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The “Other of the Other” and “unregulated territories” in the urban periphery: *gecekondu* violence in the 2000s with a focus on the Esenler case, Istanbul

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This article investigates the broader question of collective urban violence in “peripheral” (squatter) neighborhoods in the capitalist semi-periphery. Based upon a specific case, namely, the Karabayır neighborhood in Esenler, Istanbul, it aims to identify the potential sources of conflict and the conditions under which they turn into violence. To achieve this goal, first a review of the changing relationship of peripheral neighborhoods with the state is offered in a historical perspective. Then, the Karabayır neighborhood and the recent violence it experienced are briefly described, based on the information that appeared in the press and the Internet. And this is followed by a discussion of the possible causes of conflict and violence in the context of the changing conditions in the urban periphery in the 2000s. The transformation of peripheral land into commodity, the increasing physical proximity of residential groups due to land scarcity and building density, the asymmetric position of different residential groups with the state, and the ungarded socialization of the youth explain the increasing tendency towards violence in the urban periphery. In this process, the urban periphery emerges as “unregulated territories” that inhabit the “Other of the Other”.

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Introduction

Especially since the 1980s, the mounting urban violence in the capitalist “semi-periphery” as diverse as Brazil (San Paulo; Rolnik, 2001), Nigeria (Lagos; Do, 2001), India (Rajgopal, 1987) and Nicaragua (Rodgers, 2002) has been the subject of an increasing number of studies. Three broad categories can be identified as political violence, communal and ethnic violence, and criminal and anomic violence (Gizewski and Homer-Dixon, 1995). Political radicalism of the poor and collective violence against the state as its potential outcome have always been a concern of the general public and the state, and it has

received much attention in academic circles. On the other hand, violence between ethnic, racial or religious groups is rising today, and it calls for thorough investigation (Gizewski and Homer-Dixon, 1995).

Before we proceed further, the terms *gecekondu* (squatter housing) and *the urban periphery*, which we use interchangeably, need clarification. In the original meaning, gecekondu housing, which in Turkish literally means “built overnight”, refers to temporary housing built in the city’s periphery that serves as the shelter of the poor (mostly rural-to-urban migrants) in the moral economy of society. However today, it has lost its initial characteristics. Through amnesties, political favors and clientalistic relations, it has become a “twilight zone” that contains both legalized and unauthorized housing stock, shanties along with

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apartment buildings. And while some gecekondü settlements occupy the city's peripheries, some have ended up being close to the city center as the city has expanded, and even in some cases middle-class housing projects have grown up in their midst. Thus, the term gecekondü fails to qualify as the proper term that accommodates these changes. On the other hand, a term that successfully captures the essence of this recent transformation of gecekondü housing is lacking today. Thus, in this article, we prefer to continue using "gecekondü" since it is still conventionally used in society to refer to this type of settlements. Also, we use the term "urban periphery", despite the changes in its geographical location, in order to draw attention to its asymmetric positioning vis-a-vis the established and better-off areas and population in the city, i.e. "the Center." The "urban periphery" refers to the position of gecekondü residents in the system—their major common characteristic is their poverty and their gainful use by the center, for whose residents they provide the necessary services and labor (cheap and usually unorganized), making possible its reproduction. Thus, gecekondü residents still live in the periphery of the system despite the relative geographical closeness of some gecekondü settlements to the city center today.

When we consider the relationship of squatter residents (residents of the urban periphery) with the state in the "Third World",¹ earlier research points to their willingness to integrate into urban society and their interest in politics as a means of achieving this goal (Nelson, 1970; Karpas, 1976). Especially in local politics, they tended to exchange their votes for the provision of infrastructure and basic services to their squatter neighborhoods, as well as titles to their squatter land (Gilbert and Gugler, 1992). In the Turkish context, this meant voting for the center right parties in elections during the 1950s and 1960s, when the rapid industrialization of the country in this period enabled *gecekondü* residents (rural migrants) to experience upward social mobility (Danielson and Keleş, 1985; Keyder, 1987). They started taking on the roles of cheap, flexible and unorganized workforce needed for the type of economic development model that the country had adopted, namely, import-substitution industrialization, and they were present as eager consumers in the domestic market, which was protected by the state against international competition through tariffs, quotas and the like (Şenyapılı, 1982). However, when the economic growth began to decline in the 1970s, both due to the economic crises in the capitalist world following the oil crises of 1973 and 1978 and to the political instability of the country in this period, mostly run by coalition governments, the compliant behavior of gecekondü residents and their support for the status quo began to disappear.

