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Neslihan Demirtaş & Seher Şen

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Varoş Identity: The Redefinition of Low Income Settlements in Turkey

NESLIHAN DEMIRTAŞ & SEHER ŞEN

The aim of this article is to outline the transforming media representations of the concepts *gecekondu* and *varoş*, which refer to squatter settlements in Turkey. The identities of *gecekondu* (*gecekondu*) and *varoş* (*varoşlu*) have been defined and redefined in recent years in relation to the politics of urbanization in Turkey.¹ As a novel concept that entered the agenda of public debate in the late 1990s and has been used both in place of and alongside the concept *gecekondu*, *varoş* will be given particular importance in this investigation. The concept has taken the form of a label that artificially defines low income settlements as a homogenous space and in recent years has carried a robust exclusionary potential. Although the usage of *gecekondu* and the representations of these settlements in the public debate have always incorporated negative connotations and imposed a falsely homogenous identity on the people living there since the 1940s, the nature of the ‘othering’ process as part of the dominant discourse² has changed and gained a new impetus since the 1990s with the introduction of the term *varoş*. The nature of this change and motivations behind it will constitute the subject matter of this article. To situate these developments, the history of *gecekondu* settlements and changing representations of them will be elaborated by comparing two historical periods. First, we will very briefly tackle *gecekondu* politics and the changing public and academic approaches to these settlements between the 1940s and 1980. Secondly, and more extensively, we will discuss the structural changes in *gecekondu* settlements after 1980 and how the nature of public perception altered in parallel to these transformations.

Before doing that, however, it would be helpful to give a brief definition of *gecekondu*. *Gecekondu* is accepted as an informal component of Turkey’s rapid urbanization process, as is the case in many developing countries. *Gecekondu* literally means built overnight. Although the concept has taken on new meanings in recent years with these settlements’ changing physical and social context, it originally referred to the groups of houses or neighbourhoods constructed on state or privately owned land without planning permission through the efforts of migrants and their fellows. We will examine the period covering the years between the 1940s, when *gecekondu* settlements first entered the agenda of public debate, and the early 2000s, by which time these settlements had proliferated in social and spatial terms and when the processes of their establishment and inhabitation had taken on a more complicated form. The low income settlements in recent years, which have constituted the majority of urban space today, and hold a certain potential to transform it, are perceived from a mainly urban elitist perspective as the source of

criminal, terrorist and violent incidents in cities. The context of exclusion and the nature of othering have taken on a new dimension as a consequence of the novel ingredients of urban culture and the changing political context of the country. Besides that, *varoş* as *gecekondu* no longer implies a concrete spatial reference indicating the lifestyle in peripheral settlements only. *Varoş* is used in a more wide-ranging fashion to denote the underground or kitsch aspects of contemporary urban life.

The history of low income settlements can be divided into three main phases in accordance with the changing socio-economic structure of *gecekondu* settlements and their public perception and representation.

The first period covers the years between 1923 and 1950 under the rule of a single party, namely the Republican People's Party. The single party regime that lasted until the late 1940s followed statist economic and cultural policies which aimed to construct a national industry depending on the country's own resources and to implement a civilized lifestyle modelled on the West, in parallel to the new Republic's ideals. Migrants in these years, small in number, settled either in shelters or rented rooms in desperate conditions in some low income neighbourhoods at the centre of the largest cities. During this era, illegal settlements were mentioned in planning laws but the political measures taken were not effective.³ The uneasiness on the part of the Republican elites about the presence of *gecekondu* settlers in the city was first pronounced in the late 1940s as the forerunner of a degrading discourse, which would carry its effects in the following years.⁴ Alongside this discourse, however, there was also an optimistic discourse on the transitory and reversible nature of migration and settlement in modern urban districts in these initial years of *gecekondu* construction.

In the second period between the years 1950 and 1966, the populist policies of the Democrat Party, the first victor of the multiparty period, brought about a strengthening of the dependent relation between landlords and peasants. This reduced most peasants to the status of farm labourers with no choice but to migrate to the cities.⁵ Besides this, the mechanization of agriculture and the expansion of transportation infrastructure with the construction of road networks through US aid, contributed to the scale of rural-to-urban migration. Consequently, this period is to be considered the breaking point in *gecekondu* history, which changed the form of *gecekondu* settlements from the scattered houses or sheds of the late 1940s to more permanent and established neighbourhoods in the 1950s.⁶ It also denotes the initial setting up of macro-urbanization policies that always lagged behind the rapid informal developments in cities and were never applied properly and efficiently due to the populist bias of the government, lack of financial resources and technical manpower and the existence of patronage relations in the state bureaucracy.

During those years, the emergence of *gecekondu* settlements at the periphery of the cities drew public and academic attention which combined a certain degree of astonishment, uneasiness, and an optimistic belief in the transitory character of these settlements or a belief in the possibility of blocking the migratory flow from rural areas. The elitist bias fed by the modernization ideals of the Republican regime took on a more concrete and conservative form as a result of the closer encounters between the 'native' city dwellers, who had deeply internalized these ideals and been

educated in accordance with its doctrines, and the rural migrants. The urban elites who held important posts as bureaucrats, academicians and as part of the intelligentsia were severely critical of these settlements and the lifestyle of their residents. *Gecekondu* were considered as deviant and ugly spaces that ought to be removed from the beautiful cities.⁷ Academic works also referred to a belief in the transitory and rural character of these settlements.⁸ In these studies, the everyday habits and tastes of *gecekondu* families were described in a discourse of degradation so as to express the 'rural other' of the modernization process.⁹ Such studies would increase in number in the following years.

The third period runs from 1966, the year denoting (with the pronunciation of a publicly known name '*gecekondu*' in a legal document *gecekondu* law no.775) the first formal recognition of *gecekondu* settlements, and 1980, when the political and economic structure was totally changed by military intervention. This period witnessed the extreme polarization of politics between right-wing and left-wing ideologies. *Gecekondu* space like other places in the cities was dominated by violence and the struggle between these extreme political groups. In this period, the proliferation of *gecekondu* settlements was overlooked as a result of populist concerns that brought about the enactment of amnesty laws in 1976, avoiding the demolition of *gecekondu*, and also the inefficiency of the centralist system of local government which lacked financial resources to prepare or apply urban planning due to its dependency on the state for external funds.¹⁰ Moreover, the politicization of the *gecekondu* space that will be dealt with below made the application of laws challenging. The perception of *gecekondu* settlements as shelter for the poor changed during that period due to the beginning of the commercialization of the *gecekondu*. In the early years of rural-to-urban migration, *gecekondu* settlements were mainly built for the immediate and direct use of migrants. At that time, *gecekondu* had little or no market value. However, from the 1970s on, we can talk about the commercialization of *gecekondu* settlements due to the continuous migratory flow into these settlements and the perception of early *gecekondu* settlers of their land and house as the main source of economic gain.

This period also witnessed the deconstruction of the homogenizing effect of the identity previously imposed from above on *gecekondu* dwellers as the 'rural other'. The heterogeneity of *gecekondu* dwellers in terms of ethnic, sectarian and origin differences became apparent due to the fact that these differences triggered the emergence of serious conflicts. The unequal municipal treatment of different regions in *gecekondu* neighbourhoods according to their political affiliation, termed '*particilik*' (favouritism) emerged as one of the reasons for social conflicts there. Besides that, as a result of the political and economic instability during the period, the sectarian identities of Alevism and Sunnism¹¹ took on a political character and were added to struggles going on between leftist and rightist groups. Thus, these were the years when the imposed homogenous and traditional identity of *gecekondu* dwellers as the 'rural other' was deconstructed, though not destroyed, because the social differences within *gecekondu* society had become visible in public debate. These differences might be political, as was the case of struggles between left-wing and right-wing groups; they might be economic and could be related to the timing of migration or to taking different roles in the diverse occupational chances the urban context provides; or they might be cultural, related to sectarian or origin differences. Migrants attained an experiential maturity in the city environment during this

period. Their numerical weight and accumulated knowledge on the political and economic relations in the city turned them into agents having a certain capacity to construct their spaces according to their needs, which constitutes another reason for the deconstruction of their perceived homogeneity.

