulukule also embodies stigma inversion. The lyrics reframe the stigmatized neighborhood as a place of cultural richness and resistance:

Streets of sulukule
Are down down down
Urban progress bullies
Try to steal its crown
Till first note a-ripples
And street beats erupt
Now you see who's heart and soul
Is bankrupt
Not these smiles not these eyes
Tired of truth they're tired of lies
Do you believe by the sword all die
When mahalados are just trying to get by
Educate thy neighbor (ah ah ha)
Educate my friend thy neighbor ey
Educate thy neighbor (ah ah ah)
Educate my friend thy neighbor ei ei ei
Lyrics from "Educate Thy Neighbor" by Gogol Bordello (Bordello 2009)

In addition, the moment when Romani children locked themselves inside the Children's Art Workshop during its planned demolition and resisted the destruction with darbukas (traditional drums) also exemplifies stigma inversion in action. Hacer Foggo, founder of the Sulukule Platform, recounts this powerful resistance:

> I'll never forget—one day, as I was dropping my child off at daycare, I got a phone call saying they were demolishing the children's art workshop. The children had locked themselves inside the workshop that was about to be demolished. They were playing

> music with their instruments—darbukas and so on—and cursing at the demolition teams in protest. That day, they didn't let the workshop be torn down.

(EA-01, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, 57, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

Studied Indifference

Although some residents of Sulukule did not participate in overt public resistance, they sought to sustain their presence symbolically. This form of silent resistance has been documented by writers and filmmakers through books and documentaries. One of the most powerful examples is the story of Gülsüm Bitirmiş. Her home was the last one to be demolished in Sulukule. She referred to her blue-painted house as "my blue mansion." On the day of the demolition, unable to bear witnessing the destruction of her home, she quietly left Sulukule. Hacer Foggo and Nejla Osseiran recount Gülsüm Bitirmiş's story as follows:

> Gülsüm Bitirmiş's house was the last to be demolished in Sulukule. On the day of the demolition, she told us, 'I can't watch my house being destroyed—it would break me. I'll go to Edirnekapı Cemetery to visit my deceased relatives.' Then we locked ourselves inside her house, bolted the doors, and resisted as much as we could to stop the demolition. But we couldn't stop it—they demolished the house. What affected me most was how Gülsüm referred to her home as her 'blue mansion.' She had painted it blue and resisted silently until the very end. After her house was destroyed, we rented her a house, but eventually, we could no longer pay the rent. Later, we had to place Gülsüm in a nursing home (Darülaceze). One day she told me about a dream she had: 'In my dream, I'm always swimming in the ocean, but I can never reach the shore.' That shore was actually her blue-painted house. It really moved me.

(EA-01, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, 57, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

I interviewed many people, but no one expressed themselves as clearly, poetically, and precisely as Gülsüm did. Her narrative felt very poetic to me. I visited the neighborhood for a year trying to interview her, but she kept her distance that she wouldn't even let me take her photo. Then one day, while I was nearby, she came and sat down. She said, 'Go ahead, take my photo.' Her son was in prison, and she wanted to give him a photo at their next visit. She knew I would print the pictures and bring them to them. So I took her photo. She said, 'Ask me anything you want.' I had a voice recorder with me, so I turned it on and started the interview. I originally planned to use it in a book or an exhibition. Eventually, I created a short video using the photos I had taken and added her interview audio. When I shared it, my friends said, 'This isn't a book, it's a documentary!' So, we published it immediately. Her interview drew a lot of attention and deeply moved people.

(EA-02, Nejla Osseiran, 55, Female, photographer, filmmaker, Sulukule Platform member)

Figure 4 Gülsüm Bitirmiş and Her Blue Mansion

Source: Nejla Osseiran Archive

In Sulukule, alongside public protest, Gülsüm Bitirmiş's silent yet profoundly meaningful struggle for existence became internalized by many, and her emotional bond with her "blue mansion" remains one of the most powerful symbolic statements against the demolitions in Sulukule.

5.3 Territorial Stigmatization, Demolition, And Resistance in Küçükbakkalköy

5.3.1 The Production of Territorial Stigmatization: The Construction of the "Urban Problem"

Küçükbakkalköy was one of the historical Romani settlements on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. Before its demolition, this neighborhood was home to approximately 150,000 Romani people and was considered the largest Romani neighborhood on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. According to archival records and participant accounts, the neighborhood was founded during the Ottoman period by Romani people historically referred to as "Kıpti," even before the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. The historical background of this situation explained by participants as follows:

> When you look at the identities of the Küçükbakkalköy Romani people, in the e-Government family trees you can trace them back to the 1850s, and thousands of Romanis are listed this way. These Romanis were born in Kadıköy Küçükbakkalköy, Üsküdar, Zeytinburnu. In other words, they are truly native to Istanbul. The number of Romanis who came from outside the city was far less.

(*EA-03, male, 30, Romani rights activist focusing on urban transformation)*

> My grandfather spent his childhood, even his infancy, in that neighborhood. He is now 80 years old. That means our family has been living in that area for over a century.

> When our family first arrived, Küçükbakkalköy was still a forested area. It was full of wolves and foxes, entirely immersed in nature. Back then, it was not yet a residential area. One of the first settlers was my grandfather's father. So our family has been there for more than three generations.

(EA-07, male, 45, president of a Romani federation, former resident of Küçükbakkalköy)

Although the Küçükbakkalköy Romani people are recognized as native residents of the city, their living spaces have historically been portrayed as "criminal areas" and "crime hubs." The neighborhood was frequently subjected to police blockades, identity checks were carried out at entry and exit points, and it was stigmatized as a drug hub. The presence of a police station at the neighborhood's entrance further reinforced this perception, often leading to tensions between police officers and the Romani community. A female civil society activist from the area describes the situation as follows:

> The neighborhood was under constant police blockade. It was well known that Küçükbakkalköy was a Romani neighborhood. I believe the Romanis had been living there since the Byzantine era, making it the oldest Romani settlement on Istanbul's Anatolian side. Old neighbors in the neighborhood claimed that their families had been living there since the Ottoman period. The reason for the police blockade was this: the neighborhood was associated with crime due to its Romani identity; it was seen as a drug center and crime scene by the state and other ethnic groups.

(EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakkalköy)

This testimony directly aligns with Loïc Wacquant's (2007, 2008) theory of "territorial stigmatization." As Wacquant emphasizes, the moral, social, and cultural degradation assigned to a place inevitably affects the identities of its inhabitants. In the case of Küçükbakkalköy, the

residents' Romani origin functioned as a legitimizing basis for negative perceptions of the space.

Before the urban transformation took place, the residents of Küçükbakkalköy did not see their neighborhood as a "no-go area," "criminal zone," or "center of crime" as described by outsiders. On the contrary, they saw it as the safest place for them a place where children could play on the streets until late at night, where people supported each other, and even doors did not need to be locked. This situation was described as follows:

> For us, the neighborhood was a very safe space compared to the outside world. In Küçükbakkalköy, everyone felt safe—including non-Romani residents. For example, we used to sleep with our doors open at night, and there were no thefts. As children, we would play in the streets until very late with no fear. You can't do any of that in today's so-called secure luxury sites.

(EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakkalköy)

Residents stated that regional stigmatization in the Küçükbakkalköy case intensified before the transformation and reached its peak when the transformation process began. Identity checks at the neighborhood's entrances reportedly increased. The president of the Romani Federation on Istanbul's Anatolian side recounts an incident he experienced:

> There had been a slight rise in theft incidents recently, so the police started coming to the neighborhood more frequently. Identity checks were carried out, and various interrogations took place. We weren't opposed to the security measures themselves. The real issue was the label imposed on us. One day I got stopped by the police. I had a small truck at the time. The officer asked, 'What do you do for a living?' I said, 'I sell flowers.' Then he replied, 'We also know what else you do besides selling flowers.' I got really angry and confronted him, asking what he meant.

(EA-07, male, 45, president of a Romani federation, former resident of Küçükbakkalköy)

It becomes clear that Küçükbakköy was effectively turned into a "surveilled zone" through pressure and identity checks, resembling the "state of exception spaces" described by Agamben (1998) with his concept of the "camp." In these spaces, the suspension of the law allows for state-enforced oppression, intimidation, and illegality. A female Romani activist shares a story her older brother experienced:

> Police used to check IDs at the entrance and exit of the neighborhood. When my brother was ten, police took him to the station and strip-searched him. When they found nothing, they let him go. Later, in a crowded gathering, when my brother told this story, all the other men there said they had gone through similar discrimination and mistreatment. They said police would stop them at random, slap them for no reason, search them, and take them to the station. I've heard of such incidents from many elders in the neighborhood. This has been going on for a long time.

(EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakkalköy)

This "state of exception" in Küçükbakköy materialized during the operational phase of the urban transformation. One morning, hundreds of police officers, municipal officers, and demolition teams entered the neighborhood. The residents were told that "landscaping and urban planning" would be carried out, and were removed from their homes, which were later demolished along with their belongings.

"They deceived the people in Küçükbakköy. They said they would do city and environmental planning, got people out of their homes, and then demolished the houses along with all their belongings." (EA-01, 57, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

> One morning, we woke up and saw bulldozers and demolition crews, police and municipal officers, heading toward the neighborhood. They started demolishing homes even though people hadn't yet vacated them. The destruction of our neighbor's home was especially horrible because they had built a stable for their animals. They started tearing it down while the horses were still inside.

(EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakkalköy)

To summarize, the production of territorial stigmatization in the Küçükbakkalköy case has deep historical roots, and law enforcement, local governments, and state policies have played a decisive role in framing the neighborhood as an "urban problem." Despite a Romani presence of nearly a century, the neighborhood was criminalized through discourses of crime, insecurity, and constant surveillance. Practices involving the suspension of legal norms were observed. The next section will examine the capitalization of stigmatization in Küçükbakkalköy's urban transformation and the cooperative transformation strategy developed by the state after the Sulukule case.

5.3.2 The Capitalization of Stigmatization and the Mechanism of Cooperativization

The urban transformation of Sulukule, led by the Fatih Municipality, an elected local government, triggered significant public backlash. The accumulation of responsibility for the grievances experienced during this process within a state-supervised structure also led to criticism of state policies. In contrast, it is evident that the state and local administrations adopted a different tactic in the Küçükbakkalköy transformation by learning from the Sulukule case. This shift was based on the rationale that "the municipality is not carrying out the transformation; private companies, contractors, and cooperatives are, and people have already sold their houses to them." During this period, a group of contractors—allegedly guided by the

Kadıköy Municipality entered Küçükbakkalköy, negotiated with residents over their properties, and established their own presence in the neighborhood. Many Romani families' homes were purchased for very low amounts, without any information given about what would happen next. This situation is reflected in participants' statements as follows:

> At first, the people coming in and out of the neighborhood began to change (other ethnic groups, contractors). These people collected signatures from locals in exchange for small sums of money. Some residents sold their homes for extremely low amounts—back then, with the amount they were offered, they couldn't have bought a house elsewhere in Istanbul. At the time, people didn't know their rights, nor were they aware that financial centers would later be built on those lands. I think this was also due to unfamiliarity with legal procedures.

(EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakkalköy)

> So, people's houses were taken away easily and sold for 4,000 to 5,000 lira but now those areas are priceless. Anyway, I went to Küçükbakkalköy many times for Yüksel Dum and honestly stalled the contractors quite a bit. In the end, the contractors started to hate me. We resisted for 12 years with Yüksel Dum.

(EA-01, 57, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

As the neighborhood was opened up to capital, the poverty and lack of access to rights experienced by the Romani community were effectively used as tools. Most of the residents struggled with deep poverty, had limited access to education, and urgently needed the small sums offered more importantly, they were unaware of their rights and unable to defend themselves, which was exploited by capital holders.