As the routes of social mobility closed down for gecekondü residents and as they were politicized in the permissive atmosphere of the era brought by the politically liberal 1961 constitution, political radicalism began to reign in gecekondü areas (Danielson and Keleş, 1985; Öncü, 1988). Some gecekondü neighborhoods came under the control of radical leftist groups ("liberated areas"), and they were frequently attacked by ultra-nationalists to "conquer" them. The violent street fights between the radical Left and the ultra-nationalist Right in the 1970s, during which 4663 people were killed in three years between 1978 and 1980 (Danielson and Keleş, 1985), were only ended by the September 12, 1980 military intervention. A passification and depolitization of the society was attempted during the military rule, and the military government stepped down in 1983 after forming a new constitution, which was much more conservative and restrictive than the former one. Following military rule, the first civil government (the Özal government) aimed at opening the society to international markets through its liberal policies. In the process, the Özal government attempted to integrate gecekondü neighborhoods into the formal urban market by passing successive laws. And by doing so, it sought to integrate their residents, who were once active in radical opposition to the status quo, into the established urban society, by offering them enormous profits on the gecekondü land: gecekondü formation was legalized through a series of gecekondü amnesties and the construction of up to four-story apartment buildings was allowed to replace gecekondü houses (Şenyapılı, 1998). While this brought some cooperative behavior among gecekondü residents in their relationship with the state, it intensified the conflict among gecekondü residents, for example, between those who owned gecekondüs and those who rented them, and between those who had title deeds to their gecekondü land and those who did not. In the 1990s, the gecekondüs once more became the site of violence, at least as presented in the media, namely the Gazi episode of 1995, which was introduced by the media as the uprising of a neighborhood, where Alevis (i.e. those who belong to the heterodox Islamic sect in Turkish society and who are known for their progressive politics, liberal religious attitudes and humanistic values) resided, in its reaction to the bombing of a local coffee house, and the 1 May 1996 demonstrations, which were explained in the media as the vandalism of radical leftist groups who "came down to the city center to destroy it". This changed the dominant view of gecekondüs in the society; and a new concept, namely the *varoşlu*, emerged that suggested a tendency in the once-compliant gecekondü residents (*gecekondülü*) to become increasingly violent and opposing (Erman, 2001). In Turkish society, the term "*gecekondülü*" is generally used to refer to those who migrate from rural areas to big cities in their search for a better livelihood and who build their houses on public land in their need for shelter, and

¹"Third World" is used here since it is the term used in that literature.

hence to those who, although they fail to become real urbanites due to their backward rural characteristics which they continue to preserve, are nevertheless harmless. On the other hand, the new term *varoşlu*, which is rapidly replacing the old term *gecekondu*, refers to those who are *contra* the city (Etöz, 2000).

The *varoş* is oppositional to the city and is setting itself against the city; it is hostile and antagonistic to the city...(It) is attacking the city, its values, its political institutions and, more importantly, the very core of its ideology (a secular and democratic society built on consensus and unity) and its social order (Erman, 2001: p 996).

The term *varoşlu* as it is used in the media and increasingly so in the academy covers diverse groups of people, all with negative connotations, ranging from street gangs and children oriented to substance abuse and hence those who have nothing to do with political involvement, to those who are radical political activists ("Islamists" or "communists") rooted in the peripheral neighborhoods of the city. In brief, while the former term *gecekondu* can be understood as the "Rural Other", the latter term *varoşlu* can be best summarized as the "Threatening Other" (Erman, 2001).

With this background information, let us consider the Karabayır-Esenler case, focusing on its intra-neighborhood conflict and recent violence. While doing so, the article draws upon the information that appeared in the press and the Internet.

The Karabayır neighborhood in Esenler, Istanbul

Esenler, which is located on the European side of Istanbul, a "globalizing" city and Turkey's largest metropolis with a population of over 10 millions, has been one of the most migrant-receiving regions, many coming from the rural areas of Anatolia (see Figure 1). Its proximity to major industrial centers, as well as to the central wholesale market of fruits and vegetables, attracted migrants to Esenler, who built their *gecekondu*s in the area. Thus, Esenler, which was a village of Istanbul until 1970, grew rapidly and reached a population of about 350,000 in ten years (the actual number of residents may be higher since some unregistered people live in the district), and it became a municipality in December 1993. Following it, the district experienced unregulated housing development, during which *gecekondu*s were replaced by poorly built multi-story apartment buildings. Those who want to draw attention to their *gecekondu*-like substandard housing quality call them *apart-kondu*, which is coined after *gece-kondu*. Many of these buildings were built without building permits, and some of them did not even have land titles and were not registered in city records. The proximity of the

district to the new central bus terminal and to main highways intensified commercialization tendencies, creating a vast informal sector, both in the housing and job markets, that largely exists outside of state regulations and control. Today, the district is mainly residential yet the basements of some apartment buildings are used as clothing workshops, employing local people. The district consists of 17 neighborhoods, and it is socially divided, people from different regions and with different sectarian (*mezhep*) backgrounds occupying different locations. The municipality is run by the Islamist Party since 1994 (Mayor Mehmet Öcalan won both the 1994 and 1999 local elections), and it holds the upper hand in distributing economic benefits to residents, favoring those who support the party. As one of its neighborhoods, Karabayır was established in 1975, and today its population has reached 42,500. It is the largest neighborhood of the Esenler district, characterized by its densely and poorly built multi-story apartment buildings (the facades of many of them are left unplastered) and its irregular streets. Karabayır came to the public's attention by a violent confrontation in the neighborhood. The following section describes it.

The intra-neighborhood violence in Karabayır: the March 2002 event

On March 2–3, 2002 Karabayır witnessed a violent street clash between two residential groups, namely, Romans (gypsies) and those mostly from Siirt (Siirtans), a city in Eastern Turkey which is famous for its religious organizations (*tarikat*), and some from other provinces, which are also known for their political and social conservatism. Romans arrived in Karabayır earlier than most of the other groups, and many have been living there for over 30 years. They belong to the Alevi sect. Today, there are about 400 Roman households in which there are many children, and their number reaches 3000. They concentrate in the lower side of the Sakarya street that divides the neighborhood into two, separating Romans from the rest spatially. As the residents say, fights would take place upon a Roman youth's entering Siirtans' territory, and vice versa. Romans mostly earn their living by collecting garbage, riding in their horse-drawn carts, and unemployment is widespread among them. Their children are known for their poor school attendance. Thus, they are the poorest of the poor, and in terms of their numbers, they are a minority in the neighborhood. On the other hand, the rest of the residents, who occupy the upper side of the Sakarya street, are rural migrants, many from the provinces in Eastern Anatolia. They earn their living by small-scale trade or by their labor. Thus, they are relatively better-off when compared to Romans. However, the economic crises of December 2000 and February 2001 have hit the district hard, and unemployment has increased, especially among the youth. The two groups do not have established economic relations,