Between 1940 and 1980, the academic and public approach towards *gecekondu* settlements seems quite similar, shaped by a modernist perspective. Despite the above-mentioned transformations experienced in *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, the question of the integration of the *gecekondu* population into city life still dominated academic discourse as an important problem during these years. The studies conducted at the time were influenced by modernization, as was the case in the previous decade. This line of thinking defines 'urban' behaviour in terms of selected cultural ideas/ideals about civilized living (going to the theatre or dressing in certain ways, for example) and looks down on the inhabitants of squatter settlements as lacking the competency to integrate into 'urban life-styles'.¹² However, starting from the 1980s there emerged a serious disjuncture between the discourses of academic works and public debate. The academic approach from then has aimed at developing an in-depth approach to the lives of the migrants, whereas the presentation of *gecekondu* identity in the written media has appropriated a more pejorative and exclusionary style.

The post-1980 period was characterized by the neo-liberal policies that were put into effect by Turgut Özal, the leader of the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi* – ANAP), which took power in 1983 just after the military intervention. As a consequence of the removal of welfare policies from the political agenda, inequalities both in income and pattern of consumption became more apparent.¹³ In other words, the gap between rich and poor in the urban context widened and deepened. The policies of ANAP initiated numerous political, social and economic transformations and the *gecekondu* space and its transformation was no exception to that general course of events. The period witnessed a turning point in the history of *gecekondu* settlements, where the term *gecekondu* in its classical meaning lagged behind in defining all low income settlements that showed great spatial, social and temporal variety. This fact held true particularly for the low income settlements of cities such as Istanbul and Izmir in the west and Mersin and Diyarbakir in the south and east where the migration intake gained new momentum and form after the 1980s. The enactment of the *gecekondu* law in 1984 triggered this rapid transformation. The law aimed at winning the support of the *gecekondu* masses that had become distant from the system as a consequence of the political unrest of the 1970s. The law foresaw the distribution of title deeds to *gecekondu* settlers who had already built their houses on state-owned land, land of foundations or municipal land, under the condition that the settlers would pay the price of the land they appropriated in advance. Moreover, it gave permission for the construction of up to four-storey apartment houses on the plots of *gecekondu* that had already been legalized either by means of a prior amnesty law or the current one. This permission paved the way for the capitalization of *gecekondu* construction far beyond the commercialization process beginning in the late 1970s.¹⁴ This law and related successive laws issued during the 1983–88 period, generally, aimed at the rapid legalization of *gecekondu* settlements and the transformation of these settlements into organized districts composed of apartment houses. Nevertheless, the

implementation of the transformation was left to informal and local agents and so the law became an encouragement for newly emerged actors like land mafias and speculators to appropriate more land for construction.¹⁵ Inevitably the *gecekondu* became the main area of conflicts between different interest groups.

Due to the dense settlement patterns and the ineffectiveness of old migration and settlement processes, most of the time the migrants were not able to settle with their fellow country people, as was the case with *gecekondu* settlements up until the late 1970s.¹⁶ Therefore, close encounters between different ethnic and sectarian groups have occurred in these peripheral settlements, which have led to the emergence of contested and fragmented spaces, increasing the potential for tension between groups. On the other hand, though *hemsehrî* bonds – common origin – still play an important role in these neighbourhoods, wider identities like sectarian or ethnic affiliations constitute the primary reference for defining the ‘other’ for migrants, with the further institutionalization of these identities. Particularly in the newly emerged illegal settlements, these identities carry greater importance.¹⁷ However, such a return to communal and local bonds is accepted as contributing to the illegitimacy of these places in the novel sense of *varoş* by paving the way for the formation of socially isolated and closed communities. For example, after the electoral success of the Islamist parties, the religious communities in these settlements were judged a threat to the secular state and national unity, a matter which will be dealt with in detail below. As Erder¹⁸ mentions, the inhabitants of these areas are labelled as the ‘citizens of outlaw spaces’, ‘other’ citizens of Istanbul; once they were marked as ‘*gecekondu*’, now as ‘*varoşlu*’. We believe that the new labelling process has a strong relation to economic and social polarization and its reflection in the landscape of cities as a serious spatial segregation. New enclaves for the wealthier sections of the society emerge in the periphery of the cities, while the urban poor reside in topographically the most unsuitable places for settlement. The periphery of the cities, which once attracted little attention from high-income classes, has become valuable real estate since suburban life became popular in the 1990s. That development has brought the two socially most dissociated groups together as the main interest groups of the peripheral land. In some cases, the physical distance between these groups is minimal, which increases the degree of uneasiness on both sides. Inevitably, ‘a new social and legal imaginary that has been internalized by politicians and residents alike’ has emerged in these years.¹⁹ ‘Hitherto seen as poor people without resources to find adequate shelter, the migrants are now regarded as invaders of public property and beneficiaries of unfair privilege.’²⁰ There seems to be a strong connection, in that sense, between the changing dynamics of the land market and new representations of low income settlements which has contained severe exclusionary and racist overtones.

Under these circumstances, in which the modernization ideal foreseeing the integration of *gecekondu* settlements with the ‘modern’ urban space failed due to these settlements’ proved permanency and their growing presence on the periphery of large cities, new efforts to redefine and understand the changes in *gecekondu* spaces became widespread. Despite the structural transformations in low income settlements, *gecekondu* as a concept is still used in public discussions mainly with reference to illegal construction and ownership patterns. However, the illegality of low income settlements has been emphasized more by attributing to illegality an extensive meaning transcending the originally illegal construction processes of the

gecekondu. In fact the term *varoş* has appeared within this context, and has gained extensive usage from the first half of the 1990s.²¹ Rather than focusing only on the illegal construction of physical space, new discussions around the term *varoş* are concerned more with the social, political and economic tension-laden ingredients and potentials of these spaces.

The definition of the *gecekondu* and *gecekondu* by dominant discourse constitutes the context of the usage of *varoş* after the second half of the 1990s. The changing meanings of *gecekondu* after the 1990s were given little attention while the new concept *varoş* became accepted as dominating public debate replacing the other term in most studies on the subject. However, the continuity between the definition of the concepts *gecekondu* and *varoş* can highlight the underlying dynamics of representation. Therefore there is a need to address the changing representation of *gecekondu* in public debate in the 1990s before jumping into the discussion of *varoş*. To accomplish this task, we consider some widely read newspapers: liberal in tendency, such as *Milliyet*, *Sabah*, *Hürriyet*, or *Yeni Yüzyıl*; Islamic in orientation, like *Yeni Şafak* or *Zaman*; centre-left like *Cumhuriyet*; centre-right like *Türkiye*; and a weekly magazine, *Aktüel*, for comparison. News items about the *gecekondu* and *varoş* are selected from the period between 1990 and 2004. In this examination emphasis is given to the issues with which the concepts have been associated and the general discourse within which the issues have been reported. News and discussions related to *gecekondu* settlements come to the forefront of public debate mainly during election times; for that reason these periods dominate the news sample.