This vulnerability was taken advantage of by opportunistic actors during the urban transformation process. These communities, unable to defend themselves against development

projects, saw their neighborhoods become accessible to contractors, and planning was done in line with the priorities of these contractors.

"A relative of mine once said: 'If you're having money problems, go buy property in a Romani neighborhood. In five years, you can sell it for a high price.' In other words, Romani neighborhoods were seen as economic opportunity zones." (EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakkalköy)

In addition, all Küçükbakköy interviewees claimed that some of the contractors involved had mafia ties and that they used threats and pressure to force residents to sell their homes. Their testimonies describe the situation as follows:

> There were mafias back then. They came to the neighborhood and tortured people into signing contracts. While torturing, they would say things like, 'You gonna give us the house or not? Sign here now!' If you signed, you could go free. The mafia forcibly took property from many people. More than half of Küçükbakkalköy was sold in this way.

(DO-01, female, 65, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

> Some contractors operating in the neighborhood at the time were basically semi-mafia. They instilled fear and pressured people. This goes back even earlier than 2009. Back then, a few individuals came into the neighborhood with various excuses, trying to extort money from residents.

(EA-07, male, 45, president of a Romani federation, former resident of Küçükbakkalköy)

"They got in our heads, saying the mafia would take your homes anyway, so we sold them for pennies." (DO-02, male, 55, Abdal, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

In the Küçükbakkalköy case, the use of stigmatization as a means for capital accumulation in the context of spatial transformation is particularly striking. The increasing market value of the

region and its potential to become a financial hub were combined with discourses suggesting that the area needed to be cleared of Romani people. One interviewee explained it as follows:

> I believe the neighborhood was criminalized to justify urban transformation. The state needed a pretext for displacing the neighborhood, so they created one by stigmatizing these areas as drug and crime centers. This made it acceptable in the eyes of the public. Also, this is not unique to Küçükbakkalköy—it can be seen in all Romani neighborhoods in Istanbul undergoing urban transformation.

(EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakkalköy)

> The state or local administrations group neighborhoods they see as crime-prone, apply pressure, and then wait for the area to develop over time. Once the area gains value, they eliminate those neighborhoods—forcing people to relocate. For instance, Yüksel Dum did not sell his home to contractors, but his house was still demolished. In this process, not only the homes of those who refused to sell but many others were forcibly evacuated. In reality, urban transformation brought about a major 'cleansing'—an ethnic cleansing. When people refused to leave, municipal and police teams entered the neighborhood to remove them.

(EA-07, male, 45, president of a Romani federation, former resident of Küçükbakkalköy)

In conclusion, the Küçükbakkalköy case clearly illustrates the intersection of Loïc Wacquant's "territorial stigmatization" theory with capital accumulation. Initially stigmatized through narratives of criminal spatiality, the neighborhood later became a prime target for private companies and cooperatives due to its increasing market value. The poverty, limited access to education, and legal support of the Romani people were used as leverage, and their properties were swiftly transferred through exploitative tactics. As Tyler suggests, stigmatization has become a tool of neoliberal governance, but in this case, capital holders also exploited the

Romani community's socio-economic vulnerabilities. Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence" and Harvey's "creative destruction" both operated in the Küçükbakköy case. The "spatial cleansing" described by participants clearly benefited capital and private enterprise, while profoundly harming the Romani community.

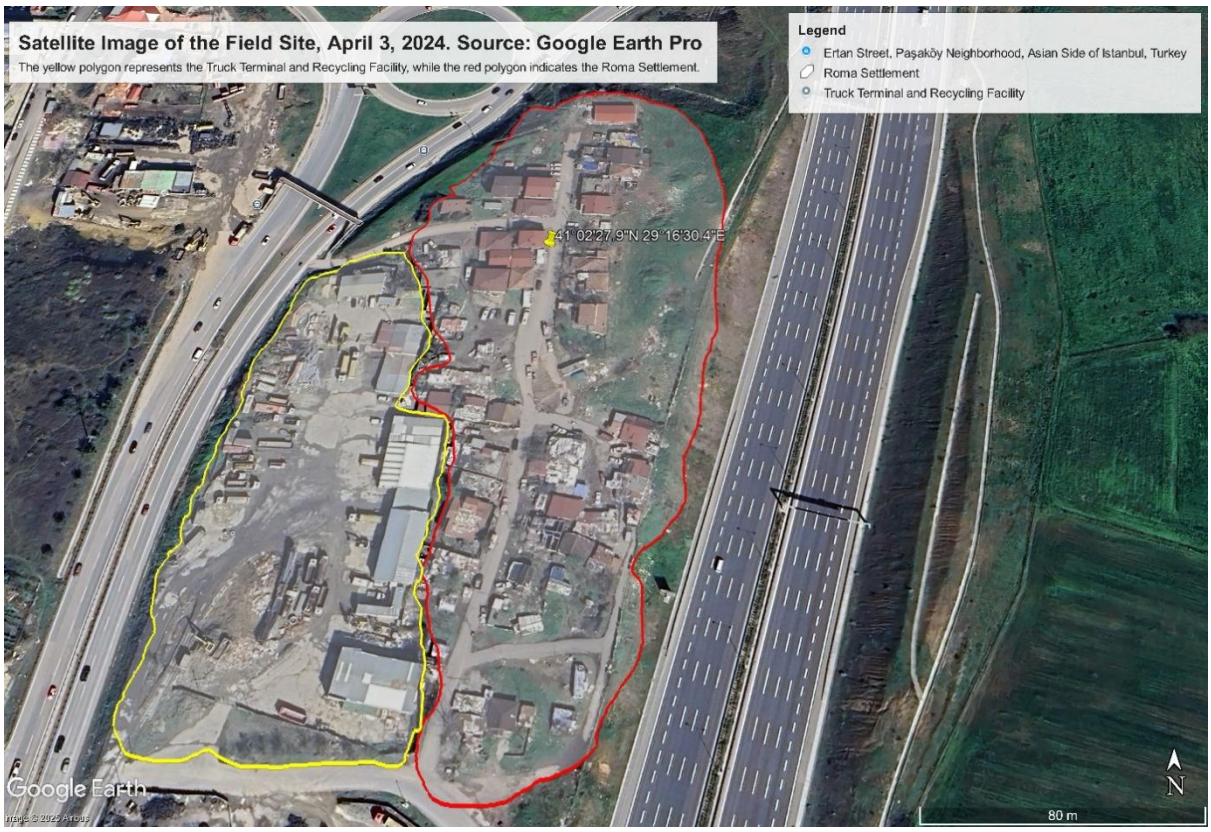
In the next section, we will examine the current situation of the Romani population displaced from Küçükbakkalköy to various parts of Istanbul's Anatolian side, and discuss the long-term impacts of this urban transformation process.

