

# **WOMEN AND THE HOUSING ENVIRONMENT**

## **The Experiences of Turkish Migrant Women in Squatter (Gecekondu) and Apartment Housing**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article investigates the experiences of rural migrant women in an apartment district and a squatter (gecekondu) settlement in Ankara, Turkey. It demonstrates the significant role the housing environment plays in the lives of women, both by defining who they are and by shaping their daily lives through encouraging some behavior and discouraging others. Gecekondu housing is potentially a source of negative identity for those migrant women whose reference group is the modern established urbanites, whereas those migrant women who take the gecekondu community as their reference group tend to preserve a positive image of themselves. On the other hand, apartment housing enhances a feeling of achievement in its residents of village origin. Furthermore, gecekondu housing encourages intimate social relations and thereby social control, whereas apartment housing demands some formality in neighborly relations and provides privacy. As social agents, women use their environment actively, attempting to foster certain images of themselves, and communicating those images to others as well as to themselves. This is particularly apparent in the case of modern gecekondu women who, by their outward appearances and demeanor, challenge the negative image attributed to gecekondu residents by the larger society.

**The significance of the physical environment** in the lives of people has been widely documented in environmental psychology and the literature is full of valuable research. In the investigation of the critical factors that influence the experiences of migrants in Third World cities, the physical environmental dimension has been increasingly receiving attention (Patton,

1988; Payne, 1977; Potter, 1993; Turner, 1967; Turner & Fichter, 1972). In this literature, the focus has been on squatter settlements, and only very limited research has been conducted on rural migrants in apartments. In the latter case, those who are located from squatter settlements to social housing projects have been mostly studied (Bryce-Laporte, 1970; Perlman, 1976; Safa, 1964), with only a few studies that investigated migrants in condominiums (Ayata, 1989; Erdogan [Erman], 1981; Erman, 1990). Yet it is important also to study rural-to-urban migrants in condominiums (namely, those who are not forcibly relocated to apartment projects built by the state) if one wants to understand the varied experiences of migrants in the city and how this experience is affected by the physical environment.

This article investigates the experiences of rural-to-urban migrant residents in two different types of housing environment in Turkey's capital, namely, *gecekondu* (Turkish squatter housing) and apartment (condominium) areas. An underlying premise of the article is that, although migrants in apartments and *gecekondus* vary on some aspects (e.g., higher incomes and longer stay in the city in the case of apartment residents), the physical and social characteristics of the two housing environments create different experiences for their residents. The article further asks what it means for a Turkish rural migrant to live in a *gecekondu* or an apartment in the city.

In this article, the emphasis is on women, and this is so for both practical and theoretical reasons. Women, who are traditionally defined as homemakers and the main providers of care and emotional support for the family, are closer to the home and the neighborhood, and thereby are more affected by them. They spend more time in the neighborhood, especially if they are housewives and have small children, and if they are expected by society to socialize with their neighbors. In the case of traditional Muslim women, because of the restrictions on their movements, the significance of the neighborhood increases (Bauer, 1984). Women develop deeper and more personal bonds with their residential environments than men due to the kind of relationship they have with it (Hayward, 1977; Tognoli,

1980). The significance of home to women is stressed by Dandekar (1994). Thus a focus on women when the topic is the housing environment has adequate theoretical justification. This is acknowledged in the fast growing body of literature on the relationship of women with the physical environment. This multidisciplinary literature covers "environmental settings that vary from microenvironments of homes to macroenvironments of cities and regions" (Altman & Churchman, 1994, p. 3). It reveals that not only women are more affected by the home environment but also are active agents in creating homes for their families, shouldering triple-work burden (Moser & Peake, 1987). Hirschon (1985) and Joseph (1978) have shown how women invest psychologically and socially in their communities.

Although in research conducted in Ankara that compared those who migrated to the city and settled in squatter settlements to those who remained in the village (Potter, 1993), no significant differences were found between women and men with regard to their degree of satisfaction with their housing and the aspects of housing that led to this satisfaction, and it is expected that more detailed and in-depth studies will reveal gender differences regarding housing (e.g., see Erman, 1990). Research may not reveal gender differences when the questions about housing are general (such as safety, ownership, cost, size) or asked in a questionnaire format (respondents, particularly traditional people in the Third World, may have difficulty translating their concrete experiences into clear and definite answers).

As for the practical reason, being a woman researcher, it was easier to approach women than men, and throughout the research, women were more available and more willing to share their experiences and thoughts with me.

#### **GECEKONDU (SQUATTER) AND APARTMENT HOUSING IN THE TURKISH CONTEXT**

Gecekondu settlements appeared in Turkey following World War II as the result of rapid urbanization of the country, which

entailed large numbers of villagers migrating to cities. Because the cities were not ready, either physically or economically, to receive them, migrants built their own houses—first in the geographically undesirable areas (steep slopes, river beds) and later on in increasing numbers on the peripheries of the cities. The early *gecekondus* were small houses (shanties) made from second-hand materials and were built in areas that lacked any services or infrastructure. In the course of time, the role of migrants in the economy gained significance as the result of their contributions both to the industry through their cheap labor and to the internal market as consumers (Senyapili, 1977). Furthermore, there existed a populist approach among politicians to *gecekondu* residents: They attempted to take advantage of the vote potential of the *gecekondu* population by legalizing the already existing *gecekondu* settlements (Danielson & Keles, 1985; Karpas, 1976). As a result, *gecekondu* settlements became a permanent part of large cities. Many of them received services and infrastructure, including roads and bus transportation to sites, city water, and electricity inside houses (Payne, 1982). Today, many *gecekondu* settlements in Turkey are established village-like housing environments. In general, Turkish *gecekondus* are in a better physical condition than squatter settlements in many other Third World countries. This is partly due to the approach of the government to improve existing *gecekondus* while trying to control further *gecekondu* formation (Payne, 1982), and partly due to the nature of rural migrants who were usually small land owners in the village rather than landless peasants and thereby had some capital to invest in the city (in housing, and in later years in consumer goods) (Keyder, 1987).