News on the *gecekondu* in the 1990s mainly dealt with the magnitude and complex nature of the *gecekondu* problem. The relative size of the *gecekondu* space and its population with respect to the city in general well reflects concerns over the increase of the *gecekondu* problem.²² The failure of *gecekondu* policies is criticized more harshly than in previous periods due to the fact that the results of urbanization policies in Turkey became more obvious in the 1990s.²³ Therefore reports criticizing the populist urbanization policies are represented most frequently among all the news items on the *gecekondu*. The problems of *gecekondu* policy in Turkey have been carried into public debate in an unusually critical manner.²⁴ Concerns about populist policies related to the *gecekondu* and system-related causes of the problem have gone hand in hand with an exclusionary discourse depicting *gecekondu* settlements as cancers in the urban space in both social and physical terms, in which *gecekondu* have been shown as the main actors causing this pathology.

Gecekondu as a concept has been most commonly used in news stories dealing with the illegal construction and ownership patterns of these settlements and the struggle between the police forces and *gecekondu* in demolition of the houses; while *varoş*, as will be elaborated below, has usually been used in stories attributing the new definition of illegality to these settlements, which is different from the one associated with the concept *gecekondu*. These settlements are portrayed as settings of extreme politicization, violence, criminal activities and informal communities. In contrast, the only item where *gecekondu* is used with respect to some kind of criminal activity is where the resistance of *gecekondu* dwellers against security forces during demolition has been reported.

As mentioned above, the pejorative approach to *gecekondu* in fact reflects a growing conflict between different agents sharing the urban rent. The transformation of *gecekondu* settlements into lower-middle class districts of apartment houses has brought about the increase of urban rents and the proliferation of actors demanding their share of *gecekondu* rents. The rapid apartment construction in *gecekondu* settlements is often pointed out in the written media.²⁵ Election periods are reported as giving impetus to the construction of additional flats on *gecekondu* houses and triggering the rise of 'apartment *gecekondu*'.²⁶ This transformation has brought the issue of the distribution of rent between *gecekondu*, private companies and the municipality under public scrutiny.²⁷ The proliferation of actors in the construction of *gecekondu* and increasing force and power of these illegal actors, namely land mafia and speculators, have been more often put on the agenda by means of the press. The news portrays the mafias of the *gecekondu* settlements as the secret manipulators of improvement plans.²⁸ Overall a clear dislike of *gecekondu* and *gecekondu* settlements dominates the discourse in news. This antipathy has been related mostly to the unfair rents obtained by *gecekondu* dwellers through recent transformations. In *Milliyet* of 30 October 1991 it is reported that new city dwellers (*gecekondu*) have been becoming rich due to the acquired rights to build additional flats and have all kinds of electronic appliances in their homes. Such discourse reflects a reality in *gecekondu* life, though, which is that the integration of *gecekondu* with city life is mostly realized in the sphere of consumption; it neglects the heterogeneity of *gecekondu* society in economic terms, and consequently the issue of poverty.

This negative approach to *gecekondu* and their potential as the source of urban tension is supported, as mentioned above, by reports on conflict between the police forces and *gecekondu* in cases of demolition. The demolition of *gecekondu* as a result of improvement plans just before and after election periods and the struggles between police officers and *gecekondu* is given extended coverage in newspapers.²⁹ The news most of the time attributes illegitimacy to the resistance of the *gecekondu*, though in some cases portrays *gecekondu* dwellers as the victims of demolition.

In the early 1990s there emerged also a discussion about the cultural aspects of *gecekondu* life, which gives the first signs of a discursive transformation to *varoş*. As mentioned in the introduction, the early discussions of *gecekondu* culture mainly dealt with its marginal qualities as a continuation of rural practices. However, the public debate through written media since the 1990s has focused on the degenerative capacity and effect of *gecekondu* life on city culture. Particularly with reference to Istanbul, there appear frequent reports about the deterioration of the authentic culture of the city due to the effects of the *gecekondu*. Being from Istanbul (*İstanbul*) is an important indicator of high culture in Turkey. People who define themselves as being true *İstanbul* blame the *gecekondu* for the deterioration of the city. Some editorials claim that some early *gecekondu* unjustly appropriate the identity of being authentic *İstanbul* and accuse newcomer migrants of being mainly responsible for the city's deterioration.³⁰ At its most extreme, solutions to the *gecekondu* problem such as the application of special taxes on *gecekondu* and entry visas to the city are voiced in the newspapers.³¹ In contrast, there are few cases where the problems of *gecekondu* have been presented from their perspective. The complaints of

gecekondu about being perceived as second-class citizens have been voiced in some editorials. These illustrate well an environment ripe for the success of Islamist parties in responding to the identity crisis in *gecekondu* settlements.³²

The structural transformations discussed above and the hardened exclusionary discourse about the *gecekondu* and *gecekondu* in public debate prepared the context for the use of the term *varoş* interchangeably with *gecekondu*, extending and altering its associated meanings. The threat perception in public debate seems to be strongly related with the increasing visibility of *gecekondu* in the city. Children suffering from poor conditions in *gecekondu* settlements have been portrayed as carrying the potential for criminal acts. In the same way, Alkış,³³ a journalist, claims that *gecekondu* may incline to violent and terrorist acts out of their dissatisfaction with and reactions to exclusionary treatment. This is a commonsense belief in the potential of these settlements to disturb social harmony.

Especially after the second half of the 1990s the word *varoş* began to be used synonymously with *gecekondu* in a stigmatizing way that reflects this transformation. It would be helpful to analyze two important events that open a new phase in the process of redefinition of *gecekondu* neighbourhoods. It will also be possible to trace the conceptual transformation from *gecekondu* to *varoş*. The first one is the Gazi neighbourhood affair and the second one concerns the incidents that took place on Workers' Day, 1 May 1996.

Gazi neighbourhood, a low income unplanned settlement in Istanbul, was held to have a population of 100,000 when it appeared at the forefront of public debate following a sad incident on 12 March 1995. Most of the neighbourhood's settlers had migrated from south-eastern Anatolia and were Alevi and Kurd in origin.³⁴ The *gecekondu* neighbourhood was shaken by a series of events that resulted in the death of a number of people and over 100 injuries. A small group of people whose identities were not determined attacked four coffee houses mainly used by Alevis and a *cemevi*³⁵ with machine guns and killed some people there. As a result, Alevis living in the neighbourhood, together with other Alevis and leftist groups from different regions of Turkey and Istanbul, while protesting about the event, also protested at the indifferent attitude of the police forces and clashed with police. These struggles turned into serious fighting between the groups. The harsh response of police forces in repressing the protests contributed to the seriousness of the event. This event and the sectarian conflict between Alevis and Sunnis may constitute the subject matter for another article but for our purpose what is crucial is its reflection in newspapers which paved the way for a renewed public perception of *gecekondu* settlements. The Gazi affair was defined in newspapers predominantly as the social explosion (boom) of *gecekondu*.³⁶ Although, articles about the affair appeared to avoid using provocative discourse, they implicitly identified the neighbourhood with violent events by referring to the inherent qualities of *gecekondu*. The history, social, cultural and economic structure of the neighbourhood was defined as carrying the potential for such conflict, crime and violence anyway. In one of the reports, the neighbourhood was defined as a 'ghetto' and its potential for conflict was expressed in relation to its sheltering radical groups that are on opposite poles of the political continuum.³⁷