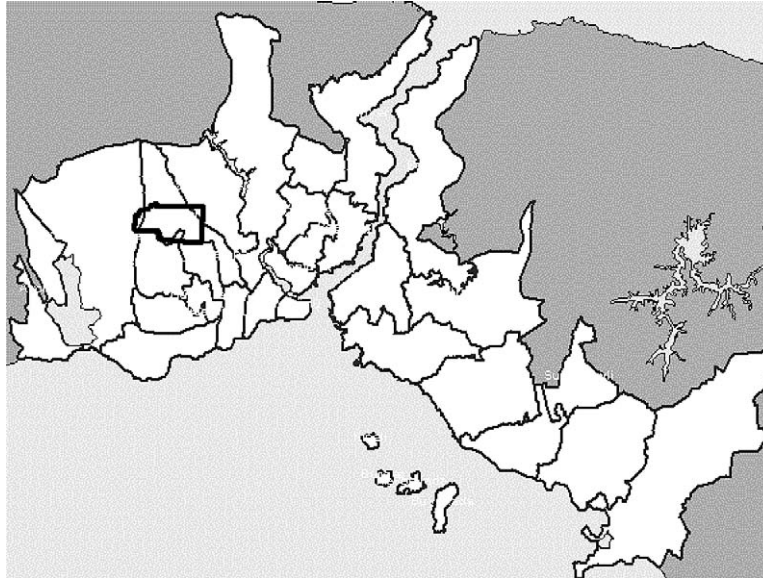


Figure 1 Map of Istanbul that shows the Esenler District

and there is no notable competition for jobs between them.

The tension between Romans and the people from Siirt (Siirtans) had always been there. Siirtans did not want Romans in “their neighborhood”, and occasional fights were taking place between the young men of the two groups. And a small spark was enough to put the whole neighborhood on fire. This spark was the unsettled dispute between a Roman resident and a local blacksmith from Siirt. When the Roman customer wanted to take his iron door back, which he had brought to get its hinge welded, saying that he would pay for it later (it was a very small amount—3 million Turkish liras; the price of a loaf was 50,000,000 Turkish liras, and the minimum gross wage was 109,800,000 Turkish liras in March, 2002), but the store owner objected. And they started quarreling. The Roman man left and came back with his friends to start a fight. In a short while, other men in the vicinity, many of whom were killing time in coffee houses, joined the fight, and violence took the upper hand. When the police came, there were already some men wounded. The next afternoon a big clash took place between the two groups. A group of some 75 men, mostly those from Siirt and Sinop, came together, and started moving towards the section where Romans resided. They had some children walking in front of the group. They attacked Romans, who were waiting for them, by calling out, “Allah, Allah”, and repeating some Arabic words from the Quran (a sign of their radical religious orientation). They invited people to their fight, saying, “Today what we do is for our neighborhood. Today is the day of machismo (*erkeklik günü*)” (a sign of their sexist orientation). And the two groups started fighting fiercely. They were armed. They had shotguns and explosives, as well as stones and axes. Interestingly,

many of the guns that were found during the arrests were unlicensed. Soon the local police intervened, yet they failed to suppress the fights. Then, the special squad with their three panzers and tear gas bombs were brought to the scene, although it still took more than 3 h to get the violent confrontations under control. While the police were chasing the fighting people to arrest them, stones and tiles were thrown at them from the roofs of the buildings in the Roman section of the neighborhood. Despite the police’s quick response, one man was killed and 21 men were injured during the clashes, one in critical condition. Following this “street war”, the Governor declared a curfew for two days, enforcing people to remain indoors between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless there was an emergency. The office of the *muhtar* (the elected official head of the neighborhood) was converted into a police station. As a journalist put it, the houses of the gypsies were searched one by one by the police, and 10 shotguns and 6 revolvers were found. In the end of the Event, some 130 persons were taken to the police station (among them there were 10 children and 9 women), and 43 were held in detention, waiting for court trial (8 of them were released because of being underage), of whom 39 were arrested after the trial. Following the Event, “to take precautions” as a police officer put it, raids were organized by the police on a Roman community in a nearby city (Bursa).

The Event occupied much the attention of the media. It was reported as a “big street war in a tiny neighborhood,” “the Turkish version of West Side Story” (the American movie in which a Puerto Rican and an Italian youth gang holding different territories within the same neighborhood fight with each other), “a signal of a social explosion”, and “a social earthquake that shook the society”. In the media, Istanbul, as the biggest city of Turkey with the highest crime

rates, once more came to public attention. It was presented as Turkey's Texas, as a city becoming like Palestine.