Different from *gecekondu* housing that is mostly inhabited by rural migrants, apartment housing in Turkey is predominantly occupied by the urban middle class. The Condominium Law of 1965 opened the door of the ownership of an apartment by a person to middle and upper classes (Heper, 1978). Apartments are the symbol of modernity and urbanity (Ayata, 1989; Kiray, 1979). Although there is a recent trend in the metropolitan cities of Turkey for upper classes to move to “satellite towns” that

largely consist of single-family detached housing (Ayata & Ayata, 1993), still the majority of upper and middle classes live in apartment housing. To this typical population of apartment housing has been added those migrants from lower-middle classes who are able today to find apartments that they can afford: As the cities expand toward their peripheries, many gecekondu settlements are being transformed into apartment districts. In this process, as more and more gecekondus are converted into apartment blocks, an increasing number of migrants are moving from gecekondus to these apartment blocks.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is based on the data collected in a research carried out in a gecekondu settlement in Ankara, Turkey's capital, where I rented a gecekondu and resided there for more than 5 months, and in an apartment district developing out of a gecekondu settlement to which I paid frequent visits. Formal interviews were conducted, which included the questions of whether the respondents would prefer to live in a gecekondu or an apartment and why, how they felt about their neighbors, their residential history in the city, and their interaction with the city (what parts of the city they used the most and why). In addition, the difficulty of getting answers through direct questions to some of the issues under investigation (e.g., how they felt about living in apartments in the case of poor gecekondu residents for whom such a move was out of the question) made participant observation and informal interviews indispensable. The formal interviews were tape-recorded, except for only a few cases in which the respondents objected, and they were later transcribed for the final analysis. Notes were taken following informal interviews. The author kept a journal, taking down daily notes of observations. They were analyzed during and after the data collection in terms of the emerging themes that guided further research (Spradley, 1980).

Photography was also used as a source of information as well as a means of approaching people: Photography proved to be useful motivating people to invite me to their homes on various occasions, such as when women gathered together or when relatives from the village came to visit them, as well as to special occasions, such as wedding and circumcision celebrations. It also provided information on how people presented themselves and how they furnished their homes. In this way, they were helpful throughout the research, providing concrete and detailed data on migrants and their environments.

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was adopted in the research. This approach acknowledges the significance of experiences and involves a grounding in data. It enables the discovery of emerging issues as well as groups. This is particularly important while studying the diversity in rural migrant women, including gecekondu residents, whose voices are hardly heard. In this way, the stereotypical images and views on migrant women and gecekondu residents can be challenged.

Based on the basic features of grounded theory, the number and the characteristics of the respondents were not determined in advance other than defining prospective respondents as rural-to-urban migrants in gecekondu and apartments. The decision about who the next respondent would be was made as the research progressed and as significant issues emerged. The research ended with 144 respondents with whom formal interviews were conducted: 105 women and 39 men; 108 in gecekondu and 36 in apartments. All but three apartment residents once lived in gecekondu.

Because the research is a qualitative one which attempted to capture the significant themes emerging from the data, and the sample was not intended to be representative, the emphasis in this article is on the issues rather than percentages.

The research sites were visited in the following couple of years, during which I was again warmly welcomed.

## RESEARCH SITES

### THE GECEKONDU SITE: CUKURCA

Cukurca, a gecekondu settlement established in the 1960s, lies on the slopes of a hill in the south of the city. The houses in the settlement are scattered, with paths connecting them. They are generally free-standing, one-story houses with gardens, mostly small, and a few large enough to grow vegetables. The environment has a rural appearance with turkeys and sometimes cows around.

All houses in Cukurca have electricity, and most of them have running water inside the house. Cukurca received electricity in 1981 and city water in 1984. There is no sewage system in the area.

There is an asphalt road in the settlement that connects it to the rest of the city. The other roads inside the settlement are narrow and unpaved. There are several stores in the settlement, including grocery stores, a real estate office, an all-men coffee house; and there are some public institutions: an elementary school, two mosques, and a health clinic. In 1989, an open market was established where a variety of consumer goods were sold along with fresh vegetables and fruits.

The Cukurca residents are rural-to-urban migrants. The majority came from the villages of Eastern Anatolia, the least developed region of the country, and from those of Central Anatolia, particularly of Ankara. Some of them are long-term migrants and have been living in Cukurca for more than 20 years, whereas some others are newcomers who either built their own gecekondu or rented the houses of people who had moved out to apartments. The economic situations of the residents vary: there are both poor and relatively better-off migrants in the settlement.

### THE APARTMENT SITE: BAGCILAR

Bagcilar lies in the southeast of the city, 20 minutes' walking distance away from Cukurca. It is a mix of apartment blocks and

gecekondus, and the construction of more apartment blocks is under way. Construction quality is rather poor when compared to the buildings in the more established parts of the city.

The roads and infrastructure are under construction. Some roads are in poor condition, especially when they are used as part of construction sites. There is frequent bus service to the area. Many commercial places exist, especially supermarkets of various sizes.

The area received electricity in 1966 when it was a gecekondu settlement. It received city water in 1978 to 1979. The master plan of the area was completed in 1980, which opened the door to "apartmentization" of the area.

The apartment buildings are generally inhabited by lower-middle-income people, mostly rural-to-urban migrants who have been in the city for some years. The gecekondu that still survive in the neighborhood are occupied by migrants.