Some writers have pointed out a strong link between under-consumption and such potential for social conflicts. Ahmet İnsel, who wrote an important article a year before the Gazi affair, considered the poverty and poor standards of living on the periphery of the cities.³⁸ According to İnsel, the people living in the periphery of Istanbul, which he calls *varoş*, are both so close to the luxury and glitter of city life and at the same time very far away from having such a life; this situation is problematic when the population of young second generation migrants are taken into account. Some widely read journalists, liberal in tendency, pointed out the potential for tension in these districts because of poverty, the pressure of police forces, the pressure of rightist and religious groups and the increasing influence of illegal leftist organizations on the young inhabitants of these neighbourhoods.³⁹ In that sense they focus particularly on the changing conditions of *gecekondu* neighbourhoods with a quite neutral, value-free tone and they attempt to attribute legitimacy to the reactions of Alevi inhabitants in reference to the conditions that make the social atmosphere tenser. Thus, the concept *varoş* and its substitutes like ghetto are not used in a pejorative manner to define the violent and criminal nature of *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, but rather used in explaining the deprived physical, economic and social ingredients of the setting that provide a likely environment for social tensions. As discussed above, the changing structural conditions in *gecekondu* neighbourhoods have led to a transformed perception and discourse in public debate regarding mainly the illegal aspects of these settlements. Long before the Gazi affair, Oktay Ekinci⁴⁰ discussed two forms of illegality in the production of space in these neighbourhoods, referring to Sultanbeyli, a large *gecekondu* region having very similar characteristics to Gazi. These neighbourhoods are illegal, firstly, in terms of the original construction and house ownership patterns. The second source of illegality for Ekinci emerges from the fact of poor record keeping in these neighbourhoods. It is impossible for the local headmen (*muhtar*) to keep track of everybody and therefore the situation provides an environment conducive to the spread of illegal communities of religious or political origin (or both). This may be threatening to secularity and democracy.⁴¹ As mentioned above, structural changes in *gecekondu* neighbourhoods like the further capitalization of *gecekondu* space and increasing encounters between different ethnic and sectarian groups due to spatial stress led to a transforming public debate on the nature of illegal settlements.⁴² The novel definitions of illegality have gained impetus in public debate with the use of the term *varoş*. The Gazi neighbourhood affair is considered as the beginning of this renewed 'social spatialisation'.⁴³

The new label *varoş* is used in reports on the Gazi affair to point out that the 'have nots' of the periphery may threaten the country in the near future. However, the term *varoş* would be used in a more pejorative and denigratory sense in defining 'the people living in the *varoş*' a year later on 1 May 1996, when Worker's Day turned into a series of violent events in Istanbul's city centre. On 1 May 1996 thousands of workers from *gecekondu* neighbourhoods alongside with many leftist organizations and militants from some illegal organizations initiated a march to Kadıköy, a prominent middle class district in Istanbul, in order to celebrate Workers' Day. However, the celebrations turned into a struggle between demonstrators and police towards the end of the meeting. Some of the demonstrators attacked police near shops and banks located on both sides of the road.

Many journalists known for their liberal tendencies evaluated the 1 May event as the explosion of the *varoş* and they explained this march with the following saying: ‘*Varoşlar şehire indi*’ (The *varoş*s went down to the city).⁴⁴ They gave emphasis to the poor economic and social conditions of the *varoşlu* and considered them victims of the system. However, besides that, the narratives of the journalists resembled the discourse effective since 1950 on the *gecekondu* and *gecekondulu* as the others of urban space and life. While the main axis of exclusion in the process of defining the *gecekondu* was for years the rural qualities of *gecekondulu* and the informal nature of *gecekondu* space, the term *varoş* shifts the axis of exclusion more to the issues of poverty, crime, violence and the illegal mechanisms and actors in the production of low income settlements.⁴⁵ One journalist identified the actions of the demonstrators on Worker’s Day with the vandals who destroyed Rome in the course of migrant invasions.⁴⁶ Another editorial analysed this event as being a direct consequence of the migration process and a lack of trust on the part of migrants who had no economic, cultural and social security in the city environment. As a result, rather than integrating into city life they express their hatred through violent actions.⁴⁷ The common argument in most of the editorials is that the majority of those people who cannot benefit from the resources of the city show their hatred towards the people and facilities of the middle class-district, even down to the tulips lining the road: the most striking symbol of this event as presented by most of the newspapers was a girl beating the tulips with a stick. This picture was presented as a symbol of the vandalism attributed to all the demonstrators. Under the title of ‘*Lale’nin Suçu*’ (Tulip’s Guilt), it was portrayed as the revenge of the girl against the system that had been excluding her for years.⁴⁸

The label *varoş* began to be used on 1 May 1996 in a more definite and widespread manner when referring to low income settlements. Its negative connotations were emphasized more in public debate compared to the Gazi affair. This event can thus be seen as a turning point from defining the peripheral low income settlements as *gecekondu* and the people living in it as *gecekondulu* to using a new label *varoş* in place of or beside the term *gecekondu* in public debate. The newspapers discussing the 1 May affair with reference to urban problems in almost all cases called peripheral settlements by their new label as *varoş*. As a consequence of this renaming process, *varoşlu* became used in defining the people who are from low income neighbourhoods, totally marginal to city life, and carrying a great potential to become involved in illegal and violent incidents. Having delineated the introduction of the concept *varoş* to public debate, it is essential to discuss the various meanings attributed to the concept within the context of the changing nature of Turkish politics in the late 1990s.

After the military intervention in 1980, Islam became one of the main components of the ruling ideology as a bulwark against the leftist movements of the 1970s. In this period state governance that had been under military control implicitly imposed and favoured Islamic and conservative values. Not surprisingly, political Islam gained momentum in the following decades starting with the notable victory of the pro-Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* – RP) in the 1994 local elections. The party tried to mobilize the urban poor, who had suffered from the liberalization policies of the 1980s which had had a negative impact on peripheral social and economic

groups.⁴⁹ It attracted 19 per cent of the votes nationally and gained 329 mayorships including Istanbul and Ankara. The 1994 local elections signified the beginning of a new period in the history of low income settlements. The local political success of Islam depended mainly on migrants' disappointment with the inefficiency of the local services previously provided by the social democratic parties, the suppression of leftist politics in the peripheral settlements by the state since the late 1970s, and the success of the RP in grassroots organization and campaigning. The disappointment felt by the residents of peripheral settlements for years towards the social democratic tradition that had had a strong basis in the 1970s were obvious in the 1994 and 1999 local elections. The success of RP seemed to be due to its appeal to the economic needs of low income settlers rather than its religious appeal.⁵⁰ *Gecekondu* residents, who had been the 'other' in Turkish politics until the 1994 local elections, accomplished a kind of democratic revolution against the central elite powers and this was the first time that people defined as the other for years had direct power to determine urban policies.⁵¹ This dramatic change in the political preferences of the *gecekondu* settlers also affected the approach towards these settlements by the 'urbanite'⁵² sections of society, which appropriated to a large extent modernist, republicanist and, therefore, strongly secularist tenets. This secular anxiety of urbanites led to a hardening of the exclusionary discourse. Meanwhile these developments instigated the spread of political Islam in everyday life in *gecekondu* settlements. Local religious communities and gatherings increased in number, particularly during the 1990s. The illegal *tariqat*⁵³ (*tarikât*) organizations and closed religious communities, particularly in recently established low income settlements, attracted considerable attention from the public and this also contributed to urbanite anxiety. As an example, Ekinci, a journalist writing in a pure elitist fashion, considers the return to all kinds of community formation in low income neighbourhoods as dangerous for national unity.