5.3.3 Long-Term Effects and the Inescapability of Stigma

Despite nearly 20 years having passed since the transformation of Küçükbakkalköy, the Romani people displaced from the area have yet to recover. Many have relocated to remote corners of Istanbul's Anatolian side, including neighborhoods such as Ümraniye Dudullu, Nişantepe (near Özyeğin University), Çekmeköy, and Paşaköy. In these new settlements, the Romani community faces a renewed cycle of stigmatization, alongside inadequate housing conditions and environmental risks. In most of these areas, they are forced to live in tents, shacks, or makeshift structures resembling slums, without access to electricity or running water. According to the president of the Romani Federation who migrated from Küçükbakkalköy, there are approximately 100,000 to 150,000 former Küçükbakköy residents in these new settlements.

In collaboration with the Romani Memory Studies Association (Romani Godi), field visits were conducted in December 2023 to observe the current living conditions of the displaced Romani people from Küçükbakkalköy and to examine their new settlement areas and survival strategies. The next section will present data from these field visits and explore the daily struggles and coping mechanisms of the Romani residents in these areas.

Ertan Street, Paşaköy Neighborhood, Sancaktepe/Istanbul, Turkey



A portion of the Romani population displaced during Küçükbakkalköy's urban transformation settled on Ertan Street in Paşaköy, located in Sancaktepe district. Today, approximately 60 Romani households reside in the area. According to the president of the Romani Federation, 52 of these households are officially registered at this address, while 8 remain undocumented. Although many families possess individual title deeds to the land, the wooden shack-like houses they have built have not gone through any formal construction approval process, and are therefore considered "illegal" by the municipality. As a result, local authorities refuse to provide basic services like electricity and water. Even house numbers have not been assigned to these dwellings.

"Almost everyone living in Paşaköy today is a Romani family from Küçükbakkalköy. They have no roads, no house numbers, no access to basic services. Yet water is a fundamental human

right—and they don't even have that." (EA-07, male, 45, president of a Romani federation, former resident of Küçükbakkalköy)

This statement was support by another participant as follows:

"Compared to the modern era, we're living far behind. You could say they [the gadje] are in the new age while we're still in the Stone Age." (DO-03, male, 33, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

The housing units mostly consist of wooden or container-like shacks built on dirt ground. There is no playground for children in the area; instead, they are seen playing near truck parking lots, where liquid waste flows into the vicinity. In addition, the region experiences a severe insect and pest problem during summer, leading to an increase in skin diseases and other health issues. Civil society workers active in the area describe the situation as follows:

> We didn't even know what the waste from the truck park was—there was a black, gel-like liquid flowing near the entrance of Ertan Street, turning the area around the shacks into a swamp. People were bothered by the flies it attracted.

(EA-06, male, 35, civil rights defender working with displaced Roma from Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy)

> Especially in summer, there are swarms of insects and bugs in the neighborhood, everyone itches. It likely causes scabies or other skin diseases. I remember during our field visit; we couldn't work because of the insects and bugs. In fact, I got sick after visiting due to the environmental conditions there.

(EA-05 38 Female A civil rights defender working closely with displaced Roma from Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy

Access to basic hygiene products is extremely limited. The community is battling deep poverty, which has worsened since the displacement from Küçükbakkalköy. Residents have developed makeshift strategies to meet minimal hygiene standards, for example, cloths are sold individually in open plastic bags, and liquids are sold in plastic cups. In a local store, children's most consumed item, ice cream, is stored on the same shelf as raw meat and bones, posing a serious food safety risk.

Due to the remote location of the settlement, residents have no nearby access to grocery stores, hospitals, or schools. Although free school bus services are available for children, they often lack essential items like coats, shoes, and stationery, which are among the most urgent needs.

The community also suffers from energy and fuel poverty. According to one interviewee, most residents cannot afford coal and instead burn plastic-like materials to heat their homes. Others collect wood from the surrounding areas to meet their winter fuel needs.

Many residents still feel deep longing for their former neighborhood, Küçükbakkalköy. When asked about their memories of the area, they reflect fondly on their childhoods and youth, noting that their quality of life there was significantly better compared to their current situation.

"Küçükbakkalköy was wonderful, we used to play ball as kids, our relatives were there... Then they got in our heads, saying the mafia would take our homes. So we sold them for a few pennies." (DO-02, male, 55, Abdal, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

Figure 5 The housing conditions of the Küçükbakkalköy Family in Paşaköy

Source: Author

Ataberk Street in Ümraniye / İstanbul

Figure 6 A Satellite image of Ataberk Street in Ümraniye, İstanbul

Several Romani families from Küçükbakkalköy migrated to a shanty-like area on Ataber Street. Over time, this area has transformed and is now surrounded by luxury housing and high-rise residences. Among these luxury developments, a Romani family from Küçükbakkalköy reported living in a makeshift home and paying a monthly rent of 5,000 TL, a cost they struggle immensely to afford. The landlords, according to the resident, have said: *"If you can't pay, go pitch a tent." (DO-04, female, 45, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)*

The interviewed family stated that they make a living by collecting paper and scrap. Within this insecure and seasonal work cycle, the mother explained that she sometimes has to dress her children in clothes found in the trash. Due to extreme poverty, she is unable to send her children to school because of the lack of proper clothing, and even access to basic food is irregular.