### **TURKISH MIGRANT WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN THE GECEKONDU (SQUATTER) SETTLEMENT**

#### **INTIMATE SOCIAL RELATIONS AND INTENSE SOCIAL CONTROL**

Because most of the women in Cukurca did not work outside the home,<sup>1</sup> this created a housing environment where women of village origin spent most of their time, interacting frequently with one another. Women in Cukurca, especially housewives, easily gathered outside or in each other's houses. They tended to use the spaces between houses, appropriating them as extensions of their homes. This intensive use of the outdoor spaces in the proximate neighborhood by women is observed in various other societies, such as Lebanon (Joseph, 1978), Greece (Hirschon, 1985), and Chile (Segovia, 1994).

Another reason why women in Cukurca spent much time outdoors was the smallness of or humidity inside the houses.

When these women sat outside, usually other women joined them. As a rule, they knitted or sewed, even while standing.



Sometimes they picnicked. Once I joined such a picnic under the trees in the garden of a neighbor. It was a communal effort, and they spent money only on the bread, picking fresh onions, parsley, and tomatoes from the gardens and bringing cooked food from homes.

Meeting in each other's houses replaced outdoor gatherings as winter took its course. In wintertime, they gathered in a house every day, moving from one to the other as the day went. These were informal visits without arrangements made in advance. Still, gathering indoors was not as spontaneous as gathering outdoors. Some women did not feel very comfortable going to the houses of people who had not visited them, although this was not a problem for gathering outdoors.

Talking to neighbors was a focal activity for many *gecekondu* women. When they did not see anyone sitting outside (this was rare if the weather was warm), they would go from house to house, looking for someone to talk to. Many tended to share their personal problems with their neighbors, including relations with husbands.

One never feels lonely or neglected in a *gecekondu* community if one gets along well with neighbors. For example, when a neighbor whose husband worked abroad got sick, neighbors took care of her, bringing food and waiting beside her bed. A woman talked about the life in *gecekondu* settlements as follows:

In *gecekondu* areas, you go out and sit in front of your door, join a neighbor sitting outside or go to a neighbor or she comes to you. You never feel lonely.

This intimacy among neighbors and the intensive use of outdoors bring another feature of *gecekondu* settlements, that is, the social control the *gecekondu* community exercises over its residents, particularly by women over women (Ayata, 1989). Their physical layout, mostly free-standing houses close to one another with outdoor areas between the houses where women often gather, increases the surveillance by neighbors. It is no exaggeration to say that there is no privacy in a *gecekondu* settlement. During the time the author lived in Cukurca, she

even knew on the same day about a young woman making love to her husband early in the morning.

**THE GECEKONDU AS TARGET OF SOCIAL STIGMA:  
A SOURCE OF NEGATIVE IDENTITY?**

Because gecekondu settlements appeared as the result of mass rural-to-urban migration and they were initially created by rural migrants when the government failed to provide housing for the large number of migrants, and because the majority of gecekondu settlements are still inhabited by rural migrants, in the society gecekondu housing is associated with rural migrants. Furthermore, the illegal and unplanned appearance of gecekondu housing and the negative characteristics attributed to rural migrants by established urbanites as vulgar, backward, and ignorant peasants who invaded their hometown have created a negative image of gecekondu settlements and their residents (Karpat, 1976; Sewell, 1964). This may take the form of a stigma, or negative identity, as Rapoport (1982) called it.<sup>2</sup>

Because women are traditionally defined as primarily responsible for the family and the home, and they are expected to be closer to neighbors and family members, they are the ones who are much affected by their housing environment, both in practical and psychological terms. In this study, it was the gecekondu women who suffered the most from the smallness of their houses, from the humidity inside the house, and the like. Furthermore, the housing environment easily becomes a major dimension of self-identity in the case of women. When negative meaning is attached to a housing environment by the society at large, as in the case of gecekondu housing, it is again women who suffer the most. Men can find other ways of defining themselves, such as in terms of the jobs they hold or the places they use daily.<sup>3</sup> But for women, particularly for those who spend almost all of their time in the housing environment, this is hard to achieve.

The social stigma attributed by the larger society to their housing environment can affect women more deeply if they share with the society the negative definition of their housing

environment, if the larger society and its values are significant to them, and if it is not possible for them to escape from the identification with that environment. In this study, there were women (12% of the female gecekondu participants),<sup>4</sup> mostly housewives, many of whom were second-generation migrants, with a few recent comers among them, who took modern urbanites as their reference group and wanted to be like them. For this group of women, living in a gecekondu settlement was a big psychological burden. The gecekondu community was where they existed physically. Yet they did not belong to that community psychologically. They often had quarrels with their neighbors, criticizing, blaming, and disapproving them. In their quarrels, they shouted that they did not belong to the gecekondu community and they deserved to live in apartments. A few isolated themselves inside their houses. In brief, these women employed psychological distancing to cope with the problem of living in a housing environment that was evaluated negatively by the people they valued and desired to be like.

These women paid a great deal of attention to their outward appearances and were always dressed in a modern fashion. When they posed for the photographs, they usually sat in an arm chair, crossing their legs and smiling.

In addition to this group of young women who were oriented to modern urban society, there were young second-generation migrants attending high school who suffered much from the negative image attached to gecekondu housing and its residents (13.5% of the female gecekondu participants). In the face of the practical reality of their daily lives which required them to interact with those members of society who despised and placed stigma on gecekondu residents, they had become sensitive to the fact that they lived in a gecekondu settlement and were vulnerable to negative comments on the issue. They expressed their concerns and problems about being considered by the larger society as gecekondu residents and thereby as "peasants in the city." Some ended up feeling negative about themselves. For example, a young woman attending high school in a middle-class district complained about the negative attitudes of other students in the school toward her who "make

me feel to be a peasant. I am not different from them. But they see me as different, make me feel different. . . . They look down upon me, after defining me rural." Once, on our return from a visit to a park in an upper-class district (GOP), the girls in the group could not hide their frustrations, saying, "Look how different GOP is from Cukurca. I feel uneasy." "You are right. They are like heaven and hell" (referring to GOP as heaven and Cukurca as hell).