In general, political developments between 1991 and 2002 strengthened the popular basis of political Islam in low income settlements. Coalition governments defined the period. The sovereignty of state imposition around the axis of the rising Kurdish question and pan-Islamism and the sovereignty of market mechanisms around the issues of stability measures and structural adjustment programmes were the two most important phenomena of the time.⁵⁴ The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP), which came to power alone in the 2002 national election, constructed its election strategy on populist criticism of this sovereignty. Advocates for change, who formed an opposition to the old ways of governing within the former Islamist Virtue Party, the successor of the Welfare Party⁵⁵ founded AKP. It took 35 per cent of the votes in the elections and gained the capacity to change even the Constitution owing to its overwhelming majority in the National Assembly.⁵⁶ A huge effort was made to explain the nationwide success of AKP. It was considered by many to be a consequence of the rhetoric appropriated by the party in relation to the peripheral settlements. Just after election day, the widely read newspaper *Sabah* announced the victory of AKP in a news report headlined the 'Anatolian Invasion'.⁵⁷ This label has often been used to refer to rural-to-urban migration within elitist discourse. Rather than an invasion, though, this success indicates the response of *gecekondu* inhabitants struggling with poverty to the inclusive discourse of AKP. The leader of the party and current Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan often refers to his identity as being from one of

the peripheral settlements of Istanbul (Kasımpaşa) in election speeches, thereby aiming to convince the audience that the party is well aware of the social and economic problems there. The image of Erdoğan as a ‘Kasımpaşalı’ and ‘*varoş* child’ seems to contribute to the support drawn from the low income settlers. This image has frequently been carried into public debate by various editorials.⁵⁸ Erdoğan’s success is attributed to his being a part of village or small town culture and *varoş*, besides his messages considering the ‘other Turkey’.⁵⁹ In addition to populist image making, the party’s harsh criticism of market thinking and its stress on social justice strengthened their base to a large extent. As mentioned above, due to the success of the pro-Islamist parties in low income settlements for a decade, the concept of *varoş* has begun to be associated with Islam and in some cases with radical Islam. This has led to a serious disjuncture in public debate between Islamist and mainstream journalists and newspapers. For example, Mehmet Altan,⁶⁰ by defining the culture of *varoş* as lumpen, neither rural nor urban, accuses the Islamist writers of propagating that culture. However, rather than propagating it, and contrary to elitist discourses, Islamist writers and newspapers, namely *Zaman* and *Yeni Şafak*, in general seem to be more careful about the usage of *varoş* in order to avoid the production on a discursive level of stereotypes and a reified culture with regard to low income settlements. Particularly since the 1 May affair, Islamic writers have approached the matter more cautiously and they rarely employ the term *varoş* with regard to news about low income settlements, sticking rather to the term *gecekondu*.

In recent years the operations of AKP, like the other political parties in Turkey, have contrasted with their election discourse, which concentrates mainly on social justice and poverty. Their ambition to integrate the country with the global economy and to liberalize the Turkish economy, including opening up of urban land to market mechanisms and the operation of global and national private markets appear especially remarkable. Keyder⁶¹ sums up recent urban policies in the following manner:

The moral economy of urban land use now seems to have reached its limits mostly because of the conflicts of interest between new sources of demand for land. As the old laws, which considered the maintenance of public land to be foundational to the legitimacy of populist government, have been relaxed, new demands from the capitalist sector have come to the fore. Formerly populist politicians now respond to these market-mediated demands rather than to a potential constituency of new immigrants. They have shifted their allegiances from populist developmentalism to neighbourhood upgrading under capitalist logic. For instance, the mayor of a squatter municipality has zoned a segment of public land under his jurisdiction as a ‘business district’ to be allocated to multinational companies.

In parallel to their policy changes, the approach and actions regarding low income settlements have also reflected their hesitancy on the subject. There seems to be a shift from an anti-elitist discourse, mainly relying on the rhetoric of social justice and social deprivation to a discourse that is almost hostile towards illegal housing and

settlement. In particular Erdoğan, by referring to his experiences as Istanbul mayor in 1995, signified the importance of migration control for large cities like Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir.⁶² Paradoxically, this change of discourse is in combination with intense media interest in Erdoğan and his family's visits to poor families in *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, particularly during Ramadan. Their approach to illegal construction on the political level seems to be very different from their approaches to individual identity claims and claims related to under-consumption in illegal settlements. In a recent interview, Erdoğan appropriates a quite modernist and elitist discourse regarding *gecekondu* development and he views the issue as an impediment to civilization. Therefore, he sees the problem of avoiding *gecekondu* development as a struggle to attain a certain level of civilization.⁶³ He refers to uncontrolled rural-to-urban migration as presenting a serious security threat to the order of the cities, and for that reason he envisioned visa (*nakil il-muhaberi*) application for emigration to large cities as essential. This change in discourse has a strong relationship with party policies regarding EU integration.

Ironically, the new populism that has dissociated itself from developmentalism and reconciled itself with neoliberalism has been criticized with reference to the tension-laden and illegal aspects of *varoş* space in public debate. Paradoxically, new populism due to its compromise with global and national capitalists regarding urban land prefers to break an important part of its alliance with *gecekondu* settlers, since the politicians no longer want to offer state land and services to them. It is interesting that despite the breakdown of the alliance, the *varoşlu* are still perceived from a middle class view as the main beneficiaries of the populist policies, that is the rent of urban land. However, as mentioned above, illegal construction is severely criticized by the government nowadays and demolition is enforced despite the strong protests and resistance of informal settlers. Politicians try to retain their alliances with the low income settlers mostly through different means, that is, identity politics. It was mentioned in some editorials that mainstream political parties have very little chance in the *varoş* where the ethnic, religious and nationalist identities had been sharpened to a large extent.⁶⁴ *Varoş* is mainly used in such news stories to denote the potential of these settlements as a nest for the extreme political groups and ideologies. In a context briefly discussed above, *varoş* has been used with an ever-increasing frequency in public debate and its content and connotations have changed in time.

Varoş seems to have replaced *gecekondu* by attributing to the label a certain hopelessness in the 2000s. *Gecekondu* is mostly encountered in news about illegal construction, its problems and incidents of demolition. In some reports and editorials, *gecekondu* and *varoş* are used interchangeably; while in others *gecekondu* stands for individual houses and cases, and *varoş* refers to more general categories like all low income settlers or settlements, or to a way of life. This indicates that *gecekondu* as a concept is no longer suitable to define these settlements as a consequence of the structural changes and changing approaches in response to these transformations. The hope for modernization carried by the concept *gecekondu* is no longer able to stand for all low income settlements. When compared to *varoş*, *gecekondu* seems to be used with relatively value-neutral connotations. Demolition and amnesty as the two inseparable events of *gecekondu* history are mostly

associated with this traditional label of the peripheral settlements. Some stories implicitly make allusion to *gecekondu* settlers as undeserving beneficiaries of urban land and at the same time aggressors in demolition incidents.⁶⁵ In most cases, the negative meanings associated with peripheral settlements and culture are attributed to and carried through the concept *varoş* rather than *gecekondu*. Therefore, though *gecekondu* compared to *varoş* holds a more concrete spatial connotation, the news and editorials on political conflicts and social tension in peripheral spaces often make use of *varoş*. Public debate on conflicting identities and the potential of low income settlements to violate urban and national security begin with a preliminary reference to *varoş*. Although at the end of the 1990s the public debate on radical Islam makes necessarily a reference to *varoş*, recently, themes other than religion are more often identified with *varoş*. Ali Kirca,⁶⁶ a popular columnist, liberal in tendency, argues that religious values have been eroding in *varoş* due to the loosening of the bond between political Islam and everyday life in low income settlements and nothing can fill the emptiness left by these values. He sees this transformation as a dangerous 'disintegration'. In fact a similar discourse goes hand in hand with the discussions of the high crime rate in low income settlements due to the loss of religious values. This time, religion is accorded a positive value rather than referring to a source of illegality in low income settlements. On the other hand, *varoş* retains its potential for criminality at the discursive level. Crime is often discussed with reference to *varoş* youths who are portrayed as having a tendency for criminal acts since they are the ones who are affected most by under-consumption in the city.⁶⁷ The increasing rate of crime in large cities is almost always explained with reference to the numerical dominance of *varoş* settlers and the dangers associated with them.⁶⁸ The verb commonly used with *varoş* in public debate in the 2000s is 'invasion', referring to both cities/spaces and culture. Rather than the spatial transformation, social and psychological rehabilitation is proposed as a solution to the *varoş* invasion. Following every aggressive event, newspapers cite the culture of *varoş* as the main reason behind it. Even a fight at the general meeting of the Republican People's Party was explained by the unfortunate domination of *varoş* culture in the party that once had a strong elitist and urbane tradition as the first party of the Republic.⁶⁹