> When elections approach, [politicians] come here. My daughter goes to school, but I can't pack her any lunch. I couldn't send my little boy to school because I couldn't buy him clothes. If we go dumpster diving, we eat. If not, we go hungry. We even collect clothes for the kids from the trash.

(DO-04, female, 45, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

A 65-year-old woman from Küçükbakkalköy said that she misses her old neighborhood but was deceived into selling her home. Now, she says she wants to go back to the old area and sell flowers, which reflects how the neighborhood has increased in economic value.

> Küçükbakkalköy was one of a kind, but it's gone now. We had a big plot of land. They tricked us. I went there recently—our house used to be right by the hospital, but I couldn't find the street, I got lost. It's beautiful now... I told myself I should come here and sell flowers.

(DO-01, female, 65, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

Figure 7 A depiction of the housing conditions of a Küçükbakkalköy family living on Ataberk Street Source: Author

A Roma Family in Turgut Özal Street in Ümraniye/ İstanbul

One of the most striking cases observed during fieldwork was that of a Romani family living in tents near Turgut Özal Street in Ümraniye. When I arrived for the interview, I found two tents set up on an empty lot between luxury residences, five young children, and a mother standing by a water container. The Romani woman explained that she had just returned from the mosque, where she collects water, as they have no access to water or electricity in their tents.

> We've been living in a tent since we left Küçükbakkalköy. We want to rent a house, but they won't give it to us because we're Romani. And rents in Istanbul are too expensive. I live here with five children. No electricity, no water. I fetch water from the mosque, bucket by bucket.

(DO-05, female, 38, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

When I asked her about her dream, she shared a painfully simple wish:

"All I want is a home. Even just one room would be enough for me. Just one room. As long as it has four walls. How much longer can we live like this?" (DO-05, female, 38, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

The local municipality's understanding of "environmental planning" or "clean-up" consists solely of demolishing these families' tents. As the woman put it:

"The municipality comes to clean the area, and they tear down my tent. After they leave, I set it up again." (DO-05, female, 38, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

Local administrations treat Romani people not as citizens, but as subjects merely "tolerated," and they fail to respond to even their most basic demands that are, in fact, fundamental human rights.

Figure 8 The housing conditions of the Küçükbakkalköy family living in Ataberk Street

Source: Author

Nişantepe Neighborhood Çekmeköy / İstanbul

Nişantepe has become one of the most significant resettlement areas for Romani people displaced from Küçükbakkalköy. According to interviewees, approximately 2,000 families live in this area, which includes a wide expanse of tents, shacks, and informal housing within the boundaries of Çekmeköy. Around 80% of those living in the region are from Küçükbakkalköy. Housing conditions are inadequate and unhealthy; most homes are heated with stoves, yet due to economic hardship, residents have limited access to coal. One interviewee, who has COPD and whose spouse suffers from a lung condition, reported that the coal they use smells bad and that they must keep their windows open constantly to avoid being affected.

Residents deeply miss Küçükbakkalköy, and their sense of injustice has grown over time. One respondent claimed they were displaced simply for being Romani, while homes belonging to non-Romani residents were left untouched.

> We had a beautiful home in Küçükbakkalköy. They committed a great injustice against us. Do you believe they only demolished the Romani neighborhood there—not a single wall belonging to a gaco (non-Romani) was touched. I came to Nişantepe after the 2006 demolition. When we first arrived, it was an empty space. We used to draw water from a well. Now I borrow water from my neighbors.

(DO-06, male, 43, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

Some of the Romanis who arrived in Nişantepe in 2006 purchased houses and plots of land. At the time, the area was on the city's periphery remote, and often frequented by wild animals. Over time, however, the region has developed rapidly. The establishment of Özyeğin University nearby catalyzed this development, followed by the construction of dormitories, private schools, and luxury residences. Today, the area has become economically valuable, and rumors of a new urban transformation have begun to circulate. Notably, while building and zoning permits are being granted to areas across the street, permits are not being issued for the Romani side reinforcing fears of another displacement. Former Küçükbakkalköy residents living in the area express their concerns as follows:

> Özyeğin University was established right next to Alemdağ, and the region developed quickly. Luxury housing projects followed, and the area became popular. But along with this development, efforts began to push the former Küçükbakkalköy Romanis out of the area. Interestingly, while zoning permits are issued for one part of the area, no such permits are given to the part where Romanis live. I think this is part of a deliberate strategy. It looks like the Romani side is being prepared for urban transformation.

(EA-06, male, 35, civil rights defender working with displaced Roma from Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy)

> Özyeğin University was founded, and luxury housing projects emerged around it. The area is now called Nişantepe and is connected to Çekmeköy. The area around the university has been zoned for development, but unfortunately, the Romani side has not. They say another zoning meeting will be held in 3–4 months. They tell us, 'Your zoning will be approved too,' but honestly, we say, 'We hope it won't be,' because as soon as that happens, we'll once again face displacement just like we did in Küçükbakkalköy 20 years ago. They'll push us even further away towards İzmit, Sakarya.

(EA-07, male, 45, president of a Romani federation, former resident of Küçükbakkalköy)

Additionally, according to a civil society representative working in the area, the current local headman (muhtar) of Nişantepe holds openly prejudiced views against Romanis. When residents request assistance, he often replies, "Most of them own property; they choose this life." This statement reflects a deeper form of discrimination:

> The headman of Nişantepe is prejudiced against Romanis. He often says things like, 'Most of the people you're helping don't actually need help.' This is a different kind of prejudice—a different form of discrimination. Usually, when we think of discrimination, we think of people being labeled dirty or thieves. But here it was more like, 'These people are actually rich.' He'd say, 'I'm the headman, I know that family has a deed here, and that one does too. They live in these shacks by choice, it's their lifestyle.' What he implied was that it's impossible to improve Romani housing conditions, because poverty and living in shacks is part of their culture. That was his perspective. So essentially, they normalize the situation and lighten their own responsibility.