The negative image of *gecekondu* housing in the society, which was internalized by these young women, had made them sensitive about their residential environment. When I took their photographs outdoors in the neighborhood, all dressed in their modern clothes (stretch jeans, sweat shirts, mini skirts), they were concerned very much about the surrounding and did not want old-looking houses in the photographs. The young woman mentioned above was particularly concerned about her friends at school who, she said, would think that she lived in a rural area if they saw the photographs.

On the other hand, it is easier for those women who identify themselves with a community which does not share the value system of the society at large. In this study, those women who were oriented to the traditional migrant community (which included the *gecekondu* community), and who, after defining the members of the migrant group as "us" and the members of the urban society as "them" ("apartment residents, the better-off, urbanites, etc."; Ayata, 1989) and spending their time with "their" own people, were not much concerned about the negative approach of urbanites to *gecekondu* residents (the percentage of these *gecekondu* women in the overall *gecekondu* women in this study is 41%). On the contrary, they seemed quite happy to live in their *gecekondu* neighborhood which enabled them to carry out various rural tasks, such as baking bread in outdoor ovens, and rural activities, such as keeping livestock, growing vegetables, and holding rural kinds of wedding celebrations during which drums and pipes were played and folk dances were performed. In this case, the migrant community, and in particular the *gecekondu* community, acted as a social buffer between the individual and the larger society and as a means

to self-esteem. It supported the individual psychologically and provided her (or him) with a sense of belonging and self-esteem which the larger society declined.

These women who were oriented to the gecekondu community seemed not to pay attention to their outward appearances when they were inside the neighborhood. A woman who recently moved to an apartment district from a gecekondu said that the gecekondu environment failed to motivate its residents to care for their appearances because it was the same people with whom they spent all their time. Yet many of them changed their way of dressing when they went out of the neighborhood, replacing their *yemenis* (cheesecloth head covering widely used in the village) with head scarves, or uncovering their hair, and taking off *shalvars* (traditional full pants gathered at the ankles) and putting on regular dresses. For their reason, they said they wanted to avoid offensive demeanor from urbanites. This dual presentation can be observed in other countries in which the norms of urban society and those of rural migrants, including the norms about outward appearance, do not often overlap, and where it is the urban society which sets the rules for appropriate appearance or behavior.

This low degree of significance attached to outward appearances when one is inside the neighborhood can be extended to the furniture in the home. Although many gecekondu residents spent money on furniture and houseware, because "for the gecekondu population the only way open to integrate with the city life is to be able to consume like the urbanites" (Senyapili, 1982, p. 243), those who bought new, modern pieces of furniture (arm chairs, coffee tables, display buffets, and the like) tended to keep them in a room, covering them to protect from dust and humidity, and saving them for future use after they moved to apartments.

Again, this was not the case for the young modern migrant women in the gecekondu settlement who displayed their furniture at all times and who were ready to criticize the furniture of their neighbors. These women conspicuously tried to give the image that they were different from other gecekondu women when possible. For example, they served their guests (including

me) the kind of food popular among established urbanites (cakes, pastries, and the like).

### **TURKISH MIGRANT WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN THE APARTMENT NEIGHBORHOOD**

#### **FORMAL SOCIAL RELATIONS AND INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY PRIVACY**

Neighborliness is still important in the lives of migrant women in apartments. In this study, women in the apartment area socialized intensely with their neighbors, although not as intensely as in the *gecekondu* settlement. There seemed to be some kind of formality between apartment neighbors. They usually visited each other with arrangements made in advance. Each woman reserved a particular day of the month in which she received guests (*kabul günü*). Neighbors from various buildings in the neighborhood came to these gatherings. Various kinds of pastries (at least three) specially prepared for the occasion were served at the gatherings, and this was very different from the spontaneous informal gatherings in the *gecekondu* settlement where usually no food was expected to be served by the hostess.

Basically two reasons account for the formality in social relations in apartment areas. First, although there is a tendency for relatives to concentrate in a particular neighborhood, and even in a particular building, still there are other neighbors whom a resident did not know before. Different from the process of *gecekondu* formation in which migrants from the same place of origin usually build their *gecekondus* collectively in the same area, families buy their apartments individually, making contracts according to their payment capacities.

Second, apartment environments lack common spaces, which are the potential areas for women to gather together informally in *gecekondu* settlements. Although in neighborhoods in transition from *gecekondu* to apartment housing, such as Bagcilar (one of the sites of this research), some common

spaces (empty lots which will soon be filled with buildings) may be yet available until the transition is completed; they cannot be used by women as spontaneously and freely as in gecekondu settlements because there are strangers and traffic-infested streets around.<sup>5</sup>

The lack of a closely knit community in apartment districts because of the residential heterogeneity, as well as the lack of common outdoor spaces for women's informal gatherings and places which bring together local men (such as the coffee shop and the mosque), all decrease the social control in the apartment environment. The relatively limited use of outdoor spaces for purposes other than movement acts in a way to further decrease social control.

A similar finding was obtained in research conducted in Canada (Reed, 1974, in Rapoport, 1990). There was a higher level of interaction, as well as social control, in detached houses compared to apartment buildings. Rapoport (1990) explained this in terms of the different meanings communicated by the two types of housing in which the physical environment (more specifically, the space organization) plays a role. For example, the lack of common open spaces in apartments brought about a low degree of social control and hence made it more difficult for residents to judge the lifestyles of others and to place them into social categories, leading to a lower degree of social interaction.