In sum, from the Worker's Day event onwards the terms *gecekondu* and *varoş* have been used interchangeably in public debate, though the terms started out referring to quite different things. As time passes *varoş* is used more to indicate the cultural otherness of low income settlers and their undeserved marginal qualities vis-à-vis city life, while *gecekondu* retains its meaning mainly as a spatial signifier. However, unlike *gecekondu*, *varoş* has lost the strong spatial signatory content that it had during the initial stages of its extensive usage. Rather than defining particularly the peripheral space, it started to be used to refer to a way of life, a culture predominantly carrying inferior and negative qualities in contrast to high urban culture. A way of life associated mainly with crime, violence, bad tastes and illegal earnings have dominated the definition of *varoş* in the 2000s. The concept represents a more ambivalent and dispersed position of being. The discourse on the vigilant peasant regarding *gecekondu* settlers has been replaced by *varoşlu* acquiring more negative identities.⁷⁰ Its strong cultural connotation makes the usage of the term vaguer in identifying all inferior aspects in the defining popular culture by the concept.

The identification of the term with a particular way of life or certain tastes, and therefore its transmission to the cultural realm mostly brings about the emergence of a discourse with racist overtones. Etöz⁷¹ points out that *varoşlu* have been labelled 'black Turks' against 'white Turks' in news and editorials beginning from the late 1990s. This discursive division between 'black' and 'white Turks', though encapsulating ethnic meanings and indicating a distinction between Kurdish⁷² and Turkish identities, encompasses this distinction by classifying people by their urban traits and way of life or with reference to consumption patterns. Therefore, the racist overtones in the dominant discourse, rather than describing an ethnic distinction, introduce a novel form of racism by supposing a distinction between 'urbanites' and 'marginals'. Recently a hot debate about an opinion column by a journalist known for her 'liberal' tendencies and writing in one of the most widely read newspapers has come to the forefront of public debate. The journalist, Mine Kırıkkanat,⁷³ by referring to the usage of a public beach in Istanbul, criticized all behavioural traits associated with *varoş* culture in a very discriminatory and pejorative way, which led to a serious debate about the growing danger of defining the other with a racist outlook. The nature of her discourse is very similar to what Bauman⁷⁴ describes as a new form of racism by referring to Gilroy.⁷⁵ In such racism, the terms culture and identity may function as surreptitious code words for race.⁷⁶ As Perlman⁷⁷ discusses (referring to a Latin American case sharing very similar experiences of urbanization), the marginality of peripheral settlements is not determined by numerical majority but what is attributed to it specifically by the middle and upper classes. In a parallel way, Culhaoglu⁷⁸ argues that the culture of poverty is present in Turkey but it does not emerge as a consequence of the acts of the poor or from the closed system of the poor. Rather it is a derivation of mass culture, and shaped by the media, sovereign ideology and 'kitsch'.

Such racist representations are quite similar to representations of *gecekondu* in academic works and public debate in the 1970s, but with a very significant difference. The recent division, *varoş*, made mainly through the aesthetics of consumption is more vague and extensive in representational capacity compared to the *gecekondu* discourse where the axis of exclusion was again cultural but contained physical, spatial implications. Therefore the latter has restricted defining capacity. To sum up the recent usage of *varoş* apart from *gecekondu* and the initial usages of *varoş* in the Gazi and 1 May affairs, refers to a wide range of constituents in city life as accepted by the elitist approach to define the other. In such a discourse, the main axis of complaint is *varoş*'s siege of all parts of urban life. This diffusion of 'varoş culture' to all aspects of everyday life has complicated the nature of defining the other. The cultural classifications identified with *varoş* very much affect the content of popular culture, which is to a significant degree appropriated by the middle and upper middle classes. An important example of the affect on 'urban' culture by elements of popular culture is *arabesk* music.⁷⁹ The *arabesk* which was identified with the *gecekondu* and its culture has been treated as an anomaly by 'urbanites', similarly to their representations of peripheral culture in the 1970s. However, by the late 1980s 'the audience of *arabesk* music had expanded to include not only the masses of *gecekondu* dwellers and much of the rural population but also sections of middle and ruling classes'.⁸⁰ *Arabesk* lost its direct affiliation to *gecekondu* culture in the 1990s and has taken on hybrid forms with other music types like pop or rap. Just as the concept *varoş* has become vague by losing direct reference to *gecekondu* settlements, *arabesk* as part of popular culture has

'lost its original anchoring in low modernism and become so diffused that it is now considered a "transclass taste" and "structure of feeling"'.⁸¹ The most educated, urban and high-income classes have even favoured such hybrid forms in music in recent years. The elements which were once considered kitsch have been appropriated by all segments of society. Ironically 'varoş culture', which is used with very negative connotations, has replaced the 'arabesk culture' of the 1980s.

On the other hand, the consuming spaces of the upper middle and high-income classes have started to diffuse into the peripheral space in adapted versions. Versions of high culture consuming spaces are being produced there. The youths from peripheral settlements who catch to a degree the 'urban' traits and tenets through consumption have become more visible in the city space. Some journalists point out the contradiction and conflicts of *varoş* life, particularly among the young generation. There are now girls and boys with mobile phones spending time in bowling alleys in *varoş* shopping plazas or in other city spaces.⁸² The increasing poverty in low income settlements has become visible with the presence of street children in the centres of large cities, some of whom are drug addicts. These children, called 'varoş children', in some cases disturb the conscience of 'urbanites' to an extent that they are considered either invisible or the cause of every crime in the city. The close encounters between 'varoşlu' and 'urbanites' in both cultural and spatial terms have made the definition of *varoş* as a way of life vis-à-vis urban life more complicated in the 2000s. At the latest stage of its definition *varoş* has also begun to be used to refer to a psychological state of being. It is defined as the undeserved but embedded part of urban society's split personality that refers to tastes and feelings related to the peripheral culture.⁸³ *Varoş* as such is no longer signifying the other in spatial terms and paradoxically has become part of urban culture. Özbek,⁸⁴ while discussing *arabesk* culture, refers to a contradiction in Turkish society: the contradiction between a dominant nationalist and paternalist incapacity to live with difference and a deep, unrealized popular capacity to change and accept difference through hybridization. As discussed through this article, that is the contradiction that defines the long process of the representation of the first *gecekondu* settlements, then all illegally formed settlements in Turkey, through the concepts of *gecekondu* and *varoş*, with an important difference from Özbek. To see popular capacity to change and accept difference through hybridization in Turkey as fully unrealized would be a partial and mistaken approach.

The migrants and their space have been defined as the other of urban space, with different identities attributed to them by the dominant discourse. These attributions have changed over time, referring to their rural being, to extreme political presence even extending to violence depending on conflicting identities, to radical Islamism and to their 'kitsch' cultural existence in relation to the political context of its definition. The *varoş* has become a scapegoat for the recent socio-economic problems of Turkish cities. Implicitly or explicitly the term carries an exclusionary connotation and it is used as a reminder of unpleasant experiences in urban society. In fact, the term *varoş* has been shaped and reshaped in public debate via the concerns of the middle and upper classes with a close connection to the conflicting interests of different classes over urban rent.

Despite the fact that the representation of the urban poor through *varoş* mainly moves its exclusionary axis to a cultural and more abstract realm, the racist overtones in the discourse have taken on a more solid form, which prevents people developing an insightful approach to the lives of migrants and their rights to the city.