The causes behind this violent event were discussed by academics and other related actors in the media, including state representatives, such as the head official of the district (*kaymakam*). The *kaymakam*'s interpretation of the Event was interesting. He refused to acknowledge any long-lived tension or confrontation among the residents, and said that there was no cultural or sectarian conflict or ideological motive. He explained it away as an unfortunate isolated event that unnecessarily went too far because of group psychology. The local political leaders explained the Event as the power show of the two groups without an explicit ideological motive behind it (explained the central left RPP district representative), and as the result of the communities that were formed when people who migrated from the same area clustered in the same neighborhood in the city, preventing them from adapting to urban way of life, and due to the dilemma the *gecekondu* youth were in because of being in-between rural and urban (argued the ultra-nationalist NAP district representative). In brief, they explained the Event by the residents' inability to integrate into urban society, i.e. by the years-old approach, which has been on the scene from the very beginning of *gecekondu* formation. The leftist parties emphasized the role of increasing unemployment and poverty, which made people prone to violence. The mayor was anxious to clear the reputation of the neighborhood, saying that there had never been any anarchy in the Esenler district, and he would reconcile the two sides by bringing together the leaders of the two groups. On the other hand, in the media and the Internet, the Event was presented in more political terms. For example, in the national press, it was reported as a seemingly small dispute that might easily trigger the long-standing conflict between Alevis and Sunnis, the two opposing religious sects in Turkey; and as the enmity between ultra-nationalists and leftist revolutionaries, the supporters of the two polarized political ideologies in society. Worsening social and economic conditions were also emphasized in the media. And in the local newspapers and websites of some radical leftist groups, the Event was presented as the alliance of the state forces with the local fascist groups to suppress progressive people. The leftist groups claimed that the way the Event was covered in the national media did not reflect what really happened in the neighborhood. According to this version of the Event, what flamed it was described as follows: The ultra-nationalist fascists (Siirtans) beat up an Alevi young man in the morning before the Event, and they gathered in the building of the "Hearts of the Ideal" (the ultra-nationalists' youth organization) in same afternoon. This was followed by a parade in a big group to the neighborhood to demonstrate their power and domination. When the police came in, they took side with

the fascists, and the local people (Romans) built barricades to defend themselves. Thus, according to the leftist groups in the media, the Event was started as a plot organized by the fascist groups against the progressive Alevis: fascists provoked local people against Romans, and their attempt was supported by the state in its policy of intimidation to control poor people; and it turned into an act of resistance of the oppressed. To support their claim, they drew attention to the fact that those who were arrested and whose houses were searched by the police during the curfew were almost exclusively Romans. They criticized state officials for trying to hide the Alevi identity of Romans because of their fear that Alevi organizations would own them, and for over-emphasizing the Romanness of the group, in order to create an image of the people as troublesome and inferior. They interpreted the Event as the attempts of Siirtans organized around the fascist National Action Party (NAP) to make a massacre of progressive Alevi Romans who blocked Siirtans' efforts to increase the NAP visibility in the neighborhood.

When we look at the local residents' responses, the Romans emphasized their peaceful existence in the neighborhood, and they defended themselves by saying, for example, that the Roman men would never get involved in any act of harassing neighborhood women. They complained about the exclusion and humiliation they had to face because of being Alevis. For example, a Roman woman said, "This fight initially started when *they* slapped a six-year-old child of *ours*² (emphases added). They attacked us, hiding behind the police. They declared us as the guilty side. We constantly face *racial* discrimination here." Several other Romans also complained about discrimination because of being Alevis. A Roman man said, "They treat us as second-class citizens here. The Municipality collects garbage up to our street and avoids our street. The *muhtar* creates problems every time we ask for our residence permits. I ask you, what kind of a citizenship is this? All this negative treatment, of course, sharpens *us* against *them*." One of the Roman chiefs (*çeribaşı*) complained as follows:

We have been living in the same neighborhood for years. But we have never liked each other. We very seldom do business with each other. The Event is the outcome of the tension that accumulated over the years. They hold us in contempt, and we are fed up with this. So we all started fighting.

²A newspaper explains this version of the Event as follows: when a local tradesman (a Siirtan) slapped a boy from a *nomadic* family (a Roman), *the many members of that big family living on the same street attacked the inhabitants of the neighborhood* with stones and sticks in their hands. And when the inhabitants counter attacked, it turned into warfare (emphases added to show the bias against Romans).

They also complained about the support Siirtans were getting from the "fascist" "Hearts of the Ideal" youth organization of the Nationalist Action Party (NAP), saying that Siirtans got their guns from the "Hearts of the Ideal", and about the police, who, they said, were on Siirtans' side and were making raids on their (Romans') houses all the time. On the other hand, Siirtans complained about Romans for their acts of deviance and for breaking the law, calling them thieves. The *muhtar*, who was accused by Romans for siding with Siirtans, confirmed this claim. According to him, acts of robbery and assault ("criminal and anomic violence") were many in this neighborhood, yet this was not reflected to official statistics, since such acts remained unreported, and the neighborhood looked peaceful on record. Additionally, one of the leaders of the Siirtan youth emphasized their cultural disparities, saying, "Both Romans and we have been living in Karabayır for over 30 years. Yet we cannot get along with them. There is a *clash of culture* (emphasis added). They should leave Karabayır." A young Siirtan woman said, "We are scared to go to the section where Romans live. In this last Event, my neighborhood people united against the *gypsies* and wanted to give them their lesson." A tradesman from Malatya, another province in Eastern Anatolia, said, "The *gypsy* young men show up in the streets with beer bottles in their hands as soon as the sun goes down. It is dangerous even for men to walk in the street. They harass passers-by. Neither the police nor the officials from the electric company can enter this part of the neighborhood. Once a Siirtan man was able to stand against them (Romans) because he had a large circle of friends and relatives." And a young Siirtan man said, "We tried to tolerate the aggressive behavior of Romans. But recently we started to oppose to them collectively."

The following section dwells upon the possible explanations of this violent event that took place in Turkey's biggest metropolitan city's *periphery*. While doing so, it identifies various dimensions, namely economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions. These dimensions are discussed in relation to space, since space emerges as a major factor in gecekondu violence. Here it is necessary to acknowledge that these dimensions and the explanations that are built on them are not mutually exclusive; for example, economic problems may intensify cultural conflicts between groups and increase solidarity within the groups. Furthermore, some of the explanations provided below explain the Esenler case more than others. Yet, since the broader goal of the article is to identify the potential causes of violence in the urban periphery, all the possible explanations are presented.