The lower degree of social control in apartment districts benefits young people the most, particularly young men. Yet it may have conflicting outcomes for women. For those women from conservative families, moving to apartment housing from gecekondu housing may end up becoming confined to the apartment. They may not be allowed to go outside by themselves. This was the case with a recently married young woman in this study who was living with her in-laws. She was not allowed to go by herself even to the local grocery store, which was a few buildings away, and she was very much affected by this negatively. In addition, those women who enjoyed the

intimate relations with their *gecekondu* neighbors missed this intimacy in their apartment districts. They were mostly middle-aged and older women who rarely traveled in the city and spent their days at home. One of these women spoke as follows:

*Gecekondus are much better places in terms of humaneness. There people become close to each other, they talk about their problems. If someone needs something, she can ring a neighbor's bell and get it from her. . . . Today I went to a neighbor to ask for an onion. My dear, here they won't give it. You have to buy it. But what about if you don't have the money? What can you do but have your meal without it. But in *gecekondus* it is not like that. Your neighbors ask from you, and you ask from them. . . . Here I get bored: I stay inside all the time. You cannot visit your neighbors anytime you want. If you visit a neighbor and she doesn't return your visit, you cannot visit her again.*

On the other hand, by moving to an apartment district, women can get rid of the social control exercised so intensely by their *gecekondu* neighbors (who are also relatives in some cases). The privacy of the family may improve in apartments, and the family may become more home-centered. One of the reasons those women who preferred apartments stated for their preferences was that they would be able to live free from the interference by neighbors, and they would lead their own lives. This finding is supported by other research (e.g., Ayata, 1989). The following is what a woman who recently moved to an apartment from a *gecekondu* said about this issue:

*In *gecekondu* areas humanness is easily lost. Since you spend a lot of time together with your neighbors, you can easily be pulled into their troubles. As soon as the sun rises, you start facing your neighbors, and if you don't get along with them, then, your life is like hell.*

Another reason for the preferences of apartments, again mentioned mostly by women, was the increased control of parents over their children in apartment districts who would not spend their time playing outside with other children who "cursed and taught bad things."



**THE APARTMENT: SYMBOL OF PROGRESS OF RURAL MIGRANTS**

As stated before, in Turkish society, apartments represent the established urban middle classes. Thus moving to an apartment from a *gecekondu* was regarded by the participants as progress in their lives. In this way, "we have moved closer to the city." Apartment residence seems to have given them the feeling that they improved their social status and became a part of established urban society.<sup>6</sup> They now lived in apartments to which they could invite people who might have refused to visit them in *gecekondus*.

In brief, moving to apartments is a sign of differentiation in the migrant community, which now has people who have been better-off in the city and who have not, those who can afford apartments and those who cannot. Thus many of those who continue to live in *gecekondus* feel its burden when they think of their previous neighbors and relatives who have started living in apartments. They complain about these people for not visiting them often enough, now and then implying that they have changed too much to visit a *gecekondu* area. When my keyperson took me to Cukurca to her previous neighbors, it was 2 years since she had visited them. They thought she was changed and said, "After you moved down (meaning Bagcilar), you have become a lady." Some complained about her delayed visit, saying "After you moved down, you forgot us."

Because moving to apartments from *gecekondus* denotes improvement in the social standing of the migrant, visiting their previous neighbors who have recently moved to apartments becomes a sensitive issue for *gecekondu* women.<sup>7</sup>

This symbolic value of moving to apartments from *gecekondus* in the case of migrants increases the significance of the home as a means of sending to the outside world the message of who they have become. The interiors of the apartments in this study reflected the pride their residents took in them. Many furnished their apartments with modern furniture sets that they

kept tidy and clean at all times. They kept the best furniture in the salon (the best and biggest room in the apartment reserved for guests—the reception room).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, they tended to possess the latest consumer items on the market, displaying them conspicuously in their homes.

The message they attempted to send through their homes and furniture that they had improved their social standing in society was also sent by their self-presentations. As the participants mentioned and the author observed, women in general became more concerned about their outward appearances after they moved to apartments. At *kabul günü* (formal neighborly gatherings), different from the neighborly gatherings in the gecekondü settlement, women paid more attention to their outward appearances and demeanor. They noticed each other's outfits, commenting on them and getting information on where to get them.<sup>9</sup> They were conscious of how they sat and what they said.<sup>10</sup>

Here it can be argued that because those migrants who live in apartments are more settled economically and have longer stay in the city when compared to the gecekondü population which varies greatly on these aspects, they may have a stronger tendency to attach more significance to the status aspect of their housing environment. As Sastrosasmita and Amin (1990) stated, drawing on Turner's categorization (1968), although tenure is the highest housing priority for "consolidators" (5-15 years in their present jobs; relatively stable income and job positions), for "steaders" or "identity seekers" (15 years or more in their present jobs; highest level of job security), it is the modern amenities they value the most about their housing in their "search for social esteem in city life" (p. 83). On the other hand, the strong positive feelings of some gecekondü women for apartments (despite their brief stay in the city) challenge this argument.