(EA-06, male, 35, civil rights defender working with displaced Roma from Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy)

In conclusion, the living conditions of Romanis in Nişantepe remain extremely challenging, and many families continue to carry the trauma and losses caused by the urban transformation of Küçükbakkalköy. Access to basic rights and services, which are particularly housing, water, electricity, education, and healthcare, is severely limited. Furthermore, the Romani community in Nişantepe lives under constant uncertainty and anxiety about a potential second wave of displacement as part of another urban transformation process.

Figure 9 The housing conditions of the Küçükbakkalköy family living in Nişantepe Settlement

Source: Author

5.4 An Examination of the Strategies Proposed in Wacquant's (2011) Theory of 'Territorial Stigma': The Case of Küçükbakkalköy

5.4.1 Strategies of Submission and Withdrawal

Dissimulation

According to interviewees, Romanis from Küçükbakkalköy tend to avoid speaking the Romani language, one of the defining markers of their identity. When they are outside the neighborhood. The act of concealing the language clearly indicates an effort to hide their Romani identity. When evaluated through Wacquant's strategy of "dissimulation," this behavior can be interpreted as an attempt by Küçükbakköy Romanis to shield themselves from stigmatizing and discriminatory external gazes. Participant, EA-08, explained this as follows:

"We usually didn't speak Romani outside the neighborhood; honestly, our family told us not to speak Romani in public." (EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakköy)

Within the neighborhood, the Romani language is seen as a cultural artifact and an essential element for the continuity of cultural identity, as well as a symbol of belonging. However, outside the neighborhood, it transforms into a trigger for exclusion and discrimination. Therefore, Küçükbakköy residents refrained from speaking Romani in public as a protective reflex against stigmatizing discourses.

On the other hand, interviews do not indicate a direct sense of submission or passive acceptance of urban transformation. Rather, the strategy involving language can be seen as a small-scale defense mechanism developed in response to everyday discrimination.

Mutual Distancing

During the transformation process, a certain fragmentation within the community emerged. Some residents, who were content living in the neighborhood, began developing stigmatizing discourses about it after relocating. This resulted in the weakening of solidarity networks within the community and undermined the possibility of collective resistance.

> Everyone living inside the neighborhood was very happy with it. But the moment they moved out, they started blaming the neighborhood. They began distancing themselves from the identity of that place, saying they were not part of that community or its 'crime.'

(EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakköy)

Lateral Denigration

Interviews clearly show that external stigmatization has, over time, been internalized and transformed into lateral denigration—the act of demeaning one's own community. One participant not only expressed approval of the urban transformation but went so far as to say that Romanis "deserved it."

> Actually, it was for the best—our Romanis deserved this (urban transformation). Back then, there was a lot of drug use and theft. You can't ever please Romanis. Now there's also a lot of drugs and such here. There should be harsher punishments to stop this kind of behavior.

(DO-06, male, 43, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

"The issue of internalizing crime within the community… I think one of the biggest factors is the acceptance of 'we're already like that.' In Küçükbakköy, there were people who believed

'we're already dirty, we don't even try to improve ourselves.'" (EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakköy)

Retreat into the Private Sphere

Compared to the Romanis of Sulukule, the Küçükbakköy Romanis were more economically vulnerable, which pushed them into the private sphere during the urban transformation. The pressing need for even the very modest amounts of money offered to them became one of the major obstacles to forming any significant resistance movement.

"Poverty is just like that. If you're both Romani and poor, it's even harder. Imagine you've got kids, a baby, no water… How are you supposed to resist? Who do you resist with, and against whom?" (EA-01, 57, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

The long-standing police pressure in Küçükbakköy also played a role in driving people into the private sphere, as residents were reluctant to confront institutions they referred to as "the state" (i.e., the municipality, ministries, and security forces).

Another factor was the spread of rumors about mafia threats in the neighborhood, which further encouraged people to retreat into their private lives. This is reflected in interview statements such as: *"They got into our heads, said the mafia would take our homes, and made us sell them for pennies." (DO-02, male, 55, Abdal, displaced from Küçükbakköy)*

An additional factor was the lack of awareness about legal avenues for seeking justice and the absence of organized resistance. The rapid progression of the process via contractors and cooperatives may also have intensified the retreat response.

Exit

Although sporadic departures from the neighborhood were observed when the transformation began, the major rupture that led to collective displacement occurred on July 19, 2006, when 256 homes were demolished. Around 5:30 in the morning, accompanied by police, authorities

entered the neighborhood and removed residents from their homes under the pretext of "landscaping work" while they were still asleep. Many homes were demolished along with their contents, and Romanis weren't even given the chance to retrieve their personal belongings. Some set up shacks next to the ruins of their demolished homes, while others had to move in with relatives in other neighborhoods.

"They deceived people in Küçükbakköy. They said they were doing city planning and environmental improvements, got people out of their homes, and then demolished the houses along with their belongings. It was a brutal demolition." (EA-01, 57, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

5.4.2 Recalcitrance to Resistance

Defense of Neighborhood

Unlike Sulukule, no organized or mass resistance developed in Küçükbakkalköy during the urban transformation process. One of the main reasons for this was that the community had been deprived of social support mechanisms and institutional actors for many years. The absence of a local association also played a critical role in the failure to initiate or sustain self-organization. Additionally, residents of Küçükbakkalköy were economically more disadvantaged than those in Sulukule, which further weakened their ability to mobilize resistance. Hacer Foggo, one of the founders of the Sulukule Platform, expressed this situation as follows:

> You've been ignored for years, you have no one beside you—no political party, no association, nothing how can you resist? For example, if the police had come during resistance efforts and detained the Romanis, taken them away or harmed them, nobody would have asked 'Why did you take them?' They're aware of this. So, what would they resist against?