Possible explanations of violence in the urban periphery

Economic dimension

Economic rent and emerging conflict and competition: the commodification of land in the urban per-

iphery As in the other "semi-peripheral" societies, Turkey has witnessed the formation of squatter (*gecekondu*) housing since the 1950s when the society underwent a major transformation as the result of the attempts to integrate it into the capitalist world system. When peasants, who were dislocated by the mechanization of agriculture, began to flow to big cities in large numbers, the pace and magnitude of the process went beyond the state's capacity for a "planned urbanization", giving way to gecekondu formation. In the early years of gecekondu formation, the houses that were mostly built on state land provided shelter to newcomer rural-to-urban migrants. The inability or unwillingness of the State to commodify state-owned land, which was inherited from the Ottoman Empire, due to its paradigm of "moral economy of land and shelter", when coupled with the populist tendencies of politicians "to retain the privilege of arbitrary allocation so as to strengthen their own positions" (Keyder, 2000: p 128), large amounts of land became available to rural migrants to build their gecekondu. However, over the years gecekondu were commercialized, first in the informal housing market, and lately in the formal housing market, acting as sources of profit for their owners. As the result of the attempts of the Özal Government in the 1980s to commodify the urban peripheral land as part of its neo-liberal policies (Keyder, 2000), gecekondu districts have been increasingly transformed into regular apartment districts. Today, the rent brought by gecekondu can be enormous depending on their location. As the city expands towards its peripheries, and as gecekondu are being replaced by apartment buildings, gecekondu owners may become the owners of several apartments in the buildings replacing gecekondu. Having titles to the gecekondu land is critical here, and it determines the amount of rent to be appropriated from the gecekondu. In Turkey's populist politics, the general practice has been to legalize gecekondu through amnesties, distributing title deeds to gecekondu owners. Thus, the tendency of politicians to legalize gecekondu in return for votes opens the door to much profit-making on gecekondu. And as the profit-making on the gecekondu land increases, so does the conflict and competition over it. The fact that the state land available on the city's periphery is draining, since it has been continuously consumed by incoming migrants, sharpens the contestation over it. Furthermore, today a new actor is present in this competition over the peripheral urban land, namely, big construction companies for the upper classes. When the opening up of the society to international competition, in the attempt towards its full transition to a free market economy, curbed the profits of the national bourgeoisie, it started looking for new sources of profit, and the domestic housing and land market appeared as one such source of profit. Thus, the bourgeoisie has emerged as one of the two strongest players in the competition over the urban peripheral land [the "organized capital"]

(Keyder, 2000)]. All this points to one direction of change: "...moral economies against the cruelties of the market (have) collapsed. Liberalization is the order of the day" (Keyder, 2000: p 130). Interestingly, while the contestation over land intensifies, loyalty to a group, usually one that is built upon common ethnic/sectarian/regional ties, becomes a major means of entering into this contestation, enabling to lay claims on the urban land in the periphery. As a result, ethnic identities are emphasized, "us vs. them" sharpens, and "they" are excluded and discriminated against more rigidly. Additionally, the *gecekondu* mafia, i.e. "organized illegality" as Keyder (2000) puts it, who are again organized on the basis of common ethnic/religious/regional ties, become the other strongest player in this game, often resorting to violence.

In the case of Esenler, in the face of the increasing apartmentization of the district, although largely in an unauthorized manner, the potential for urban rent tends to fuel the conflict between the local groups who compete with each other for "illicit profit" ("*avanta*") as described in a newspaper. And one of the motives behind the attempts of the "rest of the neighborhood" (mostly Siirtans and Sinopians) to get Romans out of the neighborhood may be the desire to appropriate the potential rent that exists in the land inhabited by Romans.

Up to now, we have discussed the possibility of conflict and violence due to the economic advantages the peripheral land promises to *gecekondu* residents. On the other hand, conflict and violence may emerge in peripheral neighborhoods due to increasing economic disadvantages, upon which the following section dwells.

Economic deprivation, frustration and violence The violent confrontations in Karabayır-Esenler took place in March 2002, following the two major economic crises Turkey lived through, namely the December 2000 and the February 2001 crises. As the Turkish economy has opened its doors more to liberal policies, lifting up its protection on domestic industry and money markets, it has become more vulnerable to international monetary movements, occasionally ending up in financial crises. The well-known frustration-aggression explanation and the concept of relative deprivation fit well to explain the violence in Karabayır in this context. When people are used to living at a certain standard of life, and experience a sudden and sharp decline in their economic conditions, they may react to this change by engaging in violent acts. When they cannot direct their frustration and anger to the "real" source of their economic hardship, for example due to political repression, or when they fail to identify a "concrete" source, they may display their aggression towards a "scapegoat", that is, a social group or person who is not responsible for the problem yet who is made to take the blame.

In the case of Esenler, as a result of their deteriorat-

ing economic conditions, Siirtans, who are mostly small-scale merchants, and hence who are very vulnerable financially during economic crises (bankruptcy of small store owners was common during the crises), may have directed their anger onto Romans, who are socially, politically and economically the most powerless group in the neighborhood, that is, they are the "Other of the Other". In addition, the increasing rates of unemployment in society³ have intensified competition over the limited number of jobs available, especially in neighborhoods such as Karabayır where new migrants keep arriving all the time. And in the case of rural migrants, access to these jobs is usually possible through membership in a group formed on the basis of common origin/ethnicity/religious sect, again sharpening the difference between "us" and "them."