## DISCUSSION

### THE ROLE OF GECEKONDU AND APARTMENT ENVIRONMENTS IN THE EXPERIENCES OF RESIDENTS

Apartment and squatter (gecekondu) environments require different kinds of relationships from their residents due to their different physical and social attributes. Gecekondu settlements are characterized by their rural migrant residents and the intimate and informal social contacts between them, particularly between women. Gecekondu residents form a community in which mutual help and sharing are emphasized. The vulnerable position of rural migrants in the city due to the nature of their economic activities (mostly employed in low-paying, insecure, and temporary jobs) and the low status conferred by established urbanites to rural migrants have created dependency of migrants on each other. In Turkey, as well as in other Third World countries that experience massive rural-to-urban migration, the migrant community acts as a buffer between the individual migrant and the larger society that is hostile and uncertain in the extremes (Karpat, 1976; Lobo, 1982; Peattie, 1970), and it supports the individual migrant in the new environment.<sup>11</sup> The gecekondu community is inherently conservative by its very nature because it tends to preserve the values and norms of the village in a new environment (the city) where different set of values (e.g., individualism and competition, liberal gender relations) are prescribed. In the Middle East, including Turkey, this conservatism of the migrant community is directed mainly to women who are regarded as the major means of preserving "cultural authenticity" (Kandiyoti, 1991).

What all this means in terms of the experiences of gecekondu women is that they live in a housing environment where they are expected to interact closely with their neighbors, socializing informally and frequently with them and offering them help and support anytime it is required and asking for help and support anytime it is needed. It also means living under the control of the community and carrying out the traditional gender roles

strictly prescribed by the rural community. This may empower some women (older) who feel that they are the ones who have the power to check on others (women and young people), whereas it may oppress others (young women) who are aware that their actions are being closely watched and criticized.

The informal and frequent contacts among neighbors, as well as the traditional (and conservative) orientation prevalent in the gecekondu community, all decrease the significance attached to outward appearances by gecekondu women when one is inside the neighborhood. As a rule, gecekondu women do not dress up when they are inside the neighborhood (except for those oriented to modern society), and they dress conservatively and look rather rural (except for single young women who grew up in the city). They tend to save their furniture for special occasions (e.g., visits by distinguished guests), and if they have the intention to move to apartments, they save them for their future use in apartments. Because everyone in the neighborhood knows what others possess, it is not necessary to display them in daily interaction.

On the other hand, in apartment districts, there is high residential density and heterogeneity, and this reduces (but certainly does not eliminate) the social control exercised by neighbors. It brings some formality and distance to neighborly relations. Individual families acquire an independent status and become somewhat autonomous. This makes them carry out conspicuously a strategy which Goffman (1959) called "impression management." Through this strategy, individuals present their "social faces" by defining reality in their own terms and by presenting that reality to others in a convincing way, hiding some facts and exaggerating others. In this context, the role of the furniture and self-presentation ("the personal front") increases. As Goffman (1959) stated, the personal front (clothing, posture, speech, etc.) is important in carrying messages about who and what the person is. Clothing communicates status and identity (Rapoport, 1990, pp. 63, 71). The physical setting, and particularly the home, becomes the "front stage," which is

manipulated to convey the fostered image of the person to others. It also acts as a medium which communicates to the self as well as to others the personal/group identity of the person (Agnew, 1982; Duncan & Duncan, 1976; Pratt, 1982). In this process, the objects in the house act as status symbols (Duncan, 1982; Laumann & House, 1972). Thus apartment residents become more conscious of how they present themselves and their homes to others, and their new and desired identities are communicated through the objects and furniture they possess at home,<sup>12</sup> as well as through their outward appearances. Particularly active in this process are women who, after defining it as part of the husbandly duties, now and then demand that their husbands buy new pieces of furniture or other consumer goods (Ayata, 1988).

#### **THE CONSEQUENCES FOR RESIDENTS OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL MEANINGS ATTACHED TO GECEKONDU AND APARTMENT HOUSING BY THE LARGER SOCIETY**

Gecekondu and apartment areas also hold different social meanings and provide different statuses for their residents. Although gecekondu settlements tend to produce negative identity in their residents because of the stigma attached to gecekondu settlements by the larger society (originally illegal housing occupied by "backward," "vulgar," and "ignorant" rural migrants), apartment districts provide a feeling of achievement in their residents: Moving to apartments becomes a sign of social mobility for rural migrants; it is a sign of success, a sign of "making it" in the city.

There is a deep bond between persons and places where places become a part of the person. Proshansky and associates called it "place identity" (Proshansky, 1978; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983) and defined the concept as follows:

Those dimensions of the self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment. (Proshansky, 1978, p. 155)

Thus the physical environment plays a significant role in the self-definition of the person. It may affect one's self-esteem (Krupat, 1983). The social image of a neighborhood influences the identification of people with it (Hunter, 1974) as follows:

Individuals whose self-identity does not fit the symbolic identification of their local area might exhibit signs of psychic and social withdrawal, or they might manipulate the symbolic definitions of the area or even move to a new area to bring about consistency between self-identity and community-identity. (Hunter, 1974, p. 195)

Thus the stigma attached to gecekondu residents, which is termed as negative identity by Rapoport (1982), may affect very negatively women, particularly those who are oriented to modern urban society. They do not have any other choice but to live in the gecekondu settlement, and they lack the power to manipulate the stigma attached to gecekondu housing. What is left to them is to withdraw themselves psychologically and socially from the gecekondu environment, and to actively involve in this process of proving to others (and to themselves) that they are different from other gecekondu residents who deserve such a negative evaluation. As a consequence, by the way they look and behave, they constantly try to send to the world around them the message that they do not belong to the gecekondu community and that they are not like one of their neighbors. In this attempt of the young, modern-society-oriented women to prove to others (external identity) as well as to themselves (internal identity) who they actually are (Rapoport, 1982), the personal front (clothing, posture, speech, etc.) (Goffman, 1959) is actively used.

On the other hand, because there may be different meanings and values given to a physical environment by different "social worlds," and the same physical environment may send different messages to different groups and may mean different things for different groups (Duncan & Duncan, 1976; Pratt, 1982), the stigma attached to gecekondu housing may not affect some others that deeply. In this study, it did not create negative feelings about the self in the case of those women who were

oriented to the gecekondu community and its traditional values and who took as their reference group the gecekondu community.