(EA-01, 57, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

As Foggo points out, the residents—lacking legal and political support—were reluctant to openly resist due to their historical relationship of respect and fear toward the state. The long-standing police presence in the area also played a role in silencing potential resistance. A former resident, now the head of the Romani Federation, describes the situation as follows:

"Romanis have always had a kind of respect for the state, for the government. Some people panic just at the sight of the police. Even though they haven't committed any crimes, they're afraid when they see police." (DO-04, female, 45, Romani, displaced from Küçükbakköy)

Sulukule, where most residents held official title deeds, however, Küçükbakkalköy had many homes with only tapu tahsis (provisional title certificates), which also weakened their legal standing and their resistance. Hacer Foggo explains this distinction:

> Unlike Sulukule, Küçükbakkalköy had houses with tapu tahsis. In Sulukule, the majority had official deeds, some dating back 100 years from the Ottoman period. Küçükbakkalköy, on the other hand, was an area of informal housing with provisional titles, and that made it easier to demolish.

(EA-01, 57, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

Activists and civil rights defenders who wanted to support the neighborhood also faced challenges. Most rights-based organizations are located on Istanbul's European side, while Küçükbakkalköy is on the Asian side in a physically demanding location, which negatively affected the sustainability of solidarity.

> I fought hard in Küçükbakkalköy, brought many people there to offer support. But nobody came back after their first visit. I lived on the other side [European side] and traveled every day. The trip was exhausting, and I think that's why many rights

> defenders I brought couldn't provide lasting support like they did in Sulukule. Plus, the homes had already been demolished people were living in shacks, there were rats. The people were in extreme poverty. It was honestly a tough field.

(EA-01, 57, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

Furthermore, changing municipal boundaries might have led to a quieter resistance. Initially part of Kadıköy Municipality, Küçükbakkalköy was later transferred to Ataşehir Municipality, creating administrative confusion and uncertainty regarding responsibility. This made it harder for residents to assert their rights.

> *The area was originally under Kadıköy Municipality, then it was transferred to Ataşehir. That caused confusion, and suddenly, the responsible authorities changed. To this day, no one can say who was officially in charge back then. There's a constant state of uncertainty.*

(EA-06, male, 35, civil rights defender working with displaced Roma from Sulukule and Küçükbakköy)

The most important symbol of resistance in Küçükbakkalköy was Yüksel Dum. Even though he only had a provisional title, his house was demolished. He continued his legal struggle for years while living in a wooden shack he built in his garden. He never left his neighborhood and eventually passed away in that shack. After 12 years of resistance, the court ruled in favor of Yüksel Dum.

> Yüksel Dum was my comrade. We went everywhere together. Before he died, he took me to Bakkalköy—to where the houses had been demolished and people were now living in shacks in Sancaktepe, with rats running around. He said to me, 'Let's make their voices heard too.' While fighting his own battle, he was also thinking of others. He was truly an activist. Then he passed away. His wife was very ill too. One day, she

said to me, 'If I die, please don't leave my children alone.' Not long after that, she died as well. Then we continued the struggle with Yüksel's children—and we won the case. Yes, they still live in that house.

(EA-01, 57, Hacer Foggo Yıldırım, Female, Founder of the Sulukule Platform)

In conclusion, resistance in Küçükbakkalköy, compared to Sulukule, was a quiet but determined struggle for existence, carried out with limited resources and without institutional support.

Stigma Inversion

Some interviewees emphasized that, contrary to the "dangerous" and "criminal" image attributed from the outside, Küçükbakkalköy was in fact a very safe place. However, this sense of safety remained an internal perception among residents and was never transformed into a tool to reverse the stigma during the urban transformation process. In contrast, Sulukule saw examples of stigma inversion through artistic expression—such as the lyrics of Tahribat-ı İsyan or Gogol Bordello. In Küçükbakkalköy, such expressions were absent. This can be attributed to the more limited resources, less media visibility (both national and international), and lower engagement from rights-based actors in the case of Küçükbakkalköy.

Studied Indifference

Although visible protests or organized resistance in Küçükbakkalköy were minimal after the demolitions began, a silent yet persistent resistance was evident. Most notably, some Romani families whose homes were demolished did not leave the neighborhood; instead, they set up tents and makeshift shelters in their yards and continued to live there.

Even though Kadıköy and later Ataşehir municipalities repeatedly dismantled these structures, the residents rebuilt them each time, maintaining their silent resistance for years. This was a

form of resistance by people who had nowhere else to go—choosing not to overtly oppose urban transformation but also refusing to abandon their homes.

> When demolitions started in Küçükbakkalköy in 2006, people didn't leave the area and pitched tents in the yards of their demolished homes. If I remember correctly, some stayed in tents until 2012, 2013, 2014—even 2015. Initially, Kadıköy municipal officers came and removed the tents, and later, when the municipality changed, Ataşehir officers did the same. After each intervention, the Romanis rebuilt their tents and stayed.

(EA-08, female, 35, Romani civil society activist from Küçükbakköy)

5.5 Chapter Conclusion: A Comparative Analysis of The Sulukule And Küçükbakkalköy Cases

The urban transformation processes of Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy were initiated within a very close timeframe and resulted in the de-Romanization of Romani spaces located in city centers in Turkey, leading to the gentrification of these areas. In both cases, historical Romani neighborhoods were targeted (Sulukule with a history of around 1,000 years, and Küçükbakkalköy around 100 years), and these interventions seriously damaged the Romani community's historical and cultural presence, spatial memory, solidarity networks, livelihood strategies, and property rights. Both cases share common patterns that can be interpreted through Loïc Wacquant's theory of "territorial stigmatization." However, they differ in the tools employed, forms of resistance, and socio-spatial outcomes of the transformation. Therefore, this chapter provides a comparative analysis of the two cases.

In both instances, systematic regional stigmatization was carried out prior to the transformation through state actors, media outlets, and local governments. Drawing on long-standing stigmatizing codes historically imposed on the Romani people, Sulukule was criminalized

through representations such as “moral decay,” “prostitution,” and “monstrous aesthetics,” while Küçükbakkalköy was portrayed as a “drug hub” and “no-go zone.” These stigmas, constructed through state institutions, law enforcement, local administrations, and the media, aimed to generate public consent for the urban transformation projects. These practices align closely with Imogen Tyler’s (2013) concept of “social abjection,” as both cases involve efforts to render the Romani people “repellent others.”