In the neighborhood's violent event of March 2002, it is interesting to witness the very rapid mobilization of local people into this collective violent action. Many local men, who spent their time in local clubs/coffee houses (*kahvehane/kıraathane*) of their region of origin (e.g. *Siirtliler Kıraathanesi*) since they were unemployed, were quick to respond to the quarrel between the Siirtan shop owner and his Roman customer, engaging in violent acts. Young men were readily available. In an economy of high employment, they would most probably been out in their workplaces, and such a small dispute between the shop owner and his customer would not have turned into such an event of mass violence. Furthermore, economic insecurity tends to intensify the tendency of the residents of the periphery to seek protection within their ethnic-based communities. Communities are important to them to guarantee their lives that lack any formal social security. Ethnic/cultural differences bring our attention to the next issue elaborated in the following section.

Socio-cultural dimension

Intensifying cultural conflict among residential groups: territorial clustering in the urban periphery

In the Turkish experience of "rapid urbanization" and chain migration, rural migrants tend to cluster together with "their own people" in the city, i.e. those with whom they share ethnicity, religion (sect) and/or regional origin. In the cosmopolitan environment of the city where they encounter strangers who are perceived as a threat to their values and ways of life, migrants cluster in the urban periphery with those with whom they share their ethnic origin and religious sect. While this spatial concentration of migrant groups enables them to preserve their ways of life and

³Interestingly, as unemployment increased among *gecekondu* men, *gecekondu* women began to work outside the home, usually employed in the garment industry by subcontracting (See Eraydin and Erendil, 1999). However, this does not mean that the economic conditions of *gecekondu* families improved.

practice their own traditions, it renders them visible in terms of their cultural differences, sometimes causing area stigmatization and cultural conflicts between the groups. Thus, while solidarity in the group based on sameness increases, the neighborhood is fragmented among these groups. And when the groups start to perceive each other as enemies, as threats to their own existence, then violent confrontations take the upper hand. Furthermore, when people identify themselves strongly with their groups, accentuated more by living together in the same area, they tend to respond collectively to individual disputes: an insult to someone in their group is perceived as an insult to their own selves.

In the case of Esenler, the relatively liberal way of life practiced by Romans, both due to their gypsy inheritance and their Alevis religious sect, seems to conflict easily with the conservative way of life practiced by the religious Sunni residents from Eastern Anatolia, such as Siirtans. Especially the position of women in the public/private domain may create conflicts between the two groups: while for Romans, women's presence in the public space is acceptable, and the social rules on women's behavior are relatively relaxed, for many Siirtans, women's presence should be restricted to the private domain of the family and the house, and when they are in the public space, they are expected to cover themselves. Thus, conflicting cultural groups exist in Karabayır (see *Figure 2*).

In the context of this neighborhood where Romans are the most economically disadvantaged group, the cultural differences between the two take on an asymmetric existence, and in the cultural hierarchy of the neighborhood, Romans are defined as culturally, as well as religiously, inferior by the conservative Sunni Siirtans. The fact that Romans are separated from the rest of the neighborhood by a street makes them easily identifiable. Moreover, the increasing population density of the neighborhood due to its rapid apartmentization in its "unplanned development" tends to bring residents more into contact in daily life, increasing the potential for conflict. Unless their interdependency makes them to cooperate, this conflict may easily turn into open confrontation.

Generational dimension

As stated by *Erder (1997)* based on the field research she conducted in one of Istanbul's peripheral districts, the socialization of the (male) gecekondu youth in the streets, inside the peer gangs creates a potential for violence. As education ceases to act as a means of social mobility for the gecekondu youth, and as their job market erodes, they are ever present in the streets, spending time in peer/gang groups (*Ayata, 1996*). This holds true for the Karabayır case. The quarrels between Romans and Siirtans mostly take place between the youth of the two groups. Especially when unemployment increases and many young people cannot find jobs, they end up spending many idle hours

in the local coffee houses attended mainly by the people from their region of origin. This situation may easily make the youth form their own groups/gangs, and they may spend their time bullying others and attacking other territories. In this culture of young men, machismo is celebrated, which is identified with such terms as being "strong", "daring", "dominant", "fearless", and "virile". Furthermore, the obsession of many Turkish men with guns⁴ connects manliness with aggression. Violence that dominates television programs, furthermore, provokes aggression. And all this opens the door to violent confrontations and physical destruction among the youth of the periphery.

Political dimension

The asymmetric position of the state vis-a-vis different groups and political clientelism in the urban periphery

The military rule of 1980–1983 and the civilian politics following it supported Sunni Islam as the state's religion under the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" in "its fight against communism". As a result, the State's distance to different Islamic sects (mainly Alevism and Sunnism), which had been problematic since the 1950s when multi-party politics was first adopted, as well as to different political positions and ideologies, varied considerably, Alevis and the Left being the most disfavored. When this political atmosphere created a fertile ground for the rise of radical (Sunni) Islam, the military attempted to take it under control by the February 28, 1997 National Security Council's decisions. In this period, there were some attempts of the State to win the cooperation of Alevis, who are known for their support of secularism. But this was interpreted by Alevis as the maneuver of the State to use them against Islamists, and was discredited (*Erdem, 2001*). In brief, the relationship of Alevis with the State can be influenced by conjectural factors, yet the State, nevertheless, favors Sunnism against Alevism.

Despite the shaky relationship of radical Islam with the State, its triumph in local politics in the 1990s is beyond doubt. During the 1990s, the Islamist Party won victories both in the 1995 and 1999 local elections. And Alevis became disadvantaged as a result, losing their jobs in municipalities and those gecekondu neighborhoods were neglected by the local government (*Ayata, 1997*). Today, the Esenler Mayor is from the Islamist Party; he is serving his second consecutive term as mayor. The clientelistic relations that characterize Turkish politics, as in many other

⁴In Turkish society, the number of licensed guns is quite high [965,000 shotguns and 461,000 revolvers (<http://www.silah.net.com>)] and most probably many people own unlicensed guns. In the Esenler Event, firearms were found in many houses ("the houses are like warehouses of fire-arms" as a reporter put it).