#### **THE FIT BETWEEN RESIDENTS AND HOUSING ENVIRONMENT: WHICH HOUSING FOR WHOM?**

Bearing in mind the physical and social characteristics of gecekondu and apartment housing discussed in the article, we can say that the gecekondu experience is embraced by some migrants, although it is rejected by others. For those migrant women from conservative families with orientations to the rural community (other migrants in the city and villagers) who spend most of their time in the proximate home environment—including newcomers, young housewives, and elderly women—gecekondu housing serves their needs and expectations better. On the other hand, apartment housing seems to fit better in the case of those migrant women who have experienced a longer stay and economic progress in the city (this is a requirement for apartment ownership in the first place) and thereby have become less dependent on other migrants, as well as in the case of those migrant women who are oriented to modern urban society and who are able to interact with the city on their own. Thus, in the case of those migrant women whose families are not too conservative to expect them not to interact with strangers or not to use the parts of the city outside of the neighborhood, as well as those who work or travel by themselves in the city, apartment residence seems to be a better alternative. The orientation of the migrant to the rural or urban societies is very relevant. Knowing the present influence of the mass media, particularly TV, on Turkish society which reaches rural areas, it is wrong to assume that recent migrants are more oriented to the rural community, and this orientation disappears over the years. Today, as this research strikingly reveals, there are those newcomer migrant women who move to the city with the expectation of living a similar life to modern established urbanites, and the first requirement is to live in a decent apartment district (i.e., district where established urbanites reside) and not in a gecekondu settlement. When these women are obliged to live in a

gecekondu settlement, they tend to reject the gecekondu experience completely. On the other hand, those migrant women in apartments who need the community support and the "gecekondu spirit" feel unhappy to live in apartments.

In brief, although the physical environment is important in shaping people's lives (and more specifically the housing environment in shaping women's lives) through providing opportunities for certain behavior (e.g., outdoor use for gecekondu women) and placing constraints on others, and although the social meaning attached to the environment by the larger society affects people's sense of selves (who and what they are in society), people (in this case, women), as social agents, can actively seek for ways to manipulate the environment and its social meaning. Such an attempt can be observed in the gecekondu-community-oriented women who define gecekondu housing as the residential environment where there exist sharing, cooperation, and mutual support between people of the same origin (rural). Furthermore, people can attempt to create an image of themselves which contradicts the image given by society to the residents/users of a particular environment. This is the case of modern-society-oriented women in the gecekondu settlement.

One point to further emphasize here is the active role women play in creating their home environments, and in the case of migrant women, in discovering creative ways of adapting to the new environment. Their voices may be harder to hear than men's, "(they) may be invisible and their voices 'muted,' (yet) in their quietly revised daily domestic practices, they are more influential than is often recognized" (Pader, 1994, p. 79).

#### **DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Research in environmental psychology that investigates the interactive nature of the relationship between the physical environment and people is believed to be important. The question of under which conditions people are able to manipulate the environment to make them respond to their needs (social as



well as psychological), and under which conditions they fail to do so, should be addressed in different contexts. It is both interesting and informative to explore this question in the context of women and the housing environment, particularly doing research with or on migrant women in Third World cities who shoulder heavy responsibilities and assume new roles (Erman, *in press*) in their new environment as the result of the move from rural areas to cities, and who actively seek to use the housing environment in this process. Women's experiences are inherently contextual (Altman & Churchman, 1994), and they may vary from one society to another and in the course of time. Yet the significance of the home environment for women and women's active roles "as producers, reproducers, and community and household organizers" (Pader, 1994, p. 99) who tend to negotiate their needs and expectations in manipulating the home environment are common in all societies.

Furthermore, as this article has attempted to achieve, research on rural-to-urban migrants in various Third World contexts is believed to contribute significantly to the migration literature as well as to environmental psychology. It has the potential to reveal the differential experiences of rural migrants in different housing environments, thereby challenging the stereotypical image of rural migrants as ignorant, vulgar, backward *gecekond* residents. It can further inform us about the role of the physical dimension in the lives of migrants in the city.

## APPENDIX



**Figure 1. A General View of Cukurca, the Gecekondu Site of the Research**



**Figure 2. A General View of Bagcilar, the Apartment Site of the Research Developing out of a Gecekondu Area**

*Appendix continued*

**APPENDIX: Continued**



**Figure 3. The Houses in Cukurca are Scattered, with Paths Connecting Them**



**Figure 4. The Roads in Bagcilar are Under Construction**

**APPENDIX: Continued**



**Figure 5. The Use of Outdoor Spaces Between Houses by Women in Cukurca for Various Reasons, Including Puffing up Wool**