Notes

1. *Gecekondu* is the name given to the informal low-income settlements in the periphery of the cities. *Gecekondu* refers to the people living in these settlements. *Varoş* is a recent term that is used in place or with the term of *gecekondu*. *Varoşlu* is the person associated with *varoş* culture.
2. We borrow the term 'dominant discourse' from G. Baumann, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-Ethnic London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.22. It refers to the space of public debate where the representations of low income settlements and settlers have been produced. For a discourse to be dominant one would expect it to show four features according to Baumann, which are: 1) its conceptual make-up should be economical not to say simple; 2) its communicative resources should border on monopoly; 3) it should be flexible of application and should allow for the greatest ideological plasticity; 4) finally it should lend itself to established institutional purposes. The context where the discourse on *gecekondu* and *varoş* has been represented show very similar qualities with Baumann's definition of dominant discourse. First of all, the characteristics attributed to *gecekondu* and *varoşlu* have been put forward in a very precise manner; hence, any possibility of developing a sense of everyday life in *gecekondu* is not permitted in these definitions by means of short-cut and definite labels. Secondly, particularly after the 1980s the main communicative resources, the media, have been to a large extent monopolized by a small number of large conglomerates. Thirdly, with respect to the representations of *Varoş* in the media, ideological plasticity from right-wing conservatism to liberalism even in the editorial discourse of a single journalist seems remarkable.
3. M. Heper, *Gecekondu Policy in Turkey: An Evaluation with a Case Study of Rumelihisariüstü Squatter Area in Istanbul* (Istanbul: Bogazici University Publication, 1978), p.12.
4. In an essay published in *Cumhuriyet* (Istanbul daily) on 28 September 1948, the journalist Metin Toker used degrading discourse to report on the presence of *gecekondu* settlements very close to Istanbul's most refined and beautiful neighbourhood Şişli, suggesting the natural response to be revulsion and horror. One year later, the same journalist, referring to Istanbul city governor Fahrettin Kerim Gökay, wrote in the following manner: 'Governor Gökay seems to protect *gecekondu* constructors; we have no words to say. However, there would be nothing surprising if the *gecekondu* who have their own laws, order and cabinet today created their own police forces or military tomorrow', quoted from T. Şenyapılı, 'Cumhuriyet' in 75. Yılı *Gecekondu*nun 50. Yılı' [The 75th Anniversary of Republic, the 50th Anniversary of *Gecekondu*], in *75 Yılda Değişen Kent ve Mimarlık* [Changing City and Architecture in 75 Years] (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1998), p.308.
5. F. Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.116.
6. Şenyapılı, 'Cumhuriyet'in 75', p.309.
7. N. Tok, 'A Critical Approach to Gecekondu Studies in Turkey with Reference to Modernization Theory' (unpublished MA Thesis, 1999).
8. Research conducted by Yasa in 1964 was full of stereotype images of migrants and degrading discourse about their rural lifestyles. See İ. Yasa, 'Gecekondu Ailesi: Geçiş Halinde Bir Aile Tipolojisi' [*Gecekondu* Family: The Typology of a Family in Transition], *ASBF Dergisi*, Vol.25, No.4 (1970), pp.9–18. The women doing domestic work were referred to as junk dealers because of the fact that they wore the cast-offs of middle class families over their rural clothes, which Yasa viewed as an ugly look that threatened the modernist taste and aesthetic (ibid., p.11). According to the premises of the study, the *gecekondu* family had to integrate with city life in order not to threaten security in the urban environment, since *gecekondu* families who were in the middle of the process of transition caused social unease and insecurity in the city.
9. Tok, *A Critical Approach to Gecekondu Studies*, p.47.
10. See K. Görmez, *Yerel Demokrasi ve Türkiye* [Local Democracy and Turkey] (Istanbul: Vadi, 1997); and M. Heper, *Local Government in Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1989).

11. There are two main religious sects in Islamic Turkey, Sunnism and Alevism. Sunnis constitute the majority of the population in Turkey. Alevism can be considered as the Shamanist interpretation of Islam, which mainly relies on oral cultural tradition. Sunnis are more conservative in their everyday practices compared to Alevi. Before the 1950s where Alevi and Sunni people lived in villages of their own, these identities although very different did not lead to any conflict between groups. However, after the 1950s, with the intense rural-to-urban migration, these identities came into close contact in *gecekondu* settlements constructed on the periphery of the cities. These close encounters turned into serious struggles in the 1970s where fights between leftists composed mainly of Alevi and rightists composed mainly of Sunni plunged the country into serious political turmoil.
12. See Yasa, 'Gecekondu Ailesi'; O. Türkdoğan, *Yoksulluk Kültürü* [The Culture of Poverty] (Istanbul: Dede Korkut Yayınları, 1977); K. Kartal 'Kentleşme Sürecinde Toplumsal Değişme Odağı Olarak Ankara' [Ankara as a Locus of Social Change in the Urbanization Process], in Türkiye Geliştirme Araştırmaları Vakfı (ed.), *Kentsel Bütünleşme* [Urban Integration] (Ankara: Vakıf Yayını, 1982).
13. Ç. Keyder, 'The Housing Market from Informal to Global', in Ç. Keyder (ed.), *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), pp.91–2.
14. See S. Erder, *Umraniye: İstanbul'a Bir Kent Kondu* [A City Disembarked to Istanbul Ümraniye] (Istanbul: İletişim, 1996); *Kentsel Gerilim* [Urban Tension] (Ankara: Um:ag, 1997); O. Işık and Melih Pınarcıoğlu, *Nöbetleşe Yoksulluk: Sultanbeyli Örneği* [Poverty in Turn: Sultanbeyli Case] (Ankara: İletişim, 2001).
15. Şenyapılı, 'Cumhuriyet'in 75', p.312; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu, *Nöbetleşe Yoksulluk*, p.160.
16. Tok, *A Critical Approach to Gecekondu*, p.83.
17. A. Gunes-Ayata, 'Gecekondu'larda Kimlik Sorunu Dayanisma Oruntuleri ve Hemşehrilik' [Identity Problem, Solidarity and Hemşehrilik in Squatter Settlements], *Toplum ve Bilim*, Vol.51/52 (1990–91), pp.89–101.
18. Erder, *Umraniye*, p.36.
19. C. Keyder 'Globalization and Social Exclusion in Istanbul', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.29, No.1 (2005), p.130.
20. Ibid., p.130.
21. Z. Etöz, 'Varoş: Bir İstila Bir Tehdit' [*Varoş: An Invasion a Threat*], *Birikim*, Vol.132 (2000), pp.49–53.
22. See the news in *Hürriyet* (Istanbul daily), 22 Jan. 1991, 18 May 1992, 6 Jan. 1995, 8 Aug. 1996; *Cumhuriyet* (Istanbul daily), 4 July 1991, 12 Feb. 1992, 15 Aug. 1996; *Milliyet* (Istanbul daily), 17 Feb. 1992, 24 April 1992.
23. See the news in *Sabah* (Istanbul daily), 28 Jan. 1997, 12 May 1997, 1 June 1997, 16 Sept. 1997, 2, 26 Nov. 1997, 29 Aug. 1998, 16 Sept. 1998, 1, 9, 27 April 1999, 17 Sept. 1999; *Hürriyet*, 13 Jan. 1999, 2 Feb. 1999, 26 May 1999; *Milliyet*, 14, 31 March 1999, 25 Nov. 1999.
24. *Sabah*, 1, 7, 20 Feb. 1994, 10 June 1992, 4 Nov. 1994; *Milliyet*, 24 Aug. 1993, 18 Feb. 1994, 13 Jan. 1994; *Türkiye* (Istanbul daily), 7 Feb. 1994, 15 March 1994, 15 Aug. 1996; *Hürriyet*, 15 Jan. 1994, 10 Feb. 1994, 3, 6 Aug. 1996; *Cumhuriyet*, 23 Feb. 1994, 15 Aug. 1996.
25. *Cumhuriyet*, 17 Feb. 1991.
26. *Hürriyet*, 8 Nov. 1995; *Cumhuriyet*, 29 Jan. 1994.
27. *Türkiye*, 3 Nov. 1994, 10 Aug. 1996.
28. *Sabah*, 30 April 1993, 10 Feb. 1994; *Milliyet*, 13 Jan. 1995, 26 May 1996; *Cumhuriyet*, 21 Sept. 1996.
29. *Cumhuriyet*, 18 Nov. 1992; *Milliyet*, 12 Aug. 1992.
30. *Cumhuriyet*, 17 Feb. 1991; *Milliyet*, 28 April 1992.
31. *Milliyet*, 23 May 1996.
32. *Cumhuriyet*, 29 Sept. 1991, 1 April 1994.
33. *Cumhuriyet*, 25 May 1994.
34. D. Şahin, 'Gazi Mahallesi İzlenimleri: Zorunlu Göçe ve Şiddete Bağlı Ruhsal Sorunlar' [The Impressions of Gazi Neighbourhood: Mental Disorders Related to Forced Migration and Violence], *Ütopiya* (2000), p.61.
35. *Cemevi* is the religious place of Alevi people.
36. *Hürriyet*, 15 March 1995; *Sabah*, 19 March 1995.
37. S. İşcan, in *Aktuel* (weekly Istanbul magazine), 16–22 March 1995.
38. See A. İnşel editorial, *Aktuel*, 26 May 1994.
39. See editorials by A. İnşel, *Cumhuriyet*, 19 March 1995; A. Kirca, *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 14 March 1995.