When both cases are examined through Wacquant’s theory of “territorial stigmatization,” it becomes evident that spatial stigma was transformed into an economic tool. For instance, in Sulukule, “Romani entertainment houses” were once seen as cultural assets, but just before the transformation, they were redefined as symbols of “moral degradation.” In the Küçükbakkalköy case, systematic police raids, identity checks, and security blockades rendered the neighborhood a “danger zone,” and through this legitimizing narrative, the area was opened up to capital investment.

The instrumentalization of stigmatization for economic gain was carried out using different strategies. In Sulukule, the transformation process was implemented directly by the state through an urgent expropriation order issued by the Council of Ministers in 2006. As such, this case can be explained using David Harvey’s (2003) concept of “accumulation by dispossession.” On the other hand, in Küçükbakkalköy, a more “indirect” model was adopted by learning from the Sulukule experience, where the transformation was carried out via private companies, contractors, and cooperatives. In this context, the supposedly “voluntary sales” in Küçükbakkalköy were, in reality, driven by threats, pressure, and the instrumentalization of poverty.

Despite more than 20 years having passed, the Romani communities in both cases have not been able to recover. They are struggling to survive in areas far from city centers and lacking

basic infrastructure services. Compared to their former neighborhoods, they now live under socially, economically, and environmentally more fragile conditions.

In the Sulukule case, a civil society-supported organized resistance developed, and a multi-actor struggle network formed around the "Sulukule Platform." This ethno-cultural resistance succeeded in attracting both national and international attention, making rights violations within the urban transformation process more visible. In contrast, resistance in Küçükbakkalköy remained mostly individual and limited. Compared to Sulukule, the economic vulnerability and social disorganization in Küçükbakkalköy weakened its resistance. Furthermore, Sulukule's symbolic historical status and its proximity to human rights organizations contributed to the strength of its resistance.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis critically examined the production, instrumentalization and capitalization of territorial stigmatization in the urban transformation processes affecting historical Roma neighbourhoods in Istanbul, Sulukule and Küçükbakkalköy. Drawing on Wacquant's (2007, 2008, 2011) conceptual framework of territorial stigmatization and borrowing concepts from Bourdieu, Goffman, Tyler, and Harvey, this study has illuminated the structural processes through which space, identity, and power intersect to produce spatialized exclusion, displacement, and socio-environmental vulnerability.

The empirical evidence reveals that territorial stigmatization is not merely a discursive or symbolic move; it is actually a real mechanism of neoliberal urban rule. In all these cases, local and national governments, in addition to private capital, utilized stigmatizing narratives to represent Roma neighborhoods as zones of deviance, crime, and degeneration, thus legitimizing exceptional urban intervention in the name of "renewal" or "risk management." The research demonstrates that such stigmas, grounded on centuries-long ethnic prejudice, were strategically amplified during urban transformation to legitimize dispossession and commodification of space according to Harvey's (2008) theory of "accumulation by dispossession."

In Sulukule, the demolition of a 1000-year-old Roma community under UNESCO protection showed how cultural heritage was subsidiary to market-led regeneration. The case exposed how legal instruments, such as Law No. 5366 and state of emergency expropriation orders, were employed in dismantling forcefully the built environment and collective memory. Küçükbakkalköy also demonstrated the rapid and coercive processes of removal, in which

policing, media discourses, and infrastructural abandonment converged to facilitate gentrification. Cases also pointed to the long-term duration of stigmatization, that there existed a systemic trajectory of criminalization and erasure of culture culminating in displacement and rearrangement of space.

One of the most significant findings of this thesis is how stigmatization of territories was a multi-pronged process, discursive, legal, and material, simultaneously. Discursively, state officials and media representatives criminalized Roma territories. Legally, coercive and ambiguous urban transformation legislation enabled interventions without the hand of participatory justice. Materially, the outcome was the creation of geographically demarcated "Roma-free" spaces in the heart of Istanbul and the resettlement peripherally of uprooted individuals to peri-urban locales characterized by poor infrastructure, environmental risk, and denial of livelihood opportunity. The change thus was not just physical but deeply social and symbolic, a project of urban cleansibility colored by the aestheticism of Ottoman revivalism and modernity.

Further, this thesis has provided a nuanced understanding of Roma resistance. Contrary to dominant assumptions of passivity, the Roma groups had access to a repertoire of coping strategies from dissimulation and symbolic withdrawal, to organized protest and judicial activism. Wacquant's (2011) categorization of responses from submission to stigma inversion was found to be pertinent in typifying these disparate acts of survival and transgression. However, the evidence shows that while some forms of resistance were powerful in taking back narrative and space (e.g., Sulukule Platform's activism), structural constraints and the power imbalance usually short-circuited their ability to bring change.

In scrutinizing the long-term impacts of these changes, the research found that territorial stigmatization persisted long after physical devastation. The new spatial configurations, gated

luxury blocs, truncated TOKİ developments, and informal settlements, have not eradicated fundamental inequalities but have re-spatialized them. The displaced Roma populations still face barriers to education, work, public services, and housing, and in most situations, in contexts of heightened environmental risk and diminished social cohesion.

In summary, the research demonstrates that urban change within Istanbul's Roma communities is not only a spatial but also a biopolitical process wherein neoliberal governmentality exploits territorial stigma as a control mechanism, a tool of accumulation, and exclusion. The thesis contributes to critical urban studies by articulating territorial stigmatization as a conceptual lens for examining how historically marginalized groups are systematically displaced in the name of modernization. Besides, it advocates for a rights-based, inclusive, and participatory style of urban policy that is conscious of the interdependence between identity, space, and justice.

Future research has to continue following the shifting geographies of Roma displacement, explore the intersectionality of space, class, and ethnicity in urban policy, and document new patterns of resistance and resilience among marginalized communities. It is only through such continued research and political will that urban transformation can be made a tool for inclusion and not dispossession.

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