**Figure 6. A Women's Picnic in the Gecekondü Settlement**

*Appendix continued*

**APPENDIX: Continued**



**Figure 7. A Women's Neighborly Gathering in the Apartment Area**

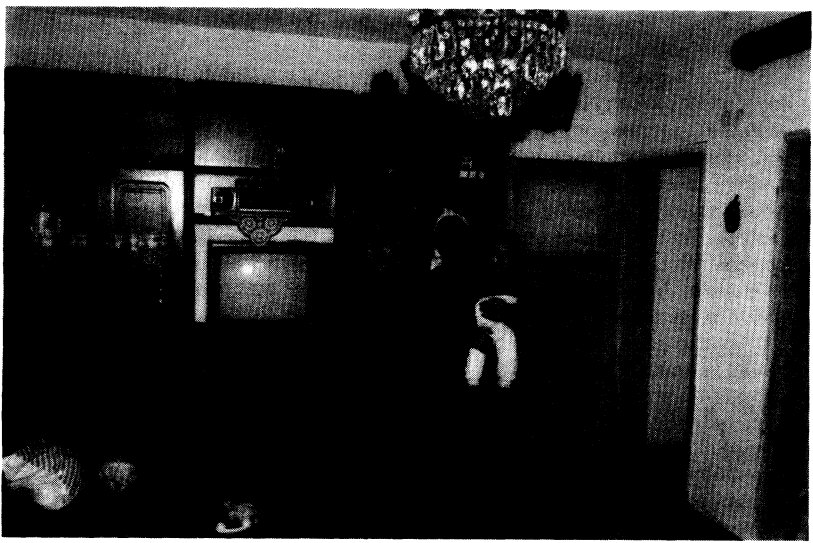


**Figure 8. Inside an Apartment in Bagcilar**

**APPENDIX: Continued**



**Figure 9. Inside the Gecekondu of a Poor Family**



**Figure 10. Inside the Gecekondu of a Relatively Better-Off Family**

## NOTES

1. This finding can be generalized to the female migrant population as a whole: Migrant men, as a rule, do not want their wives to get a paid job, and as their reasons they give their young children to be taken care of, the work to be done at home, as well as the "evil" in the city (male strangers, liberal attitudes). If migrant women do work, they usually work part-time as cleaning women, mostly in the homes of the upper classes.

2. The housing environment can also be negative or stigmatizing in the case of slum residents in industrial societies. The prevalent view that "(s)lums are inhabited by 'bad' people (Rapoport, 1990, p. 139) makes their residents vulnerable. Here the distinction between squatter and slum residents should be once more emphasized. Although the former group is mostly rural migrants who are hopeful about their future lives in the city, the latter group is frustrated and they occupy marginal positions in the social and economic system.

3. Buttner (1980), in her concept of "social space," mentioned the use of the environment creatively and selectively by the individual, preferring certain routes and places to others, and these preferences are dictated by "the reference groups from which an individual derives his (sic) values and behavioral norms" (p. 27). In this study, those migrants who were oriented to urban society tended to use modern parts of the city in their free time where established urbanites lived, and this was more true for men than women who, as males in a Muslim society, enjoyed more freedom than women.

4. This may seem to be a small number. Yet it is very interesting to encounter such a group among gecekondus (thanks to the exploratory nature of the grounded theory approach) because this group of women radically challenges the common view of gecekondus as conservative and rural. The presence of these women (which are expected to increase in number in the future) points to an ever-increasing conflict between modernizers and traditionalists as Turkish society comes more and more under the influence of Western culture on one hand and, on the other hand, under that of fundamentalism.

5. This places migrant women at a disadvantage in apartment areas who need outdoor spaces to carry out various house tasks, such as puffing up woolen pillows and mattresses (migrants commonly use handmade woolen or cotton beds).

6. Here it is interesting to note the different meanings and statuses attached to apartment housing in different societies, for example, in Turkey and the United States. Although apartment housing in Turkish society is seen as the symbol of belonging to the middle class, the same type of housing in the United States, which is historically associated with public housing, acts as a stigma on apartment residents. Rapoport (1990) wrote: "Multifamily housing, particularly high-rise apartments . . . are seen as negative, as symbols of undesirable people" (p. 32).

7. During such a visit, the author felt tension among the women. The hostess received her guests to the salon, where she kept her recently bought furniture sets. Among the subjects of conversation were the furniture the hostess had bought after she had moved to her apartment, the superiority of apartments to gecekondus (the hostess mentioned it), and intentions of moving to apartments (a gecekondus woman said it). In all the talking, the author noticed attempts on the part of the hostess to prove to her previous gecekondus neighbors her better situation and on the part of the gecekondus residents not to be less than equals to this recent apartment resident. Before we left, the hostess took her guests to each of the rooms, showing them around. On the way

back to Cukurca, when I asked her next door neighbor if she liked the apartment, she said, "not bad." She seemed rather gloomy.

8. This practice is also common among the middle-urban class.

9. The difference was amazing when three women posed for me, first as "urban women in apartments," wearing sunglasses, jackets, and lipstick, and then as "rural women," covering their hair with yemeni (cheesecloth head covering).

10. For example, when relatives gathered, they felt free sitting in a traditional way (their feet under their bodies) and speaking informally (e.g., calling each other *kan*, the old woman, in the dictionary it is defined as derogatory). But when they were at *kabul g n *, gathered with their apartment neighbors, they called each other *hanım* (Mrs./Ms.) and they tended to sit formally, usually crossing their legs. The presence of a formal neighbor could change the informal atmosphere among relatives, demanding more attention paid to their self-presentations. For example, during a visit with my keyperson and some of her relatives to another relative living in the apartment district, when a neighbor of the hostess joined the group unexpectedly, one could observe the changes in my keyperson's and her relatives' behaviors. Before, they were relaxed, chatting about their past lives in the village. Later they became reserved and self-conscious about the way they spoke and behaved after that woman joined us. When the woman asked my keyperson where she lived, she said, "GOP" (the upper class district next to Cukurca).

11. But this does not mean that gecekond  residents are free from the competitive tendencies in the larger society. The gecekond  community, although on the one hand attempts to equalize its members in terms of their standings in the community despite their economic differences (e.g., defining "helping others" as the "duty" of the neighbor), on the other hand it allows individuals to compete with one another in terms of the consumer items they possess.

12. Similar findings were obtained by Duncan and Duncan (1976) in a different context in which traditional upper-class families who were established in society had humble homes and furniture, whereas those families who recently became members of the upper class displayed their material wealth in terms of their homes and furniture to give to the outside world the message of who they were.

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