(a)



(b)



Figure 2 (a) The Karabayır district during the street fight, (b) a typical woman pedestrian in the Karabayır district where Siirtans reside

“undeveloped” societies, empower religious Siirtans and place them at a big advantage vis-a-vis Alevi Romans in the neighborhood. Thus, while some groups become upwardly mobile and politically powerful because of their ties with political actors, some others are left out. And this breeds violence. Furthermore, the State oppression exercised on some groups may lead them to resort to radical actions and political violence in their attempts to gain visibility and power. For example, there are some radical leftist groups in the wider Esenler area, which oppose to the State (“political violence”), and they try to protest the State, for example, through inward-oriented violence, i.e. death fasting. And periodically, they become victims of State violence, pushed into a relatively powerless and marginal position. Additionally, the State’s support of some groups may encourage them to use violence in order to suppress opposing groups. For example, Romans claim that the support of the local police for Siirtans encourages them to use violence against Romans.

The political strife in the neighborhood may have its roots in its recent history. When the society was polarized as the ultra-nationalist Right vs. the radical Left in the late 1970s, many gecekondu neighborhoods were controlled by either of the groups, leading to frequent clashes between the two. Today, the tension and confrontation lived between the two groups

in the past may still be present, albeit in a less visible form because of the present political conjuncture. As reviewed in the previous section “Intra-neighborhood violence in Karabayır”, in some leftist newspapers and websites, the emphasis was put on the role of ultra-nationalist fascists in provoking such a violent act against progressive Alevi Romans. Thus, the “us vs. them” ideological conflict of the past may be repeating itself today, at least for some groups.

Another important characteristic of peripheral neighborhoods is their growing “autonomy”, i.e. lack of State regulations and control. When the neighborhood has its own presence free of State regulations, “who runs the neighborhood” becomes a matter of confrontation, sometimes ending in violence, as in the case of Esenler. This seems to be a major emerging characteristic of the urban periphery in the 2000s, which is discussed below.

Conclusion

Karabayır–Esenler as an unregulated territory with its own “domain of power”?

Based on the Karabayır–Esenler case, we can predict an increasing tendency towards violence in the urban periphery. In addition to the factors mentioned above, the changing relationship of the neighborhood with the larger society is important to emphasize. The Kar-

abayır residents in particular, and the residents of the urban periphery in general, are economically disadvantaged and socially excluded when compared to the rest of urban society. They have always been "the Other" in the city. The cities in the capitalist semi-periphery are characterized by their poor and substandard neighborhoods, mostly inhabited by rural migrants who surround the better-built and better-served sections of the city, resided by the better-off established urbanites. When the society experiences economic growth, which was the case during the 1950s and 1960s in Turkey, as was also true in the wider capitalist world, the structurally disadvantaged urban periphery also benefits from this growth, albeit in an asymmetric way. And when the society experiences economic decline and vulnerability, as has happened since the 1990s in the "globalization process", the urban periphery suffers drastically from the consequences, people losing their livelihood as well as their hopes for the future. When they stop believing that they, and if not themselves, their children, will eventually make it, that is, when they see that the doors of upward mobility are closing down on them in the present system, they tend to create their own "domain of power", their own "state-free" territories in the urban space, challenging the State's legitimacy and its rule of law. The urban periphery, as in the case of Karabayır, with its unregistered residents, unrecorded criminal acts, unlicensed guns, unattended schools, unemployed or informally employed workforce, illegal electric use, and more importantly with its unregulated housing and job markets, becomes the territory outside of State regulations and control. Karabayır residents resort to radical political, ethnic or religious groups instead of State institutions, or take advantage of their big families and kin, to solve their problems and conflicts; they obtain unlicensed guns through political organizations. On the other hand, the State is indifferent to all this, if not helpless or manipulative. It was only possible for State officials to enter the neighborhood when Karabayır was under curfew; the electric company only then was able to disconnect hundreds of wires that were illegally connected to street lamps to electrify houses without paying bills. Also the State's functions are inadequate, if not absent in the neighborhood, particularly in the Romans' section. For example, the garbage is not collected, and more importantly, as many Karabayır residents complain, State security forces fail to provide residents' safety in everyday life. The State intervenes when there is a problem, an "emergency", to which paying attention cannot be avoided, such as the street fighting in Karabayır. And it tends to suppress the problem by using force without attempting to understand and solve it. It does not even acknowledge it as a problem, as the words of the *Kaymakam* about the Event have shown.

Another important characteristic of the urban periphery today is its fragmentation. The "state-free" territories in the urban periphery are fragmented on the

basis of ethnic/sectarian/regional bonds. The "us vs. them" is reproduced in many contexts, and economic, socio-cultural and political factors promote it, as elaborated in the section on the possible explanations of violence. And the groups struggle with each other for power and control in the neighborhood. Different from the capitalist West where individualism reigns over communal ties, and hence where "alienated" "uprooted" "lonely" individuals are the majority in the urban poor, in many semi-peripheral/non-Western societies, the poor take refuge in their ethnic groups, forming their own residential "niches" in the city, which set them apart from the rest of the society. And this may bring conflict with other residential groups, as witnessed in the Karabayır case. The politics of identity (Ayata, 1997), which made its appearance on the Turkish scene in the 1990s, encourages differences rather than similarities in the gecekondu population. Furthermore, the solidarity inside gecekondu settlements that was needed in order to be able to exist under the extremely insecure conditions during their establishment (Karpas, 1976) seems to disappear as settlements become established. The collective existence as a neighborhood, and urban social movements, which exemplify the past experience of the urban periphery, seem to be replaced by fragmentation and intra-neighborhood strife today. And "the Other of the Other" comes into the scene, fueling intra-neighborhood conflict and violence.