40. See editorial by O. Ekinici, 'İllegal Kent: Sultanbeyli' [Illegal City: Sultanbeyli], *Cumhuriyet*, 28 Dec. 1993.
41. Ibid.
42. Tok, *A Critical Approach to Gecekondu Studies*, pp.81–3.
43. We borrow the phrase 'social spatialisation' from R. Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p.31. He uses the term to 'designate the ongoing social construction of the spatial at the level of the social imaginary (collective mythologies, presuppositions) as well as interventions in the landscape for example, the built environment'.
44. See editorials by M. İnceoğlu, *Yeni Yuzyıl*, 2 May 1996; Ş. Soner, *Cumhuriyet*, 2 May 1996; G. Göktürk, *Yeni Yuzyıl*, 7 May 1996; A. Bayramoğlu, *Yeni Yuzyıl*, 2 May 1996.
45. S. Ayata, 'Varoşlar, Çatışma ve Şiddet', *Görüş Dergisi*, Vol.6 (1996), p.18.
46. See editorial by T. Akyol, *Milliyet*, 3 May 1996.
47. See editorial by A. Bayramoğlu, *Yeni Yuzyıl*, 2 May 1996.
48. *Yeni Yuzyıl*, 3 May 1996.
49. İ. Dağı, 'Transformation of Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Rethinking the West and Westernization', *Turkish Studies*, Vol.6, No.1 (2005), p.25.
50. İ. Özler, 'Politics of the *Gecekondu* in Turkey: The Political Choices of Urban Squatters in National Elections', *Turkish Studies*, Vol.1, No.2 (2000), p.53.
51. M. Yalçın and E. Erbas, 'Mekan ve Siyaset' [Space and Politics], *Birikim*, Vol.179 (2004), p.40.
52. What we refer to as urbanite particularly after the rise of political Islam is a 'loose group consisting of the radical bourgeoisie, state bureaucrats, the army, the urban middle classes, Kemalist intellectuals, the Second Republicans and some radical intellectuals', as quoted from M. Özbek, 'Arabesk Culture: A Case of Modernization and Popular Identity', in S. Bozdoğan and R. Kasaba (eds.), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), p.228. What mainly motivates the integration of this group is a common secular anxiety against political Islam.
53. Tarikat is a word of Arabic origin, which is defined as 'a method of moral psychology for the guidance of individuals directing their lives toward a knowledge of God' in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, in Mircea Eliade (ed.) (New York: Macmillan, 1987).
54. F. Yaşlı, 'AKP, Muhafazakar Demokrasi ve Yeni Sağ' [JDP, Conservative Democracy and New Right], *Birikim*, Vol.180 (2004), p.43.
55. Welfare Party was banned by the decision of Constitutional Court in 1998 because of the accusation of becoming the centre of activities contrary to the principles of secularism.
56. Yaşlı, 'AKP, Muhafazakar Demokrasi ve Yeni Sağ', p.39.
57. Ibid., p.39.
58. See editorial by M. Yılmaz, *Milliyet*, 15 Aug. 2001.
59. See editorial by Ö.L. Mete, *Sabah*, 27 Nov. 2003.
60. *Sabah*, 6 Sept. 2004.
61. Keyder, 'Globalization and Social Exclusion in Istanbul', p.130.
62. *Sabah*, 1 Nov. 2003.
63. *Zaman* (Istanbul daily, Islamic in orientation), 27 Sept. 2005.
64. See editorial by M. Sabuncu, *Milliyet*, 22 Jan. 1999.
65. *Hürriyet*, 1 Aug. 2002.
66. *Sabah*, 9 Dec. 2004.
67. *Zaman*, 16 Feb. 2003.
68. See editorial by E. Katırcıoğlu, *Radikal*, 24 April 2004.
69. *Sabah*, 30 Jan. 2005.
70. *Hürriyet*, 31 July 2002.
71. Etöz, 'Varoş: Bir İstila Bir Tehdit', p.51.
72. Therefore it mainly refers to the rural-to-urban migrants from the eastern and south-eastern parts of Turkey.
73. M. Kırıkkanat, 'Halkımız Eğleniyor' [Our People are Enjoying], *Radikal*, 27 July 2005.
74. Baumann, *Contesting Culture*, p.21.
75. Baumann paraphrased the argument from P. Gilroy, 'The End of Racism' in J. Donald and A. Rattani (eds.) *Race, Culture and Difference* (London: Sage, 1992), p.53.

76. Baumann, *Contesting Culture*, p.21.
77. J. Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
78. M. Çulhaoğlu, 'Varoşlar ve Kent Yoksulluğu' [*Varoş* and Urban Poverty], *Sosyalist Politika*, Vol.10 (1996), p.117.
79. Arabesk is a kind of hybrid music mixing Turkish classical and folk elements with those of the West and Egypt. It emerged at the end of 1960s and captured the passions of rural migrants living in *gecekondu* and described the entire migrant culture as paraphrased from Özbek, 'Arabesk Culture: A Case of Modernization and Popular Identity', p.211.
80. Ibid., p.220.
81. Ibid., p.227.
82. N. Dogru, *Milliyet*, 10 March 1999.
83. In opposition to this degrading usage there has recently appeared a new discourse that paves the way towards the affirmation of *varoş* culture. *Varoş* is used as a 'source of praise' by some influential people such as famous musicians who grew rich through popular culture. It can be accepted as a reaction to the class distinctions, which are, in the Turkish context, expressed mainly in cultural terms. See the discussion by J. White, 'The Islamist Paradox', in D. Kandiyoti and A. Saktanber (eds.), *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), pp.191–221. We should note that this new discourse is produced through the claim of being the voice of the 'urban other' in the cultural context rather than 'urban poor'.
84. Özbek, 'Arabesk Culture: A Case of Modernization and Popular Identity', p.228.