"The Other of the Other" as the emerging underclass in Karabayır-Esenler?

"The Other of the Other" emerges as a core concept to explain the neighborhood tension and violent clashes between residential groups in the specific context of Karabayır. This "Other of the Other" is supported by the State in its ideology, which is partial to different identities and ideologies in society, favoring certain identities (e.g. Sunni, Turkish, urban-modern) against others (e.g. Alevi, Kurdish, rural/gecekondu-traditional), and in its practices ruled by clientelism.

The Karabayır case points to the emergence of an "underclass" in the non-Western context, namely, those who are excluded from the larger society structurally in socio-cultural, political and economic terms. In the specific case of Turkey, this "underclass" may be Romans (gypsies) living on collecting garbage ("scavengers"), who belong to the heterodox Islamic sect (Alevi) and hence who are a minority group in society and who have suffered centuries of discrimination (Olsson *et al.*, 1996), as in Karabayır. They may also be recent Kurdish migrants from Southeastern Anatolia who migrated to cities in Western Anatolia (e.g. Denizli) as the result of terrorism in the region and who live again as scavengers (Özgen, 2001). They form the "underclass" since their exclusion is a permanent condition. They do not send their children to school because it is more profitable to have them work in the "garbage business". Thus, their present situation will repeat itself in the future,

today's children continuing to collect garbage in their adulthood. Their political and social exclusion is not only because of their "undesirable" economic activities, but also because of their religious sect (Alevi) and race (gypsy) in the Karabayır case, and because of their ethnicity (Kurds) in the Denizli case. And especially when they reside in close proximity with religiously and culturally conservative groups, they tend to retreat inside their own groups, developing suspicious and reserved attitudes towards the State and pugnacious attitudes towards other residents, particularly if the latter tend to confront them when they find the opportunity. They tend to disregard State rules and laws, and their involvement in illegal acts may intensify since they are pushed to the very periphery of society. For example, in Karabayır, more than 100 of the 270 houses resided by Romans were using electricity illegally. And this may turn into a vicious circle: the more they are excluded (politically, socio-culturally and economically), the more they are engaged in illegality, and the more they live illegally, the more they are excluded.

In brief, today there is an emerging tendency in the urban periphery of the capitalist semi-periphery of the formation of "unregulated territories" that exist outside of State regulations and functions. As economic and political regulation and accountability of nation-states weakens in the process of liberal globalization, how limited this regulation might be in the context of the semi-periphery, and "amoral" market relations dominate, increasingly replacing moral economies, and as the system fails to promise any future through integration, the poor (the "Other") tend to seek solutions outside the State's domain, resorting to forming solidarities on the basis of shared ethnicity, religion and region. This is how the urban periphery responds to globalization's discontents. These "solidarity groups" compete (and conflict) with each other for power and economic rent in "their territory". And in this competition, the "Other of the Other", who are disadvantaged by a combination of factors, such as their "disagreeable" jobs, and their "undesirable" ethnic and religious identities, become the true victims (see, also de Queiroz and Telles, 2000, for the Brazilian case).

In this process, as much as the decreasing role and power of the State, the tendency of the advantaged classes, who benefit the most from the processes of globalization and economic liberalization, not to assume responsibility for the poor in their society, in a way to "disown" them, leaving them to their "fate" in the amoral economy of the capitalist system, plays an important role. They tend to retreat into their exclusive communities, minimizing their relations with the "Other." This (lack of) relationship between the better-off and poor classes is reflected to space in the "dual built environment" of these societies, as Rolnik (2001) calls it, i.e. the gated communities of the wealthy and the ghettos of the poor (Calderia, 1996; Connell, 1999; Leisch, 2002).

To suggest solution(s) is not an easy task. Liberal economic development reigns in the world today. What may restrain it may be the democratization of societies in which the State takes equal positioning vis-a-vis different identity groups and ideologies, approaching its citizens as agents entitled to their rights as well as their responsibilities in their relationship with the State. Establishing and implementing a legal system that responds successfully to the issues of "human rights" and "distribution of justice", and forming a political system that is free from clientelist and populist tendencies are crucial in this process.

We should keep in mind, however, that the Karabayır case points to a possible trend towards conflict and violence in peripheral neighborhoods in the 2000s, and it does not exemplify all peripheral neighborhoods. Today, many gecekondu districts exist in Turkey that are not prone to violence and whose residents are modest citizens rooted in their families. The emphasis put on the growing tendency towards violence could harm these families by creating a distorted image of peripheral neighborhoods. There is still room for their integration today, although the chances of integration are decreasing, and they vary according to context. For example, in Istanbul, the biggest metropolitan city in Turkey and the industrial-service-financial center of the society where the private sector has keen interests in the peripheral land and to where migrants still flow in large numbers, the integration of gecekondu settlements and their residents into the larger society becomes more difficult when compared to Ankara, the capital city of the Turkish Republic and the bureaucratic center of the society where there is still abundance of land in the periphery and hence intense competition over it is not yet a reality.

As concluding remarks, comparative studies on the urban periphery in general and on urban violence in the periphery in particular would benefit both academics in terms of professional knowledge and theoretical development, and policy makers in terms of useful insights into social problems, helping them to come up with ideas to curb down urban violence in our globalizing world. Particularly, a focus on emerging tendencies in recent years, such as socio-cultural and political fragmentation inside peripheral neighborhoods, ending in violent actions against the "Other of the Other" (i.e. the poorest of the poor, the most excluded of the excluded) would be useful. This article would serve its purpose if it promotes interest in this socially and politically very salient subject of urban violence in the periphery.

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